

Translation and Tribal Areas and the Valley: Meitei language in the Socio-Cultural Context

Thokchom Premlata Devi

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Abstract- Despite the fact that Manipur has various communities living together for centuries with long history of culture and tradition it would be imperative to notice that the oral narratives and cultural identity of Meiteis and other tribes of Manipur are relatively of homogeneous nature in the ancient period and this tread is found still persistent. In digging out the truth, the translation versions help depict the relative impacts amongst each other. It is imperative to know that intra- and inter-cultural enrichment can be made possible through translation.

Index Terms- Translation, Oral narratives, Homogeneity

I. INTRODUCTION

Manipur is inhabited by a number of ethnic groups. Geographically, Manipur is divided into the hill and valley areas. The valley is surrounded by hill from all directions. Meitei ancestors have described this land as the one being surrounded by nine hill ranges. The valley is inhabited mainly by the Meiteis, the largest community in the state, while the hills are inhabited by various tribes. All these communities have been living together for centuries with a long history of culture and tradition.

When Manipur became a part of India in 1949, 29 communities were reconginezed as Scheduled Tribes under the Indian Constitution. They are:

Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Koirao, Koireng, Kom, Lamkang, Mao, Maram, Maring, Mizo, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Purul, Ralte, Sema, Simte, Tangkhul, Thadou, Vaiphei and Zou.

Besides these 29 communities, five more communities were added in 2012 under the Constitution of India (Schedule Tribes) order (Amendment) Act 2011 (No.2 of 2012) dated 8th January, 2012 to the Scheduled Tribe list taking the number to 34. They are namely:

Kharam, Poumai, Tarao, Mate and any Kuki Tribes

In a harmonious manner, these communities are grouped on the basis of closer linguistic and cultural affinity. In this chapter, the researcher will make attempt to explore the hidden treasure of oral literature as found in Manipur tribal areas in terms of its origin, culture and religion and revelation of close relationship among the tribals and Meitei. The Oral narrative is said to include different varieties of Oral history, folklore, folktale, Oral tradition etc. In one way, it is cultural information passed on from one generation to the next by story tellers.

The forms of Oral tradition mean to include poetry, folktale, ballads, ritualistic hymns and chants, riddles, myths, legends, epics, proverbs and some magical Spells, etc. The mode of

expression in the Oral literary style is in its musical and rhymic ways, which further serve as both entertainment and aids to memory Epic poems mainly concerning the real destiny of the society in concern. When a myth in particular is asked for summarizing, it naturally begins with as Oral tradition followed by the written-down system. In section 2, I shall focus on other tribes' areas and Meitei language in oral narratives where I shall present the Oral History of Thangal Origin Myth, the Oral History of Anal and the Sacred Fire of Andro showing the very significance of how they are relatively of homogeneous nature in the ancient period and this tread is still persistent. This gets reflected in the translation of the oral narratives from such various tribes. Section 3 is about Cultural knowledge effects in translation prompting that through the translation only all the socio-political informations for past or present within or across the language can be easily grasped.

II. OTHER TRIBES' AREAS AND MEITEI LANGUAGE IN ORAL NARRATIVE

In Manipur there still continues to have Oral tradition among old people and some minority groups as well as among children and such an Oral narrative survives in their daily games, counting rhymes and songs being transmitted orally from generation to generation.

There is a tide connection amongst the tribal communities and Meitei clans (Salai). Meiteis believe that holy souls of their ancestors used to hunt the stars and planets, i.e., Sajik and Thaba. This sort of belief system could be connected to the Oral story of Khongchomnupi Nongkarol, indicating the lovely relation between the stars and mankind. On the other hand, the practice of buring the dead body of a Meitei was there in the then Meitei social milieu. After the incident of Puya Meithaba (the Burning of Sacred Puya books), the cremation of dead body was introduced among the Meitei society. To the fullest point of surprise, children below 3 years old were exempted from cremation on the basis of which they were not baptized into Hindu religion. The same practice still persists in the present scheduled caste of Meitei-Sekmai or Meitei-Khurkhul society. They used to bury the body within one earthen pottery or vessel instead of cremating the same at "LU-PUNG" near Sekmai Keithel (market). In the present scheduled tribal areas, such an aged burial ceremony is still followed. One can find such a sytem in the Oral history of "Henjunaha and Lairoulembi" that clearly reveals that Meiteis used to bury their dead bodies.

