

Manipuri Literature: A Journey to Post-Independence Period

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Abstract

The present Manipuri Literature, the so-called Post Independence Manipuri literature is the offspring of ancient or prehistoric Manipuri literature which has a long journey from oral to written form, i.e., from myths to scientific literature. In fact, the post-independence Manipuri literature, in its original theme, is ancient but has modern flavor. This paper presents a brief survey of Manipuri literature of both periods, namely, Pre- and Post-Independent Manipur. It is difficult to draw a distinct line between Pre- and Post- independence Manipuri literature. However, we can still characterize Post-Independence Manipuri literature in its own essence. The present paper presents a picture of the Post-independence Manipuri literature and its development.

Introduction

Manipur is a beautiful state, which extends along the extreme Northeastern fringes of India, covering an area of 22,327 sq. km. Area-wise it is fourth among the North-Eastern states. Manipuri is also known as Meiteilon (language of the Meitei) since it is the native tongue of the Meitei. Manipuri is a member of the Kuki-Chin group of the Arakan-Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Manipuri is the connecting link between the two important languages, i.e., Tibetan and Burmese. The Himalayan, Assamese (Indic language) and Naga groups of the Tibeto-Burman Sub-family, separate Manipuri in the North and North-East from the Tibetan.

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In the South and Southeast, there are Kuki-Chin and Kachin groups of the sub-family between the two sister languages, namely, Manipuri and Burmese. Nevertheless, Manipuri is intimately related to Burmese, Tibetan and in some ways to Chinese. We have to make a note of the fact that Manipuri and its three sister languages developed on parallel lines with their peculiar dialectal predispositions and often developed contradictory idiosyncrasies.

Historically, Manipuri society consisted of seven different clans, namely, Ningthouja/Mangang, Luwang, Khuman, Moirang, Angom, Chenglei and Khaba-Nganba, among which Ningthouja clan was the most powerful one from 33 A.D. when Pakhangba became the king of Meitei land and then the rest of the clans dissolved one by one into it through the ages by war or compromise. In due course of time, their dialects have also been coined into a common language, namely, the present Manipuri. Hence, in Manipuri literature we find various social themes with various vocabulary items.

Stages of Development

Manipuri is the only language among the Tibeto-Burman languages of India, which has long and profound literature, and cultural heritage, which is more than two thousand years old. It is accepted that writing in Manipuri began by the middle of 7th to the beginning of the 8th century A.D. This argument is supported by the copper plate inscription of king Khongtekcha (Report on Archeological Studies in Manipur, Bulletin I. 1935) and by the bronze coin inscribing in Manipuri script of king Ura Konthouba's period (560-658 A.D.).

Manipuri literature, based on language and style, may broadly be divided into five categories as,

1. Pre History Literature, i.e., Oral form of literature before 8th century.
2. Old period Literature (8th century to 1074 AD).
3. The early medieval period literature (1074-1709 AD).

4. The late medieval period literature (1709-1819 AD).
5. The modern period literature (1819 till date)

Post-Independence Manipuri Literature

The modern period of Manipuri literature started from 1819 AD and the literature of this period can be grouped into four subgroups based on the language used, style, and slightly variable themes.

- a) Prose/poetry written without using any foreign vocabulary
- b) Literary pieces written using foreign, archaic and modern words.
- c) Poems written using a language mixed with Bangla and Brajaboli and
- d) Prose/poetry written using a completely modern language.

During this time, Manipuri literature flourished and it was the time to sow the seeds of short stories, novels, dramas and poems on various themes. Textbooks were produced, and other books, journals and other periodicals began to appear. Tradition of drama also became more profound taking the theme of history, mythology, social and legendary stories. The prayer songs which already existed in Bengali got translated into Manipuri. Pioneer writers of Manipuri literature Kh.Chaoba, Dr. Kamal, H. Anganghal, H. Nabadwipchandra, and A. Darendrajit came up in a line. Then there was a short interim during World War II. After the war, literary work revived with new ideas. Literature of many diverse fields like – play, novel, poem, prose, history, translation, arts and crafts, began to emerge.

Literature goes on developing keeping pace with the changing society. The motto of sanctifying society through literature and society, in turn generates the need for literature.

Modernism in Manipuri Poetry

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Modernism in Manipuri poetry emerged in the 1960s, novels came up with new challenges in the society. Feminist literature emerged in the 1970s. Notable writers of this time are – G.C. Tongbra, A. Minaketan, R.K. Shitaljit, M. Ramcharan, E. Nilakanta, R.K. Dorendra, N. Suhdir, E. Priyokumar, Birendrajit N, Memchoubi, Binapani, Sunita, and others.

An Appraisal



MK Binodini 1922-2011

The literature of this time has varied themes like romanticism, modernism, contemporary topics in poetry and in prose. They dealt with experience showing the relationship of men and women, positive social values, problems of women, economy and differences between classes, degradation of traditional morality and rise of materialistic values, romanticism, etc. The language they use is purely modern in style. Some of the outstanding writers of the modern literature are Khwairakpam Chaoba Singh (1895-1950), Hijam Anganghal Singh (1892-1943); and Arambam Dorendrajit Singh (1907-1944) is another pioneer poet and dramatist whose works include three dramas,

Moirang Thoibi, Bhagyachandra and Kaurav Parajay and two epic poems, namely, *Kansa Badha* and *Subhadra Haran*.

