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The Rise of Yawol Poetry in Manipuri Literature

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Abstract

The Manipuri term *yawol* or *ya-ol* means 'a new awakening or beginning'. It is a term primarily associated with the Manipuri insurgency movement known locally as *yawol eehou*. Apart from the impending political turmoil and the polarising nature of this movement, there was a passionate, phenomenal boom of literary products in the Manipuri language since the 70s issuing from this insurgency movement. Yawol poetry is both a poetic movement and a literary period, much like the Mizo literature 'Rambuai' and Naga literature of the 'troubled times'. The urge to adopt a new style of writing based on lived experiences rather than some poetic fancy or nostalgia for a bygone era by the Manipuri writers, especially in poetry, coincided with the rise of the insurgency movement in the state. Names such as 'violent literature' or 'blood literature' that have characterised Manipuri literature sometimes overshadow the 'non-violent' yet rich poetic expressions intrinsic to the state. However, not addressing the widespread prevalence of violence and anarchy in Manipuri literature will be historically and aesthetically incorrect. In this paper, the author shall explore the rise of such a distinct poetic style adopted by scores of Manipuri poets across four decades and explain why the poetics of blood and violence have been a significant mainstay in Manipuri poetry.

Keywords: Yawol, insurgency, violence, Manipur, Manipuri literature

Introduction

Nothing could be more banal than the role of violence in initiating a school of poetry that solely focuses on violence itself. However, the perception and expression of violence in Manipuri poetry since the 70s has to do with the prevalence of excessive violence in the state where the general population considers themselves scapegoats. Therefore, Manipuri poetry can be treated as an honest effort to voice dissidence and restore natural order within the community. Needless to say that the turmoil of anarchism in a small state like Manipur has long been acknowledged and mainstreamed, but there is a sense of a general repudiation of literature as a by-product of that same anarchism. It is a common perception that Manipuri literature depicts excessive blood and is monotonous due to the absence of softness of diction and lack of range. It is to say that Manipuri literature is regarded as a monolithic entity, a metaphor for blood and violence, and literature devoid of hope or optimism. There is truth in these assumptions and descriptions. However, Manipuri literature is above and beyond these gross generalisations. I am reminded of Robin S. Ngangom's concerns regarding some recurring images in contemporary Manipuri poetry in an article titled "Poetry in the Time of Terror" in which he wrote:

In contemporary Manipuri poetry, there is a predominance of images of 'bul lets', 'blood', 'mother', 'the colour red' and, paradoxically, 'flowers' too. [...] This has resulted in criticism that contemporary Manipuri poetry is hemmed in by extreme realism. There is, of course, a danger of the images mentioned above becoming hackneyed. And maybe poets should try to strike that fine balance between realism and reflection. (2005, p. 172)

In defence of Manipuri *poesie*, I can say that the poetics of violence found in Manipuri poetry is not poetics wedded to glorifying excessive blood and brutishness but one that has walked past strictly literary concerns into the political and social spheres. Highlighting a few vital socio-political developments in Manipur would be appropriate at this juncture.

After the end of the British Raj and the accession of the kingdom of Manipur to the Union of India in 1949, the national character of its literature was reduced to that of provincial literature. Kingship was abolished with the end of the British Raj, and a democratic arrangement was introduced in 1949. The transition from kingship (within British colonial rule) to democracy meant that the Manipuri writers could freely express themselves with their explicitly political texts without any political censure or pressure. Besides that, educated youths got exposed to Western ideas and philosophies, and there was an intense realisation of Manipuri identity based on its physical features, language, culture, political ideology, and geography. From the 50s to the 70s, fear, anxiety, helplessness, the futility of existence, aimlessness in life, and other similar states of mind loomed large in the minds of Manipuri youths and poets. It was a time of pessimism, cynical views of self-scrutiny, and uncertainty of life. These mindsets and worldviews set off a new sensibility in Manipuri poetry, gradually taking its form and style. The tone of frustration and anxiety that characterises the post-war poetry took a beating paving the way for the tone of defiance and rebellion in the 70s. The new poets who started publishing in the 70s embraced poetry as a medium of attacking whatever they thought was hampering the growth of Manipur. Their everyday experiences became modes of poetic expressions; their every word sounded authentic yet very distressing.

