LIFE AFTER DEAD IN THE DARLONG, A SCHEDULED TRIBE COMMUNITY OF TRIPURA: AN ACCOUNT OF MAGIC-REALISM CONSTRUCT ON THE JOURNEY OF THE DEAD SOULS

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ABSTRACT

The year 1919 being the claimed year of the Darlongs’ entry into the realm of the Christianity, the people have undergone ample of changes since then with the ethnic practices, presently considered as a mere savage pictures, being either improvised or metamorphosized to foreshadow their present relegating the past. The Darlongs, tainted with numerous fictitious believes in the past, have had a beautifully constructed myths where the dead souls journeyed to the worlds of immortal in which the ‘Rih’ Lake, located in the present Myanmar commonly known as ‘Hri Li’ among the Darlong act a as a gate way between the worlds of immortal and the mortal. In the legendary story of ‘Pangama nih Thuitlingi’, the lover ‘Pangama’ traverse to the abode of dead called ‘Thikhua’ having crossed the fall of ‘Amnesia’ and plucked the flower of ‘fortitude’. The article attempt to exemplify the scattered narratives associated with the journey of the dead among the Darlong men and women which have been far annihilated by them. Presently, the Darlong no longer believed in the philosophy but rather in the Christian construct where soul is considered to be the ‘Tempe of God’ and ascend the kingdom of God judging upon his/her deeds on Earth.

KEYWORDS: Darlong, Travelogue, Conception, Souls or Spirits and Journey.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the pre-1919, the Darlong had their own faculty of believe pitched in the different vines of environmental phenomenon with the touch of magic realism in them where the Darlong had ample of usual as well as bizarre religious culture bringing about a wide pattern of sacrifices, offerings, prayers, rites and rituals with some of their deities being ‘Khawbiak’, ‘Lungtan Pathian’, ‘Tuitarpa’, ‘Ramhuai’, ‘Si’, ‘Khuachultenu’, ‘Fapite’, ‘Zingngawrtenu’ and many others. As such, the Darlongs worshipped ‘Natural’ and ‘Supernatural’ forces. For instance, “during illness the people called upon ‘Tara hei Pafa’ usually known as ‘Tual Pathian’ meaning god of the Earth who was believed to ensure healing and blessings” (L. Darlong 127). At other circumstances, if the illness was cause by the ‘Ramhuai’, the parent of
the victim had to go out in the forest at midnight to challenge the spirit by performing a conversational rite in return of which a healing bond for the patient was the ultimate result of the rite. However, if the parent failed to overcome his fear instinct during the performance, he was entitled to die. Besides, it was also said that the people had worshipped the likes of ‘Longтарai’ lately as a result of their encounter with other ethnic groups. In spite of all, the impact of Christianization laid a deep foundation in the niche of the Darlongs regulating their every move from then and progressively the ethnic conceptions were perpetuated in the realm of the subconscious with the new Christian concepts replacing the old ones day in and day out. Thus, the customary laws, rites and rituals, ceremonies and other aspects of the early Darlong life and the traditions are continually being neglected in the name of civilisation.

According to the Darlongs, there are two type of dead i.e. natural and unnatural. The general custom of the people was that they decorate the dead body with ‘Thangsua Puan’ before final disposal, wash and anoint it with oil. A baby dead in his pre-birth or so immediately after birth was called ‘Lairu’ where the corpse was placed in a pot, carried to a destined place where he/she was to be buried. However, if a child dies before having a tooth, it was called ‘Ramte’ and the body was taken out of the house through window only to be buried by the ladies. In both the cases, there never was any wine feast which one finds in case of young men. On the contrary, if an old person died of natural dead, he is carried with a pair of bamboo called ‘Rilang’, buried ceremoniously often followed by a wine feast during the ‘Ramdal’ where as one who does not meet his dead naturally are called ‘Sār’, carried with a piece of bamboo called ‘Langkhat’ and was buried outside the village. Nevertheless, the dead of the chief had a different traditions altogether. In the present Darlongs burial of corpse outside the village is no longer practice be it ‘Sār’ or alike. Erection of monuments and other documentation was practice in the contemporary times as well but the early erected stones had some sketches of animal in them.
II. Set-up of Darlong Belief System:

Traditionally, the Darlong regarded in the presence of an over-soul namely ‘Pathian’ who dwell himself in rivers, streams, mountains, forests, certain flora and fauna and at many instances, said to exalt himself in a varied forms known as ‘Khawhri’ or Demons including the guise of human. Besides, the people also pitched their belief in ‘Rihli’, for whom rituals and sacrifices are made with great deal of devotion because of their fear. In fact, all the rites, rituals and religious architectures are digested unanimously by the people based on the oral scriptures narrations. Thus, in the tale of ‘Zi Rihli’, a man went out to hunt in the forest leaving his infant child and wife at the village. As night fell, he sheltered himself under a tree that happened to be a ‘Zi’. At midnight while the man was yet awake waiting for his prey, he overheard a voice calling for a friend requesting him to accompany them in the task of naming a baby boy. The man then paid a silent attention to the voice and discovered that the call was being made for the tree’s ‘Rihli’ by other ‘Rihli’ of the forest. However, the ‘Zi Rihli’ rejected his friends’ call saying he had a visitor to take care of and they should do the job without him but to let him know on their return. After a while, the furies returned and the ‘Zi Rihli’ asked what name did they put on the baby boy? His friends replied, “We named him in this manner. The child will grow up to be a good looking young man and shall have two wives. The two wives will one day fight on the issue of using ‘Sum’ that would compel their husband to go into a forest in order to make another one. On his way, a tiger will devour the young man”. The ‘Zi Rihli’ was quite happy with the naming and bid farewell to his friends.
The next morning, the man woke up early only to leave for his home straight away. The nightmare kept on knocking his mind as he knew very well that the baby boy which the furies named was none other than his own boy. Years passed, his son grew up to be a good looking young man. As did the prediction of the shadows, the young man got married to two beautiful girls and time went on peacefully for another few years. One day, the two wives had a quarrel over the usage of ‘Sum’. The husband then decided to go into a forest to make another ‘Sum’ as to calm down his wives. All these while the father, a man who was the witness of the naming incident, was silently following his son. No sooner, the young man entered the forest a huge tiger attacked him but was saved by his father, who never revealing the story to anyone was secretly following his son to the forest. From then on, it is claimed that ritualistic applause was made to the ‘Zi Rihli’ in order to avoid such circumstances. In this way, the travelogue of the dead souls was constructed by the people in a form of oral narratives existing till date in the few lips of the dying bygone generations.

III. Travelogue of the Dead Souls:

“The Darlong believes in the life after death” (L. Darlong 129). Accordingly, there existed three different worlds in the Darlong pre-Christian interpretation. They are ‘Khawvel’ i.e. the ‘Mortal World’, ‘Thikhua’ i.e. the ‘Shrine of Dead’ and ‘Pialral’ or ‘Shrine of Privilege’. This interpretation simultaneously triggered the present interpretation of the Christian where the abode of the dead allegorically stands for ‘Hell’ and the shrine of privilege stands for ‘Paradise’. It was their deed and status that decides a person’s life after dead. Cruel and merciless murderer are avenged if not in the mortal world than in the abode.
of dead by their action’s victim as in the legendary story of ‘Chawngkuala’ where ‘Chawngkuala’, the protagonist await the Lushai king, who shot him, in order to avenge his dead while the good men and women are more likely to return back to physical world with a mark. Hence, babies with a pierce mark on their ears are considered not to be a new born but the return of some good person from ‘Thikhua’.

