

# Editorial

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## Quami Ekta Divas : try something to strengthen the Unity of India

As a student of History I pay all my respect to Jhanshi Rani for her role in fighting the British Raj. But May be the BJP has its own agenda in organizing a remembrance function of the brave queen considering the fact that Manipur too is now a part of India. But I wonder why Manipur BJP fails to remember Leima Linthoingambi, wife of King Ningthoukhomba, who fearlessly defeated the enemy to protect the Kingdom of Kangleipak. Besides, among the thousand Manipuri ladies, role of Leiphon Chanu who was the right hand of King Herachandra in fighting the Awa during the 7 years devastation should why be left out.

Well every November 19, India observes Quami Ekta Divas as National Integration Day. The day is being observed in remembrance to mark the Birth day of Indira Gandhi, the first lady PM of India.

Indian polity being a multi-party system with countless number of political party, paying respect to the one who belong to a specific political party felt uneasiness to many hard core politicians and political workers who belong to different political party. May be, it was the rationale behind the reason to pay respect and organize observance of Rani of Jhansi as she had also equally played her role in protecting her Kingdom.

The new ideology needs appreciation, the purpose of celebrating the Quami Ekta Divas is to spread the message that India is still united and will continue to unite in the coming days.

70 years after India regained freedom from British Raj, the Quami Ekta Week is being celebrated cutting across differences of all political parties. These days programs like meetings, seminars, symposia, particular legendary functions, cultural activities are held to highlight the themes (national integration, secularism, non-violence, linguistic harmony, anti-communalism, cultural unity, development of weaker sections, well being of minorities, issues of woman and conservation) of Quami Ekta Week. The celebration of the week starts with the National Integration Pledge.

Here comes the argument. If Quami Ekta Week is all about integrity and also about bringing back the memories of all those ladies who had led, fought and sacrificed for the integrity of the nation called India, why not the brave queens who Leima Linthoingambi among others were equally paid respect. Besides, everybody knows how Maipakpi played her role in fighting the British soldier during the last Anglo Manipuri war.

It is also learnt that during Quami Ekta Week various programme like seminars, symposia etc. use to be organised. Why not the content of the National Anthem "Jana Jana Manna....." be discussed as it alienated the erstwhile kingdom of Manipur. Leaving aside the debate about the song being written and composed to praise the Queen of the British Colonial government. The National Anthem which is a tool for unity of the nation started from Sind which is now in Pakistan and end at Brahmaputra valley and Himalayan range, at which Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland are never included.

Let this NDA government do something to make sure that the excluded geo-political entity in the National Anthem be included besides recognizing the role of Manipuri Queens and other lady who fought for the protection of their motherland, if they think of people in this region as equal co-partners in the nation building process by making amends to the not so sacrosanct marriage of the parts of the region now called India's North East at the time of merger to India. ■

## CHENGNI KHUJAI: Chronicle of Insurgency in Manipur

By- Dr. K. Shantibala

There are many instances of chaos and turbulent nations because of the unsolved problems. Such issues have triggered geo-political unrest among nations of the world. One of the most disturbing facts is the unsolved internal problems faced by many countries today. The acts of terror in the name of fighting for independence and sovereignty and for identities have now assumed to be terrorist outfits around the world and counter insurgencies and counter terrorist measures have also been taken up. In such conflict situations of tackling insurgencies and terrorist problems the civilians have to face many problems. The insurgents revolted against the government with violent steps, armed rebellion and act of terror making the government to declare such groups as terrorists. These groups made their hideouts in the peripheral locations disturbing the peace and proper functioning of the government and common people has to face such conflict situations. This ultimately hinders the developmental works.

In such a situation, we are compelled to ask ourselves the reasons behind the mass protests, the people's movement, its history, and significance. The October Revolution of Russia, French Revolution, Indian Independence Movements revealed the mass protest by the people. Considering such historical facts, what actually does valley and hill based armed rebellion signifies in Manipur? And what this revolutionary movement has given to the state and its people? Whether this conflict situation is moving in the right direction or not has now become a big question. And it is a big question whether literature of a particular society facing such problems portrayed the hard realities in its pages. Here, the focus will be made on whether Manipuri literature delineates the pen pictures of its society or it has sidelined the grim reality. Manipur lost its sovereignty two times. The first one was under the Burmese occupation during (1815-25) known in the history as 'Chahi Taret Khuntakpa'; and second under the British colonial rule (1891-1947). No doubt, the people of Manipur began to feel the spirit of nationalism during this turbulent period of foreign invasion. And Manipur also experienced the horrors and impact of Second World War. People have taken their big role in its nation building. By this time, Hijam Irabot emerged as a socialist leader of the people revolting against the prevailing system of governance. Manipur became a sovereign nation on 14 August, 1947 after the Second World War. The first Assembly Election was held on 11 June, 1948 and formed a democratic government on 27 July. However, Manipur became a Part-C State when merged with the Indian union on 15 October, 1949 experiencing a different taste of governance.

