



WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO MANIPUR THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF PAINTING

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Introduction

Manipuri women are well known for their valour, skill and active involvement in various social, economic, political and cultural activities. In every moment, they take care of their families as mothers, wives, daughters, sisters and daughter-in-laws. So, women's activities and presence are felt in different walks of life, may be in the field of art, culture, sports, medicine, administration and management. Moreover, they have been taking their parts in the current problems and issues of the Society. The heritage of art and culture left by her forefathers helps Manipur greatly in earning her present eminence and fame. The Department of Art and Culture also is trying to preserve our culture and identity. The spectre of superstition, exploitation and oppression cannot be expelled totally from the present society existing in the time known as the age of computer and many innocent victims are plunged in misery. Manipur women faced and are still facing such global problems and other which have adverse impact to their society through the medium of painting, and the purpose of the present thesis is to create a platform and a status of Manipuri women basing on their past and present activities. Their activities past and present inspire me pursue painting in series entitling "Women's Contribution to Manipur" using different painting media.

We often talk about women empowerment in our State. It is a movement concentrating on giving of power to women and allowing them to enjoy their social, political and economic rights. It denotes that women are subordinated and oppressed on all sides either openly or behind the screen. In spite of important and high level discussion and

decisions for upliftment, development and dignified life of women, we actually can often see women in our locality everywhere and always in miserable and pitiful conditions. Though some women can live happily and with dignity, many a lot are leading idigent and unhappy lives. Many poor women are working at market places, stone and sand quarries, house making, construction sites, break fields and other odd jobs in the open indiscriminating any available works and these and other jobs may be taken as visible, open, unconcealed and painstaking physical labour undertaken by poor and humble Manipur women. Besides these, many women are encountering problems and psychological torments in their families unnoticed by any neighbours and outsiders, of which a few instances are being the daughter of poor parents, meagre dowry, difference of caste or religion or community and the superiority complex of the urbanities against rural girls etc., and the oppression of a married woman for these reasons is mainly done by the mother-in-law who is a woman herself, and these become a good theme for song, drama, short-story, novel, painting and other art forms.

“Women of Manipur en-masse had always been taking very vital roles in certain critical issues in the history of Manipur. They acted like soldiers to prevent political and economic decadence when Manipur lost her independence to the British imperialism in 1891. Even though the status of Manipuri women in the society in general was not very significant individually, they were perhaps the main contributors to the economic prosperity of the land. The Manipuri Women’s Movement launched against he export of Manipuri rice outside by some Marwari mill owners for huge profit with the permission of the Maharaja in the face of scarcity of rice in due course turned into a movement for constitutional, political and economic reforms of Manipur. So, the responsibility of Manipur women towards their society had never been passive or diminished any time, and they all the more endeavoured to recreate and redirect their energy and responsibility to the area of prohibition of illicit liquor and drug in their land in the 1970’s, and again the movement proceeded further culminating in the emergence of ‘Meira Paibi’ (Women Torch Bearers) in the 1980’s. Since then the women folk of every community in Manipur irrespective of Meiteis (non-tribal Manipuri), Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) and hill women are taking major roles in every aspect of life and social activities at large as per their capacity.”

(Ref.: ‘Chayolsigi Leichal’ by Reena Nongmaithem)

Political Role of Women in Manipur

There are many tales of heroism of Manipuri women in the history of Manipur. Over and above that there are evidences of women's involvement in the politics of Manipur. In that regard mention may be made of Maharanis Linthoingambi, Gomati and Kumudini for their taking great and significant roles in the defence of their land and the administration. Again the contributions of princesses Kuranganayani, Jandhabi and Tanja Kombi to their respective kingdoms are still remembered. Besides these, the rare and unique historical events known as Nupilal (Women's Uprising) of 1904 and 1939 will remain veritable testimonies of the courage and unity of Manipuri women in history unfaded and they were spontaneous mass revolts against injustice and inhuman religious dogmas as well as a challenge against the colonial rule of the time. So, the two uprisings really have redefined and reasserted the potential of Manipuri women and their contribution to socio-political reformations.