According to the Darlongs, every soul that departed from the mortal world had to undergo the same journey which is the most intriguing plot of all the Darlong myths. The journey of a deceased soul begins from the moment one breathes for the last time. The moment a person closes his eyes, the spirit was claimed to get off the body where the spirit remain by the side of his family for a week and at certain level the spirit appears to be disturbing depending upon the circumstances of his dead. Hence, offering are made during these days. On the seventh day, ‘Ramdal’, a ceremony that farewell the soul of a dead person while praying for his safe journey to the abode of dead, was observed where the spirit was finally farewell and freed from all obligations to his family. However, in the present the observation is more of death anniversary for the bereaved family and a tribute to the dead person for all his good deeds and also a word of thanks to all the villagers for their condolence. The deceased spirit then head towards ‘H ri Li’ which is considered to be the passage to the abode of dead and fencing between the mortal and immortal worlds.

Fig.2. Picture showing the ‘Hri’ Lake, presently known as ‘Rih Li’.

‘Hri Li’, presently known as ‘Rih Li’, is located in the present Myanmar on the left bank of Tyao River one mile from the place where Aizawl –Falam road crosses the river. The lake has many lures and legend assimilated with it. In the word of some elders, the lake act as a mirror to the abode of dead where sometime people beneath the lake could be seen despite
of them unaware of the fact happening above the lake. After entering the Hri Li, the spirit reached a ‘Pialtlâng’ beyond which he/she finds a ‘Hringdam’ waterfall at whose bottom blooms a flowers called, ‘Sâwlpuipar’ for the water of the water was crystal clear. The ‘Hringdam’ water drains out all the human emotions where as the ‘Sawlpui’ flower eliminates all the worldly desires and longings. The spirit had to drink the water and wear the flower on his/her hair bun and thus reached the gate of the abode of dead called ‘Thikhuakhal’ where the spirit had to catch a parasite, creeping all over the gatekeeper. The parasites happen to be a ‘Lamkhâr’. It was said that no spirit could get in but one who accomplished the task.

Beyond the ‘Thikhua’ there lays another world called ‘Pialrâl’ which was claimed to be ascended by few privileges only. The myth behind the ‘Pialral’ is that, when the Darlongs came out of ‘Sinlung’, ‘Pu Pawlmawia’ popularly known as ‘Pu Pawla’ was the first man to step out of the cave and thus died earlier than all other that came after him. The man ascended the ‘Pialral’ where he acted as the master of the abode and only one chosen by ‘Pu Pawla’ could reach the abode safely. However, no woman was allowed to cross ‘Zingvânzâwl’, a bridge connecting the two immortal worlds. In yet another instance, the Darlong chiefs had altogether a different style of ascending the abode of immortals. The corpses of the chief were buried not but rather put it in a wooden box and let it to decompose by continuously heating the box for about ninety days. It is said that the box is often opened to check the speed of decomposition of the body which was mainly done by the ‘Tlangsasuan sub-clan’ for the people claim the sub-clan to be regardless of any taboos. After the completion of decomposition, the bones are collected where some are used as a symbol of ancestors and the rest are buried. During the funeral, a ‘Ramdal’ ceremony was organised that will sent the spirit of the chief to the abode of the dead popularly followed by an infamous practice of head hunting to be buried alongside their chiefs’ bones. The reason behind the head hunting during the dead of the chiefs was that the Darlongs had the notion of exalting the greatness of their chiefs beyond the mortal reach. “The Chief or ‘Lal’ who counts more head at his credit attains greater happiness in the life after dead as because all the heads he hunted and heads buried with him becomes his slaves in the abode of dead. It is also said that the favourite slave of the dead chief was half-buried leaving his upper portion on the ground and keep on ringing a bell till his dead proclaiming the dead of his favourite Chief” (Singh. 42) achieving the title of ‘Ratha’. Thus, the chiefs are considered to ascend ‘Pialral’ by nature. The touches of the magic in the above interpretation are not a simple or obvious
matter, but an ordinary matter as everyday occurrences are admitted, accepted and integrated into the rationality of the contemporary Darlongs. “Record has it that in the Jamatia Revolt of 1863 against the Manikya 19 Ruler, six hundreds Kukis were sent to fight against the two hundreds Jamatia Rebel who beheaded all the rebels and captured Parikshit, the leader of the revolt. The Kukis also brought all the female of Jamatia Tribe as a gift and slaves for the Manikya King. The Darlong were deployed in the fight and it was the last of their cruel headhunting game” (L. Darlong 168).