Even in Meitei Laiharaoba festival, which is embellished with songs and dances, the performance of Tangkhul Nurabi Dance confirms the apparent relation between Tangkhul

community and Meitei. The folktale of Achon Meiraba, a goddess of Tangkhul made introduction of “Lui Cloth” or “Leiroom”, which is a common religious cloth of both Meitei and Tangkhul. Such an attachment amongst the various communities and Meitei is strongly prevalent till now. In its reality, the cultural identity of Meiteis and that any tribes of Manipur are homogeneous. They also belong to pro-mongoloid stock of people.

In terms of translation work for Oral narratives reflecting the origin myth, the researcher is paying focus on some communities for the ease of exposition. We will see some amplex cases of tribal languages in the next sub-section touching some logical interpretation of their origins through myth.

2.1 The Oral History of Thangal Origin Myth

The Thangal was formerly identified as Koirao, a small indigenous Scheduled Tribe of Manipur. The etymological meaning of the term “Thangal” is still obscure. It is believed that the name “Thangal” be derived from the saying that other tribes refer to Naga tribes found on the southernmost part of Manipur, which is called “Thangkaimi” that stands for “the southernmost people”. Physically, they are indistinguishable from the neighbouring indigenous tribes belonging to the same Mongoloid stock.

Following is a translation version of oral songs of Thangal origin myth:

*“Kajong antou mini sombs
puiba sanao amdei
anrum lairing katak
lungkari tangnou, lungkanao tangni
paonni ta nge”*

Free translation

The stone drag by the monkey was erected for
men
Ties of the collateral mothers broken
line
The junior one (men) devoured up the senior
(monkeys).

Thangmi,

C.A. (2006)

From the above translation, it can be traced back that Thangals lived together with the monkeys as cognate brothers born by two collateral sisters. It was believed that Thangal originated from a place called “Angkaipang” and stayed there for a short period and further moved down towards the south to a place called “Angkaipang” and settled there for a long time. There was a large flat magical stone with supreme divine power that can produce the huge quantity of paddy. As a consequence, they become quite prosperous. As a tradition the Thangals erect large memorial stones to show their glory and prosperity. Thangals used to collect a large boulder from the foothills which had to be lifted to the hilltops. The common habitat sharing monkeys assisted them in pulling up the stone to the hilltop. On certain occasions occurred crushing many monkeys to death. As a norm of compensation, the Thangals promised that they would bury the dead monkeys with honour. Instead, they cooked and ate the meat of the dead monkeys. The monkeys didn't notice the happening. The incident occurred so frequently that monkeys somehow started suspecting the treachery and caught them red handed. The

monkeys left the village for jungle with anger and prepared for an appropriate revenge. The above song was sung by the monkeys at the time of departure. The monkeys marred the Thangal in all their life sectors and asked finally to work out a peace treaty with them that Thangals should never kill and slaughter the monkeys. Since then the flesh of monkeys has become a taboo of food for Thangals.

What can be interpreted from the above myth is that following the evolutionary theory of man in which man is considered to have evolved from monkeys (or apes), such type of close association of the people with monkeys in this myth is nothing but the real indicator of link between human and monkeys (or apes).

2.2 The Oral History of Anal

The origin of the name ‘Anal’ is obscure till now. However, most of the writers commonly agreed that the word ‘Anal’ is given by Meiteis (Rd. Kanthung, 1995).

In the sacred book of Ningthourol Lambuba, it is stated that King Poireiton, the first century ruler of Manipur, happened to slip over a mossy ground while passing an area inhabited by the tribe. He called the place ‘Nanba’ which means ‘Slippery’. In this way, the Meitei word nanba was corrupted to the Anal (Lh. Ngamhring, 2007). There is also other belief that because of their cleanliness in comparison with other tribes, the Meiteis called them Anan, which gave way to Anal. This again goes somewhat against the argument countered by the fact that in Burma (Myanmar) they were known as ‘Khon’ meaning ‘unclean’ or ‘dirty’.

