

Analysis of Irom Sharmila's Poetry Collection *Waiting For My Victory & other poems*

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Abstract

The present paper is the study of Irom Sharmila's Poetry Collection *Waiting For My Victory & other poems*. The paper interprets Sharmila's inner reflection which was penned down during her imprisonment. The present study is based on the translated version from the original poems. The poem was written in Manipuri and it was translated into English by Dr. Ibocha Soibam, He is presently the Vice- President, Amateur Rugby Football Federation of India. The brief information regarding the translator is given on the blurb of the book of poems entitled *Waiting For My Victory & other poems*, which is also the title of a poem in the book. Irom Chanu Sharmila is widely known as "Mengoubi" the fair one by most Manipuris is a humanitarian, a civil right activist and a wonderful poet. She was on strike for more than 15 years.

Keywords: *Sharmila. Manipuri, AFSPA, Atrocity, Army*

Introduction

Manipur is a land blessed by nature's bounty, with an area of 8500 square miles. To the south of the Imphal valley is the Lotak Lake, the only big lake in the whole north eastern states of India. The state is encircled by nine hills and it's a neighbor to Myanmar on the east, Nagaland, Assam and Mizoram on the north, west and south respectively. Manipuri language is the official language of the state and spoken by almost all the people in Manipur. "Geographically Manipur is part of the continental south Asiatic region and shares in its agricultural economy. Among its important agricultural products are rice, tea, citrus, musaceous plants, the morus alba (silk- worm mulberry) and bamboo.." (*The Pleasing of The Gods : Meitei Lai Haraoba*, Introduction pg x).

Manipur has a long literary tradition in literature. In an article "A Brief History Of Manipuri Poetry" written by Naorem Bidyasagar, he has systematically documented the origin of Manipuri poetry elaborately. It says that Manipuri poetry began as oral literature. Manipuri poetry can be broadly divided into three categories:

- i) Early Manipuri poetry
- ii) Medieval Manipuri poetry and
- iii) Contemporary Manipuri poetry.

The early poetry of Manipuri were mostly about prayer, royal programme, romantic events, heroic deeds and worshiping of nature which can be mostly registered in Lai Haraoba. The Medieval Manipuri poetry is reverberation of Hindu influences. “The 20th Century would be the Renaissance of Manipuri literature. When the British occupied Manipur on 27th April, 1891 there followed certain changes in Manipuri society. Western education influenced Manipuri society. The Manipuris (especially the Meities) began adopt western education. The educated Meities experimented their creative works in literature, culture and art”. (Naorem Bidyasagar, pg1). The trend of modern Manipuri poetry begins from “Shatra Macha by Khwairakpam Chaoba which was published in 1932. Famous poets of this age are Dr. Lamabam Kamal, Hijam Anganghal, Hawaibam Nabadwipchandra, Hijam Irabot, Ashangbam Minaketan, and Rajkumar Shitaljit to name a few. The Contemporary Manipuri poetry deal with the current issues, hopelessness of life, application of new words, fresh imagery, loss of village life, loss of lucidity and simplicity in the present Manipuri society, balancing between the past history and present turmoil in society, meaninglessness democracy, woman feminist poets as ardent voice for improving woman’s social status etc. Famous poet of this period are R.J. Meetei, Thoudam Netrajit, Imojit Ningomba, Dr. Irungham Deven, Sobita Bachaspati, Arambam Ongbi Memchoubi , Sorokhaibam Gambhini etc to name a few.

Sharmila is a lesser known contemporary poet to many people. She is well-known more as an activist and the longest hunger striker in the world. From her early age she was actively engaged in peace movement before she ultimately thought of going on hunger strike. On the fateful day on 2 November 2000, in Malom, ten civilians were shot and killed which came to be known as the "Malom Massacre", committed by the Assam Rifles, operating in the state. She was 28 when she began to fast in protest against AFSPA. Her primary demand to the Indian government has been the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). And vowed not to eat, drink, comb her hair or look in a mirror until AFSPA was repealed. By 2004, Sharmila had become an "icon of public resistance" (Wikipedia).

Analysis of the poems:

“Waiting For My Victory” is the first poem of the collection. The lines are quite simple for any lay man to understand it effortlessly. One can instantly feel that the lines were written straight from the poet’s heart. Sharmila is a social activist, a strong woman and she is also branded as the iron lady of Manipur. As a poet she is very sensitive to human problems and injustice done towards the weaker section of the society. The poem opens with:

The one who is omniscient and who sees everything
 Avoids listening to our begging,
 He gives us time for rethinking,
 He encourages us to endeavour,
 He makes us realize that life is not a magic or trick,
 He let us live with a purpose,

He does not like us to be spoiled uselessly, as we are His wealth;
Human being as I, should also learn to wait, (1-10)

The poet pleads to the Almighty God praising Him that He listens to everyone and gives equal opportunity to all humans. He directs all to live a good and pious life and all should perform their duty and have a goal in life. People should have the caliber to have one's own search for individuality as "Search you search, waiting, / You will find the way to lead (18-19). one should not stop and must keep on looking for better way of living and serving the people. Like a good parents, who think of the best for their children, God always help and inspires one to do good things to lead a better life. Good things cannot happen overnight one must toil every day until one gets the desired destination.