Since then, People of this erstwhile sovereign state felt quite remorse and dejected. People felt and believed that the loss of sovereignty have triggered phenomenal political changes, begging for help every time from Delhi by the representatives of the people and accumulating wealth and resources illegally in the name of the party whereas making its people to starve and deprive from the basic needs in a democratic system of governance. So people felt that the first move is to restore to its sovereign state. Meanwhile, there are different viewpoints and lots of controversies in its history for Manipur in becoming a part of India. The congress party wishes to be part of India whereas the socialist party wanted Manipur to be part of Assam state. It may rightly be claimed that among the

different political upheavals, the seed of insurgency was sown with Hijam Irabot being the leader of the communist party in 1948. Irabot attended the conference of the communist party held on 28<sup>th</sup> February in Kolkata to start the revolutionary movement in Asia. He became an underground on 29 October. Later on, he formed the Red Guard Council in 1950 and started the armed revolt and continued till 1951. Interestingly, insurgency movement had already been there in Manipur. The members of Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, the first political party in Manipur joined the Azad Hind Fauj led by Netaji Subhaschandra Bose and revolted against the British forces to free India. This episode of the freedom struggle came to an end with India becoming an independent nation and Manipur a free state. However, the peasant's revolt led by Irabot became the first insurgency movement in the state.

The unsolved grievances felt by the people of Manipur and the images of topsy-turvy political upheavals have cast the shadow on its literature too. For instance, there is an ample picture of the Russian Revolution in Mazim Gorke's 'Mother'. It ignited the spirit of revolutionary movement in Russia. Insurgency movement and its problems arise from the unsatisfied governance and where people of the deprived section revolted against its government. In another word, 'Revolutionary situation is the sum total of objective conditions expressive of an economic and political crisis in a given social system and determining the possibilities of a social revolution.' [I Frolov, ed., 1984: 360]

GC Tongbra portrayed such political crisis in his drama 'Chengni Khujai'. It delineates the pictures of the insurgency movement triggered by Irabot and its long history. No doubt there are many instances of such issues painted on the pages of Manipuri literature. But the way how Tongbra pick up the theme and the plot of conflict between the people and its government in Chengni Khujai is very rare. Tongbra, who is also the father of modern Manipuri drama preferred the Anti Romantic style of writing and always focused on depicting the conflict situation of the people and its government. Romantic scene is hardly visible in this drama rather the plot and setting focused on armed conflict and ends with the death and sacrifice of someone. He named Manipur as Vaishnavpur in an allegorical way. Those ministers, the representatives of the people were given the names of the different ethnic groups like Yenba Miya (Muslim), Natrang (Meitei) and Kaajarung (Hill Tribe). Kailash here depicts Delhi, the centre; Manipur was under a Chief Commissioner sent by the centre before it got statehood and this has been portrayed as a state governed by Devdhoot. Characters like Gana Devi, Upadev and Durga Devi were introduced to represent the type of democratic government and its administration carried out under the centre. The frequent visit of representatives from the centre; the unlawful activities and misused of funds and resources by the representatives of the people and the protest and agitation by the people that emerges are vividly delineated. Tongbra here employed two techniques, the first one with peaceful and non violent protest and the other one with violent move. The youth in the drama were against Hamengpana who proposed to use non violence movement and peaceful step to get their demands. If they follow the non violence movement, it will be under the rule of the Indian

Constitution and those hot blooded youth who were faded with the mockery of democracy and wishes to fight against Indian government to become independent. This statement is expressed through Hamengpana in the last part of the play: Hamengpana: ...I humbly appealed to follow non violence and satyagraha if there is going to be an agitation but stop violence and war. You hot blooded youth who were faded with the mockery of democracy and unable to endure with hunger and thirst fought in the war and died, you have followed the path of the patriots!

[Chengni Khujai, \_\_\_\_:77]

Young people like Yaomacha, Takhelsha, Houdongmu, Aamedadi, women character, Iroi Tharobi, Tenwa, Lonthoktabi Khutekpi were the revolutionist youth. Pikingkei and Paktokpa were two countries helping the revolutionary movement. Starting from March, 1950 the Communist party base of Manipur was trained in Burma and to get help stay there till 1952. Further, the Manipur National Union proclaimed Manipur as Independent. The Revolutionary Nationalist Party determined and stuck with the freedom movement during 1950-53. On the other hand, the insurgent group in the hill like Manipur Naga Council formed in 1955 was later on merged with Nagaland omitting the name Manipur in 1973. Armed insurgency movement was started by Meitei State Committee when Manipur Communist Revolutionary movement began to fall in 1953. Tongbra uttered this armed struggle which sow the seed in the 1950s as a result from the poverty stricken people. This statement has been emphasized very frequently in the play. This was expressed in the first part when the central government gave the financial package and how it was distributed:

Hameng: The entire creamy layer will be taken by them and the left over will be reserved for the people. Tenwa: To block the respiratory track and tooth aches are left for us.

