

Editorial

Friday, September 27, 2019

Adapting with the changing time

With the increase in reach and dependence on information technology in the present world, detailed descriptions and knowledge on any subject matter can be had at the touch of a button.

The virtual world has shrunk to such an extent that anyone can receive and relay information on someone or something as it happens, anywhere in the world.

This has led to an unexpected broadening of one's views and opinions of other people, places, religions, beliefs and customs.

A more tolerant temperament is the result of the ever shrinking virtual world today.

The world as we know now is ever evolving and changing, and it is upto us to adapt and make the best of it.

But just as everything that is continually changing, there emerges a breed of hardliners who are insisting on carrying on with the traditional way of life, and even thinking.

While the concept of preservation of culture and tradition for posterity and more importantly, for the preservation of one's own identity and those of the community is without doubt, a vital part of our responsibilities to the future generation, yet the insistence on keeping up and following the traditional way of thinking, to restrain ourselves to the set dogmas and beliefs is nothing short of denying ourselves the freedom to grow spiritually and intellectually, to think and use our rationality and to pursue our dreams.

It is basically denying ourselves the freedom to life as we see fit, so long as our beliefs and practices does not infringe on that of others.

Change is inevitable, and the sooner we accept and embrace it, the better will we be prepared to face the future, uncertain and unpredictable as it will be.

Resisting change and attempting to cling on to the old ways of thinking which at one point of time would have served its purpose or even prove vital for survival would prove futile and even regressive.

Our way of life changes with the changing times. What was once a necessity, like the caste system which was vital for preservation of communities and races, becoming more rigid to keep the increasing intruders and invaders from mingling and diluting a particular race, has now become a major roadblock in the effort to integrate the nation which is intrinsic to its progress.

The time to walk the line without questioning the rationale behind the diktat is well and truly past.

It is time to develop and encourage a scientific temperament which questions and provides a reason for the things we do and think.

Tolerance and understanding other's point of view, while, at the same time, retaining the liberty to follow and practice one's beliefs and principles will pave the way for a more inclusive society bound by trust and understanding.

How one lead one's life should not be a subject of discussion, it should rather be an accepted personal judgment that needs to be respected.

There are more important and pertinent things to occupy our minds and collective concerns in these volatile times.

Progress is not made by adjusting the changes to suit our needs and beliefs.

KTT Media Fellowship

The last date for submission of application for **Khelen Thokchom Media Fellowship (KTMF) 2019-20** has been extended till September 28, 2019 (Saturday) due to unavoidable circumstances, a statement by the Trust said.

It said that the Khelen Thokchom Trust (KTT) is inviting eligible journalist(s) from both in hill and valley of Manipur to apply for a 6 (six) month KTM program 2019-20 for journalists to study, highlight and report on "Manipur's Dying Water Resources".

To apply for **Khelen Thokchom Media Fellowship (KTMF)**, applicant should submit Bio-data, a letter of support from the editor that the output under the fellowship will be published (mandatory for all candidates), a minimum of one sample of 'published report' on environment and water issues if any should be submitted to Coordinator, KTMF C/o Pureiromba Enterprises, Konung Mamang (Palace Gate) near Pureiromba Khongnang, Imphal East District - 795 005 (Daily office timing 10am - 5pm except Sunday) before September 28, 2019.

For details call 8415945658

Letters, Feedback and Suggestions to 'Imphal Times' can be sent to our e-mail: imphaltimes@gmail.com. For advertisement kindly contact: - 0385-2452159 (O). For time being readers can reach the office at Cell Phone No. 9862860745 for any purpose.

Lai Khutsangbi, female power and punishment

By Rubani Yumkhaibam

One persistent ideology of the male-dominated society is the punishment of the female excess. Cinema, literature, everyday idioms, etc., are imbued with cautionary tales of women who have extraordinary hunger for freedom and agency. These women are punished and vanished from the domain of the civilized society, thereby weakening and suppressing their presence. Very often such tales are imparted to young children for the future maintenance of the societal status quo. The story of Lai Khutsangbi, a bedtime story for children, is the tragic story of one such woman who exercises power and freedom.

In the everyday parlance of the Manipuris, Lai Khutsangbi is used as a metaphor for unpleasant and unacceptable show of female agency, and in a similar manner Lai Khutsangbi is an accursed symbol that negates female modesty and beauty. The question is - who is the real Lai Khutsangbi? She does not have a name, she is known so because of her unusually long hands, she does not have a lineage, and she lives alone in the forest. Lai Khutsangbi's story raises multiple questions, none of which is adequately answered in the narratives - Is Lai Khutsangbi a mortal? Is she a demon? Why does she attack mostly children and livestock? What is her power? What is her weakness? It is in these questions and their inadequate answers that we have to retrieve the identity and importance of a powerful and frightening woman in our collective memory.

