

Impact of Cultural Differences: A Qualitative Analysis of Hijam Anganghal's 'Jahera'

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Abstract- Culture plays an important role in defining the identity of people. It is the core foundation of people and helps in determining even the origins. Almost everything can be extracted through this and with a deep understanding of one's culture, respect and unity can be preserved. Peace, harmony, and identity are the things that have existed among people, and due to little understanding of this; conflict can happen. So, it is important to understand one's identity first and the rest will follow. This study aims to address this issue that causes conflicts between the two groups in the book *Jahera* by Hijam Anganghal Singh. The proposed study "Impact of Cultural Differences in *Jahera* by Hijam Anganghal Singh" aims to analyze and identify cultural differences. The pre-shaped norms that have been created in an attempt to influence the people are the key element in determining this study to be of value. I will analyze and investigate the impacts of the differences in culture that exist within the novel. It is the crucial study of Hijam Anganghal Singh's novel to showcase the numerous elements of cultural identity. It is also the exploration of differences within a society and the effects of it.

Keywords: Impact, culture, cultural, Jahera, Kunjo, Identity, society.

Introduction

Jahera is a novel written by Hijam Anganghal Singh and it was originally published in 2006. Hijam Anganghal is one of the most renowned authors who has heavily contributed to the literature of Manipur. He was born in 1896 in Imphal during the after-effect of the Anglo-Manipuri War that happened in 1891. He grew up in the atmosphere of colonialism and during an intense struggle for freedom. He is one of the figures of the modern Manipuri poets. His style of writing reflects the surroundings of where he was brought up. He was very much acquainted with the various aspects of Manipuri tradition and culture. His work shows the vivid presentation of the period and he is the epitome of that era.

He started setting his pen in motion at a young age by creating lyrical poems and songs. His name as a writer exceeds in various categories either in poems or novels. His work showcases the thought of liberalism, humanity, nature, and being able to express it meticulously. He also has a deep connection with musical art form through the impression set by his mother who also loved music. His long narrative poem journey began with the poem *Singel Indu* which was written in blank verse consisting of 14 syllables and 8000 lines. It quickly became trendy throughout the public and it had a good impression. The journey of a respected writer began with this work. He went on to secure the Manipuri Sahitya Parishad Award in 1948.

Due to his undying love for theatre, he established a theatre group which is known as Yaiskul Dramatic Union. During that time there were no printed forms of drama so he decided to write two short plays called *Nimai Sannyas* and *Thabal Chongbi*. During the beginning of the theatre movement of Manipur that reigned over 10 years, there were just printed translations of Bengali mythologies and historical dramas. He took the initiative to set that only an original drama written in Manipuri language could enter the Manipuri theatre. He established this great sentiment and later created two prestigious dramas called *Ibemma* and *Poktabi* in a consecutive manner. They were social dramas and because of high demand, they came to be the beacon of what a modern Manipuri drama was. It was simply because it was not like any other that the public had ever seen. It became a phenomenon throughout the public that almost everyone was talking about it.

His poem *Khamba Thoibi* carries the essence of Manipur's culture and tradition. It also represents the nature and people of Manipur. It was a masterpiece and it singlehandedly brought up the standard of Manipuri literature to that of various literatures of the world. It is an extraordinary piece of literary work that is the product of the middle of the twentieth century and Anganghal secures a respectable position in the history of modern Indian literature. His contribution to the literary world made the identity of Manipur known to this realm. His accomplishment truly stands out making him a renowned figure in the literary world. Manipur during his time was in a state of a new shift where there was a lack of consumption of literature. He founded L.P School for girls in 1926/27 along with two theatre groups. He was also a leading figure of the most respected premier organization that deals in literature and Manipuri languages called Manipuri Sahitya Parishad.

When World War II happened, he left and sought shelter in a remote village in 1942 but after the calmness of the war he tried to come back, and on the way, he died in the house of a man in 1943. He left the world leaving the people behind an undying hope and spirit to carry on the legacy and to inspire people to create more legendary art pieces.