The constitution of India allows women to participate in politics equally as men. In Manipur women had been taking part in both parliamentary and assembly elections. The examples are - Kim Gangte, the first woman M.P. of Manipur, Hamila Saiza, the first woman who won election to the Manipur Legislative Assembly from S.T. seats and other women who became M.L.A's are Lingjaning Gangte, W. Leima Devi, K. Apabi Devi and Okram Ongbi Landhoni Devi who is at present the M.L.A. of Khangabok Assembly Constituency. Moreover, many women contested in Panchayat election in the recent years. At present there are at least 63 women Pradhans of the Gram Panchayats in Manipur. Thus, Manipuri women are taking part in various social, economic and political activities and are working to bring a better change of our society.

The advent of Nisha-Bandh

The Nisha-Bandh Movement emerged in the time of nineteen seventies with a view to prohibiting sales and drinking of liquor, stopping of violence by an alcohol user to his wife and children and as well as to check meaningless wastage of money in wine to the detriment of the family economy. So, women organised Nisha-Bandh groups in their respective localities in urban and rural areas resulting in a popular state wide movement of a unique type in Manipur. Fortitude is inherent in a Manipuri women. She will ungreemblingly do the domestic chores taking her baby on her back without waiting for anybody's help, as well as she will take part in social works also. Experiencing the evil and harmful effect of alcohol by

themselves they firmly and fearlessly stood against the sale and use of wine thereby giving birth to the movement named Nisha-Bandh.

The emergence of Meira-Paibis

In 1980 a sudden mass movement called Meira-Paibis emerged spontaneously to safeguard youths against atrocities of the security forces like arrests without warrant, killing or beating them up for without any reason. The prevailing conflict situation in the state has resulted in the killing of many innocent people, cases of rape, molestation, abduction, extortion, etc., to a great extent thereby constraining the women to feel the need to bring to an end of such kinds of violation of human rights. They keep a strict vigil in their own localities at night by taking a burning torch in their hands. When any untoward incident happens in the state, such as bomb blast, killing of an innocent civilian etc., they would strongly condemn and protest in the form of dharana, mass-rally, general strike and social boycott, etc.

Women's efforts for the welfare of the Society

During the occurrence of Naga-Kuki ethnic clashes from 1992 to 1996, women took many initiatives in order to curb human right violations between the two communities. In the great agitation for territorial integrity which occurred on the 18th June, 2001 women played a big roll. The inclusion of the condition i.e., "Without Territorial Limit" in the cease-fire agreement between NSCN (IM) and India Government ensued a great uprising for preserving the territorial integrity of Manipur thereat the women of Manipur come to the forefront for the noble cause with patriotic zeal. It was on the intense pressure of some brave Manipuri women that the 24th Assam Rifles evacuated the Kangla Fort on 20th November, 2004. Irom Chanu Sharmila, a girl of peerless courage and will undertook hunger-strike (fasting) which wont be ceased until the withdrawal of the draconian law named AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Power Act) from Manipur under which army personnel can use unrestricted force with impunity against the democratic norms. The application of the said law has eventually put the people of Manipur in peril.

Religion

Manipuri women had always been participating in cultural activities from very early days. As for example, the Umang Lai Haraoba (pleasing of local God and Goddess) Maibis (lady shamans or priestesses) play a great part in it. Right from the beginning til the end, the

Chief Maibi with her companions not only conducts ritual programmes but also acts as the most energetic performer who runs the entire function briskly and entertainingly.

Art and Culture

The beautiful little land called Manipur was created by God with a bountiful wealth of art and culture. She is renowned throughout the world for her Raas Leela - a classical dance, Leima Jagoi, folk dance of women and Maibi Jagoi - the dance of the priestess. Besides these, she is noted for Nata Sankritan - a ritualistic song which is performed in connection with ceremonies, such as wedding, funeral, Na-hutpa (Piercing of the ear-lobe) etc. It is peremptory custom and usage that a comely and tender married woman having no moral blemishes should lead the procession regarding wedding and Swasti-Puja (the ceremony of initiation of a new born baby) carrying some times of sacred articles meant for the God. Now-a-days female singers sing in ceremonial functions.

Economic role

The demand outside Manipur of handloom and handicraft articles made by Manipuri women is increasing day by day. Women are main workers in weaving, silk-worm rearing, yarn making, embroidery, pottery etc. Their participation in fishing and agricultural works is not lesser than men. Many Manipuri women run pan-dukans (betel shop), tea and snack stalls to eke out their family income. Also a good number of women work as construction labourers and domestic helpers of somebody. Ima Keithel (Women's Market) at Khwairamband Bazar, Manipur is the only market in the world meant exclusively for women and which is a busy trade centre for women. Women from all parts of Manipur come here to sell their commodities, such as handloom and handicraft articles, rice, vegetable, fruit, flower and many other things of daily need. Women's active participation in the struggle for existence and contributing their mite in the national economy is really our great pride.