Hameng: your brothers became underground because they are not happy with the treatment.

The frustrated people against the government in its second time revolt and the reason for the failed meeting have been expressed by Hamengpana in the following lines: Hameng: Beloved half fed people of Vaishnavpur! Why can't we live by ourselves? In olden days without Ningthouman (Puppet King), imposters from outside, we sustained with whatever resources available during those days. Now, what has happened? Couldn't that be restored? What do you say to kick out the over smart Mayang? (the youth claps, nodding)

PAK: Will provide better arms, please do stand firmly and give great strength. You will get some soldiers who are done with the training to lead.

Yaomacha: Mr Pikingkei said they will provide whatever helps including the soldiers and arms if bureaucrats Mayangs are going to be expelled. They said that their country is big, but they don't want to conquer other country but to make friends. [Chengni Khujai, \_\_\_\_: 23-25]

This situation of deprivation of food in the state has never been encountered when Manipur governed its own land. It all happened because of the onslaught of capitalism that snatched away the humble agricultural life, replaced by the capitalist in the state and this has been vividly expressed. The insurgency groups who underwent vigorous arm training in the countries like China, Pakistan and Burma and got help from these countries were portrayed through

the characters of Paktokpa and Pekingkei. Tongbra critically analyses such scenarios and written it in 1969. It was staged in 1970 and published in 1972. Before this, the play, 'Leibak Houbha Andallon' based on the taking down of the Board of Law was published in 1960. Tongbra who wrote more than hundred plays critically studied the administration of Manipur government. Among many of his plays related with political issues, 'Leibak Macha' 1970, 'Mani Thiba' (staged in 1973 and 1976) and 'Chengni Khujai' are the three plays based on the topsy-turvy administration. Leibak Macha and Mani Thiba are the plays which addresses the bright side of monarchical form of government. In the last part of the play 'Leibakmach', King Chakrapani who got the punishment said, 'hey players of politics, if I'm not wrong, may there be an illness called betrayal to all of you.' [GC Tongbra, 1970: 81]

In the play Mani Thiba, the stone worshipped as god was thrown from the cliff and Houbha became the king. This has been sarcastically expressed when leaders like a stone knowing nothing about law, politics, religions was ridiculously replaced by another powerful people. It is not easy to rule a state and if it falls under an unfit ruler people suffers the most and it seems it goes on.

Chengni Khujai has the best pictures of the first arm revolt against the government much related with the history of Manipur as why people started the insurgency movement in the state. The vivid portrayal of the incidents related with the political affairs, the counter insurgency measures and how people look for hide out in the jungles are skillfully crafted. To easily suppress such insurgency movements, the Indian Parliament passed the Arm Forces Special Power Act 1958 considered as black law and it has been implemented. Under this act a person can be killed if found to be suspected. Behind this horrendous act, the people of Manipur have been suffering from the ill human oppressions and brutality of the India Army over the decades. Such law of the arm forces makes big pictures in this play. The frustrated youth who were deprived of food started looting the bank, the shops and establishments and set ablaze offices and on the other hand, people were blamed for the mistakes. This has triggered the youth to take up arms. Yaomacha who is the son of Hamengpana was beaten black and blue in mere suspicion ultimately invoking him to become an insurgent. This very question has been asked by Tenwa to Durga who finished the democratic government and made President rule:

Tenwa: Oh Mother Durga! There is no meaning of human rights if a person is judged on mere suspicion, interrogated on false charge. This is the law of the Junglee where might is right is prevalent. Have a look from the abode of civilized Kailash [Chengni Khujai, \_\_\_\_: 58]

All such laws have made the youth to become insurgents. In spite of the state being under the President rule, frustrated leader Yenba wishes for statehood.

Yenba: Tokpa Lannae! Give power, we want statehood.

Pak: Brothers who couldn't bear hunger and thirst! Afraid not but believe in the power of youth. Yaomacha was abducted today from here and others like Sannao, Yennao, Hamengcha have already been abducted yesterday from different places. Stop counting the beads and stop crying Meme. Sharpen your nails, grind your teeth, show your power! Ngararao... Ngararao! Let there be sovereign state. Will give arms. Take up arms

[Chengni Khujai, \_\_\_\_: 50]

(To be contd.)

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