

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 into the poem. The poets also portray the existentialist situation of Manipur in a lighter tone.

Keywords: Made in India, Manipur, Survival, Ibopishak, Satire

Introduction:

There is a great cultural diversity where various ethnicities have coexisted for ages. 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 leaving more than thousands of widows 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 is a cultural exchange with the mainland through literature. Manipuri literature 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" the writer of the article has discussed in detail the beginning of Manipur poetry. Before the outbreak of written literature especially in Manipuri 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 a prose piece 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 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 had been so far lucky

not to meet them in person. But he couldn't 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 in the poem are 'Fire, water, air, earth, sky' which are the basic component of human life. The satirical aspect here with the killers is that very basic component of human life was in need of killing another human. The poet was not aware of his crime. He was clueless why he was going to be killed. That's the pathetic situation in Manipur. The poet seems to look worried while talking to the killers and tried to calmly confront the killers. The killers wanted to know what type of a writer the poet is. (12), or a mad man. 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 at its heart is concerned with ethical reform. We see in the poem that the poet wants to die with the bullet made in India and not by foreign-made bullet. The poet says:

'With which gun will you shoot me then? Made in India, or made in another country?'(23).

Here the poet is hinting at "Made in India" movement which encourages companies to manufacture their products in India and also increase their investment. The poet seems to be supporting the movement so he says that he wants to be "killed by Indian bullet". Especially in Manipur, China goods were banned and it did follow some destruction but it did not last that long to sustain what they started. There are still overflowing with China goods in the international market in Moreh, Manipur. In Manipur, 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 people will come and kill them.

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.'

I said: 'That's a good thing. Of what use are plastic flowers without

any fragrance ?'(26-29)

These lines are quite funny. The poet through the lines says that Indian products are good. Here it is not particularly talking about the materials production, the pun here is the empty promises made by many officials to bring about peace and prosperity in Manipur. According to the killers "When asked to make plastic flowers India can only produce toothbrushes", the line depicts how in the name of bringing peace so many killings is happening in Manipur like AFSPA(Arms Forces Special Power Acts). This act had taken many lives. The people of Manipur expected 'flower' which represents beauty, peace, and prosperity but it's only the 'toothbrush' India could give to the people of Manipur. What the people get from Manipur Government as well from the Center are merely empty promises. Manipur is in a war zone like situation for the past three decades. Many politicians came and went and what they did nothing to bring about changes in Manipur, nothing much has happened so far. The plight of the common people is left unheard. 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. 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 made in India have killed its own brother and sister in Manipur. The poet is not in favor of killing innocent people. 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? The poet is a true Indian.

4) Satire is witty, ironic, and often exaggerated:

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 people who hated Bharat wanted to kill the Poet. It is not clear why the killer was after the poet. The poet is fortunate not to be killed by the killer. 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 love their nation and really work for the benefit of its progress. 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 are identity crises. 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. 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. It also addresses the deeply rooted conflict among the ethnic 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 issues, AFSPA, fake encounter, unemployment, no proper law and order, drugs smuggling, child trafficking to name a few. The poet advocates the people to rise about personal gain and work for the progress of humankind.

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