About the book

The novel *Jahera* by Hijam Anganghal was originally published in 2006. The novel is set during the rule of monarchy in Manipur. It is a powerful story of passionate love set against the backdrop of Manipur's 1930s monarch dom. The pure love that blossoms between a Manipuri Muslim girl and a Meitei Hindu youth surpasses all obstacles in her path and the horrible reality of racial prejudice. The story showcases the unfruitful love between a Muslim girl and a Hindu boy. With the new introduction of strict orthodoxy with the system of Mangba (social ostracism) by The Brahma Sabha of the Maharaja of Manipur, the two lovers had to struggle and try to overcome it. Both of them went through constant disapproval by society and had to set on the journey of youthful desires. *Jahera* is the endmost work done by Hijam Anganghal before his departure to the afterlife. *Jahera* is a Muslim girl, yet she has a deep love for a young Hindu man named Kunjo. While Kunjo is a part of the everyday world and is driven by fears, anger, and desires, she is unaffected by the illusory aspects of love. The two souls are not compatible. Tragic events mark the novel's conclusion.

The book is about the differences in culture but also about the similarities in the nature of human beings. The natural feelings that emerge from within themselves are in fact innocent. It shows the feelings between two people who were stuck and held back because of societal norms. The society that tries to set up and match the higher authority was challenged by their feisty rebellious act. But in this case of the society being a higher authority figure, their bond faces strain throughout their way. Not simply because of their righteous act but the norms that were set up to safeguard their identity in an exaggerated manner. The novel drops its curtain with a tragedy leaving unfulfillment of the two souls due to the pressure that their love will never be welcome by society.

Research Methodology

The proposed research will be conducted using qualitative research by performing a textual analysis of Hijam Anganghal Singh's *Jahera*. The causes and impact of the societal norms will be analyzed by highlighting the ideologies that lurk within the story. The theory of cultural studies will be given broadly by talking about various theorists of the related theory. I will go through multiple points of view from the different theorist and their perspective which are also available online. It will be a critical and analytical study of the characters in *Jahera* and the societal pressure placed on them. The theory of cultural studies by Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Michelle LeBaron will be applied to interpret the text to better understand the background justifying the cultural impacts. Several theorists and other texts regarding cultural study will be considered and will be taken as a backup to address the issue in the novel *Jahera*. Different websites that hold the information of cultural studies will also be acknowledged and will be taken as valuable sources. The text will be evaluated highlighting the crucial events of the cultural impacts and be given to a parallel view with the theorists of the cultural studies. I will keep intact with various sources available either hard copy or soft copy and including various websites. The format of the research paper will be formulated as per the MLA 9th standards.

Impact of Cultural Difference

The novel *Jahera* showcases the feud between the two groupings. Through the character of Jahera, she represents the sheer struggle for her decisions that contradict the ideology of her own people. The fixed notion that carries amongst themselves stands as a way of how things should be. Her people in a sense of safeguarding their identity play an enormous role in the refusal of what Jahera morphs into. The setting set in the novel was during the early formation of their culture and identity and this is the sole reason for the restricted belief. Jahera who is a Muslim girl has become obsessed with the way of a Meitei Hindu. She has adopted the norms including food habits, dressings, activities, and so on. This can also be termed as something completely unrelated to the identity of the must but at the same time, it can be both. It can simply be because she feels comfortable with the things so she can be herself. However, the communities with the influence of the few put the influence of what an outcast would be.

Jahera always came off as a marvelous and charming figure most of the time. She has always caught many eyes and provided a staple figure of what beauty in a woman stands. Many individuals set to be the suitors that will be perfect for her. From a young age to the start of becoming a grown woman, many had laid their eyes on and even dreamt of being her husband. But despite all these Jahera never had any interest regarding marriage and all the obsession and somewhat exaggerated ways. She never plans to seek any interest regarding this step of life. The incompetence of those who couldn't seem to impress her was set to the pathway of critiquing her. Creating false accusations and spreading rumors, her image slowly deteriorated from the constant bashing held in groupings.