The analysis of Laikhutshangbi in this brief article is drawn from two recent sources - James Oniam's *New Folktales of Manipur* (Notion Press, 2016) and Pupu's *Folk Tale's* short digital film on Lai Khutsangbi (<https://pupusfolktales.com/wp/>). Although there are other sources of the story, the sources here are chosen for the lucidity of the narratives. Let us analyse Lai Khutsangbi's character. Lai Khutsangbi is characterised as a demon-like human who does not

behave and think like a rational human, and one who feeds her hunger on the raw flesh of humans and animals. Lai Khutsangbi lives in a remote geographical area where the wilderness of the untamed nature meets the human dwelling, a heavily forested, sparsely populated village community. Although she lives in the geographical proximity of the everyday human beings, she is set aside at a safe distance from the villagers. Being a grotesque flesh eater, she cannot mingle with the people in the story, and so she lives in the shadiest and thickest part of the forest. The intriguing abode and cannibalism are further linked with her inexplicable and hideous demeanour - tall stature, unusually long hands, unkempt hair and eerie laughter. She kidnaps young children and kills animals, and she has an inordinate appetite for human flesh, from which the village women and children have to be protected. In James Oniam, she is also portrayed as snatching dead bodies of children from the burial ground (which also shows that the story of Lai Khutsangbi goes back to the time when dead bodies were buried). Her isolation from the harmony of everyday living is evident from the uncooked food she eats and the dreaded dwelling in the thickest part of the forest. Every child dreads her. Notwithstanding her extraordinary character, she is never portrayed as a magical, immortal soul; she is portrayed as an extra-human, demon-like, evil witch; she is a mortal woman with immense faculty (long hands) and evil prowess.

Lai Khutsangbi is a denizen of the wild nature. One can hear recurring attack on the nearby village from the accessible distance between the village and her dwelling. The village is a natural extension of her forest dwelling. One wonders if she preys on the wildlife in the forest. And if so why does she attack children and livestock? In a brief yet insightful reading of Lai Khutsangbi, James Oniam opines that Lai Khutsangbi's attack on the village children is "driven by

poverty and hunger", which leads her to "survival cannibalism" ("Kabui Keioiba and Lai Khutsangbi: Stories of Hunger?", www.e-pao.net). In such a state of material existence, it is only consequential that Lai Khutsangbi attacks the nearest village community, and the caution and repulsion of Lai Khutsangbi among the villagers is also the required precaution.

The story of Lai Khutsangbi is tendered for the young audience as a cautionary tale to stay in the safety of the home. The moral lessons of Lai Khutsangbi teach children to be careful, and to be obedient to the parental advices. In the olden times when the locales in Manipur were largely rural intertwined with the thick growth of forests and jungles, and also the impending danger from the wild animals lurking in the seamless expanse of villages and the wilderness, such tales must have resounding relevance. Like a carnivorous tiger, Lai Khutsangbi is a constant danger. Ultimately, Lai Khutsangbi's aggression is projected as pure evil in the process of the real story telling. However for the modern readers, the subterranean implications of power and resistance of the female agency are not far from detection. That Lai Khutsangbi has an inordinate appetite for human flesh is evidenced from her dissatisfaction with small meals of small animals, and hence she sets out to prey on her victims (young children and livestock in the village). She uses her long hands as weapons to kill her prey. Her powerful long hands are not the hands that nurture; they are the killing hands of terror and sensual satisfaction (of eating). She wields the power of her long hands in the boundless wilderness of the remote forest. On the other hands Satchi's (Satchi is the child protagonist in Pupu's Folk Tale) mother feeds Satchi with loving and protecting hands. Her long hands defy the danger of the dark and thick forests. When all the villagers are sleeping, she prowls in the night landscape (in our times, a woman could be raped or molested in absence of a male guardian!). While

being a figure of violence and terror, she is also a figure of self-sufficiency, and in this sense she hunts alone with her bare hands. Such embodiment of horror and agency makes her a transgressive figure, a woman who crosses domestic confinement).