L. Samarendra Singh (b.1928) is one of the forerunners of modern Manipuri poetry. He is renowned for his poetic collections *Wa Amata Hiage Telanga, Mamang Leikia Thambal Satle* and *Khun Amagi Wari*. H. Guno Singh (b.1927) is an acclaimed short-story writer in Manipuri. His important works include *Khudol, Langjin Mangkhrabi Kishi, Laman, Aroiba Paodam* and *Eikhoigi Tada*. He also translated Sukumar Sen's *History of Bengali Literature* into Manipuri. Pacha Meetei (1940-1990) set a new trend in Manipuri novel by introducing contemporary social problems in place of the romantic and passionate atmosphere prevalent in the Manipuri novel in the first half of the 20th century. He is acclaimed for his novel *Na Tathiba Ahal Ama*.



Kh. Chaoba Singh 1895-1950

Poetry



Hijam Irabot 1896-1951

In the early decades of the 20th century, a band of educational patriotic writers heralded a renaissance in the arts and literature of Manipur. The period witnessed the birth of pioneers like Hijam Anganghal (1892-1943), Kh. Chaoba (1896-1950), Hijam Irabot (1896-1951), H. Nabadwipchandra (1897-1946), Ashangbam Minaketan Singh (1906-1995), Arambam Dorendrajit Singh (1907-1944), to name only few, who were the precursors of modern Manipuri literature in all its forms. Their works heralded the approach of modern Manipuri literature. Their writings made a rediscovery of Manipur's past glory, a new consciousness of the people, the richness of their language and also a taste of vernacular literature, which had been denied to them for number of years. They were the major writers who shed the luster of patriotism, national consciousness and reawakening and brought an efflorescence and lyrical outburst in modern Manipuri literature.



Khumanthem Prakash

After 1960, a new trend in theme, which is different from the earlier view of the pioneer poets, has inspired the society. Western view gradually enters into the minds of the younger poets which results in social change. The earlier religious themes have been replaced by the reality of modern thought. In a nut shell, the only voice of the people is that there is no meaning in life, no morality, gone are the beauties, the truth and honesty in human beings, all have gone. In the collection of poems titled 'Wa Amata Haige Telanga' (Lit. Kite, let me tell you a word) (1962) by L. Samarendra, we find the major changes even in the use of language. English words are coined with Manipuri; western technique, model and style of writing inspire his poetry. Fortunately, he could communicate with the native people. In 1966, Naharol Sahitya Premi published a book titled 'Lai Amagi Bindu,' a collection of twenty poems, which is in western style. This collection entirely deviated from Kamal and Chaoba's style. The western color and style are not matched with the feeling of the native. The same trend is always associated with the younger poets of the age. In the writings of modern poets, the theme and surroundings of industries, motorcar, nuclear power, killings, street fighting and struggle of evolution are favorably described. Unfortunately, these are absent in Kamal and Chaoba's work and contemporaries and the new approach is looked at as artificial because the readers cannot touch the emotion and sensibility of the description of industrial city. In 1969, Thangjam Ibopishak's '*Apaiba Leichil*' (lit. The wandering cloud) and Madhubir's '*Machu Machugi Atiya*' (Sky of different colours) were published. Western influence is lesser in Madhubir's poem.

However, Ibopishak's poetry is still in western color and style. In his poem, the cries of angry young men are seen. Madhubir's poem '*Kairaba Murti*' (lit. The broken idol) (1970) is also in western color. Shri Biren's '*Tollaba Sadugi Wakhal*' (lit. The thought of the helpless animal) (1970) is purely in western color and new experience. He tries to keep his distinct style and purely modern and western vision. He transforms the earlier vision into modern and mechanical life style.

A modern and western color poetry is the collection of Shri Nilakanta '*Chatlasine Kadaidano Ibani*' (lit. Let's go somewhere) (1971). This is the collection of old and modern visions; here lies the image of T. S. Eliot, Jibanand Das and Rabindranath Tagore. His writing is based on native themes. Sagolsem Dhabali's '*Sanarik Machu*' (1968), Kangjam Padma Kumar's '*Sandhyagi Isei*' (lit. The evening song) (1972), and Thiyam Ibohal and Thiyam Ratankumar's poems are revolutionary poems against the early traditional view, social beliefs and religion. There are many poems of the younger generation that are not named here. All in all, the poetry of post-independence era is a mixed variety of western color and Manipuri feelings. The concept is modern and dynamic, value-based with new spirit, new style and new theme.

The modernist poets who came after Nilakanta and Samarendra reveal their experience of modern sensibility of the changing society. After the war, there is a transition of the old aged traditional value and outside influence. These poets have sound knowledge of the transition. Therefore, their view and writings are sharp to give awareness to the masses. Their approach is profoundly modernist. They try to depict the experience of desperation, destitute conditions, frustration, and the downtrodden and helpless people of the society critically. These works include moral value, commitment and responsibility of humankind in a more realistic way. The poets march towards the theme of love, integration, and unity to bring a modern social value. The poets tempt to take the idea of western poets to bring the modernism in Manipuri society. Among the post independence poets, Shree Biren is the pioneer poet in this direction. His poems are rich in modern sensibility. He repents for not justifying what is truth in life. Life has no justice. In general, it is the human that neglects moral order. He blames god and seeks

freedom of the soul. Another two renowned poets Ibopishak and Ibomcha also try to depict the real sufferings of the modern society. Their idea is more subjective and more artistic. Ibomcha's poems are rich in expression of hopeless individualistic value and sorrowful lives. He tries to find the individual's identity. His idea is the reality of the present day life.

