

# Editorial

Friday, November 30, 2018

Contd. from yesterday

## TROUBLED HOMELAND.....

By- Dr. Ph. Jayalaxmi

**Imphal Times  
strongly denounce  
the arbitrary  
detention of  
Wakhemcha  
Kishorchand after  
being released on  
bail by the Chief  
Judicial Magistrate  
Imphal West.  
Imphal Times  
today left this  
space empty as a  
mark of our  
protest against the  
detention**

The poems of these three writers demonstrate how memory and nostalgia grasp their existence on the individual level and facilitate in visualizing the bleak future. Remembrance of the past often intermingles with the disintegrated social realities of the present time. Memory interpenetrates the present thereby blurring the gap between the past and the future. When the dynamism of memory is lost it leads to the breakdown of the land of dreams which is lying before us with no certainty, no harmony but only affliction.

Nostalgia and memory of the past existence help the writers in chronicling the indelible past that is burdened with painful history. The nostalgia for the homeland often provokes the imaginary homeland where they lived their childhood without fear and terror. Despite the abhorrence of the not so convincing life at the homeland which becomes a home for ethnic conflict, degrading law and order situation, the corruption, the political subjection, the repression of the struggle for right to self determination, social and economic neglect, the writers often look back at his/her homeland. However, their vision is often blurred with memory that is no longer part of the present. While looking back at their memory, it reminds them of the conflict, the old scars, and bitterness. Thus, the nostalgia for the glorious past and bountiful nature has been the recurrent themes. The yearning for lost homeland, myths, love, and hills, are some of the motifs. The sense of nostalgia persuades their poetic imagination to visualize what they have lost in the route to modernity. What enhances the pathos of human lives is they fail to comprehend the interrelationship between man and nature. The use of natural setting and imagery to show the impact of violence on the natural environment and human existence has rendered a new poetical sensibility that addresses the human predicament in a poignant manner. What happens when one fails to relate to the environment that is an essential part of our existence? Ecopoetics which means the place or home for dwelling proposes that 'we must hold fast to the possibility that certain text marks called poems can bring back to our memory humankind's ancient knowledge that without landmarks we are lost' [Bate, 2000: 175]. Natural landmarks are part of our identities and the amelioration of natural habitat would mean the destruction of identity marker. Ecopoetics goes beyond the nature poetry. Christopher Arigo explains that 'much of ecopoetry being written seems to take place more in the realm of the innovative, as opposed to more mainstream poetries. Perhaps, this is because innovative poetries are loci of resistance to mainstream poetic practices (and values) which presumably reflect larger social paradigms. Thus, innovative practices and ecological thinking/being/feeling combine to produce a site of resistance, of politics, of political resistance' [Ibid., 3]. Therefore, poetry merging from the conflict-torn area focuses on the resistance to violence and politics by infusing the metaphors of natural/ecological descriptions. The ecopoetry not only talks about the nature poetry but it also conjures up the symbolism of displacement of home and annihilation of the environment. The ecopoetics accounts for the poetics of pathos on the loss of metaphorical nature which is the habitation of human beings. It intones how the annihilation of nature leads to the loss of human lives.

Greg Garrard, the famous environmental and ecocritical critic has rightly touched upon the

modern environmentalism concern that originates with 'A Fable for Tomorrow' by Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (1962) which expresses the angst for the lost environment. Carson's fairy tale opens with the words:

There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. The town lay in the midst of a checkerboard of prosperous farms, with fields of grain and hillsides of orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drifted above green fields. [Carson 1962]

He talks about the landscape of America with the great ferns, wildflowers, beautiful roadside, countless birds, houses, etc thereby 'invoking the ancient tradition of the pastoral... concentrating on images of natural beauty and emphasizing the 'harmony' of humanity and nature that 'once' existed' [Garrard 2004: 1]. Suddenly the pastoral peace has been disturbed and it leads to catastrophic destruction. Carson continues:

Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community; mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death. [Opcit., Carson] A strange and mysterious malady has swept the land thus ruining the peaceful existence. This very fable will soon be the anecdote of Manipur's landscape as well. In the Manipuri poetry, we could find the image of crumbling and degeneration of natural environment that makes the writers to write about the idyllic past. The celebration of ecological grandeur of the region is reminiscent of the absence of the tranquil and serene pastoral life. In addition to it, the symbol of death is juxtaposed with the dying landscape to envision the apocalyptic and grotesque world with its impending end. Along with the memory of the glorious past, the quintessential characteristic that enhances their poetic creation is the suffusion of the grieving mother in the form of nature imagery. The metaphorical image of the dilapidation of nature exemplifies the annihilation of the equilibrium of human chain due to conflict and its resultant impact on its inhabitants and environment at large. Consequently, like other ecocritical poetry, their poems put across the concern for the environmental degradation in the wake of war, violence, technology, counter-insurgency, etc.

The poems in the collection "Angst for Homeland" have their genesis on the disconcerted moment and the discomfiture of the common people. Their poems accentuate the lamentation of the fractured memory that they have found in the present streets which are cracked with the ruined past. Chaoba Phurishabam in the poem 'Freedom' laments the loss of freedom of life or the right to existence. She questions the intimidating life which the Manipuris are living under the aegis of the powerful people with guns. With the use of imagery of Thangal General who was a historical figure in the history of Manipur, she laments the fact that she does not have the competence and dexterity of the great general who fought against the British in the freedom struggle of Manipur. She avers that: In an empty room  
In the midst of darkness  
I seek the meaning of freedom  
I cannot rule with guns in my hands  
Nor can I defend with an army  
Nor did I learn  
The way Thangal General diffused the bomb  
With a sway of his sword.