With respect to the legend of Anal origin, there is a belief among the Anals that they came out of the ‘khol’, a word with two meanings. The first means a deep ‘hole’ in the earth while the other means a ‘foreign country’. As the legend spells out, the Anal people came out from a big cave covered with a stone. There was a savage tiger which kept watching over the hole and ate up anyone who came out from the cave. There were two brave Anal heroes called Hanshu and hanta who engaged a bird group, Pari birds (in Anal) with the promise that if it helped them, it could eat freely in their fields for all time to come. Now the Pari birds flew in front of the tiger's face in a swarm thereby blinding him intelligently. In the mean time, the two brave men came out from along with their party and fought and killed the tiger. In this way, the Anal people came out of the hole spreading all over.

The following song depicts the victory over the tiger Anal people won:

*Rāi Kasung, rāi kasung zā
Chim pho le rāi lu kasung na
Chim pho le rai lu kasung na
KaraI sungna kakng korera*

Free English translation

Fought and fought the enemy,
With shield and sword enemy's
Sharpeneth was my sword use for war

*Kāonvā kāonvā yā
Rāi oh sa danite nii oh kāon vā (2)
Zu oh sa oh danite kappā kekolro*

Free English translation

Called me called me!
Called me thence be enemy
Called me thence be enemy
Invite my father thence be a feast
From Daryal Juli

Anal (2009)

The pari birds still try to feed themselves in the tribe's fields of paddy and millet. Their emergence from the 'Khoi' is concretised from the following Anal song:

*Khol – o hahang sānpe
Hnakhāl o lāngdāl pathusinnu – o
Hedum patel sinnu – o
Khehluwng – o limsor pathusinnu – o
Hethun patel sinnu –
Hari –o ... Hari ae*

Free English Translation:

Ah, the days of old,
When we first emerged from the khol
The broad teak leaves were our make-believe gongs
Which we playfully tolled, the whole day long
And the grasshoppers would be our cattle, you know
As we prodded and poked them, a long time ago¹.

There is a cultural practice in Anal society that whenever there is any journey to take amongst the whole family, the women and children are made to go in the front while the men walk behind. This insues from an earlier reflection that when the people were about to leave the cave, the priest chanted prayer to invoke blessing and gave farewell and after the event of chanting, they performed divination by breaking an egg and started journey forward in response to the divination. The women and children walked in the front while the heroes, Hansu and Hantha followed them behind with shields in their hand. So, the practice of letting the women and children go before the men emerged henceforth. Even in our Meitei society the same culture is visible. The above translation version is the only proof showing the idea of how Anal community originated and how they got spreading all over.

Anal have many festivals similar to that of Meiteis'. Daryal (2009: 76) mentions that Khamtungro/Phamka (Coronation) is of a recent origin after the Anals came in contact with the Meiteis and their subjugation by the Meitei rulers. This coronation happens to be performed only by a member of the village authority. A person nominated or elected as a member of the village has to perform this function. This coronation function usually takes place during the night and all the villages invited are served with *Zu-tuwng* (rice beer) and *Sa-tuwng* (meat). The song leaders (*Kamtang*) lead the singing with musical instruments and *Jakadām* (a kind of dance) is performed. In this function, the host first dances with his wife and other males and females make pairs and followed the session. Every pair, after the dance, offers some money to the host team for buying a pig to be eaten by those who will help in the closing ceremony of the coronation.

Anal songs are of various types composed by great heroes of the past, poets and singers. One of the traditional love songs called 'Tuna' is 'Akam Hla' is sung only during the Akam festivals. 'Luhla' is sung on the occasion of Sape ceremony while the songs sung during the death ceremony are called 'Atho Hla'.

The following song is one of the many songs sung on the occasion of 'Akam':

*In hmun su – oh sewa kenu sewa – tha
Akanare amma atuwng nare amma
Akanare amma atuwng nare amma
Atha puwnt rang chunrawng, oh*

Thinsel

Free English Translation:

Looking for the construction of a house
Quite lonely, when no men are there
Though Thinsel built a house and

called the people.