The idea of commonness in the modern generation poets is not trust but frustration, not aggression but the challenges faced. These writers paint the darkness in the world and focus on broken idols, but there is no end in sight for the fulfillment of their hope for a better future. They present a more artistic and more scholarly note. Sometimes it is found that expression is more experiential than artistic. However, it is true that the idea of repentance and support for the downtrodden are prominent.

A calm and serene mood, an embracing humanism, cosmic sympathy for all living objects, spirit of sacrifice, and distinctive traits of Vaishnava character found adequate expression in the poems of these pioneer poets. The great influence of World War II in Manipur (from 1942-45) had brought many changes in the socio-political life of the people. As a theater of war, Manipur witnessed the destructive potential of science and technology; the impact of materialism eroded people's faith in the traditional value of life and it gave way to anger, frustration and disillusionment. The poetry of the post-war period was dominated by two poets, viz., E. Nilakanta Singh and L. Samarendra Singh. These two poets were regarded as harbingers of modernity in Manipuri poetry. E. Nilakanta Singh (1927-2000) had published three collections of poetry: i) *Chatlasine Kadaidano Ibani* (lit. I wish, we two shall go somewhere) (1971), ii) *Tirtha Yatra* (1985), and iii) *Pukning Leikolgi Athuppa* (lit. The secret of the heart) (2000). And L. Somarendra Singh (b. 1915) is a well-known satirical poet. The works to his credit are: i) *Wa Amata Haige Telanga* (lit. Kite, let me tell you a word) (1962), ii) *Mamang Leikai Thambal Satle* (1974), iii) *Khul Amagi Wari* (lit. The story of a village) (1983), and iv) *Wakching Kavita*, (lit. The poetry of Wakching month).

After Nilakanta and Somarendra, a host of young poets arrived on the scene. Among them, the names of Shri Biren, Y. Ibomcha, and R.K. Madhubir are worthy to mention. Their poems present pictures of degradation, violence, moral bankruptcy, mechanical civilization and disintegrated values. They make bold experimentation of new forms. With the emergence of their poems, there is a break with the romantic or conventional poetry of the pre-war period.

Alongside of the above poets, there are a number of other poets who enrich the tradition of Manipuri poetry with many forms and style. Among them, the names of K.Padmakar, K.Ibohal Singh, Tokpam Ibomcha, Borkeinya, Ibempishak Devi, Kshetrimayum Subadani, Kiyamuddin Pukhrimaym, Sarat Arambam, Memchoubi, Lanchenba Meitei, L. Ibemhal, A. Minaketan, S. Nilabir Shatri, Kheiruddin Choudhury, S. Brojeshwar, Saheed Choudhury, Ak. Seram and Raghu Leishangthem may be mentioned. Among the youngest, Kshetri Rajen, and others may be mentioned.

Novel

The novels of post-independence era mainly focus on the reality of life. The novelists paint the story based on the present social life and they look at the social themes more transparently. There are developments in all aspects: artistic expression, form in structure, and presentation. More focus is on the growing dissatisfaction with the value system and disagreement with the present social system. They give up sentimental and moralistic themes. The view of the novelists is more objective, deeper, and focused on social realism. In short, the novel has become the social document of the post-independence era. However, the sense of romanticism in the Manipuri novel is not fully gone from its theme. Hence, the product of post-independence era is a blend of romance and the reality of life.

Hijam Guno is a major novelist of the post-war period. His novels—*Khudol* (lit. Gift) (1964), *Aroiba Paodam* (lit. The last report) (1965), and *Laman* (Indebt) (1958) are popular for his romantic themes associated with the grim realities of life. In *Bir*

Tikendrajit Road, and *Ipam Meihoure*, he depicts the predicament of modern life, the complex human relationship and the degradation of moral values.

R.K. Shitaljit is an idealist. All his novels – *Ima* (Mother) (1947), *Thadokpa* (Sacrifice), *Rohini* (1948), and *Nungshi Wakheiba* show the value of chastity, noble-heartedness, sacrifice, etc. After Shitaljit, came Ram Singh Leitongbam with his *Jat Onba* (lit. Transformation of caste) (1954). He depicted the current and changing social practices. The boy and the girl in the novel belong to families that are not socially permitted to enter into marital relations. They flee to the hills where there is not such a social restriction. '*Khangani Poloida* (lit. The last one will speak) (1963) is another novel of Ram Singh.

Among the female writers, the names of Thoibi Devi, M.K. Binodini Devi, and Kh. Pramodini Devi may be mentioned. Thoibi Devi has written four novels *Kaina Echou* (1957), *Radha* (1965), *Nungshi Eechel* (1967), *Chingda Satpi Eengellei* (1979), *Lamja* (1979). She writes with simple diction; the plot and characterization of the novel are not complex. These novels deal mainly with the small and placid world of women. M.K. Binodini Devi is famous for her novel '*Bor Saheb Ongbi Sanatombi*' (1976). The novel depicts the splendour of the royal court, the cultural life of the people, the romantic life between Sanatombi and Mr. Maxwell, the first political Agent of Manipur, in beautiful prose. Kh. Ibohal, Th. Birchand, A. Chiteshwar Sharma, E. Sonamani, T. Ibomcha, Indrakumar Thiyam, etc. are some of the novelists who came on the scene dealing with many social problems.

