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WHERE TO SURVIVE? HOW TO REVIVE? : MANIPURI LITERATURE AS A TALE OF
SURVIVAL AND REVIVAL

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ABSTRACT

The entire course of development of 'writing about', 'writing of it' and 'writing for' has grown into becoming an important aspect of ethnicity and society. The most distinctive way to ascertain the nature of any emerging nature literature is, its 'space' and 'accessibility'. There have been ever-increasing numbers of writings from the Northeast, spreading a new literary consciousness and marking a new beginning of the region, with the finest blending of modernity and mythical representations. Northeast is all about the 'voices', the common voice representing the whole ethos of the region, wedged between politics and history, differences and internal conflicts and the foremost being, the idea of 'beingness' and 'non-beingness'. A land often considered to be all about violence, is retelling its story of survival and recovery, in spite of all its conflicts and degeneration. The liberating and releasing factor of translation will give life for the survival of 'lost literatures' and release a new lease of life to the survival and its renewal, reaching to a larger number of audiences. The growth of interest in the corpus of translational activity and its cultural turn will enable the readers to construct and revitalize the lost civilizations. The present paper looks into the themes of resistance and revolution in the oeuvre of the Manipuri dramatist, Arambam Somorendra Singh. It is an attempt to embody the voice of Manipur, a land of jewels, as a representation of the Northeast, and translation used as the backbone to make it possibly able to cross the mountains and make its bells heard by the rest of people and to help move beyond the space of literary marginality.

KEYWORDS: Space, Voice, Lost, Survival, Beyond and Translation.

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Writing or the purpose of lettering out can prove its adequacy and accountability once it crosses the edges of 'spaces' and claim for togetherness and oneness. So how do we intend to rate a Writer's work- on their geographical location or on the Writer's identity? Are works considered according to the freshness of new forms of writings or their thematic ability? If so, then what about the 'long lost rich literature' which enfolds the history of the region, has not been able to make its existence feel, to the people of the larger

masses (mainland)? Is translation the determining power for the growth of regional literatures and have an impact for greater intercultural consciousness in the present day? north east is a land of diverse culture and the writings from the region narrate stories of the untold suffering. There have been ever-increasing numbers of writings from the Northeast, spreading a new literary consciousness and marking a new beginning of the region, with the finest blending of modernity and mythical depictions. The role of translation and its objectives will unquestionably unlock the locked stories of the locked region

Northeast is all about the 'voices', the common voice representing the whole ethos of the region, wedged between politics and history, differences and internal conflicts and the foremost being, the idea of 'beingness'. Some of the undertones in the writings of the region include roots, identity and conflict. The region has many other things too to present to the literary contributors to move beyond the thematic understanding of nationalism, revivalism and revolution. North east is a terrain of diverse cultures and a land of shared experiences and history. A land often considered to be all about violence, is retelling its 'story of survival', in spite of all its conflicts and degeneration. These factors of survival mark the beginning of the writings coming from the region with a new freshness of positive thoughts and a new call for a new awakening. So what do we do for the unheard voices to be powerful and be heard, and make their existence possible? Tillotama Mishra observes in her anthology, "For a region marred by decades of violence, its literature is not just a social and historical map of events, but also a medium of telling its story". (3)

The only way to make this entire cause effective is through 'Translation', and the process of translation activity as an act of 'finding a voice' and 'giving a voice', undeniably for the voice of the untold suffering and unheard ones. Translation and the medium of translation can make the literatures of the region accessible to the rest of the country. The urgent need for translation of indigenous works and literature in the Northeast is the innermost idea of this attempt, and the translation of Northeast literature and culture would contribute to the spreading of knowledge of the lesser known social and linguistic groups. Furthermore, this ongoing initiative to translate regional languages to English will broaden the spheres of 'connectivity and spaces'. It is an act of a form of reconciliation between the lesser known and aspiring cultures. In Susan Bassnett words, "Translation is about wanting to cross boundaries and enter into a new territory". As a serious and creative activity, translation is used as a tool to introduce literature of an alien and unheard language into one's own. This paper is an attempt to embody the voice of Manipur, a land of jewels, as a representation of the Northeast, and translation used as the backbone to make it possibly able to cross the mountains and make its bells heard by the rest of people and to help move beyond the literary marginality.