Waiting for unknown customer to earn their living.
Wait not to pollute life,
Spreading multiple countless disease.
Life, which consists of birth and death,
Has been made born to test,
And is bound to extend the test never ending. (23-28)

The above lines express the poet's feeling towards those who are earning their living through offensive and negative ways. She is against those people who are spreading diseases through immoral acts. 'Disease' here in the lines refers to AIDS since it was ramped in Manipur at one point of time killing several innocent youth and destroying many families. She believes that one should work and earn one's living in a decent way, 'Let his sweat's earning endow with love' (42). And one should not fear to die but always stand for the truth no matter what may come, 'Fear not to die for truth' (48). Everyone is conscious that they all will die one day but still are engaged in doing wrong deeds harming people for personal monetary gain. The poet also says that, 'Though aware that life is mortal/Rare are those who faced death with a smile' (86-87), one need to have the courage to die bravely. Those who are pure at heart can only die peacefully without any regrets.

In the this poem the poet also talks about how religions should be binding all together rather than separating one human from another. One should not be the reason of other's sufferings, 'Torture not any soul/ Unseen are the ways of Creator/ His creations are not to be construed as enemy, (59-61). All should try to exist in harmony, peace and love. Not fight to have personal gain. Everything in this world has a system, ups and down, 'Is but as it follows the wheel of time' (107). We should try to stop complaining to God all the time. The poet claimed that she is a 'soldier of non-violence' (130) and 'become ridicule to onlookers' (131). One can feel the pathetic situation and sadness in the tone of the lines. When she set out for her hunger strike there were only few people who stood by her. There were many debates that surround her hunger strike. But she was not bothered by the negative comments fired upon her and believed in what she set out to do.

Life is not meant only for fight.
He has made me wise and witty and enthusiastic,
As he had ventured around the battlefield,
And reached many places, and knowledgeable of many things;
He has made plans to win the war;
Waiting for my victory. (135-140)

The above lines are the crux of the poem and the title of the poem is also taken from here. Here one can notice the poet's sad tone and her better understanding towards life during her hunger strike. "He" the Almighty God or can be the poet's lover who was a constant supporter of the poet. Victory here is the victory of the removal of AFSPA which was removed from the capital city or it can be the victory within oneself fighting all odds in life. When she initially ventured out on hunger strike there were few supporters and later her struggle was supported both nationally and internationally, which is a triumph in itself. The poem ends with a positive note that human beings should try to do good things in life as there are so many unwanted things happening we should all come together to fight for a good cause.

The second poem in the collection is "In The Glory Of Monarch Of Diseases". The title of the poem is quite interesting. Who is the Monarch? and What are the diseases? are quite interesting questions to ask on this poem. The poem opens with:

But unpredictable and undetectable monarch of diseases is not treatable,
Such are the diseases of brain, which are not made perceptible
to the patients,
Not akin to the type of diseases outcome from bad habit,
That does not give any disturbance to the daily life of the patient;
The human world is like the replica of form of monarch of
diseases,
Like division of day and night, there exists good and bad in this
diseases. (11-19)

The poet here personified the disease as a king and he is ruling the world according to his whim and fancies. Like the monarch the diseases is the supreme owner of the world killing up the very root of human existence. Wrong things that are done with the purpose of hurting someone is very dangerous, they are fully aware what they are going to do. This type of diseases is the most 'dangerous one' (23). If only people are aware of individual inner strength and potential we will be able to respect and know other people well, 'If you know yourself, then only will there be peace in the world' (33). Humans have become insensitive and indifferent towards the problems of other people. Life has become so self-centric, seeking more money, and materialistic.