With the coming of Pacha Meitei, a new trend in Manipuri novel has started. His novels— *Na Tathiba Ahal Ama*, *Imphal Amasung Magi Ising Nungsitki Phibam*, *Anouba Pao Ama*, *Pigi Wari*, *Lamdang Asida Eibu Khangba Amatangdi Thorakpa Phei*, *Kalimai Mamangda Laibak Katpasu Yaowi Kattabasu Yaowi*, etc. are famous for exposing the decay and rottenness of contemporary society with bold experimentation in form, style and diction.

After Pacha Meitei, the names of B.M. Maisnamba, Arambam Biren, Kshetrimayam Subadani, Punyabati, R.K. Radhesana, M. Borkeina, E. Dinamani Singh may be mentioned. Many young novelists are also coming up.

Short Story

The changing political image, economic development, living standard, modernization and the history of contemporary society evolved as the root of short story in Manipur. However, the idea of short story had been in practice during 1932-1941. The short story got its ultimate effective launching during 1946-1960; it got matured in 1960-70 and reached its important milestones from 1970. The writings are based on the theme of social reality; after independence the influence of social, economic and political life of the people were focused upon during the 1960s. All the short story writers approached dealt with common themes such as freedom, meaning of democracy, the futile hope of social life after the colonial rule, of the kings before that, and the British rule. In the 1960s discontent over the administration, social reformation, and economic instability had impacted the society. Keeping the social structure that was changing, the same which had earlier led to the weaker becoming downtrodden, as the central point, the writers marched towards social reformation. The varieties of themes, viz., degradation of moral value, advancement of materialistic life, expression of fear and anger and anxiety in the torrent of time, increase of corruption, loosening of the respect between male and female, deteriorating position of the common people are the popular subject matter of the post independence short story writers. Shree Biren, Kunjamohon, Prakash and Guno are the pioneer short story writers in this line. Kunjamohon depicts the loose moral value of women for money and power; *Wanomba* Prakash depicts the illicit relationship between a mother-in-law and son-in-law; *Manorama*, for the hope of a son, a woman has illicit relationship with a stranger; *Icha*, a woman having relationship with her husband's doctor friend, etc.

Kunjamohon depicts the destitute life of the poor and the down and out social class people living hopeless lives - *Ilisa Amagi Mahao* (lit. The taste of an Ilisa

fish),(1973). After 1974, the writers have drawn closer towards western colour and style adopting the new technique of new trends in the short story like allegory, symbol, dream, fantasy, folk element and more of the philosophical and psychological view in their form and expression.



E. Dinamani

E. Dinamani started writing on the comic theme, an ironic impression of the present day society. He uses injustice as the present day symbol. Ibomcha depicts human relationship and the kinship terms as an artificial one (*Sunita and Menaka*; *Nong Ngankhridraba Ahing* (lit.The night never met daylight). Rajkumar Mani and Ranbir depict the difficulties and responsibility of mankind, and so on. After 1990 there is a major change, and the ideas of emancipation, self-respect, identity, and cultural identity have emerged. Tracing back their identity, the writers try to create a new history. They take more universal interest in metaphysical problems, intellectual isolation, etc. Yumlembam Ibomcha predicts the revolutionary feelings of the people, the sufferings of the common people as victims of society. He tries to pull the scenes of Vietnam and Bangladesh to Manipur society. Ch.Ningomba, Premchand and Priyokumar depict the restlessness amongst the youth and among the hill people due to their social and community clashes.

The modern period in Manipuri short story begins with the publication of some stories in the journals like '*Yakairol*' (1929), '*Lalit Manjuli Patrika*' (1933). However, this new genre has its firm foundation laid in the hands of R.K. Shitaljit Singh with his

collections of short stories, *Leikonnungda* (1946), *Leinungsi* (1946). The idealist R.K. Shitaljit Singh depicts in his stories the ideals of womanhood, sacrifice and love. Next comes R.K. Elangbam with the collections, *Chingya Tamya* (1955), *Yumgi Mou* (1958) in which he portrays the romantic aspect of feminine sentiments. Nevertheless, in his later collections of short stories, '*Leipaklei*', he depicts the despair and suffering of Manipuri women.

After the pioneering works of these two writers, a group of writers appeared on the scene in the 1960's. They are M.K. Binodini, N.Kunjamohan, Kh. Prakash, Shri Biren, H. Guno, E.Dinamani, Chitreshwar Sharma, Nilbir Shastri, etc. There is a strong release of Manipuri short stories in the 1960s. The works of these writers gave new color and direction to the Manipuri short story as a fully developed art form.

M.K. Binodini (*Nungairakta Chandramukhi*, 1965), N.Kunjamohan (*Chenkhidraba Ichel*, 1965, *Illisa Amagi Mahao*, 1973), Kh. Prakash (*Ichegi Sam*, 1965), Shri Biren (*Leichillakki Thaja*, 1967), H.Guno (*Phijang Marumda*, 1969), E. Dinamani (*Thaklabi*, 1970), Chitreshwar Sharma (*Ngasidi Lakle*, 1970), Nilbir Shastri (*Basanti Charang*, 1967), etc. are the impressive production of the time; these writers started to study social reality critically and depicted in their stories realistically the socio-economic-political issues of the day.