On the contrary, lovers who could not unite in the mortal world are destined to ascend to another immortal world called ‘Lunṭhlalêng’ or ‘Lungsiaṭłâng’ which ‘Pangama with Ṭhuiṭlingi’ and ‘Zawlpala with Tualvungi’ had ascended in a stories bearing the same name. The passage to the abode of dead remained the same and need not used the ‘Zingvânzâwl’ bridge but ‘Luivamit’, a small brook to reach their romantic world with the consent of ‘Pu Pawla’ for he stood right at the intersection of the three bridges. In the story of ‘Pangama’ and ‘Thuitlingi’, two friends decided to bond their friendship eternally and they eventually get pregnant at the same time. One day, the ladies decided to gives their first born children for marriage in case male and female are born to them and prayed to the gods. The two friends’ wishes were fulfilled when Pangama and Thuitlingi were born to them who fell in love from the time they were in the wombs of their mothers. The two lover step to the mortal world and attained the age of marriage. As a matter of fact, Ṭhuiṭlingi’s family decided to undergo the tradition of ‘Puantom Sep’ in order to choose her life mate.

One fine morning, all the youth of ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ attaining the age of marriage were asked to show themselves for ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’, who was standing at one side opposite to the boys standing in line during which Ṭhuiṭlingi secretly marked the spot where ‘Pangama’ was standing and was eagerly waiting for the order from the elders. To the cruelty of fate, ‘Pangama’ was betrayed by a person standing beside him by intentionally dropped his ‘Tawnkil’ at which ‘Pangama’ bent down to pick it. No sooner did ‘Pangama’ bend to pick the ‘Tawnkil’, the elders ordered ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ to shoot her ‘Puantom’, who threw the ‘Puantom’ exactly at the spot where Pangama was standing. Nevertheless, it was a coincidence that the order and ‘Pangama’s bending collide. The circumstance was further strengthened in favour of the other guy when ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ did not care to look for the second time before she threw her ‘Puantom’ at her lover. As a consequence, ‘Pangama’ and ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ were left heartbroken and had nothing but to canonize their love for each other. As a consequence, ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ passed away from her mortal world and the funeral ceremony was made and ‘Pangama’
planted ‘Sawlpui’ flowers on the grave of the decease to mark his yet blooming love for her even when she passed away.