So, keeping their distress on their minds, the young poets launched a new poetics which was never encountered in Manipuri literature before. Their writings coincided with the violence and bloodshed set off by the launch of a self-determination movement in the valley of Manipur in 1964. The poets, and more specifically the general public, were left with no choice but to deal with the horrific results of this daily armed struggle. What follows is for everyone to see. Death, destruction, violence, abduction, extortion, custodial deaths, rights violations, and many more similar issues became everyday routines. There was a severe undermining of social values and customs. There was a general sense among the intelligentsia that the state and its machinery had failed the citizens of Manipur. These happenstances crept up in Manipuri literature; images as heinous as scattered dead bodies, destroyed and devastated villages, and violence-filled streets became poetic fodder. The grotesque imagery that crept into Manipuri poetry can be found in Thangjam Ibopishak's poem "Pratima of Kongba Bazaar" written in 1962:

From the other side of the mosquito net,
Watching us, Pratima of Kongba Bazaar said –
"The dharma of a woman
Was wrecked and snatched away.

I am a leftover of them animals
 I don't have any value now."
 And she showed
 Without any shame and reticence, her intimate parts
 Bruised and bloodied
 Breasts and thighs;
 The horrendous pain of the animals' torture
 On them the soft petals of a withered flower. (Ibopishak, 1962) [own tr.]

Yawol Poetry: The need for a fresh poetic idiom

The movement for self-determination that began in the early 60s got accelerated in the 80s in terms of intensity and violent confrontations. Poets such as Ibopishak, Ibomcha, Ranjit, Bhubansana felt that Manipuri literature, and more importantly poetry, needed a complete overhaul, an avatar of sorts to cater to the intellectual and psychological needs of the people. These needs were expressed in three publications; namely, *Shingnaba (Defiance)*, 1974 (Ibopishak, Ranjit and Ibomcha), *Atoppa Khonjel (The Other Voice)*, 1975 (An anthology of modern Manipuri poetry edited by Tombi, Joychandra Ibopishak, and Ibomcha), and *Humfutarada Humalakpa Nonglei (The storm that came to the 70s)*, edited by Hemchandra, 1979. These three books, along with other individual collections of poems, had two principal objectives. They are, as pointed out in the 'Introduction' to *The storm that came to the 70s (Humfutarada Humalakpa Nonglei)*; i) poetry must tackle the corrupt system, and ii) Manipuri poetry should avoid Eurocentric poetic traditions adopted by the post-war poets (Hemachandra, 1979, p. 4).

For political and historical correctness, the period between the 70s to the 2010s in Manipuri Literature may be referred to as Yawol Literature. The Manipuri term *yawol* or *ya-ol* means 'a new awakening or beginning'. The *yawol eehou* (revolutionary movement/movement for self-determination) occupies a key moment in the history of Manipur and Manipuri literature. It is also a crucial period in Manipuri literature because it interrogates the magnitude of violence experienced by individuals and social groups and inexplicably persistent in the collective memory of the Manipuris. Hence, the term Yawol Poetry is derived from two specific propositions; i) the conscious stance by the poets in the 70s to adopt a new poetic idiom in Manipuri poetry, and ii) the impact of *yawol eehou* that turned violent in the 80s. Yumlembam Ibomcha's "The Princess and Young Birds" is an example of the idea of *yawol* that got entrenched in Manipuri poetry where the alleged freedom fighters are compared to young and inexperienced birds who are meant to sacrifice themselves for 'a bright new morning';

Drenched in their own blood
 The young red birds
 Are falling and scattering on the ground
 Like the falling blooming buds
 They are on their journey
 Of courage and sacrifice
 Of a bright new morning. (Ibomcha, 1992, p. 51-52) [own tr.]

The poets of this period do not just express impediments but rather offer hopes for future generations, the precise imagery of 'a bright new day' they instil in the readers' minds functions as a post-violence reconstruction effort. As to the interpretative crux of poetry in Manipuri from the 70s to the 2010s, one must rely on the texts themselves to locate meaning/s rather than the author's intention or the experience as a reader. It is to say that the aesthetic fineness of Manipuri literature should be taken as self-contained and self-referential. Above all these, the period and the movement are specific and historically located, and its style of writing will continue to appear even after the end of the violence and return to normalcy.