The lack of translation of Manipuri literature has made many areas of its rich literature remained untouched. The means of translation can only help in bringing out the best writings of Manipuri literature not only to the people belonging to the same linguistic region but also to the readers from every corner of the world. This study takes up the works of Arambam Somorendra Singh as he is considered to be the Father of Post-War Drama period of Manipur. Arambam Somorendra Singh (1935-2000), emerged as one of the greatest dramatist of the Manipur region, who stood for hope and change, revival and regeneration, and harsh realities of the present scenario. Singh is the voice of Manipuri Drama and depicts realities through his employment of real-like characters. The man of the post-Manipuri war period imbued in the people the hope of resurgence and by enlightening them with the concept of Manipuri dramas reiterates the importance of regenerating one's own roots and belongingness. Being the Founder of an underground organization (UNLF) in a conflict ridden place like Manipur, and transforming into a famous dramatist, it is needless to say that Singh's life history has impacted his way of writings and his revolutionary themes are all embedded in all his real-like characters. Using his famous plays ("The Family of the Judge"/ Judge Sahebki Emung, 1968 and "Seven Years Devastation"/ Chahi Taret Khuntakpa,1958) as a case study, this paper probes into his treatment of the present day condition of Manipur and fix him in the map of Indian literature through translation.

"The Family of the Judge" exhibits the internal conflicts of values and ideas, the want of preservation of one's own roots, the craving for a better living by discarding the folks values, and a struggle of the middle

class family caught between 'modernity' and 'regionality'. Singh writes about the predicament of modern people and their misrepresentation of modern culture.

Mohan: I am doing Research

Phulo: What? Research? What sort of research?

Mohan : Research on ancient Manipuri culture and tradition

Phulo : Bah , what are you going to do with it?

Mohan : What do you mean ? Do you know the implication of my subject?

Phulo : (Angrily)I don't care, I don't care for that rotten culture.(427)

Fixed up between modernity and regionality, the above lines exhibit the struggles of middle class family, signifying the importance of roots, 'the never ending want for roots and the never wanting wish for returning to roots'. These sensitive lines express the urgency to preserve our nativity and belonging. The undertone of these lines includes the thematic study of assimilation, contradictions and confusions.

While Singh echoes the love of one's own native through the character Mohan,

Mohan: Civilized value and refinement are not blind learning of the manners of the Sahebs. The Japanese who are not Sahebs are very refined people in Asia. (Phulo stares at Mohan) What you have learned is that you began with Bangla and Sanskrit and ended up with English – isn't it? (428)

Singh brings out the loss of nativity and the natives disregarding their nativity through the character Phulo,

Phulo : Nonsense, a rebel against the tradition of the family.....instead of learning the European ways of life, you have been wasting your time discussing about the discarded notions of Meiteis, those early men of Manipur . I really pity you my boy.....Why don't you look out for new ideas which will broaden your outlook? Will that narrow subject benefit you? (428)

Manipur shared its history with the past colonial legacy and suppression and Singh gives us a graphic knowledge of the past towards the present. Spelling out his motives behind preserving the native culture, he declares an ultimatum to safeguard the diminishing culture, lest the route to the roots would be snapped and the natives would be lost in the labyrinth of belonging and longing. Singh could be felt in his characters and his appearance through their words reminds us of his personal background too. His revolution came as a mass struggle and his employment of his personal life in his oeuvre conveys his deep urge for change and revival. Mohan struggles throughout the play, and finally could find a match for his thoughts in his sister-in-law, Aruna. They both finally depart from the house in disgust but never fall prey to the so-called 'modernity and assimilation', and went to live with his folks.

"The Seven Years Devastation" portrays the historical aspects of the region, the historical struggle and a history to be studied, which has marked the new growth of transformation. Singh takes up the significant study of war and mirrors its reflection to the present day context, keeping in mind the significance of the effects and the causes of war, and above all the coming of smiles after the tiring teary days.