All what we see happening around are the artificial creation of
The shadow of our habits
Those who keep on fighting are those who do not want to bear
the pain of loss and agony of war.
Those who meet ill fate at the top of the Himalayas and beneath
the sea are those who do not want to die,
those who spent sleepless nights in the laboratory are the
scientists, who also want to have sound sleep,
Those who indulge in smuggling, corruption and indecent acts
are those who want to become ideal persons,
Those who are very brave in punishing others are those who do
not know their character, (46-51)

The above lines clearly depict the causes of miseries on Mother Earth all because human beings are selfish beings. Wars that are happening around the war both in the physical world and war in mind benefits only a few people power but the actual person who are at war don't know for what they are fighting for. There are dedicated scientist who are working day and night to bring about better changes in this ill fated Earth. Those who involved themselves in smuggling and drugs are few lots who want money at the cause of someone else's life. Some people (self-centered) with power talk and preach good things with empty words without meaning anything, here

In the poem 'Disease' it says that, 'The bird that survived from storm, arose from trouble'(82), 'Stronger fish are killing the weaker, competing for a handful of water growth'(111), 'In the wheel of time'(127), etc are few of the concrete image employed in this poem to arrest the attention of the reader. This poem is full of images and each sentences is interpreted in various way. The lines run in a simple manner with deeper meaning. Each sentence enhances the meaning of the next that follow. Here in this poem she expresses her desire to have a good leader to bring about peace and prosperity in the chaotic state Manipur. 'Where has gone peace, truth and love that the monarch of disease is shouting! / Shinning alone inside the screen without distributing its light,/ 'Masses stood outside confused; Leaderless'(141-143), these are the concluding lines of the poem. Manipur is a land of so many burning issues like, bad educational system, bandh, strike, blockade, unemployment, border issues, corrupt political system, racist attitude of the mainland towards the northeast, ethnic clash, kidnappings, drugs, child trafficking etc to name a few. The Center is least bothered and is the complaint of most of the people in Manipur.

The poem entitled, 'The Value Of Songs' is the shortest compared to the first two poems. It consists of only 17 lines with simple theme of life and of doing good things to others. I have taken only the close lines which offers an important message about the well being of our society.

It says:

Let the seedling of love grow only in the field of peace,
 Let it not afraid of the land and property,
 Let not any judgment pass against over somebody,
 Let the institute for learning on warfare be abolished,
 Let not oil refinery be established in the agricultural field
 Let not the habitats of animals and birds be disturbed,
 Let the Nature be made clean by your songs,
 Let the listeners have unison that the earth is one family. (10-17)

The poet expresses her desire to have a peaceful environment where everyone co-exist, especially in the chaotic state like Manipur, where there are lots of conflicts and burning issues that tear apart the peaceful existence of people. She hopes for a better society, a peaceful place to live in.

The poem entitled, 'When I Am Confused Of The Road I Have To Take' is also a short poem in which he poet expresses her confusion, whether the step she has taken that is the 'Hunger strike' is the right path or not. Though so many years on hunger strike the center was indifferent to her demands and nobody stood for her. It was later when many foreign organizations started writing about her, than only the media in India especially mainland media projected her strike and people started voicing it for the stand she took. The lines below predict her uncertain mind:

I feel afraid of whether the disk will fall in,
 My mind is not settled,
 The one who is giving me the direction is testing me. (22-24)

The poem 'Ill- Fated' is the last poem in the collection. Here in this poem the poet has used an imagery of 'pottery' to depict the creator and human like the pot and the pottery.

The potteries of the potters,
 Using it in whatever way,
 Befitting to the purchasers,
 What a happiness the potter has!
 The extent of life of the pot and its strength
 Rests on the way it is used by the user,
 A particular simple meek person
 Who will end up as the pot ends its life when it breaks,
 Not knowing his quality,
 With boastful ego ahead,
 If identify himself according to his sweet will,
 As fallen in faulty rebuke and discontentment,
 Of those who jeer and jealous upon him,
 Every steps of his, will be ill-fated,
 And will not be able to live with peaceful mind. (10-24)

The happiness of the potter is in satisfying the demand and need of the customer who is going to buy the pot, so he does anything to make the customer happy. Likewise God has given human the power to think and exercise is or her mental thinking for the benefit of the world. But human beings are full of ego which becomes the means of destruction for all since ego leads only to the world of devastation. The poet also says that people who are self-centered and egoistic will end only in ill fated situation and will never have a peace of mind.

Conclusion

The collection of poetry *Waiting For My Victory & other poems* depicts the inner anxiety of Sharmila. She like any other woman wants to have a normal married life. Circumstances lead her in a different direction which ultimately ends her hunger strike after 16 years on 9 August 2016. She was upset with the mindset of people as nothing was changing and her voice and cries were left unheard by the centre. She astonished the whole world by deciding to end her long years of hunger strike. She decided to marry her lover Desmond Coutinho which was not taken well by people. There were certain criticisms regarding her marriage. Deep down Sharmila anguish towards the unruly society of Manipur is reflected in her poems and how she craves to have a better world for all to live in. In one of her interview she has expresses her view that she says that "I really loved life" "Just because of that love, those long years of endurance were possible". The collection is a simple poem with unspoken words of Sharmila who is sensitive and pious, a human who still has faith in humanity and goodness of people. The lines are straight from her heart, one can easily relate to her feeling.

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