



## From the viewpoint of Feminism: Poetries of Arambam Ongbi Memchoubi

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**Abstract:** *Feminism is against the stereotyped patriarchal value system for it gives unhealthy impacts to the womenfolk. It is a voice against the impacts that do not give equal rights and that torture the womenfolk. It demands the right to live equally and harmoniously without any gender bias. Such ideology is seen for the first time in the writings of Hijam Irabot in the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, after independence of this century, such viewpoints are seen in the writings of Laishram Samarendra, Moirangthem Borkanya, Arambam Memchoubi, L. Ibemhal and Sorokkhaibam Gambhini. In the decade of '80, Memchoubi has been the flag bearer of this moment Feminism. She starts fighting against the traditional systems that victimises the womenfolk. She takes the lead to break the outdated customs to inure with the modern civilization. Her long poetic journey does not come to end with the destroying acts. After finishing the destroying acts there she gets self-realization. Then she enters into the female stage. She is able to establish perfectly a model of female by which the female can take part in every systems of society without any dependence in a freeway. This has become the destination of her poetic journey. Hence, she is known as a perfect feminist in the journey of Manipuri poetry.*

**Key Words:** *Stereotype, patriarchal, androtext, gynotext.*

### 1. Introduction:

Feminism is an ism that supports the quo- status of rights of both man and woman as human beings in the world. It is a voice against the impacts faced by the women whom is a model established by the stereotype patriarchal value system. It is a protest that the customs which are made for the women cannot make them the human beings. It is a movement against the curtailed position of women in the society, the fate of being sexual object, the suppressed and bonded life by the custom, and the downcast look in every angles. Basically, sex is a biological concept whereas gender is traditionally made by the society. It is an outdated view that keeps male in higher level and female in lower level. There is no any relationship between gender and biological sex. The model of female is made by mankind. It is not an inborn model. Hence, Simone de Beauvoir identifies the identity of the woman as such- 'a woman is not born but rather becomes a woman'. This statement gives a highly forceful impact to the womenfolk.

### 2. Study:

In Manipuri literature, Feminism started to surface up its ideology in the early stage of 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Hijan Irabot was the first one who raised his voice for the downtrodden womenfolk. He was the first one who sang the awakening song for the downcast womenfolk. Manipuri women were the ones who had stood darenly against the gunpoint of Britishers. Reviving such valour to let the Manipuri women know about their rights and freedom to their lives. Irabot cried out in a shock:

Put up Devi  
Your disheveted hairs.  
One December 12 has gone  
One December has come –  
Do you forget?<sup>1</sup>

This war cry awakened the slumberous Manipuri women. Then, after independence, poet Laishram Samarendra added the strength to the awakened Manipuri womenfolk. A strain was there in his poetry which tore the image of stereotype female based on traditional concept. He was infuriated for the flesh of female body was transformed into commercial objects. In his poem- 'Sita', he expressed to march forward and to fly like butterfly coming out of the cocoon into the realm of science and technology of a new civilisation to have a new life.

However, in Androtext of Manipuri literatures, destroying the stereotype - idol of female, it was hardly seen to establish a new image. However when Gynotext came up, Feminism also started to bloom in the stream of Manipuri literature. "Sajibu Leirang" (flower of April) written by khwairakpam Anandini in 1967 perhaps was the first Gynotext of Manipuri poetry. She was followed by Kh. Subadani, L. Ibempishak, S. Bhanumati, M. Borkanya, and Arambam Ongbi Memchoubi etc. Memchoubi came out as a flag bearer challenging the patriarchal value system. In her poetry anthologies - "Nong-goubi" (1984), "Androgi Mei (1990), "Eigi Palem Nungsibi" (1998), she proceeded as a feminist. In her fights, she established a perfect female idol that she desired of. She was against the idol of female grounded on the patriarchal values. She challenged it. According to time, place, and condition based on men, the identity of female was changing. She had no proper and fixed status. She was like was water dependent upon the pot. It was natural to be slave in the poor family and to be again doll in rich family. But the poetess was against the tradition that the woman should be Tulsi-leave in all times in her character without any dark spot. Again on the wedding day, parents used to say, 'maternal home is not the deadbed of unmarried girl, so never twin back your face'. Behind such usage, it was shown that womenfolk did not have its natural rights. Her husband's rights were her rights. Actually it showed the puppet life bounded by the tradition of Manipuri society. 'On my wedding day', poetess expressed her angst :

Maternal home is not the deadbed of unmarried  
So,  
Though be treated lovely or not  
Though be poor and needy  
You should bear and live  
Never you are destined  
To come back here.<sup>2</sup>

Such proverb proper which meant the affair of couple world - 'Maternal home is not the deadbed of unmarried', was so functionally used. It stated that traditional value of a couple word is a very economical words.