With the above mentioned facts, we show our unique identity in history. Manipuri women do not lag behind men in art and writing also; there are many women articles, poets and writers of good fame. Besides them there are distinguished sports women like Kunjarani, M.C. Mary Kom, Sarita etc., and special mention may be made of Irom Lady Sharmila who undertook fasting for about 16 years for the cause of her motherland.

A keen desire to reduce the great qualities and activities of Manipuri women in painting surges up in me so that I would immortalise their name on the sands of time.

Since I begun my career as an abstract painter, I took a fairly long time to know how to study painting and drawing. In the recent years I had met many experts in the subject. I had participated in many art camps organised at State and National levels. I also heed seen the natural beauty and various art forms of my native land but I faced a difficulty in reproducing them in the medium of painting. In 2002-2003 I painted Meira-Paibi (Women torch bearers) first. The figures been in the pictures are Meira-Paibis who keep keen vigil fearlessly every night taking lighted torches in their hands to prevent theft, dacoity, atrocity and various others crimes and anti-social activities. A women from every house in the locality comes out and assemble at a club or a shed built for them and they catch any drunken man or mischief doer and send him to his home after counselling him not to repeat the evil thing and to shun it for good. In this fluid, insecure and woeful situation prevailing in Manipur women take a big part in prevention and decreasing of killing, oppression, larceny, anti-social acts and crimes etc., and I am endeavouring to study about their noble efforts and translate them into painting for elevation and enhancement of women's social status by pursuing my artistic work in series.

As I am not a critic of painting I shall find it a bit difficult to deal on and write about it. But, to keep the little knowledge I have about it unexpressed is at the same time a worry to me and expressing it anyhow will at least assuage my worry to some extent, I think. So, when I made up my mind to study about the subject I chose "the contribution of Manipuri women to our Society" as my topic. It is a series work. This painting based on semi-realistic and abstract form uses different medium which can be done on paper and canvas. I first painted it in Middle Age Indian style. After I had met Sir Sudhakar Yadav of Bombay I changed to the idea of abstract art, but I should like to say that none can see success in my effort. Then I met Shri Samit Dey and being impressed by him I painted many pictures. Thus I begun to incline sharply on abstract painting. But I could not show off, what may be called Manipuriness in them, no one see Manipuriness in my style of paintings and they are more akin to Indian contemporary style. Having come to know of these points, a new idea came to me and I begun a new style of painting concentrating on the unique and special dress of Manipuri women's customary and traditional dress with a view to preserving and honouring our culture.

The above mentioned points are the sources of the idea of my pursuing the present paintings. For the work of painting in series there must necessarily be a basis for it, otherwise there could not be a complete, coherent and feasible idea.

The exquisite natural beauty of Manipur, its literature, culture and tradition always allure me. The value and beauty of my land will be elevated if I can express and tell them extensively to my heart's content, I think. But painting is more than telling a fact, it is a practical art. Moreover, I have a strong and fond desire to translate my thoughts and feelings into painting.

About my desire to pursue this type of painting

The land called Manipur surrounded by nine hill ranges was given the epithet 'the land of jewels' by Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India. Our native land Manipur which is also known as Kangleipak is really a place abundant in beauties of nature. It was an independent kingdom which had its distinct art, culture, custom and tradition very different from others. We regard these beautiful and valuable things as the own creation of our motherland and we are proud in preserving the culture and identity of Manipur.

When we take the word mother to our lips we use to recall the feminine features and attributes as the high quality and status ascribed to womanhood. In the Indian context Sorojini Naidu, Rani Laxmibai, etc., are heroines and their bravery and service are remembered still. Manipur, as mentioned before, had produced many brave and exemplary women who will be immortal in history, and the Nupi-Lal (Women's Uprising) bears testimony of it. I have the opinion that Manipuri women play a big role in the events and problems occurring in the present day Manipur and also they take a great responsibility in various social activities. Besides being laden with the onerous domestic chores Manipuri women play a pivotal part in earning family income by pursuing active trade from which the Ima Keithel (Women's Market) at Khwairamband Bazar, Imphal bears witness. Knowing from the mentions made by scholars, politicians and others about the high qualities of sacrifice, love, fortitude, generosity, daringness and patriotism of Manipuri women I feel myself belonging to them and regard any Manipuri woman as analogous to Panthoibi, a Manipur Goddess. The Manipuri women's traditional dress, good manners, arduousness and other high qualities impressed me much. I wanted to display it to the world through the

medium of painting. So I made up my mind to take up a series work on the subject under the title “Women’s contribution to Manipur” and fixed it as my goal.

