

# Revisioning the Novel “*Chaobi*” of Dr. Bheigyaa Singh Yengkhoiba

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## ABSTRACT

Novel, one of the most important genres of literature is of the west and borrowed from the west. There had been drastic changes in the various humanity art culture, literature and education when the spirit of renaissance was inculcated in India during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The foundation of novel and fiction was laid down for the first time in India by the Christian religions missionaries. The establishment of a printing press at Serampore near Calcutta in 1800 and the emergence of the new wave of journalism further strengthened the foundation of prose fictions in Indian literature. In the realm of Manipuri literature also, novel is born in response to external influences made by modern education also known as western education. Novel, as the first of its kind appeared in the form of “Madhavi” written by Dr. Kamal, Published in 1930. The Second Novel, *Chaobi* (1957) was the artistic creation of Bheigyaa Singh Yengkhoiba in which the writer vividly portrayed a serene picture of his contemporary Manipuri Society in respect of economy, education, social norms and values.

Key words: Novel, missionaries, renaissance, journalism, vividly, norms and values.

## Introduction:

Novel is fictional prose narrative in which characters and situations are depicted within the framework of a plot. The word ‘novel’ is derived from the Latin word *Novellus*, a diminutive of *novus* meaning ‘new’. During the early Renaissance, it is applied to any new story. The term *Novella* was applied by the Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio to the short anecdotal prose narratives in his *Decameron*. When his tales were translated into English, the term *Novel* itself passed into the English language. (C Rani Kapoor: 2003:238) In course of time, within its broad framework, novel had encompassed various types and styles including picaresque, gothic, romantic, realistic and historical. In this way, novel has successful to depict most fully the life styles of the ordinary man (Evans Ifor:1970:206) in particular and of the society in general. *Don Quixote* (1605), the Spanish novel written by Miguil de Carvantes is the first of its kind not only in the history of Spanish literature but also in western literature. (Marriam Webster:1995:819) Samuel Richardson’s (1689-1761) *Pamela or virtue Rewarded* (1740-41) is the first novel in English literature. It is the story of a maid servant of good and prudent upbringing whose virtue is perseveringly attempted by her master. (Evans Ifor:op:cit:206)

Since the eighteenth century its success has been almost alarming. By the time of Dr. Johnson's death in 1784, novel had become the most popular form of literature.

Although some sort of archaic prose work was in use in India before the arrival of the British, novel stepped into the Indian literature late. It took its birth with the introduction of western education in India. As a result of the spreading of western education by setting up new schools and colleges, new western thoughts, outlooks, values, along with the neo-concept of patriotism known by the terms nationalism and human liberties sprang up in the history of India. In other words, with the emergence of modern elites who got western education with their democratic and scientific outlook that changed the former conservative Indian life style, there appeared the genre of novel in India.

The next novel *Chaobi* (1957) (oral interview with Durgabati Devi on 20/5/07) was written by Bheigy Singh Yengkhoiba. *Chaobi* reflects the image of the society of that time like that of *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1856) in which pyarichand Mitra showed the urban life of the Hoogly river during the nineteenth century. (George K.M: 1984:610). In this novel, the writer drew a vivid picture of his contemporary Manipur society by giving details of untouchability, caste, sub-caste, marriageable and non-marriageable relationships etc. (Bheigy Singh:1983:75) The impact of casteism and untouchability which brought disadvantages to the Manipuri students studying outside is shown by the writer in this novel. The story was centred around Komol Singh who studied at Guwahati College with the financial assistance of the Manipur State Durbar. But scholarship was terminated as he stayed in the house of a Bengali family. By challenging the strong custom of casteism, Komol married a Bengali girl, Krishnakumari by name in her last moment of life. In this way, the writer shows his desire to oppose the custom of casteism and untouchability. He looked upon all the communities in this country with an equal eye. The writer made another attempt to depict the financial condition of the State. The financial state of the society in Manipur at this time was not so good but there was no check in feast or festival in the name of religion. This is expressed in the words of the writer as follows:

“The social festivals of the Meiteis were many, the  
Condition of the Meiteis was dreadful. The annual  
Budget was not a pai in excess but a Rupee due. In  
Feast and festivals there was no difference between  
The poor and the rich. (ibit:110)

The writer tauntingly also described the manner as to how the Manipuri society was greatly reduced to poverty due to excessive expenditure on the religious rites of Hinduism. The Hindu Meiteis wasted money in Tarpans and other religious feasts. According to him in the name of religion the Brahmin were benefited in cash or kind. Here, a few lines from the novel may be cited in the following manner:

“After the end of Tarpan, all the property of the Meitei is thrown away and was led in Pitrilok (Land of the ancestors) and blessing them to be Poor, went away to report about the shameless old Brahmin to Brahma. (ibid) [Translation]

In this way the writer recorded such customs which worsened the poverty stricken Manipuri society.

The writer also described the lower social position of women in the Manipuri society in this novel. What one finds in Madhabi like kidnapping of women, forced elopement and other antisocial activities can be seen in the novel Chaobi. (ibid:108) Ningthemjao successfully tried to kidnap Chaobi without her consent. In doing so, he caught hold her hand. This is not the end of the tragic story fallen on Chaobi. Manipur was the land of rumour. By that time even an unmarried girl was slandered to the status of a married woman if her hand had been held by a man. This is true in the case of Chaobi. This was the vivid picture of the peculiar societal pattern of Manipur where women were looked down without any sense of justice. On the other hand, by protecting the Bengali girl Krishnakumari as a highly educated and enlightened woman, the novelist expressed the necessity of a generous, noble-minded woman in building a good society.

What Kamal had shown in his novel Madhavi about the scene of a revolution in higher education was also seen in this novel with more completeness. By developing in the person of a medical practitioner who studied medicine abroad, Komol paved a broad way for professional ethics. The writer himself belonged to the first group of doctors in Manipur. In this novel one could see the influence and effect of the professionals who underwent training outside Manipur.

Conclusion: Novel, one of the most important genres of literature came late in this hilly region by the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Madhabi (1930) written by Dr. L. Kamal is the first novel of Manipur. The novel under study “Chaobi” is the second novel in which various aspects of the contemporary Manipuri Society such as economy, social values and norms like, condition of women, untouchability and caste system, education and culture are clearly reflected. One of the most important changing aspects of the then contemporary Manipuri society as reflected in “Chaobi” is the impact of modern western education on the existing social norms and values. The writer while bringing out the existing social defects like untouchability, casteism and other forms of human exploitation, expressed his desire to create or reform and better society free from all these social evils. In this way, while literature acted as a reflection of the society, it also acted as an active agent in bringing about social change in Manipur.

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