The critical concerns of the poets are the issues of identity, culture, and authority. However, the ongoing trust deficit between the common masses and those running the troubled state is plunging the state into further chaos. I am reminded of the journalist and political commentator Pradip Phanjoubam's take on this issue. He contends:

It would be a safe bet to say that nobody anymore trusts the government, not any particular government, but the institution of government as such, is capable of doing anything honestly or with the larger interest of the people as intent. This is the general psychology that the generation after generation of state's leaders [have] left as a residual effect of their selfishness. A terrible mutation of the collective social reasoning process has taken place and the frustrating difficulty of dealing with his mutated psychology is what the place is condemned to live with. Manipur's salvation can dawn only when this trust and faith in the authority and intent of the democratically elected government. (Phanjoubam, 2006, pp. 286-7)

Why was there a trust deficit, and why did the poets call for a new beginning? The answer lies in three contentious areas which emerged in the post-World War II Manipur; rise in ethno/nationalism, identity formation, and cultural nationalism or revivalism. The nostalgic past or romanticism imported from Britain could no longer cater to people's intellectual and aesthetic needs. Therefore, these primary concerns were vociferously expressed so that the readers knew where they stand as a community. Therefore, the poets peddled an old tradition rooted in the ancient literary culture where every writing or literary product belonged to the state and was written for the state. The rootedness of the poets to their land and people is amply highlighted in their poems. It shows the rootedness of these poets to "their beloved land; the roots of their people's culture; the roots of their times; and most of all, the roots of the past that is "lost" to them, [which] have sunk deep in their psyche" (Nongkynrih, 2006, p. 4).

One of the significant thematical concerns of Yawol poetry is violence. Many critical postulations of violence in literature reveal that it is difficult to approach and investigate. The existential questions of Manipuris as a community regarding identity, culture, and nationalism widened in scope and deepened in intensity in the late 60s. The following poem written by Shri Biren ("*Chafadraba Laigi Yen*", "The Sacrificial Rooster Which Shall not be Eaten") is one example of many such poems that underlines the sombre mood among the Manipuris regarding their worth as a social group or community in a conflict-ridden Manipur.

In a dark, decrepit corner
Of a crowded eatery
In the middle of the city

A sacrificial rooster which shall not be eaten
 Whose sheen and splendour have vanished
 Wishes to leave a mark

In this eclectic world; (Tombi et al., 1975, p. 41-42) [own tr.]

Sri Biren equates the circumstances of a Manipuri man with the ill-fated rooster to be sacrificed by a shaman to please a particular deity through a sacrificial ritual. He questions if the people of Manipur were sacrificed for the convenience of some mightier forces, and in the process, they are subjugated and not allowed to grow and develop. The poet seems to suggest the plight of the common masses in the new political setup where violence and injustice are widespread.

Yawol poetry as movement and period can be divided into four *generations*, and each *generation* is discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

The first-generation Yawol poets

Hannah Arendt opines that "The Second World War was not followed by peace but by a cold war and the establishment of the military-industrial-labor complex" (1970, p. 9). Thangjam Ibopishak, Yumlembam Ibomcha, and R. K. Bhubonsana who grew up in World War II ravaged Manipur, became the major poets in the *first-generation* of poets in the Yawol movement. The trademark of the *first-generation* poets is satire with complementary raw humour and unmatched wit. Besides, their poetry takes a little less apolitical stance while critiquing social flaws or political impasses. For these poets, also for the subsequent poets, the function of literature was no longer to soothe and calm the body and mind but as a tool to empower themselves with their grievances, indictments, and propaganda.

They challenged the existing status quo of poetic expressions and deviated from the romantic nostalgia of the past glory of Manipur, which still lingered in the worldview and expression of the poets. The separation from the past with the sole aim to focus on the predicaments of the present no longer found poetry to be means of complaints, accusations, and utterances of the frustrated mind. Instead, poetry became a battle cry for justice and the right to life. Using sarcasm Thangjam Ibopishak encapsulates his desire to live in a state where life is cheap and worthless in his poem "I want to be killed by an Indian bullet" :

'Whatever it may be, if you shoot me please shoot me with a gun made in India. I don't want to die from a foreign bullet. You see, I love India very much.'

'That can never be. Your wish cannot be granted. Don't ever mention Bharat to us.'

(Misra, 2011, p. 57) [tr. Ngangom]

The imagery of blood and violence is bound to traverse along with the myriad and often less deceptive depiction of death and decay in the state. Whereas Ibopishak would use wit to survive, Bhubonsana would see his body split into two as nobody wants him alive anymore. So he devises a way to split his body into two by himself (more than a suicide) and witnesses his dismembered body in his poem "Jarashandha" published in *Indian Literature*. Bhubonsana encapsulates the actual situation of Manipur with gripping imagery of a man who just split himself into two halves:

In front lies abandoned
 My lifeless body split into two
 The torn, disjointed lumps.
 On bright red chunks of meat
 Throb my eager-to-live
 Unfulfilled pulse.

