

Poetry Section

An untold story

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I still know how it feels like, those uncomfortable;
Trying to take those moments away, I blend
Easy, undisturbed, safe and secure and comfortable;
Sunny brightly, serene compose that evening, calm and quietly;
I walked down the street swinging up and down beholding;
Fresh as a morning lily, I stood tall by the roadside;
Sweating softly as though morning dew drops shivering;
That lofty hair of mine swings across covering my face;
I took measures of those blue sheathe rapidly now and again;
Hanging down my spirit, veiling and masking my temple;
With that smooth half peeping blouse I adore;
I still remember that *Phanek* I carried a mystery to me.

Eager and hurried I glanced again and again distant apart;
Wanting a ride to some unknown place I ever visited;
I know it's just a distance apart, handy but I doubts often;
I waited and waited, it never turns up that easily;
Securing myself, I was keeping ready for that excursion
Knowing not what may happen, I fasten couples of self potions;
Far distance I saw that beast riding sluggish towards me;
Ah! No vacancy, Seats all occupied, I hesitate;
Come! You can sit here, I doubts one and again inactively;
How! How can I sit in front by your side? I asked
I may fall off easily! How safe the sitting is on the side? I inquired

I feel a little dismay; I know something is going to happen;
Uneasy as I was, feeling uncomfortable, I was quite concerned;
Restless and uneasy, unsettle and watchful, I took the ride
along;
Oh! What an incorrect situation I was involving in?
Sitting by 'his' side, I thought I'm Stupid and false;
Securing myself out and again; I try sitting little on that seat
Should I have known 'his' confidence, that auto driver a frail;
Trying to connect those soft velvety white sheets of mine;
Attempting Pressing and nudging, folding and patting;
How may he do? I wondered 'his' insecurities all rubbishes;
'His' emotions all a lie; 'His' reach a failure held.

Should I stop the vehicle? I thought twice and thrice
Should I jump off that running beast? I meditate deep;
I feel quite easy riding that distance, a child's cradle holding tight;
How alluring I was to him? I question self five,
My Simplicity a pride; uneasy lies on 'his' beholding;
Now and again 'he' tied to capture 'his' attention tense;
With those dirty elbow of 'his', nudging wrought emotions;
'Riding' and 'rubbing' 'patting' and 'connecting'
Sooner I observed calmly enduring what may 'he' do?
Silly old beast! Inside 'his' insensible stupid maneuver;
Keep gazing 'me' still far apart, when in I fall detach;
I still recall that evening bizarre, an untold story of mine.

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On Academics, Intellectuals, Political Class and Activists

This write up is an excerpt from Prof. Angomcha Bimol's speech delivered on 10th June 2006 under the title "Towards a Wholesome Holistic Self On Silence, Identity and Coloniality of the Postcolonial", on occasion of Arambam Somorendra Memorial Lecture here in Imphal

Mr Chairperson, it is possible that some in the esteemed audience might find the title of this Memorial Lecture (Towards A Wholesome Holistic Self: On Silence, Identity and coloniality of the Postcolonial) esoteric or even baffling. If that is so, I would say, it is not their fault; blame it on my "tribe", the academics! I would quite agree with many if they feel that the member of this tribe don't talk in "simple and straight" language. In fact, I would even go a little further and say, even, in the age of globalization, and amidst the talk of the global village, this tribe tells its stories on how they would thrive in isolation! Jokes apart, if the title sounds peculiarly "academic", I am afraid that my lecture may be jeopardized from the very outset. Given my experience, particularly in Manipur where the word "academic" seems to conjure up a world that is nothing more than utter irrelevance, such a fate is more likely than not. In effect, such a fate, that is rendering the world of academia and their voice irrelevant, has been a critical element in aggravating and perpetuating the silence that haunts Manipur. Therefore, allow me to devote a few more minutes on the matter to preempt the possible subversion of the lecture, and engage with this aspect of the silence.