In 1974, a journal called '*Meirik*' was published by a group of storywriters. This group includes writers like Shri Biren, Ibomcha, Viramani, Priyokumar, Premchand, Kishorchand, Ibohanbi, and others. With a manifesto, they revolted against the exploitation of the people and depicted boldly the moral degradation, and many social ills using new idioms.

After the 1970's, number of young short story writers came on the scene and they started writing on the new themes like search for cultural identity, regional patriotism, ethnic issues, etc. Lanchenba Meitei (*Mikap Thokpada Manglaknaba*, 1989), Birendrajit Naorem (*Amambadasu Anganbadasu*, 1992), Memchoubi (*Leiteng*, 1992), A.

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Kholchandra (*Amamba Atiyagi Makhada*, 1995), are some of the writers (and works). Among the contemporary short story writers, the names of K.Priyokumar (*Nongdi Tarakkhidare*, 1995), L.Premchand (*Imagi Phanek Mchet*), L. Viramani (*Picnic Picnic*), Dr. Ch. Ningomba, Kshetrimayum Subadani, H. Satyabati, Dr. I.S.Kangjam, and N. Kunjamohan, may be mentioned.

Light Essay and Criticism

Kh. Chaoba Singh is primarily a poet. He is regarded as the father of modern Manipuri essay (prose). The prose works of Chaoba include the following collections of essays -i) *Chhatra Macha* (1923), *Kannaba Wa* (1924), *Phidam* (1925), *Wakhal* (1926), *Wakhalgi Ichel* (1930), *Sahitya Ahanba* (1935). There are about twenty-four essays published in the journals. Chaoba was a teacher, a scholar and an analyst by the standards of his age. The depth and vastness of his knowledge and scholarship proved that he was an essayist and analyst of all times. His didactive, chiselled form and diction really bear the mark of excellence. His poetic vision and tender treatment naturally softens the generic harshness of critical renderings. Some of his serious essays include *Kavi*, *Kavi Amasung Kaviya*, *Khamba Thoibi*, *Wari Amasung Mahakavya*, etc. No doubt, Chaoba was a pioneer essayist and critic of modern Manipuri literature.



G.C. Tongbra

The famous dramatist G.C. Tongbra was also a well-known essayist of the post independence period. *Wareng Pareng* (a collection of essays, 1966), *Seireng Wareng Singju* (a collection of essays, 1967), *Leirammi Nok-wa Shannaba Nipa Ama* (a series of essays published in *Sahitya*), Prefaces, etc. are a well known collection of essays. His essays are characterised by *Nganggoi* - his humour, satire, light and crisp prose with

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devastating metaphors. A. Minaketan in his *Pareng* (1949), *Bharat Chanu* (1951), *Ramayangi Wari Khara*, (1955) have shown the beauty of Manipuri colloquial diction. E. Nilakanta Singh has brought out more than three collections of his essays — *Acaiba Lei* (1957), *Matamgi Wakhal* (1973), *Sanskritigi Saklon* (1998). He discussed various issues counting Manipuri literature and culture. Ch. Pishak Singh, H. Ranabir Singh, B. Manisana Sharma, R.K. Surendrajit, and L. Somarendra Singh are well known essayists of Manipur.

Criticism

A. Minaketan Singh was the pioneer critic of Manipuri literature. His '*Meitei Upanyas*' published in 1950 was the first work in criticism, discussing the novels of Kamal, Chaoba, Shitaljit, and a translation work of Bankimchandra by M. Koireng Singh. In his impressionistic way, he attempted at the comparative study by these novels. E. Nilakanta Singh is both an essayist as well as a critic. His analysis of the contemporary Manipuri literature is noteworthy. As a critic, E. Dinamani Singh has published the following critical works — a) *Manipuri Sahitya Amasung Sahityakar* (1969), Khwairakpam Chaoba (1971), Dr. Kamal: *Punshi Amasung Sahitya* (1982), Anganghal: *Sahitya, Samaj Amadi Sanskriti* (1992). Dr. Baasi (I.R. Babu Singh) in his critical writings (*Krishnachuragi Angangba Mapal*, 1977), made a reappraisal of Dr. Kamal, and the modern novel. S. Brojeshwar's '*Anouba Manipuri Kavitaghi Shaklon*' (1983) gives a critical survey of Modern Manipuri poetry.

In due course of time, many critics have been appearing with their published works. Among them, the names of Ak. Sharma, Ch. Manihar, L. Damodar, N. Tombi Singh, Thokchom Jogendra, H. Gourdas, L. Joychandra, Shri Biren, I.S. Kangjam, N. Aruna Devi, and Th. Ibohanbi, may be mentioned.

Play

The western proscenium theatre came to Manipur in the beginning of the 20th century. The first Bengali play, *Pravas Milan* was staged at the Babacharan Mukhopadhyay Bandhav Natyasala, which was run by the Bengali Babus at Babupara, Imphal. Many Bengali plays were staged in the first two decades of the century. Then came the first original play, *Nara Singh*, written by L.Ibungohal Singh and staged at the palace compound during the Durga Puja festival on September 30, 1925. It was a landmark in the history of Manipuri drama.