The sight is quite gory and repulsive. Nevertheless, that is how the poet sees the condition of every Manipuri living under the constant fear of deprivation and intimidation. The psychological harm caused to the common masses comes from stories they hear or events in which they were involved. In the last part of "Jarashandha", the poet's language becomes more irrational and obscene as if there was a transgression of sorts:

In confusion and torn against their will
 My angry intestines
 Emerge slowly reluctantly
 Outside
 Piece by piece.
 I cry I shout I try to stop
 Tears falling from my eyes I plead.
 Angry by now I defy them
 Blood rising to my eyes, my entire body shaking

 Who killed me
 Come outside if you dare
 For what reason was I killed? (1997, p. 39) [tr. Ngangom, Robin S.]

The second-generation

As the insurgency movement gained momentum in the state, a new, more vigorous poetic sensibility entered Manipuri poetry in the early 80s. It also coincided with the demand for the Manipuri to be included in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It was a long and perilous movement. The general public felt that the linguistic aspiration of the people of Manipur was undermined by the insensitive Govt. for a long time. On the other hand, The Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, which was extended to Manipur through an Amendment in 1972, was beginning to show its true colours in terms of lethality and being undemocratic in the 80s. Manipuris were no longer concerned by luxuries such as 'freedom of speech' or 'right to property.' Their main concern became 'right to life' as they were caught in the 'damned if you do, damned if you do not do' situation. They more or less appeared as sitting ducks in the crossfire between the Armed Forces and the insurgent groups. Poetry, hence, took a radical turn in terms of its objectivity and style. There was more than frustration and anger in their expressions; seemingly innocent words became overtly political. It was agitprop at its best. The *second-generation* poets (Memchoubi, Borkanya, Birendrajit, and Saratachand as major poets) emerged with these added challenges.

Not just these, the *second-generation* poets infused in Manipuri literature the ideas of cultural revivalism, nativistic outlooks, women issues, and matured expressions of loss and deprivation. The finest example would be Memchoubi's "The Fire of Andro" which is part eulogy, part lament;

The two dead bodies of
 The wise Thangal General
 And the gallant Koireng Yuvraj
 Dangled from each a hangman's noose
 At Pheidapung;
 Their necks fractured
 Their eyes doleful.
 In the vicinity, in heavy silence
 Meitei women stood stunned
 Their heads covered in white
 Girdles tightened around their waists
 And their bellies stirred and impregnated
 With a volcano inside
 With a volcano inside. (1990, p.1) [own tr.]

Memchoubi here uses the historical event of the British occupation of Manipur and the subsequent hanging of Yubaraj Tikendrajit and General of the Manipur Army Thangal in 1891 to remind every woman of the loss of freedom and what it entails for Manipuri women. Memchoubi echoes Slavoj Žižek's theories are gathered from the ideas already espoused by Karl Marx, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and other thinkers. He further adds that systemic/objective violence includes "the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence" (2009, p. 8). Memchoubi is aware of the systemic violence which has spread like cancer in the Manipuri society. The allegations of 'state-sponsored terrorism' that has gained currency in Manipuri lingo reflect all the three types of violence Žižek postulates in his thesis. The hanging of Yubaraj Tikendrajit and General Thangal is a lesson taught to the Manipuris to dare not think of any revolt in future. Such vindictive incidents or examples are set in the post-AFSPA Manipur too. Here, Memchoubi calls out to every woman to muster the courage hidden within them to pull out Manipur from the abject state of anarchy it is in.

The Yawol movement also ushered in feminist writings in Manipuri literature. And Memchoubi is the harbinger of Manipuri *écriture féminine*. Following Hélène Cixous's call for adoption of female-centric views and worldviews in literature and other forms of writing, Memchoubi initiated a style of writing in Manipuri literature where the 'female' tells her side of the story. Her poetry collections such as *Androgee Mei*, *Tuiphai O Ningthibi*, *Edu Ningthou*, etc. are all examples of *écriture féminine* in Manipuri literature. Over and above this, her poem "The Goddess of Lightning" can be considered a feminist manifesto in Manipuri discourse and literature. In the poem she uses the mythic character Nongthangleima (literally the Goddess of Lightning), responsible for completing the creation of space and earth in Manipuri cosmogony. But she uses Nongthangleima as a metaphor for achieving peace and tranquillity in the state if the menfolk had failed to do so. The poet is convinced that Manipuri men are not prepared for such a turn of events (both past and present), as they still cannot fathom the collective strength women can exert in a society. As for the poet, Manipuri woman still can shoot "with the thousand-fold

sparks/Reflected from my [women] eyes/I shall burn them,/The mouldering burden of ideas/You [men] have carried for centuries" (Ngangom and Nongkynrih, 2009, pp. 177-78).