However, our cultural sensibility has to punish such a figure of female transgression. In both James Oniam and Pupu's Folk Tale, Lai Khutsangbi withdraws in the wilderness/burial after her hands have been severed by the fathers of Naocha and Satchi. Lai Khutsangbi is not inherently weak, but in absence of her hands she is reduced to tears and helplessness. Once her hands are cut off she flees in fear. It should not be considered a co-incidence that her power is destroyed by the male head of the family, husband/father. Satchi's mother can only withstand Lai Khutsangbi for a while through a witty connivance of misinformation; she waits for her husband to destroy Lai Khutsangbi. We do not find women standing against the evil incursions of another woman in Lai Khutsangbi's narratives. In the early days, when men were far away from home on military duties, women were responsible for maintaining the household, and this is a cultural marker of the courage of the Meitei women. However, the protection of the village from a female terror is physically invested in the hands of the male members, and this is factored as a masculine responsibility. Eventually the destruction of the female devilry is symbolic of the repression of female agency and triumph of masculinity. In the end, Lai Khutsangbi is a tragic figure who stands at the crossroad of female assertion and the necessary male suppression. She is figure that has to be reclaimed from demonization and cultural erasure of complex female characters.

Acknowledgement

I express my deep gratitude for Santa Khurai, an indigenous nupi maanbi activist, for her encouragement in writing this article.

Five Oscar Winning Film-Hugo to be screened with interaction on September 30

IT News
Imphal, Sept. 27

With the support from Manipur State Film Development Society, Film Society of Manipur will screen English film-HUGO (2011) directed by Martin Scorsese on September 30, 2019, Monday at 4 pm at MSFDS Auditorium here, under the monthly film screening programme with interactive session towards the promotion of good film movement in Manipur. Earlier it was fixed on September 21, 2019.

Hugo is a historical adventure drama film adapted for the screen by John Logan. Based on Brian Selznick's book *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, it tells the story of an orphan boy named Hugo Cabret who lives alone in a railway station in Paris in the 1930s and wrapped up in a mystery involving his late father and an automation. His journey leads the discovery of

Georges Méliès, the father of Special Effects in Cinema. Hugo received critical acclaim and 11 Academy Award nominations including Best Picture, more than any other film that year, and it won five awards: Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction, Best Sound Mixing, Best Sound Editing, and Best Visual Effects. School children from a few schools in Imphal will also attend the film screening and the interactive session so that they can learn the film medium and what the good film is about.

Eminent personalities from the Critics Forum, Manipur and Film Society of Manipur will share the space of the interactive session to be conducted after screening of the film.

All concerned are informed to attend the screening with their family and children and to take part in the interactive session.

AR conducts medical camp

IT News
Imphal, Sept 27

Thoubal Battalion of 9 Sector Assam Rifles under the aegis of HQ IGAR (South) organised a free medical camp at Natjang village yesterday. The medical camp was organised by

Upper Khoripok Company Operating Base (COB) of the battalion. The camp commenced with an informative lecture on 'Hygiene and Sanitation'. This was followed by an interactive session during which various queries raised by the attendees were clarified.

Voter ID- Card lost

I, the undersigned, Kenny Sarangthem, do hereby declare that I have lost my Voter ID Card (Voter ID No. FKZ0377374), issued by the Election Commission of India on the way between Haobam Marak to Singjamei on 10/09/2019.

Finders are requested to hand over it to the undersigned.

Sd/-

Kenny Sarangthem

S/o S Shantakumar Singh
Haobam Marak Irom leikai, Imphal

Name Changed

I, the undersigned, Mayengbam Keshorimuhon Singh, do hereby declared that I have relinquished, renounced and abandon on the use of my old name Mayengbam Keshorimuhon as I have assumed my new name Mayengbam Keshorimuhon Singh

Sd/-

Mayengbam Keshorimuhon Singh
Keishamthong Elangbam Leikai, Leirak Achouba, Imphal

Voter ID- Card lost

I, the undersigned, Khoisnam Birla Singh, do hereby declare that I have lost my Voter ID Card (Voter ID No. FKZ0006213), issued by the Election Commission of India on the way between Haobam Marak to Singjamei on 10/09/2019.

Finders are requested to hand over it to the undersigned.

Sd/-

Khoisnam Birla Singh
S/o Kh. Kamini @ Tonu
Haobam Marak Irom leikai, Imphal

Voter ID- Card lost

I, the undersigned, Honey Kenao Sarangthem, do hereby declare that I have lost my Voter ID Card (Voter ID No. FKZ0425819), issued by the Election Commission of India on the way between Haobam Marak to Singjamei on 10/09/2019.

Finders are requested to hand over it to the undersigned.

Sd/-

Honey Kenao Sarangthem
S/o S Shantakumar Singh
Haobam Marak Irom leikai, Imphal