In the 1930's, many theatre houses were established - Manipur Dramatic Union (1931), The Aryan Theatre (1935), The Society Theatre (1937), etc. Then came a number of dramatists staging in these new theatre houses. The dramatists are S.Lalit Singh (*Sati Khongnang*, 1930, *Areppa Marup*, 1939), A.Dorendrajit Singh (*Moirang Thoibi*, 1935, *Bhagyachandra*, 1939), A. Minaketan, Singh (*Sita Banabas*, 1936), H.Anganghal Singh (*Poktabi*, 1935, *Ibemma*, 1936) and others. These plays were mostly historical and mythological in nature.

The Second World War reached Manipur in the year 1942. The war brought many changes in the economy and outlook of the people. There was a mushroom growth of playhouses in Manipur. Along with this, many native playwrights came up with plays on mythological, historical and social themes. Some playwrights explored the rich treasures of Manipuri folk culture and legends, out of which they wrote beautiful plays. H. Tomba Singh (*Tamna*, *Sayon Saphaba*, *Pidonnu*, *Thainagi Leirang*, *Sajik Thaba*), S. Bormani Singh (*Kege Lamja*, *Tonu Laijinglembi*, *Nura Santhalembi*, *Haorang Leisang Saphabi*) were two important playwrights using this new form of drama. These plays were very popular and gave a picture of the beauty and charm of ancient Manipur, adding native color and taste. Other playwrights like M. Birmangol Singh, L.Netrajit Singh also wrote plays of such kind. The themes of patriotism and revival of local faith were also very popular. M.Bira's *Tikendrajit* became a very popular drama of the period.

Quite different from this trend, G.C. Tongbra who was regarded as G.B.Shaw of Manipur came up on the scene. He wrote more than ninety plays during his life time.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:7 July 2013

Dr. Irom Robindro Singh, Ph.D.

Manipuri Literature: A Journey to Post-Independence Period

Some of his famous plays are - *Matric Pass* (1964), *Hingminnaba* (1961), *Hengni Khujai*, *Ngabong Khao*, and *Kakkharaba Kokyam*. His satirical and humourous plays deal with the problems of injustice; corrupt practices, the prevalence of bribery, exploitation of the weak and poor and other forms of misuse of power. He stood out as an undaunted revolutionary. He is indeed a phenomenon in the history of Manipuri drama. Maibam Ramcharan Singh has published more than eighteen plays of which mention may be made of the following few works — *Sarat Purnima* (1966), *Ningol* (1955), *Thadokpa* (1970). He deals mainly with family problems and human relationships in his plays.

Apart from these, there are few writers, who are actively involved in Manipuri theatre. They are H. Kanhailal, P. Shamu, A. Tomchou, and A. Somarendra. These writers felt the pulse of the changing society, the social reality, and the problems arising out of socio-political, economic and cultural contradictions. They started questioning the traditional value system and started a new trend of playwriting. Kanhailal's *Tarel Leima* (1967), *Tamna Lai* (1975) depict a realistic picture of a Brahmin family as well as the menace of goondaism in Manipur. A. Tomchou Singh takes up major problems in his plays. *Promotion* (1978), *Jali Mee* (1975), and *Nunghshiba Thiba* (1978), are some of the famous plays of A. Tomchou Singh. P. Shamu Singh (*Ayekpa Lai*, *Jagoi sabi*, *Atonbi* 1975) is a sensitive playwright, and he is searching for a new meaning of life. His endeavour is to search for the inner truth in order to redeem mankind from its tragic plight.

A. Somarendra Singh is one of the most famous playwrights in this new group. He writes in a realistic mode and tries to expose the problems of the present day society, specially the middle class. He writes to expose the sharp anomalies and inherent characteristic weaknesses of this class, their perpetual tendency to exploit the lower classes. Some of his popular plays are – *Judge Sahebki Eemung* (1973), *Karbar* (1976), *Dasha* (1978), *Tirtha Jatra* (1975), *Yening Thagi Isei*, *Sanatombi*, etc.

The other writers who emerged on the scene are K. Dhiren, Shri Biren, B.K. Wahengba, W. Kamini, Niladhawaja Khuman, Kh. Brajachand, Kh. Brojendra, Y.

Rajendra, etc. Among the female dramatists, the names of M.K. Binodini Devi, Kh. Pramodini Devi may be mentioned.

Autobiography

A. Minaketan Singh is a pioneer writer in the field of autobiography writing. He has published two volumes i.e., '*Punshigi Saktam*' (1980, part I) and in 1983 (part II). The first part of the autobiography covers the period from 1906 (the birth of the writer) to the time he was 60 year old. It has 17 small chapters and 27 small poems. The first part (Volume I) describes his parentage, childhood, environment, etc.; the second part (Volume II) has eight chapters, 60 poems and covers his early education, later life etc. No doubt, his racy and poetic prose has its own charm and beauty. L. Ibungohal Singh has written '*Jivan Charit* (1975) - his autobiography in a different style from his creative works.