The idea of not being able to dominate and conquer came as an embarrassment to be dealt with. So, they immediately turn against her nature and begin seeking faults in her. This all led to the eruption of the unsettling harmony that can be erupted at any given moment. This was an ignition to the cause between the two groups. The backfire resulted in not just an individual but a mass grouping. The small family of Jahera which consists of just the two including her mother, had to go through the pain of an outcast. The ideology was rejected by the undefined and reliable input from the same grouping. The persuasion was put to be true of the fear of losing the image. Jahera never really came to be a romantic figure but all changed when she met Kunjo who was a Meitei Hindu. He caught the attention of Jahera with his simple and gentle character.

Kunjo talks in a calm manner but yet in a way that strikes Jahera and challenges her composure. She met Kunjo when he was searching for medicine for his mother. The day where they met together strikes both in their heart that they both fell hard for each other. Both the characters were in disbelief and intrigued intensely. They both were stuck in their own thoughts which clearly shows the urge of wanting to meet each other. Jahera who was already on the radar of disapproval sprouts more intensified ones. Their unestablished connections trouble the communities and show resilience amongst themselves. The feud between the two groups can be traced to the history of Manipur.

During the reign of Manipuri king Khagemba, the first settlement Of the Manipuri Muslims took place in the different parts of the place. And with the ideology influenced by the sankritization the people were brainwashed to despise anyone that has the same faith. This led to the social ostracism of the group to which Jahera belongs. The ignorance thus sparks the people to speak up and revolt but not in an intense way but to address it. The disapproval by the group of Jahera can be seen as a result of this. It is also to safeguard their faith and what they want to stand for. As Jonathan H Turner was saying about how conflict happens, it is caused by the differences in cultural values and beliefs among one another (Turner 87). He mentioned the structure of one's belief and if someone goes beyond that or the expectation which is set up is disregarded, this causes turmoil. The line where one's expectation is drawn stays inside that region only and nothing else. The idea and the perception all are given to form by the culture itself. Michelle LeBaron identified that this is the sole reason that forms a structure of living. The perception is all because of the shaped culture. (LeBaron 2013)

The conflict is not an easy one, it is a stubborn mole. Different belief collides and contradict and cause disturbance. It is simply hard to bring to a common ground add they are fixated by different backgrounds. (Turner 83)

It can also be on a more complex level as it is not based on an individual ground. This can't be dealt with singularity and can't be retrieved to a singular form. In the novel, the same things happen in the same manner. The issue is always dealt with in an unsettling way and due to this poor verdict, the result was not so harmonious. The two characters Jahera and Kunjo belonging to different beliefs but as outsiders are rejected due to the preconceived belief set by the people that each individual should belong to certain categories. The outside force influences them and their desire to unite was therefore constantly interrupted. The cause of the conflict is not because of the acceptance but rather the refusal to comprehend. Kunjo and Jahera didn't see the obstacle and merely acknowledged it. Their belief was set entirely on a different path and that was the bond. The goal to unite and together neglects what the people have set up. This caused a rift among the group because they were very much entitled to their own belief and wanted to be in it.

Conclusion

In the novel Jahera, both groups of people try to establish their own culture and power relations. According to Stuart Hall, he said that culture is a critical site of social action and intervention where the power relation is potentially unsettled. Just like in the novel, there is unsettling of whose procedure holds the superior position. There is always the presence of a clash as they believe each of their own has more weight to it. Through the characters of Jahera and Kunjo, there is intervention either by their own group or the opposite. When Jahera found out that she had feelings for Kunjo, the whole community wasn't in favor. It can be because of the fact that her pursuit of Kunjo can alter her identity as well as her community. It can be also for the fear of what society might label them as society holds the authoritative figure and no one can surpass it. Stuart also said that identity is something that is not fixed or rooted in the past but the constant changes that are adapted to the changes by society. Because they are the subject of the continuous play of history, culture, and power.