The following song is sung on the occasion of Phamkha:

*"Jakase, jakase, jakatinkase
Jakamumda, changluse jakatinkase
Ningthou majumda changluse*

jakatintare"

Free English Translation:

Merry, merry, be joyful
Enter the house of a man merrily
Enter the house of a man merrily².

In the above song, the last line contains a phrase *Ningthou majumda*, which are Meitei words meaning 'to the house of the King'. Daryal (2009) opines that "it is in Meitei language and shows the influence of Meiteism on the Anals. Besides, the Phamka ceremony origin goes back to the time after the Anals were subjugated by the Meitei Kings in the 16th and 17th century".

From the above translation work, it clearly reveals that Anal literature is highly influenced by Meitei literature, and even Meitei words are found inserted in their songs. We can see the linguistic synthesis out of the source language, Anal and the target language, Meiteilon within the state itself.

From the political point of view, the Anal heroes protected the Anal land from dangers and were adventurous and they went out on an expedition to the Kabow valley by establishing their hegemony over a large tract of territory. *Thumkhel* (the Anal hero) extended his hold over the Loktak Lake region of Moirang and there he caught a wild bull for his ailing wife. The following song depicts the underlying connection:

*Kathe palung eni- o, Thebong palung
eni – o*

*Morang so ki sal- o jungke kadobe
A sha the thal pinam- o, ka ruwng ngan
teh dim ma*

Free English Translation

Oh! Thebong, my kind hearted wife,
She has asked me to catch the wild bull from the green pastures of moirang region.

Though caught and killed, the beef thus obtained seemed not enough³.

The following is the song of Thumkhel's Expedition to the Kabaw Valley:

*Thumkhel lāngcham sina, Tamu zol, huzā eh vathal ting hmi deso.
Oh, volhlung lāngcham sina pinsa zol, husa eh vathal tehmi lingsā,*

Thumkhel ral duh tensinbe, simzong lu oh marende,

Huzā- aluwng som hmin tungka.

Oh, Volhlung rāl duh tensinbe, kikiing lu oh marende,

Huzā- aluwng kheh hmin tungmi.

Free English Translation:

The battle fields of Thumkhel lies at the southern part of Tamu, covering vast area. As a mightier fighter, he killed and destroyed everything. Nothing remained behind to be seen at far. Southern part of 'Pinsa' (now called pandah in Myanmar) is the battle field of Volhlung. As a less superior fighter, he could not clear and conquered a large area. Many lives and things remained visible when looked at. The number of heads of his victims is as amny as the number of monkey heads being raised by a good hunter in front of his house. The heads which filled ten rows are Thumkhel's. The score of heads claimed by Volhlung are of weaker and smaller beings like 'Kikiing' (sea snails) and is even short of one row⁴.

From the above songs and brief traditional accounts, we could spell out that the Anals belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family of Mongolian race are one of the various types of Manipur. They believe that they came out of the 'Khol', still preserving their cultural way of life by tradition. Christianity and modernization cannot wipe away their tradition and culture. The Anal's cultural literature is found influenced by the interaction with the various tribes such as Kuki chin tribes and the Naga tribes. The Anal tribe has also tendency of strong feeling that there is impact of the Meiteis in belief, culture and language. Daryal (2009: 145) spells out that "Today's Anal dialect has many Manipuri words. Old words have given way to these new borrowed words. The Anals have linguistic affinity to the Kuki Chin tribes". This is how we can observe how the above translated version provides a clue depicting the richness of the culture of a language like Anal. The Oral narratives and cultural identity of Meiteis and other tribes of Manipur are relatively of homogeneous nature in the ancient period and this tread is still persistent. This gets reflected in the translation shown above.