In the book, he depicted the pre-war Manipuri society, the experiences of education outside the state, etc. Dwijamani Dev Sharma's short autobiography '*Eigi Punshigi Wari Khara*' (1980) is a documentary account of the educational backwardness in Manipur and the hardships suffered by the people in the early decades of the twentieth century. A well-known novelist, A. Biren has brought out his autobiography entitled '*Ningshing Wari*' 1998 in which he recounts his experiences as a writer. The youngest writer is Babudhon Singh. In his autobiography, '*Eigi Punshi*' (2002), he narrates many interesting episodes of his life. Nongmaithem Pahari's '*Eigi Diarydagi*' (2002) is an account of the writer's experiences in the Imphal and Tripura jail.

Biography

Kh. Pramodini is one of the pioneer writers of biography in Manipuri literature. The '*Nuja Phidam* (1957), '*Leimarol* (1958) contains the life-sketches of few renowned Indian and Manipuri women. A. Minaketan wrote some childrens' books namely '*Ramayangi Wari Khara*' (1952), '*Angangi Ramayana*' (1952), '*Ngangoi Pareng*', etc. in

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Manipuri Literature: A Journey to Post-Independence Period

which the lives from the puranas have been portrayed. Ch. Pishak's '*Bharatki Sadhaksing*' (1966) is a biography of some great men of India. Chhatradhari Soyam and Langol Iboyaima have published biography on Jananeta Irabot, the legendary leader of Manipur who fought against British imperialism. L. Iboyaima's '*Irabot: Punshigi Shaktam Khara*' (1996) is a well-researched biography of Irabot. R.K. Sanahal's '*Bir Tikendrajit*' (1973) and '*Thangal General*' are two important biographies on two historical personalities of Manipur. The works are more historical than projecting the men. Dr. N. Tombi's '*Shaktam Macha Machasing*' (2001) is a collection of important profiles of Manipuri writers. He wrote '*Meitram Bira Singhi Punshi Wari*' (2000), a biography on the life of a well-known dramatist and director of Manipur. Shri B.S. Rajkumar also has published two biographies - 1) '*Guru Govind Singh*' (2000), 2) '*Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*' (2002).

O. Shyamananda's book on '*Eina Khangba Madhumangol Sharma*' (2000) is a biography of a Manipuri politician who was killed in the prime of his life. Laishram Tarini Kanta is a biographer from Cachar, Sihar who published a biography on '*Yengkhom Kamal*' (2003), a social worker of the region.

Travelogue Resources

Travelogue (travel literature) as a new genre in modern Manipuri literature appeared in 1937 when Hijam Irabot Singh wrote an article called '*Mandalegi Khongpham*' which was published in Manipuri Sahitya Parishad Patrika. It was an account of the journey on ship from Chittagong to Mandalay, Burma. The writer gave a vivid and firsthand experience of a journey in a beautiful language.

N. Kunjamohon Singh (*Sovietki Leibakta*, 1977), and (*G.D.R. Diary*, 1985), is a major writer in Manipuri travelogue. In the books, the writer describes in detail the historical and socio-economic conditions as well as the intimate encounters with the people of the places he visited. He praises the achievements of Soviet Union and G.D.R. in his books. Kh. Pramodini Devi in her '*Icrisatki Cooli Nupi*' (1991), '*Torbung gi Tera Pambida Shatpa Meibul*' (1993), '*Huntre Hunpham Manipur*' (2001), takes the readers to

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Dr. Irom Robindro Singh, Ph.D.

Manipuri Literature: A Journey to Post-Independence Period

the different parts of India and Manipur. She narrates her experiences and the episodes in a simple language.

Now, the travelogue has become a popular genre. Many writers have come up with their new travelogues. Some well known writers are - Shoni (Manihar) ' (*Khongchat*',1999) and (*Thawanmichak*',2003); L.Somarendra Singh (*Swargada Awaba Amasung Nungaiba*, 1999); E. Nilakanta Singh (*Americaga Unaba*, 2001); Ibotombi (*Baikal*, 1977); Panthoiba (*Imphaldagi Kanyakumari*, 1994), (*Bangladesh Khongchat*, 1994), (*Gujarat Khongchat*, 1994); Dr.Ch Jamini Devi (*Swargagi Leibaktuda*, 1994), (*Korouhanbana Ironnungdagi Khongdoirakpa Lamdamduda*, 1998), (*Americagi Khongchat*, 2001), (*Kohinoorgi Mashaigonda*, 2000); Saratchand Thiyam (*Hajillaba Isinggi Manakta*,1994), (*Nungshibi Greece*,2002); L. Ibomcha (*Chatsi Puri*,1995); J.K. Luwang (*Pullambagi Mahao*,1998); O.Shyamanada Singh (*Tlomngainagi Lamdam: Mizoram*,2000); Ch.Somarendra (*Numitna Thorakpa Japan Urubada*,2001); Memchoubi (*Eropagi Mapao*,2001); Bimol Chongtham (*Tripura Lamnungshi*,2001), M.K. Binodini Devi (*Oh! Mexico*, 2004), and Dr. Th. Ibohanbi (*Bangabondhugi Leipakta*).

Female Poets and Literary Criticism

a) History:

In the 1980's, many women writers emerged on the scene, of which there are many women, who oppose the social system and are on the way to finding out a new way, and another group of women who became aware of the negative impact of being submissive to the patriarchal society. Still another group of women writers agrees with the traditional value system; they are neutral and they find peace in their own life. Despite their desire to cross social barriers, the first group of women writers, are unable to stand on a steady footing. Therefore, they stick to the idea of sacrificing themselves for the society. Notable writers of this age are – Thoibi Devi, Subadani, Rajkumari Radhesana, Punyabati, Hemolata, and others. Then appears the second group of writers, describing a traditional phenomenon with a new vision and a new consciousness of their

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Dr. Irom Robindro Singh, Ph.D.