Singh starts the play with an extreme amount of intense emotions and the fear for the downfall of the region due to the inability of the King,

(Mocking at the King) Mother, who am I, darkness..., what and who all, what situation is this; darkness, the whole state is on fire, gosh.....what is this, the sharpened shining sword is bleeding profusely. The rivers are filled with remains of bodies. Only deaths everywhere, everything is lost....lost, the whole state is lost. Forceful winds are blowing your way....when the place is at its pathetic state, you powerful man, you are still busy with your sleep.....ha ha ha ha ha ha.(1)

He throws light on the Manipuri-Burmese war, which lasted for seven years, with deaths and sufferings everywhere, civilians being treated like dogs by the foreign troops but finally the Burmese troops had to surrender to the Meithei armies and troops. And tragically the then King of Manipur, Maharaj Marjit left his kingdom and fled to the neighboring state fearing for his life without giving a thought of what will happen to his civilians under whom he was given the charge to take care of the welfare of the state . Maharaj Marjit is a shame for the state as he left his duty in the hands of the foreign troops. All his citizens are held captives with brutality and numerous murders. And the story unfolds the unimaginable life of a common man, Bijoy, who

came to rescue the whole region. Through Bijoy, Singh emphasizes upon the issue of survival amidst all terror and fear.

Know this, today I am swearing, Oh Mother, your worries are my witness, I feel myself cursed for having seen you with pain with my own eyes, will surely drive the enemies away from Manipur (42).

However with the onset of dawn and the dust of smoke covering the skies reducing to rain, with clearer and purer drops, marks the end of darkness and fear of the region. A new beginning with new hopes and thousands of smiles, Bijoy, the voice of the region, proves successful to his fellow folks,

A salute to all elderly people, please don't lose hope. Today the Burmese armies are my captives. The day will come very soon for us to erase the whole painful memories of the Burmese armies. The day has come for our colorful flag to fly freely in the air. The waves of happiness will surely touch us some day very soon (56).

The long lost happiness will mark its spring arrival sooner, leaving behind the haunted memories, to breathe freely in the air with only positivity and charm.

The 'carrying over' and 'crossing over' of meanings, language and culture of Manipuri literature from its close boundary towards a more larger sphere is the efficiency and effectiveness of translation. In Susan Bassnett words, "As the world shrank conceptually with increased trade, greater ease of travel and better communications generally, so translation helped to bring awareness of the variety of cultures that existed and had existed from around the planet. Translation was a means not only of acquiring more information about other writers and their works, but also of discovering new ways of writing".(174) Arambam Somorendra's writings and his profoundly striking thoughts will be deeply remembered and we could sense the writer's vivacity in his works for a bigger stand this time. The author will be enquired all over again; his writings will find new readers towards a new beginning, for generating his ideas for a better cause. The central idea of this paper is to make the writer and his writings come alive to the masses, and the repeated call for recognition is answered. The 'Unrecognized Soldier' of Manipur will be given his stand for identification and equality. His attempt to breathe life into the implication of one's own roots and values, will be re-embraced with a 'new mission of weaving it', outlining the 'good fabric of regional taste' with a 'new touch of its consciousness'.

More importantly, it's all about the ethos of the region, the need to survive amidst all the oddness of the historical and political constrains, and hold on to the pride of the regions 'unique possession' of diversified culture and languages. Singh's characters (Mohan and Bijoy), could beacon us the 'hope' of dawn and 'new revivalism'. The weapon of translation has responded the call of dawn for the 'long lost literatures' and their writings. Singh's voice is one of the most prominent voices in the history of Manipuri literature and has contributed to the literary growth of the region. This paper has come across as a source of adding to the linguistic and cultural fervor of the diverse region, wherein the 'unheard voices' will no longer be the 'Far cry from the Mountains', but will be called as the 'Survivals from the Mountains' as translation will help to 'bridge the bridging' of language barriers and his themes of revolution will be answered, heard and enquired all over again.

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