In Manipur, I have come across a tendency amongst social scientists to begin their comments on the realities of their societies and the state with a defensive opening remark, "let me share some views from the academic vantage point" or let me share some academic views". I often wonder as to what they intend to communicate by such opening remark. By saying that their views are "academic" or from an "academic vantage point", do they mean to suggest that their views have nothing to do, or are incommensurate, with the reality of the state of affairs on which they are commenting? Or, does it reflect an inability or unwillingness to take responsibility for the implications of their comments and views? Perhaps, professional academics in Manipur need to seriously reflect on these questions for themselves and for Manipur and her people. Finding answer to these would have a critical bearing on our understanding and finding ways of the silence I have talked about earlier.

Mr Chairperson, it should go without saying that a defunct or irrelevant academia or a sterile or impotent intellectual class is not a feature of the "advanced and developed" countries in the contemporary world, and, for that matter, many of the great "civilizations" of the past could not have been what they were without their thinking classes. A thriving thinking class, of which the academics and the intellectuals constitute two crucial segments, is a critical indicator of a healthy and civilized society. I must as well remind ourselves that if Manipur has been marked as a unique geo-political and cultural entity in this part of the globe, it has not been solely because of its political or military legacies; it is also critically because of its class of authors, thinkers and preceptors who have left us with ballads, songs, and various genres of literature along with the treatises on a range of issues, and cultural institutions in course of its history. I believe that if our

society shows any signs of ill-health, our attention should also be focused on the health of our academia and the intellectual class as much as on our political class. In a sense, I would even place a higher responsibility on the shoulders of our academic community, particularly those working in autonomous institutions like the university system, and the intellectuals than on our political class to articulate issues of public concerns, and contribute towards shaping and refining public debates and political consciousness so as to ensure the well-being of our society.

By placing such a higher stake or responsibility on our academia and intellectuals, I am not absolving the responsibility of our political class, particularly the politicians. Neither am I devaluing or discarding the significance of the place and role of the political class or political institutions in our society. But rather it is to acknowledge and squarely face an unfortunate fact of our life – that is, the political class of Manipur is, willy-nilly, trapped or constrained by the existing "patron-client" (political-economic) structure between New Delhi and Imphal, and its concomitant ideological components. Whether one likes it or not, it has been a political-economic structure that produces our political class as a coterie of "middle-men", whose power and legitimacy come primarily from their proximity, and capacity, to represent the interests of the political lordship at New Delhi rather than the people of the State whose will and wishes it is supposed to represent under the modern democratic polity. To expect such an uprooted or alienated political class to lead or rescue the society would be asking too much; at least at this juncture, it will be unrealistic. But at the same time, we have to remember that a people with an alienated political class, disconnected or uprooted from its own people, encourages despotic rule and, worse, it amounts to inviting subjugation of the people to forces from without.

It should go without saying that no society can live without a professional political class or political institutions; a healthy society requires a mature political class, well versed in the rules and nuances of the power game, including electoral politics, and capable of stewarding the society with the vision of statesmanship. It is our misfortune that we do not have a political class who can play the power game as well as show the leadership quality of statesmanship. We need to produce and groom a mature political class for the survival and health of our polity and society. The familiar cliché, cynicism and tirades against the political class have to give way to serious efforts to shape a political culture with a mature political class that its moorings firmly grounded on its own soil. Only then could we hope to ensure a real rule by our own political class, even if it operates within the constraints of an existing system, under the democratic imperative of the people whom it should not be able to displease. Such a political culture should enable us to distinguish this real rule from that of the rule by proxy with no local accountability, by forcing the latter to come out undisguised as it is and for what it is. Such a

political culture can never flourish in a society with silent or defunct academic and intellectual classes.