[Chaoba and inter alia, 59]

She also evokes another historical figure like that of the valiant Bir Tikendrajit who also became an admirable figure fighting against the British. She gets frightened to live in a place where there is no freedom and even more threatening is that she does not have the courage to fight and stand against the people with guns. She fears the inevitable death which this gun culture would bring. Remembering the glorious past she remembers Paona, another historical figure, who she believes will infuse her the courage to fight against the excruciating circumstance where she has been landed. She laments that as none of them is alive the future generation is engulfed in darkness where everything has lost its meaning. The poet could hear the sound of incessant guns in the distant hills and valleys. Pondering over the disordered condition, she inquires, 'Whose freedom are we seeking?' [Ibid., 59]. She further questions whether we are fighting to seek freedom for Shiroy Lilies in the hills which are the national flower or for the Nong-een (the national bird) or for the Tamna that sings in the hills. The metaphors of the flora and fauna have been employed to show the degrading nature due to the violence. The violence/gun culture has marred the forest and the hills which are the dwelling places for these precious flora and fauna have been leaving their habitats due to the encroachment by the men. Therefore, she states:

Tamna that sings in the hills  
Left the nest in fear of invasion  
Tracing its path through its gentle voice  
Shiroy in the hills no longer blooms  
In fear of being plucked before time  
Indeed it must have asked in spite of being mute  
'Where is our freedom?'  
[Ibid., 60]  
She talks about the futile revolution which brings only harms and destructions to the bountiful nature. Thereby referring to the Loktak, the only fresh water lake in the nation, which has been the habitation of many birds, animals, and people, the poet says that due to the violence which has been brought by insurgency and counter-insurgency many inhabitants have fled. She says, "In the rhythm of ripples above Loktak/ Flight of swans no longer sways in dance/ Exiled from this Meitrahak of Poiril" [Ibid., 60]. Consequently, not only the innocent lives have been lost but also the beauty of natural world is irreclaimable. The exile of the inhabitants allegorizes the fleeing of the common inhabitants who left their heavenly abode due to the torturous life brought forth by the violence.

Man-nature relationship is a holistic process and the disequilibrium will crumble the man-nature relationship. David Pepper conceives that alienation from nature means a failure to conceive of nature as a social creation. He further emphasizes that for the deep ecologists overcoming alienation means asserting the naturalness of humans by living in harmony with environment... for nature is the source of worth and it will be endangered unless we follow its rules [David Pepper, 1993: 114-115]. The poet has questioned the very motive of the freedom struggle that endangered many lives. In her other poem 'Operation Summer Storm', the poet has revisited or remembered the unfortunate day that happened on the day of Cheiraoba. The State forces launched the Operation Summer Storm on April 10, 2009 to combat the insurgent groups. The poet explores the disillusioned life of common people by alluding to that unfaithful day when many

innocent lives and home were lost due to the heinous nature of the armed forces. The State forces in order to control the armed resistant group launched the pathetic flush out operation and the attack on the 'phumdiies' or floating grass which are also the home to many people. Without considering that many people would become homeless the State forces had in an undignified way turned to the worst form of violence and at the same time they also backed out to own the deeds by saying that no collateral damage had been done to the people. The Loktak is the world's only floating National Park - the Keibul Lamjao, and also the habitat of the Sangai becomes a battlefield. The poet unfolds the pitiable condition of a wretched mother who questions the meaning of living on this earth. The imageries of a hungry child and a dead husband on the floor have deepened the living condition of the common people who have to live from hand to mouth. The poet vividly pictures the prying eyes of the dead husband which breaks the illusion of a utopian life:

The tired corpse of my husband  
Lay on the cold muddy floor  
As he hides his pain and anguish  
Over nothingness,  
His eyes red and wild,  
Stared and laughed at me  
Mocking at my illusions of a yet to visit miracle  
.....  
Silence was broken again with the cry of my child.  
[Chaoba and inter alia, OpCit., 63]

It shows how such gruesome practice has affected the life of the common civilians who have been depending on the fishing as a source of their livelihood. This counter insurgency operation has displaced many people. The aftermath of this operation has left many without home and food. It only leaves a bleak future with endless questions without any answer from the people responsible for such mass destruction. She not only questions the sense of belongingness but also expresses her disappointment on the exploitation of bountiful nature due to the conflict. In her poem, she has brought forth the wretched condition of Manipur that is incapacitated by terror. Furthermore, she talks about how people are searching for the safe haven thereby migrating from their homeland. The serene home is replaced by terror, fear, and gun.

In the poem 'Between Two Flags', the poet addresses the fractured loyalty due to her allegiance to two flags one with chakra i.e. the Indian flag and other with shakok (the head of an animal) which is the symbol of valour of the Meetei people. Her sense of belongingness is aligned to both the flags. She is baffled by this entrapment which demand her loyalties which she says, 'Beloved, both/ One, borne/ One, nurtured' [Ibid., 57]. She says, Mislaid at the warfield  
Between two flags  
I asked all  
Who do I belong to?  
Frequent, my thought  
Can I belong to both?  
.....  
The shakok embellished flag  
Chasing me  
With a sword  
Stating a stranger, I am  
Between two flags  
Scrambling me  
She is mine  
She is mine  
They said.  
.....  
I, adrift  
Between two flags  
Between these two flags.  
[Ibid., 57-58]

(To be Contd.....)

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