The social ostracism that came to exist doesn't exist before but it is the higher authority that changes with time. There is a presence in the novel of the hybrid elements if we dive into the characters of both communities. Jahera has the view of rejecting within her own community as she thrives for liberal ways to live her life and her community rejects the idea of a non-uniform level that has been enforced by the higher power. They didn't like the power relation that had been set up without their full consent but it is applied anyway. So, the identity has been set up as they were the subject of play.

On the other hand, Richard Hoggart saw culture differently as something that is set up in order to establish power by the working-class people and it is they who assumed what a culture should be. So, the people who have access to power decide what is right and what is wrong. In the novel Jahera the Brahma Sabha of the Maharaja of Manipur can be taken as the working-class people and it is they who decide what the ways should be. They enforced social ostracism among the people and it is the indication of setting up dominance over the other. It is the strategic approach to shape their identity, the identity that will determine their place. When Kunjo went on to pursue Jahera's whereabouts, he was reminded that he couldn't be with a person who belonged to a different community and was constantly filled with negative impressions that society would never accept. It can be seen through the social and political domains portrayed in the novel that they are related to culture. There is a presence in both communities that their interaction is done with caution and with a boundary. Both the communities are aware of that line and try not to cross it. They seem to have given to it in order to ignore the intense level of clash.

Raymond William saw culture as a process of human perfection. He labeled it as a state to become better. The whole point redirects to the same thing in Jahera with the norms and the implementation by the higher authority. They somehow saw it as a way of betterment which is actually the opposite way and has a negative impact on the people. The rebellious act both by Jahera and Kunjo clearly determines the rejection of the system. These two characters didn't care for the perfection of society but the perfection of themselves. They followed their own ways and tried to overcome whatever was thrown at them.

Raymond William terms culture as something that has certain rules and principles that are established to be considered universal and absolute. In the novel, the principles that are established are considered to be the one and only true form and no one should go beyond it. The higher figure expects the rest to follow what they have created. He also said that the culture is ordinary and it is the product of the society. He also said that it should be

preserved. So, what the people in the novel were trying to do was to preserve their culture and believe it shouldn't be mixed. We can conclude from the novel that the culture doesn't come to exist by itself but it is created by the people. However, the enjoyment part struggles among the people because of the different ideologies and the dominant nature of the working-class people.

The conflict in the novel can be look in a different way. As Michelle LeBaron states the conflict is deeply rooted in the culture itself but the culture doesn't cause it. The conflict in the novel doesn't sprout from the culture but it is the people that intensify it. Even though culture can be a reason for it, it doesn't necessarily have to happen. When both the communities of Jahera and Kunjo try to influence their own belief, they are in disagreement. The conflict arises when the people instigated it and the culture doesn't in any way amplify it. We can see the unconscious part by the majority of the people accepting and following the norms blindly. We can look at the action of rebellion by Jahera and Kunjo as a way of resolving the conflict and as a sign of protest. They are rejecting and appealing that the societal norms are not indeed positive. Not only rejected by Jahera and Kunjo but the rejection of the communities to the new principles can be looked at as a way to preserve their identity and make it meaningful. It is the way of creating their identity and making it meaningful. It is the way of creating their own identity and going against it destroys their image. Culture being powerful can be justified through the sacrifice of love of both Jahera and Kunjo. Their love didn't end on a happy note and had to pay the price of the cultural impact and how strong it was. Their fulfillment shatters and ends with tragedy. The society had a great impact on both Jahera and Kunjo, Kunjo was deeply altered psychologically and ended up taking Jahera's life as he couldn't see any other way. He saw that taking her life could only be the path to their love being fulfilled.

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