Techniques and procedure

I draw before painting. Then I prepare the colour and it is spread on the drawing to make a form with a broad brush and wash it. After drying I begin to colour it, I shall apply the colour until I attain a satisfactory tone. Thus I gradually try to get its dimension. Then the appearance is created and the traditional Manipuri dress is put on it. Finally a finishing touch is given to the distorted form by means of rubbing to bring about the completion.

Conclusion

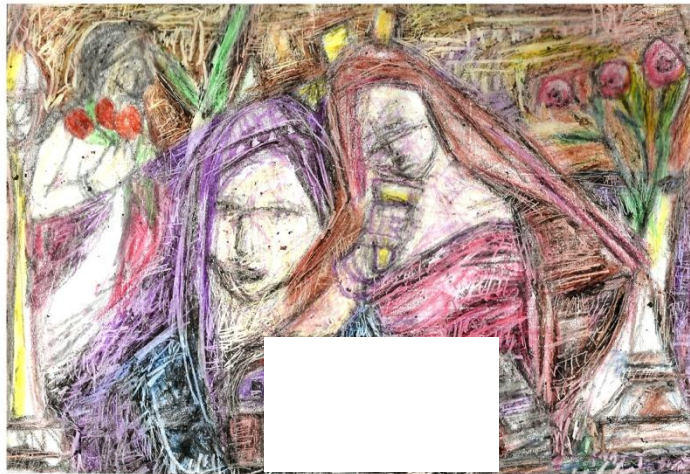
Manipur lies on the north-east end of India. It is inhabited by different types of communities and therefore, it is a multi-racial land. This culturally rich little land is also having abundant in natural beauty. But, it has now become a land devoid of peace and full of miseries due to lack of understanding and wilful creation of animosity and violence. Besides the rampancy of bandh, blockade, general strike, murder and violence it has become a state full of corruption, and again since everyone is doing as he likes disregarding law and morality our society is verging on insecurity and chaotic situation. In the face of this dangerous state of affairs, women from every community are coming forward to face the peril and bring back to normalcy and peace. The women of this land are courageous and at the same time patient. When the husband shirks the responsibility of maintaining his family, the Manipur wife can carry the family burden regarding it as he bounded duty. The bravery shown by our women at different times of our history is never forgotten and people sing their praise. There are at present many brave women in Manipur still and some women have become big officers executing their duties efficiently. All are well aware of the high responsibility of our women in this society. Generally a Manipuri women is humble, graceful and abide by the national custom and tradition, but when provoked and confronted she is furious like a lioness. She will revolt against injustice and evil deeds and bring the transgressor under her feet. In crucial and important national issues, Manipuri women had always been at the forefront to face the situation when I came to know of the courage, fortitude, and other good qualities of Manipuri women I was much impressed with admiration and made up my mind to delineate them one another with my brush strokes. I earnestly desired to convert our culture, custom and tradition into a beautiful art form and to take up a painting work in series on the subject I prefer.

Hence, I begun an experimental research work in painting choosing “Women’s contribution to Manipur through the medium of Painting” as my topic.

PAINTING PLATE



**TITLE : CRYING WOMEN, Medium - water colour, Size 15 x 11 inch
Execution : 2002**



**TITLE : WOMEN'S PROTEST AGAINST CORRUPTION & BAND BLOCKADE,
Medium - Oil Pastel, Size 11 x 8 inch
Execution : 2010**



**TITLE : WOMEN'S IN DIFFERENT MOTIVE
Medium - Oil Pastel, Size 11 x 8 inch
Execution : 2010**



TITEL : WOMEN FOLK AGITATION AGAINST BAND AND BLOCKADE,
Medium : Charcoal, Size : 11 x 8 inch.
Execution : 2010



TITLE : MEIRAPAIBI (TORCH BEARER) , Medium : Acrylic, Size : 15 x 11 inch.
Execution : 2002



