

Everyday Life and Songs of Resistance in Manipur

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The merger of the princely state of Manipur with the Indian Union plays an important role in defining the present socio-political situation in Manipur. Songs form an important part of politics in Manipur. Songs become a medium through which dissent and resentment are voiced. This paper explores the relationship between songs of resistance and the dynamic political and social milieu which reflects and also shapes the reality of everyday life in Manipur. It seeks to understand the historical lineage of songs as resistance in context of social and political upheavals. With the help of the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Manipur, it attempts to reflect on the present situation there and highlight the contribution of artists who engage with songs of resistance.

KEY WORDS: India, Manipur, Everyday life, Songs of Resistance, Ethnography.

Introduction

The use of songs to voice dissent and to resist is not new. Other than the use of varied genres, both political and social changes have drastically influenced the content of these songs. This paper explores the relationship between songs of resistance reflecting the dynamic political and social milieu shaping the reality of everyday life in Manipur. 'Reflects' is used in the sense that the everyday is where the politics lie. Songs of resistance are a reflection of the nitty-gritty of the everyday. Songs of resistance shape the reality in terms of information that is transmitted. This paper seeks to understand the historical lineage of songs as resistance in Manipur in the context of social and political upheavals. With the help of the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Manipur, it also attempts to reflect on the present situation there and highlight the contribution of artists who engage with songs of resistance. The fieldwork was conducted in two phases in the dominant Meitei community in Manipur. The initial fieldwork was done between March and May 2016, and the second (and the main) fieldwork was conducted from March 2017 to November 2018. Participant observation and in-depth interview of artists and listeners/ audience were also conducted.

Everyday Life and Resistance

The concept of 'everyday life' has been widely studied since the second half of the 20th century. This turn came when the focus of sociology studies increasingly shifted to the social interactions of the mundane and everyday life. Sztompka (2008) writes that everyday life seeks to

study the social events at a mundane level which is real and obvious. It is in the everyday that the 'embodiment and realisation' of 'social system, structure and social actions' takes place (2008: 35). He argues that the focus of everyday life is a new turn or a paradigmatic shift. There has been an increased study of everyday life including the various forms of resistance. In the context of resistance, one can understand the use of different ways or means to question the dominant forces. When individuals who may have to follow the rules of the dominant forces in spaces where the power restricts their voices and movements, they use any means to subvert the established rules that govern and restrict them. The major contention among scholars who engaged with resistance studies is what acts are to be called resistance. There are circumstances that do not give the opportunity or the resources to the oppressed for a large-scale movement or a collective movement such as armed struggle. In situations such as this, there exist subtle or partially hidden acts of resistance which become vital to look at in order to understand the people and the place. It is crucial to point out the kind of acts that fall into the category of resistance.

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) review various works on resistance and create a taxonomy where they look into different elements common to uses of resistance and found there is one underlying understanding common in all the work they examined. That is the understanding that resistance is an oppositional act. Johansson and Vinthagen (2014) write that the typology that Hollander

and Einwohner suggest 'contradicts their simultaneous emphasis of resistance as a complex and ongoing process of social construction. Furthermore, their typology privileges consciousness as 'recognition' by or 'intention' of actors, which dramatically limits their scope' (2014: 2). De Certeau (1984) discusses everyday acts of resistance as tactics used by ordinary people to manipulate or exploit the order of things that are controlled by the dominant forces. Individuals are not merely passive receptors controlled by the established orders and rules but are those who indulge in acts who can escape the control of power. To understand resistance which is initiated by the marginalised or by the oppressed it will not be enough only to look at grand acts of resistance because it becomes crucial to understand the everyday acts of resistance. These acts of resistance which are scattered, are not collective and are partially or completely hidden from the dominant forces that are sometimes the best means for ordinary people to engage with the powers that they are not in control of. Seymour (2006) talks about the increasing focus of cultural anthropology on the concept of resistance. While talking about the everyday forms of resistance, the author says this form of resistance focuses on the 'small acts of defiance that do not constitute a social movement but that suggest a person's or small set of persons' dissatisfaction with the status quo'. (2006: 303).

These small acts of defiance are reflected in James Scott's (1985, 1990) work on everyday forms of resistance which has played an instrumental part in the field of resistance studies. Scott, in his book *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) noted that the most subordinated class did not have the 'luxury of open, organised political activity' (Scott 1985: xv). Scott shows that everyday forms of resistance were equally important as the larger collective resistance. In his later work, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), Scott discusses everyday resistance in different cultures and societies. He discusses the relevance of infra-politics which meant 'a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name' (Scott 1990:19). These low-profile forms of resistance are shielded and given anonymity to the perpetrators of the act. He talks about the form of resistance which does not fall under collective opposition. The resistance he talks about are the everyday form of resistance which often go unnoticed or/and not regarded as a threat by the person or organisation it is targeted or resisting. Bayat (1997) studies the ordinary practices in large cities in Iran. He is of the opinion that the ordinary practices remained unnoticed because it was not like revolution. But its presence was felt only after decades. He argues these practices are prevalent in many developing countries. In this work, he talks about the poor people taking the urban spaces while illegally claiming the right over the place and says these acts are not extraordinary and occur on

a daily basis. He writes 'these practices represent natural and logical ways in which the disenfranchised survive hardships and improve their lives. What is significant about these activities, and thus interests us here, is precisely their seemingly mundane, ordinary and daily nature' (1997: 4).