Among the poets of the *second generation*, Birendrajit Naorem stands out for his fiery diction and radical views. He is perhaps the most political among these poets. We may consider "Churanthaba Has Come"^[i] as an example (2004, p. 25). He writes, "Beware, folks of the land beware, /Beat the *yaipung*^[ii] of the Kangla/Burn the chilli-torches/Send out the king's riders/Spread the message." Without naming any person or a group, he cautions the people of the land of the impending dangers of the terror some people can bring. He calls upon the "Defunct house of justice" to resurrect again;

Otherwise, the woman who was hanged
After raping in front of her husband
Will never rise from her death again.
Otherwise, the innocent youth
Who was arrested in front of his mother
And murdered after hurling a load-full of charges
Will never come back again. (2004, p. 36) [own tr.]

The same call for caution and measures to avoid misfortunes is reflected in Saratchand Thiyam's poem "Sister". The poet echoes the plight of women under the spell of AFSPA in Manipur. He writes:

Sister, I won't allow you to go
Every road is reverberating
With the deafening utterance of boots.
Hide inside the house, sister
Don't you go at all. (Ngangom and Nongkynrih, 2009, pp. 284-5) [tr. Robin S. Ngangom].

The resonance of this poem can be felt and heard when one Thangjam Manorama was killed by the Assam Rifles after, allegedly, raping her in 2004. The year 2004 was a turning point in Manipuri political and social history because Manipur has never witnessed such a sustained protest against 'state-sponsored terrorism. There was a steep rise in violent public protests as if the people had had enough. In a way, Manipur started fighting violence with violence, and the streets of Manipur resembled battle zones. In this regard, eminent theatre personality and historian Lokendra Arambam observed that "The deliberate withdrawal of the Indian security forces from public visibility in the wake of massive anti-AFSPA agitation in 2004 was substituted by a new form of intervention through development funding by the Centre (Arambam, 2015, 117-8)." The change in the policy to deal with the insurgency issue in the state seemed to have worked for all the parties. The seemingly quiet and violence-free streets restored normalcy in Manipur but there was something else going on despite the change of heart among the security forces after introducing the doctrine of the 'iron fist in the velvet glove'. Arambam continues to tell us why violence persists in the region and especially in Manipur:

The complexity and intensity of violent relations between the Indian state and non-state actors of Manipur which have witnessed being acted out for the last four decades in an environment of rapidly transforming ethnic societies within the '*hegemonic*' political structure of an advancing

South Asian power within a fast globalising universe, and the new geopolitical dimensions of intense global rivalry between India and China, and the underlying vulnerability of the Indian state's hold over Northeast India's population had signaled grave unease on issues of peace and human security of this strategic region. (2015, pp. 118-19)

The third-generation Yawol poets

Young poets such as Imojit, Netrajit, Abdul Hamid, Sorokhaibam Gambhini, Bidyasagar, etc., appeared in the literary scene of Manipur with a new vision and aesthetics which has the potential of starting a new school of poetry. They are poets born in the early 70s and began publishing in the late 90s. They are poets born in the early 70s and began publishing in the late 90s. While some poets of this *generation* are influenced by the *first-generation*, some have allegiance with the *second generation*. Abdul Hamid, Sorokhaibam Gambhini, Bidyasagar, who are from outside the state, broaden the spectrum of Manipuri poetry with their experiences in their home states.