**TITLE : TWO WOMEN IN THE ROOM, Medium : Acrylic, size : 2x3ft
Execution : 2010**



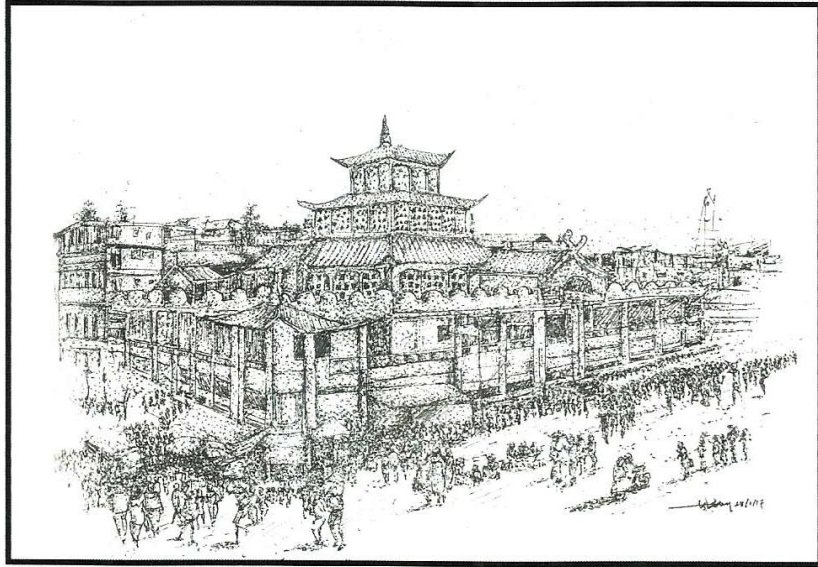
**TITLE : SAD MOTHER, Medium -oil on canvas,size 3x5ft
Execution : 2005**



**TITLE : PREGNANT WOMEN, Medium : Acrylic, Size : 2x3ft
Execution : 2010**



**TITLE : OUR SAD MOTHER, Medium : Acrylic on canvas, Size: 4x6ft
Execution : 2010**



TITLE : IMA KEITHEL (Womens' Market), Medium : Ink Pen, Size : 11x8 inch
Execution : 2017



TITLE : NUPI LAL (Womens' War, 1939), Medium : Water Colour, Size : 11x8 inch
Execution : 2017



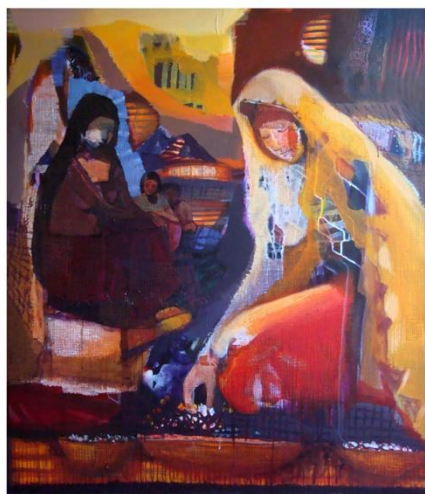
**TITLE : TWO WOMEN, Medium: Acrylic, Size : 50 x 60 inch
Execution : 2012**



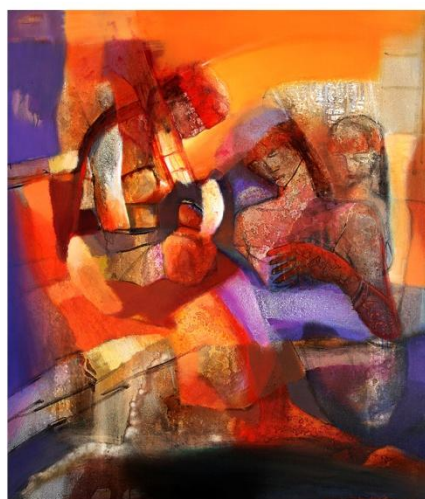
**TITEL : WOMEN AND COW, Medium : Acrylic, Size : 5 x 6 ft.
Execution : 2007**



**TITLE : WOMENS PROTEST AGAINST BAND N BLOCKADE,
Medium: Acrylic on canvas, Size : 2x3ft
Execution : 2006**



**TITLE : KUNDO LENGLIBI (KEINA) Medium : Acrylic on canvas, Size : 3x 4ft
Execution : 2011**



**TITLE : THE THREE MOODS, Medium : Acrylic, Size : 127x109 cm.
Execution : 2016**

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