Vallas and Courpasson (2016) argue that 'resistance requires the contexts, selfhood, friendships and kinship connections, possibilities of empowerment and relations to the world, as well as a sense of community through which people care more and think more about what they can do together to feel better or simply to survive' (2016:13). Music is not only used as a weapon to express dissent but also used by political organisations to further their agenda. Street (2003) talks about the use of popular music as a form of propaganda in election campaigns. He says songs and sounds are powerful weapons as music directly relates to the emotions. Denisoff (1983) talks about the use of propaganda song and says the purpose of it is to create political or social consciousness for a movement or the individual who is using it. Morant (2011), while writing about black popular music, discusses the role of the artist. The author writes that the artist moves away from being just an entertainer and takes a pivotal role in terms of narrating stories of past and present, thus also expressing and shaping the dissent and resentments that many share. Similarly, in Manipur the artists tell the stories of the past and present. The dire socio-political conditions are reflected in their songs shaping the way people could express and share their experience. For many people, it brings awareness of issues that are happening and to many others it becomes a voice that represents them. Music also serves as a means of connection and forging new ties, forming solidarity and reasserting identities in a place where people are marginalised and face social exclusion.

It's true for diasporic communities (Gilroy 1993) and also for racially marginalised communities (Martinez 1997 and Morant 2011). Bennett (2015), while talking about community and music, says there are two main ways community is applied to the study of music, firstly, locally produced music becomes a means for individuals to identify with a place. It becomes a way through which an individual connects to a particular place. The second is music creates a way of forming new commonalties among individuals who did not have any shared experiences before. Music then becomes a way of life on which a community is formed. The first one is particularly relevant in my study as songs of resistance become a means through which individuals who migrate to places connect to a place that they have left. These songs generate emotions of longing, fear and belongingness. Songs of resistance generate cohesion, solidarity among the audience. It provokes

individuals to think and to reflect on the dreadful state they are living in. It is sometimes a call for immediate action or urging the audience and listeners to unite for a collective action (Morant 2011). The songs also sometimes have the ability to subvert the power and generate a narrative where listeners and audience feel a sense of hope, and give them strength to resist. The song represents the aspiration of the suppressed and marginalised. Fonarow (1997) writes that there is 'an emotional feeling of community and connectedness' between the artists and their audience when it comes to independent music (1997: 364). The singing of issues may not initiate an immediate action in terms of protest, but the songs generate a sense of oneness and brings connection among people with shared experience of trauma and pain. Music is a symbolic force which helps create a shared identity. Music has a capacity they believe to generate, sustain and define group identity' which makes it an important form of political expression (Appelrouth and Kelly 2013: 301). Music that is prevalent in conflict situations, particularly music which talks about a social-political issue tends to have the ability to provoke the masses and also ignite a strong emotion. Music reflects on the historical, social and political context of a place. It helps bring a sense of solidarity and belonging (Grant et al. 2010).

Bennett (2005) writes that while using the musical texts, 'individuals also symbolically engage with the everyday, the conventions of play, pleasure and protest associated with collective participation in music, facilitating a symbolic negotiation of everyday life in contemporary social settings' (2005:118). Artistic work touches protest lyrics which reveal internal discontent into personal and social needs and motivation. When the songwriter writes a protest song, he or she voices a complaint either overtly or covertly. The writer narrates painful experiences through artistic ways.

History and Songs of Resistance

The merger of Manipur is a contentious issue. An organised armed struggle soon followed. Manipur has seen decades of violence from both ends of the spectrum with the self-determination movement on the one hand and the repressive state machinery to curb the movement on the other. In order to fully understand the present socio-political situation of a place it is important to look at the historical context. In this study, it is crucial because of the long presence of violence and conflict which has shaped the way people resist. This gives rise to various acts of resistance which are not only confined to organised resistance like armed struggle but also the use of art. British dominance prevailed in Manipur till 1947. In 1948, Manipur went on to establish a democratically elected government with a full adult franchise and a constitution (Naorem 1988 and Kamei 2016). The

merger with India took place in 1949 and became the vital period which shaped the socio-political landscape of the state. The Indian state instead of dealing with the democratically elected government chose to engage with the then titular head, Bodh Chandra Singh, Maharajah of Manipur. Parratt and Parratt (2015: 56) write that the Indian state 'instead persisted in dealing with the former feudal ruler, who himself repeatedly protested that he had surrendered his power to the elected assembly'.