Interestingly, leading poets of this *generation* are from Assam and Tripura who closely follow Manipur's poetic trends and enrich them enormously with new sensibilities and techniques from their experiences gathered from trends in other languages. This group of young writers who have appeared in the literary scene at the most crucial juncture of *yawol* movement vis-à-vis violence and bloodbath in Manipur has the potential of starting a new school of poetry or a new trend with their fresh outlooks and aesthetics. Here is an example of how Bidyasagar looks at the violence in Manipur from Assam in "Blood-smear Dawn" in which he demonstrates his anger and exasperation regarding the turmoil in Manipur;

I see
A blood-smear dawn
Entering the courtyard
After getting up from a grave. (Ngaangom & Kynpham, 2009, p. 63) [tr. Tayenjam Bijoykumar]

For Imojit Ningombam and Thoudam Netrajit, Manipur is like a slaughterhouse where men and women are in the news as collateral damages. They are the ones trying to escape death both physically and metaphorically. Some of their poems evoke a sense of *deja-vu*. The extreme views adopted by their predecessors are reflected in their poetry. However, the difference is that the poetry of Imojit and Netrajit gives us the vibe of defiance and rebellion. Are the poets of this generation upbeat and hopeful about any peaceful end to the present impasse? Can they foresee a progressive Manipur? It is difficult to answer. Because the war is still on as expressed by Imojit in his poem "War Boys";

Amidst the wild storm of the war
Mothers dress up their children with combat uniforms.
Swords, spears, and shields
Are placed on their hands.
They are allowed to play with guns and bombs
So that they do not get tired on the battlefield. [own tr.]

The devastating psychological impacts of gunfights, bomb blasts, combing operations, detentions, third-degree torture, etc., on the children are manifold. In an atmosphere created to fear the state children grow up harbouring hatred and alienation. However, the atmosphere is changing. The state policy towards the insurgency movement in Manipur seems to have changed after the 2004 mass movement against the alleged state-sponsored terrorism.

However, despite the 'promised future', there is a thematic monotony in Manipuri poetry which poses a challenge to its aesthetics and reception. The poets of this generation are aware of the challenges they must face as the future torchbearers of Manipuri poetry. Also, finding a new poetic path is going to be even harder given the circumstances (perennial social and political deadlock).

The fourth-generation Yawol poets

The *fourth-generation* poets are poets who were born in the 80s and started publishing in the 2010s. They are Naorem Romina, Haobijam Chanu Prema, Angom Sarita, Tongbram Amarjit, Wangthoi Khuman, Jiten Oinamba, Yandibala, Prashuram Thingnam, Lenin Khumancha, etc. Without a doubt, these young poets have shown incredible talent and sparks of brilliance in some poems. It would be premature to put a poetic value on their poetry as they are still exploring poetic possibilities in a changed atmosphere.

The murky residuals of almost half a century-long blood and violence persist in one form or the other in Manipur. Moreover, young poets in this generation are victims of that fallout. It is probably, for this reason, the young female poet Yandibal evokes the image of Mahatama Gandhi, who is the messiah of the poor and downtrodden, to be prepared for the whips of the might and powerful himself in her poem "*Furit Litlu Gandhi*" ("Wear a Shirt Gandhi"):

The time has spent
 For your non-violence
 For the trap of violence
 Has ensnared it
 It's useless to yell out
 The acuity of non-violence [...]

You are also innocent
 But, your turn is evident
 For the whip of the mighty and powerful
 Is sure to lash on the shirtless
 Bareback of yours
 Therefore, put on a shirt Gandhi
 Make sure you wear one. (2011, p. 38) [own tr.]

Conclusion

It is generally perceived that the clamour and chaos that characterised Manipur has subsided over the years. There is a semblance of peace and sanity in the state. Yet, the problem persists in one form or the other. Apprehensions are still intact, the dangers of violence flaring up again still loom

large. Cultural and psychological trauma in the people's collective memory is still visible and will not evaporate anytime soon. Manipur needs "collective catharsis" that Farnz Fanon talks about (2008, p. 112). Fanon's idea also finds its echo in the ancient Meitei Lai Haraoba (propitiating festival with offerings to the tutelary deities) tradition, in which every individual prays for the welfare of the community. I want to be optimistic and claim that the community healing or the ritual of the healing process has already begun in Manipuri art and literature because the politics of fear and deprivation that got entrenched in the psyche of Manipuris, individually and collectively, has already gone through the process of undoing. However, the apprehension is that those who commit violence will continue to commit it in the name of the state despite violence being "neither aesthetic, nor ethical, nor religious" (Žižek, 2009, 168).

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Notes:

[i] Someone scary and heinous who abducts and kills young children as a form of sacrifice for dam or bridge constructions in the Meitei legend.

[ii] The big drum which is sounded when there is any calamity such as war or major happenstances in the palace called Kangla.

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