Manipuri Literature: A Journey to Post-Independence Period

lives existing under a patriarchal morality. They wish for a revolution of women. Writers of this tradition include Borkeinya, Subadani, Ibemhal, Satyabati, Rashi, and others.

b) Movements:

The numbers of female poets or female writers as compared to male writers or poets are comparatively less. This is because in the early days before the 1960s, women in Manipuri society were hardly allowed to have school education. Those women who were educated were generally considered as polluted. Due to this reason, elders did not send their daughters or female members to school. After the 60s, people gradually understood the importance of women's education. Therefore, with the coming of a new vision, the seed was sown for the rise of women writers and poets. The real feminist literature in Manipur started with the coming of Jannaneta Hijam Irabot (1896-1951), G.C.Tongbra (1913-1996) and Memchoubi and others.

All these writers in one way or the other, encouraged many other women writers to show their talents, which resulted in the appearance of women writers and poets of substance. Many women writers or poets of the new age come up with their different views according to their experiences, or look into the inner and outer world of women's lives. Some of them need to be mentioned here.

Haobam Nalini, her love of God, depicting the theme of life and death as the main subjects of her poetry; Nalini mentions God in most of her poems. She has a strong feeling of patriotism as well. There are five poems entitled Nupi (woman) written by Ibemhal, Bimabati, Hemolata, Nima and Urmila. Other poems, which reflect women's conditions, are Ibeyaima's *Meitei Nupi*, Landanbala's *Ima*, Mangalliema's *Nupigi Mapok*, Borkanya's *Malika* and Memchoubi's *Eigi Palem Nungshibi*. Thoibi Devi and Khwairakpam Anandini's poems commemorate the Nupilal (Women's War) in the history of Manipur. Pramodini, Leingaklembi, Memchoubi, Rani, Sapam Bijaya, Sumila Asem and Nungshitombi write patriotic poems. The post war conditions and situations of Manipur are reflected vividly in the poem *Mareibak Ningbadi Makhoini* by W.

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Dr. Irom Robindro Singh, Ph.D.

Manipuri Literature: A Journey to Post-Independence Period

Kolamema. Vanumati's poem which follows the theme of revolution. There are other women poets, who write their poems with the revolutionary spirit. Benubala writes satirical poems. Themes of death and loss of justice are apparent in the poems of Ekasini. Nevertheless, her poems are lacking in seriousness. Chandrakala writes seriously but the standard of her poems is not high. Nanda Devi appeals to women to be courageous. M Borkanya's poems have the special womanly quality and innocence.

Feminist Literature Resources

Feminism started in the West in and around the 1960's and then spread very quickly in other parts of the world. Many Manipuri male writers, no doubt sympathize with the movement; they visualize women as ideal and worthy to be given favour in facing the odds of life in a society. Manipuri women from the time of ancient myths have occupied a distinct place. Mention may be made of Panthoibi (the goddess of power, knowledge), Phouwoibi (the goddess of food grain), Leima Namun Khambi (the one who took revenge to her husband's murderer), Thoibi (the one who even challenged her father, the king's brother). All these characters have a trait of bravery, which is distinct.

The history of Manipuri novels indicates that women were important and they were the centres of the novels. Out of three novels of pre-World War II, two are titled with the names of the heroines. However, what they portrayed is the women of the upper class, of high esteem, tradition-bound and are living within the accepted norms of society. Jannaneta Irabot, in the early part of the 20th century, stepped forward to emancipate women. Post-war novelists like Shitaljit Guno portray women as ideal characters who could face social challenges.

The next phase of feminism in Manipuri literature starts with the emergence of three women writers of profound influence, Thoibi Devi (1920-96), Khaidem Pramodini (1928-), and Maharajkumari Binodini (1922-). Thoibi Devi's novels portray women of almost perfect personality, mixed with traditional values and the educated, rational viewpoint, the women who could object to the social norms and dare to go their ways, the

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Dr. Irom Robindro Singh, Ph.D.

Manipuri Literature: A Journey to Post-Independence Period

women who could dedicate themselves in the cause of humanity. Binodini's novels and short stories are full of sobriety mixed with hilarity, which could charm the readers. She, in her Sahitya Academy Award winning novel, portrays a woman who could break the social, religious, and class barriers, to handle the unpredictable with an unusually independent mind. Pramodini took interest in the social condition of women. She could not bear the pulse of the weak women; she gave a message to oppressed womenfolk to rise and lead a respectable life.

Conclusion

The flavor of post-independent Manipuri literature, in a real sense is the essence of early Manipuri literature which has many qualities of ancient myths and folk tales. In the later stages, from time to time, the influence of existing life styles, changing social strata and other un-definable reasons exalt it, especially with its peculiar model. No doubt, there are lots of influences of other Indian literature like Sanskrit, Bangla, Hindi and so on in Manipuri literature. This article narrates briefly, how the post-Independence Manipuri literature flourished and what kind of motivation moved and inspired those writers.

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