One of the factors that Manipuri women remained inferior status in the society was that they could not take part in the politics. Poetess Memchoubi pinpointed this. Manipuri women must not deviate from the path of politics. If women could protest this place in politics, then they could walk in pace of time. No one could suppress them. This was poetess's stance. This stance was expressed in 'Nongoubi'. Nongoubi did not have the advantage to drink water from river and lake. Such etiological legend was used as metaphor in the poem. Nongoubi was prohibited as a punishment to drink water from river and lake while she remained absorbing her mind in serving her husband and in doing household chores. She did not respond to the call of creation. In a parallel, such activities was described that the Manipuri women did not enter into the political arena and they could not get their rights. So, like Nongoubi all Manipuri women were called out:

Come, come out Nongoubi  
Today creation is to be started again anew  
And journey is to be begun towards the source of light  
Come, Let's start the creation of land<sup>3</sup>

It was a dream to have a social status-quo of rights of both men and women of a new society. By destroying the sooted tradition, the narrow thought and view; it was aspired to establish a land of light which offered right to life in a same way to both man and woman. Memchoubi became radical feminist when she wrote Nongthangleima (Goddess of lightning). In this poem, the voice of emancipation was heard as well as taking of her right forcefully by holding the flag of valour and challenge was seen. Instead of being an idealistic woman, rejecting all softness, breaking out the sooted wall of tradition, her woman took the visage of Nongthangleima, a powerful one who could destroy. In her poem, she established her confidence that a new image of woman would be erected by destroying the patriarchal value and stereotype - woman idol:



I am Nongthangleima  
So you know  
In my loud and piercing sound  
All your colours of every trend  
That remain smearing upon,  
Will crumble down and fall apart  
... ..  
Your sooted burden of thought  
Of many ages,  
While you endure closing your eyes  
All my hideous image  
Creation of universe anew  
Will be on completion.<sup>4</sup>

This poem was established on the question and answer song of Nongthangleima and Haraba, a myth of origin in Manipuri folk narratives. This was used metaphorically, when Atiya Sidaba created the universe, Haraba always disturbed and destroyed. Hence, Atiya Guru Sidaba, father of Atiya Sidaba, from his thigh, produced Nongthangleima. While Haraba and Nongthangleima absorted in question and answer song of love. Atiya Sidaba completed creation. However, in this poem, Nongthangleima was presented in a new meaning as a fighting feminist or a creator who created new social laws to adept the new civilisation.

When Memchoubi wrote 'Eigi Palem Nungsibi', the image of destroyer was no more seen. Instead of destroyer, she became creator. She made a unique Manipuri women image that she longed to her heart. After revolt, she got freedom. Crossing the stage of feminist, she entered into the stage of female. The female image made by Gynocritic Memchoubi was not of Europe model. The image was made from the roof of the highland. This was the contenance of mother. This was a firm decision taken with heart and soul after a adamantile journey of mind. This was a new image. This was not a dependent one. She was a female, a human being. This was a respect to the honour and value of a female. As such the long poetic journey of a feminist came to end. Such ideology was shown metaphorically in her poems. A hilland mother with a 'sham' (a kind of basket) on her head walked up the slopes of a hill. Inside the 'sham', there were have aged husband and youthful son. The poetess expressed:

Load on the back was shown slanting  
Never having a moment to let it down  
I looked into eagerly what's there inside  
There inside the sham of Mother contained  
Mother's old aged husband  
And mother's youthful son.<sup>5</sup>

The metaphor shown in this poem was not of image of a meek, week and destitute Manipuri women. It showed that in every political, economical and societal event. Manipuri women always walked ahead of her husband and son. This model of female was what the poetess wanted to be. It was a visage of her imagination.

There were many poems which the poetess wrote focusing on many aspects of women. In "Nongoubi" (crow pheasant) anthology, there were 'Don't bind by golden chain', 'In the darkness of heaven'. Again in "Androgi Mei" (fire of Andro) anthology, 'I don't like', 'From exile', 'Once upon a time', then in "Eigi Palem Nungsibi" (My lovely mother) anthology, there were 'Open the Kangla's Gate', 'Highland woman who carried sham', 'Red butterfly tree'. In the above cited poems, Memchoubi tried to establish the perfect image of Manipuri Women as a poetic art which was seen in her imagination. It was like making a perfect idol with pieces of clay.

### 3. Conclusion:

In Manipuri poetry, the viewpoint of feminism was reflected in the writing of Hijan Irabot since the early period of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then came Laishram Samerendra and followed by many women writers. Among them it was worth mentioning the names of Moirangthem Borkanya, L. Ibemhal and Sorokkhaibam Gambhini. These writers gave voice to feminism. In these three writers, there was challenging spirit and voice of radical feminist. Viewpoint of female phase was not seen. However in Manipuri poetry, in the decade of '80, in the writings of Memchoubi, voice of female



phase with feminist voice was there. Breaking the traditional value system, her imagination established a new society which gave perfect honor to the womenfolk. She stepped into a new civilisation which did not have the gender-bias. The poetic journey, started with challenge and angst, got calmed down when it reached the female phase. She made the new model of Manipuri women who always in every field of politics, economics and society walked ahead of their husbands and sons. Then she got the destination of her poetic journey and liberty of her mind. She still as a feminist poetess was occupying a great place in Manipuri poetry.

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- 3 ..., *Nonggaubi*, 1<sup>st</sup> publication, Imphal, 1984, p.-63.
- 4 Op. cit., *Androgi Mei*, p.-5-6.
- 5 ..., *Eigi Palem Nungshibi*, 1<sup>st</sup> publication, Imphal, 1998, p.-22.