2.3 The Sacred Fire of Andro

Andro is one of the Scheduled Caste Communities, who spoke *Chakpa* which has died out and they now speak Meiteilon. Only a few elders know their old language which is used only in rituals. It can be noted that some Puyas (old Manipuri sacred manuscripts) have information about the history, civilization as well as culture of the Chakpas in the name of Chakparol, Chakparol Khunda, Chakpa Khoira, and Chakpa Lai Khunda. There are eleven hakpa localities in the state of Manipur and most of them still practice the aged-old traditions, calling themselves the Meitei Ariba (true Meiteis) in the sense that they are what the whole Meitei community was before the Hinduism that came into

existence in 18th century was adopted by most of the Meiteis. Still Andro community preserves and guards their cultural practices forming a council to function as a local self-government. There is a building where the council has its office and they call it 'Loishang'. Inside this Loishang is the Sacred Fire, which is believed to have been started at the time when the Chakpas started living at Andro more than two thousand years ago. This Sacred Fire has never been extinguished from that time by following a particular system called 'Singhul Leng Meihul Leng' according to which two persons for everyday from two different families have to attend to the sacred fire by bringing firewood to the temple of the Loishang. A hymn is sung to glorify the sacred fire. The following is a part of the hymn with translated version.

Ubi uyel mei

Hemba pamchak mei

Lamchao Khambi mei

Amam singkum mei

Chapok kadang mei

Tara chakthong mei

Shenglou Yenphut mei

Chakpa phuyik mei

Charu tangsam mei

Poireiton khunthok mei

Poinaotana khunphao mei

Poirei khulling mei

English Translation

Fire in the ashes

Fire that can burn everything

Fire to cremate

Fire also in childbirth

Fire to cook rice

Fire to cook dishes

Fire to bake pots of the Chakpas

Fire to burn hay in the field

Fire brought by Poireiton

Fire brought by Poinaota

Fire, the foundation of Meitei

civilization.

Rajketan Chirom

(2013: 113)

Rajketan remarks that "the hymn gives the various uses and qualities of fire. It describes the role that fire plays in all the aspects of man's life. One notable in the hymn is that it talks about Poireiton, and his wife Poinaota, as having brought fire (the know-how to make and use fire) to Manipur during their migration and its importance in the civilization of this land. Thus, the people of Andro believe that if the sacred fire is extinguished, the Manipuri civilization will come to an end and all its people, culture and tradition will become extinct. Therefore, this sacred fire is always to be kept alive". This small translation tells a lot about the ancient days when many clan principalities were ruling their own small kingdoms. Pakhangba, the Ningthouja king defeated Poireiton, who came to Manipur to help Khaba clan in war. Poireiton married his younger sister Laisna to Pakhangba and she was made queen. It is said that the fire used in the coronation of Pakhangba was said to have been brought by Poireiton. It is still believed that it is the same fire which is still kept burning at Andro.

III. CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE EFFECTS IN TRANSLATION

Now let us see a recent view of the semiotic Lotman & Upensky (1978) describe literature who declares the following statement:

No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its centre, the structure of natural language.

Viewed so, language behaves as the heart within the body of culture. The interaction between the two brings forth the continuation of life-energy.

Thriveeni (2002, p.46.) describes such interactive phenomenon as an item covering all aspects of life expanding from history to traditional customs. At this crucial juncture, the translator has to take good decision about the importance given to certain cultural aspects and to what extent it is necessary or desirable to translate such elements into the target language.

Again, one can also have the handsome idea of which Hatim and Mason's theory (1990) on translation is focused on the decisive relevance of cultural context: Translating is communicative process which takes place within a social context. According to them, translators are considered as mediators: *Translators mediate between cultures (including ideologies, moral systems and socio-political structures), seeking to overcome those incompatibilities which stand in the way of transfer of meaning. What has value as a sign in one cultural community may be devoid of significance in another [...].*

Hatim and Mason consider translation as a communication process going through linguistic and cultural barriers. According to them, the translator may face problems within or outside the language concept.

The existing fact is that when a language exists in a particular culture it is very hard to realize the meaning of linguistic text to be comprehended as per the particular culture. However, even though cultural words create problems as the impact of them gets lost in the process of translation, what is good here is that through the translation only all such socio-political informations for past or present within or across the language can be easily grasped.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have explored that Manipur has various communities living together for centuries with long history of culture and tradition. The Oral narratives and cultural identity of Meiteis and other tribes of Manipur are relatively of homogeneous nature in the ancient period and this trend is still persistent. The

translation versions depict the relative impacts amongst each other. It is imperative to know that intra- and inter-cultural enrichment can be made possible through translation.

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AUTHORS

First Author – Thokchom Premlata Devi