From the ‘Thikhua’ or the abode of dead, ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ could see and read her lover’s actions. One day, when the flowers planted by ‘Pangama’ bloom out of their bowers ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ send certain animal to pluck the flower for her angering ‘Pangama’ for he was unaware of whom exactly was the thief of his flower. Eventually, ‘Pangama’ planned to discover the thief and catch him in naked hand. To his surprise, when ‘Pangama’ saw the thief it was a small animal and he catch the animal asking, “Why do you steal my flowers? The flowers are planted only for my beloved ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ and nobody is allowed to pluck”. The animal replied, “You may not believe me but it is ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ who sent me to pluck the flowers from her grave”. The name of ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ struck the thought of the protagonist who asked the animal to take him to his beloved. So, ‘Pangama’ journeyed into the abode of dead where the road were steep passing through high mountains, cracks of hard rocks, waterfalls and later they reached a village which the animal introduced it as ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’s village. In no time he finds himself surrounded by the dwellers therein shouting, “The living, the living man in the abode of dead”. Inspite of all the hurdles, ‘Pangama’ stayed at the abode of dead for a year or two before returning to the mortal world. ‘Pangama’, on the eve of his departure asked his beloved, “When I initially entered your village, I saw you very thin and weak. What may be the reason of that?” ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ replied, “that’s was because my relatives does not offer anything to eat for me at my grave”. ‘Pangama’ promising to make an offering every year for ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ left for a his mortal world once again leaving his beloved, ‘Ṭhuiṭlingi’ at the abode of dead who will be eagerly waiting for ‘Pangama’s return so that the two lovers can unite in another world called ‘Lunghthaleng’ or ‘Lungsiat Ṭlang’, the romantic world of lovers. Eventually, ‘Pangama’ breathe his last in the mortal world and ascended to the abode of dead where his beloved was anxiously waiting to journey for the romantic world, ‘Lunghthaleng’ or ‘Lungsiat Ṭlang’. Thus, the privilege few who are claimed to have license for ascension of ‘Pialral’ maybe i) Person who had attained the title of ‘Ratha’ in the mortal world. ‘Ratha’ are the legendary hunters who are said to have a command over the ghost of their slained. ii) Person who had performed a life time achievement rite called ‘Khuangchâwi’. iii) ‘Lairu’ and ‘Ramte’ may also be considered to be privilege if their fathers are proficient hunters. iv) A person who had slept with three virgins or seven different tribe of women during his life time may be considered privilege.
Magical realism is not speculative and does not conduct thought experiments. Instead, it tells the stories from the perspective of people who live in our world and experience a different reality from the one we call objective. The plots and subplots in the above discussion are magically constructed in contrast to the real scenario of the contemporary time yet one can find its respective assimilation line in the narratives. The miracles, waterfall, flowers and the lake are described with a precision that fits into the ordinariness of daily life where the characters in any of the narratives flows out into the path of the common being.

IV. Conclusion:

The study may be approached from different perspectives such as post colonial perspectives arguing the tribe’s attempt to fabricate their cultural space, as in the writings of Chinua Achebe, through narrations which were once a careful political product. According to Cultural Materialist, the phenomenon is called ‘Transcendent’. Secondly, the article may also be analysed from the view of Cultural Isolation i.e. the separation of a particular culture from the larger cultural group within its proximity. In a nutshell, Cultural Isolation is a subculture’s relative lack of participation in, or communication with, the larger cultural system where the act of imaging and imagining can be interpreted as the Darlong’s attempt of antithetical zing against the larger cultural group creating an individual identity in the vast pool of literary cannon. Lastly, the act of magic-realistically contemplation may also be studied from the stand point of poaching which I called ‘The Art of Typicalisation’. The method is a conscious act of manipulating the truth to suit one’s own contemplated image, be it in a form of literary text or an oral text. By the art of narration, the Darlongs are manifesting a typical Darlong space in a labyrinth of culturally blended pool.

VI. Reference:

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1 God of Community.
2 God of rock.
3 God of Water.
4 Spirits of Forest.
5 Abode of Demons.
6 Protector of Natural happenings.
7 Goddess of Agricultural plentifulness.
8 Goddess of Dawn.
9 The present stone deity worshipped by the Kokborok speaking Hindu in Tripura.
10 Western concept.
11 Observed on the seventh day from the hour of the dead.
12 Shadow or ghost.
13 A block of wood where a hole is dug in which a grains could be smashed to powder.
14 One among the many great warriors of the Darlong past.
15 The name ‘Rih’ was said to derived from the Lushai folktale. The lake also had many lures with the Myanmar local residence.
16 A typical flower that Pangama planted at the grave of his beloved, Thuitlingi.
17 A dark black reptile having a scale and glow like a glow-worm during the night.
18 A mythological stone cave claimed to be the birth place of human race.
19 The then King of Tripura.
20 The tradition of choosing husband by a female where all the village youth attaining the age of marriage are asked to stand in line at whom a folded piece of cloak shall be thrown by the girl.
21 A legendary flower that was said to cleanse the mortal desire of a person when put on a hair bun. The Darlong claimed that every deceased put on the flower before entering the abode of dead. Thus. Never pine to their past.
22 Elements are not limited by the historical circumstances in which they are produced.