Mr Chairperson, the academics and the intellectuals inhabit "autonomous" spaces (like other institutions in a given polity), and their locations underscores their unique identities and responsibilities. Members of the academia and intellectuals should be able to see through the hegemony of the meaning and sense of "power" embedded in the state-centric outlook. An inability to see through that hegemony, and lack of professional competence and purpose, will reduce or tempt the academics and intellectuals to play adjunct to the political class. Besides, they might even start believing that the only way to effect a change in society for the better is to become a politician! Here, I must also mention that the members of the academia and intellectuals must guard against any process that seeks to undermine their academic and intellectual autonomy and their organic link to the society. Our academics and intellectuals must be alert to the possibility of such subversions by a "patron-client" structure of research and institutional funding as well as a reproduction of the "colonial knowledge" practices wherein, in the production of "knowledge", the local scholars end up as the "data collectors", "local informants", and "research assistants" while the scholars from the politically dominant decide the designs, methods and perspectives, and theorize. Keeping in mind such issues, members of the academia and intellectual class should take a major part in setting the terms and standards of public debates to ensure that cacophony of heresies and rhetoric do not become the mainstay of our public life in Manipur.

I believe that the social scientists, as crucial members of our thinking class, could and should provide us with better understanding of, and suggest solutions to, our pressing socio-economic, political and other related problems. Similarly, I am also sure that our social scientist will agree with me that the worth of a given work of a social scientist is directly proportional to the richness of her/his analytical and conceptual tools, and perspectives and methods that she/he deploys while addressing the empirical world or the world that she/he willy-nilly projects. The richness of these tools, perspectives and methods will enable us to have a better understanding of the realities and an effective negotiation with life, including our capacity to make ethical choices. An academic culture that does not trust or practice this belief could only produce alienated selves and knowledge that is professionally and socially useless. Ladies and gentlemen, while thinking or executing any effort to come out of the present impasse in Manipur, the implications of having an active thinking class, with the members of the academia and intellectuals taking active role in setting the terms and standard of the public debates and consciousness of our intelligentsia and the masses in general, should not escape our attention.

Mr. Chairperson, I shall be truncated in my comments on this issue if I do not say a few words on our activists on the ground. I

have come across activists who reciprocate the social scientists with comments on the same state of affairs, sometimes sharing the same public platform with the social scientists, with a claim that their views authentically capture the "ground reality". Incidentally though, their comments and views would be invariably couched in words like "nation", "state", "history", "hegemony", "rights", "colonial", "neo-colonial", "globalization", "market", "captive economy" and so on. I often wonder whether the activists are aware of the sources of these words/concepts with which they claim to "authentically capture" the "ground reality"? Are they aware of the meanings and implications of these words/concepts with which they construe and shape the reality? Or, more importantly, what would be the nature of the "ground reality" if the activists were to construe it without such words/concepts? For that matter, without such words/concepts, how would they construe the world in order to make sense of their actions and purpose? I believe that it is preposterous and presumptuous – or worse, suicidal – for those whose actions are directed towards a transformation, or a defense, of an existing order or system of relationships, values and beliefs in the larger collective domain, to believe that their actions are devoid of some form of ideational and ethical orderings of the objects of their actions, for the matter of their own actions. Without a sincere appreciation of this fact or the dialectical relationship between their actions and their ideational/ethical components, I'm afraid the activists could only produce ethically deprived, directionless and episodic acts. More dangerously, it also runs the risk of obliterating a desirable distinction between the activists who are fired by dreams of an ethical order and the lumpen elements who share no such dreams.

Mr. Chairperson, I am aware that, like most tribes or communities, the academic tribe has its own ways of construing, and communication about, the world, and that people outside this community deride (paradoxically, also romanticize) their strange sounding language ("Oh! Those jargons", as some would retort, conveying an unfamiliarity with the tribe's familiar vocabulary). One may find the tribe or look at them with suspicion or find them strange and intriguing, or irritating or downright boring because they do not have the excitement of one's reality. But may I say, Mr. Chairperson, one can ignore them only at one's peril. It should go without saying that the tribe is crucial to any enterprise to define who and what we are as a people (of Manipur), and where we want to go from here and now. A life without this tribe would be a stunted life; it could very well be a life that poses dangerous and real threat to our very survival. Having said this, I should also remind those who see the tribe as an outside entity, that its existence is deeply embedded in the realities of the larger society. That common sense or folk knowledge and scientific knowledge can and does penetrate each other's domain is an acknowledged fact.

The tribe's language is therefore not unrelated to yours. However hard one might try to

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