Manipur was not given full statehood in the union after the merger. It was given Part C status which allowed the central government to reduce the status of the independent kingdom into a symbiotic relationship with India. Arambam (2015) writes Part C erased the 'efforts of self-governance and people's democracy by Indigenous communities' (Arambam 2015: 105). Even though statehood was finally bestowed in 1972 after a bitter and long struggle, the self-determination movement was already underway. An armed struggle resulted from the merger and the subsequent ill treatment of citizens in Manipur. The Indian state retaliated against this struggle by imposing a repressive law The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA).¹ The self-determination movement launched by various underground organisations which is still ongoing aims to address and fight what was considered as the annexation of Manipur by the Indian state.

Hijam Irabot was an important political figure in Manipur who started the communist movement. His political relevance has been discussed and widely written about. In 1948, under his leadership, the communists in the valley of Manipur organised an armed struggle against the monarch and the elected government but the movement was suppressed by 1951. The movement that Irabot initiated had a ripple effect on the self-determination movement. His contribution in the field of art and culture still holds an important place in Manipur. Irabot's songs were about the need to fight both feudalism and colonialism, the need for peasant resurrections, unity among different communities and issues concerning the oppressed, marginalised and the down trodden. Yurembam² remembers Hijam Irabot during the Nupi Lal (women's war that evolved into a broad movement for reform) saying that he 'led the agitation by singing songs that produced a dynamic effect on the minds of the people'. Elangbam³ writes, 'while working among the peasants in Sylhet and Cachar, his creative spirit found expression in songs and dances associated with the Indian People's Theatre Association (I.P.T.A.) movement and aroused the artistic consciousness of the villagers'.

Taro Jaidhuni Taro, is a song which he wrote in Sylhet jail. It urges the people to shed their differences and unite against the oppressors. He tells of the victory of

the masses and the need for unity to gain freedom. This song reflects not only the oppression that the masses face but the internal conflicts and division of the society. I quote here a few lines:

Taro jaidhuni taro taro
Leibak leibak khudingda miyamna oiri jai
Mukti gi lanbanda pairine phiral
Swadhintha numit thoklak le
Manipur macha nakhoi kadai
Taro jaiduni taro taro

Translation:

Listen to the sound of freedom
Flag flying on the fort of freedom
In all the lands, people have won
In the land free, the flag wave
The day of freedom has come
Where are the children of Manipur?
Listen to the sound of freedom

Nongmaithem Chittaranjan Singh (popularly known as Pahari) was one of the founding members of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF). The UNLF demanded the right to self-determination of Manipur alleging that it had been annexed to the India Union. He is considered to be one of the greatest modern Manipuri singers. In his memoir *Eigi Diary Dagi (From my Diary)* he writes of his musical journey and takes the readers to the early stages of the UNLF (Pahari 2008). He talks about how people outside Manipur did not know them, and they did not even know where Manipur was located and also about the discrimination they faced outside Manipur. In an interview conducted with a former member of the UNLF⁴, regarding the use of songs as tools of their struggle, he said, 'The organisation had a strong conviction that freedom was inevitable. But it understood India's power so the UNLF held the position that the people of Manipur should be first made aware and [are] educated about why we need a revolution. They also believed that culture plays an important role, it is a backbone for any revolution'.

Arambam Samarendra, another founder of UNLF, was also a well-known playwright. Both Pahari and Arambam Samarendra were engaged in developing Manipur Nationalism through their songs. Arambam Samarendra's song *Chaikhre Ngasi Nangi Loubukta* is still very popular. The translated lyrics were found in the book given on the Arambam Somorendra Memorial Lecture from which the lectures were compiled. Here are a few lines from this song:

Chaikhre ngasi nangi labuk ta
Nacha singi ekhengna
Nangi leisa da tinduna
Thungi leihao onnanaba
Asangbi phige thonbi palem o
Nungsibi Manipur

Translation:

Today on your fields is strewn
The blood of your sons
To merge with your soil
That it may be nourished
For seasons forthcoming
O green phige-clad Mother
O beloved Manipur!

When Pahari was arrested in 1969 the government banned his song named *Hey Ima Manipur*. This song depicts the love of the motherland and the indebtedness towards the land. I quote a few lines from the song.

Khomlang laman singamloi nanggi
Minungshi chaobi hey ima
Naoyok naokon kaojaroi nanggi
Minungshi chaobi hey ima

Translation:

Indebted to you for nurturing me
Hey compassionate mother
I will not forget how you raised me
Hey compassionate mother

In the late 1960s, the state started cracking down on the rebels. In 1969, Arambam Samarendra went underground. Pahari was arrested on 21st November 1969, sent to Imphal Jail and later shifted to Agartala jail on 10th March 1971. Imphal was already working in *All India Radio* when he was arrested for waging war against the Indian State. When statehood was granted to Manipur in 1972, Pahari was given amnesty and when he was released from prison he continued his singing career.

Songs of Resistance and Contemporary Manipur

In this section I would like to address the artists who are now singing songs of resistance. It will explore how they

started their bands and writing songs about socio-political issues. The section provides a background on the artists and their band members and their positions in the politics in Manipur. It deals with three bands namely Eastern Dark, Tapta and Imphal Talkies which are presently active. Based on the interviews conducted with the artists, firstly, I document the history of the band, the purpose of forming the band, and the reason behind singing songs of resistance.

Eastern Dark

Eastern Dark was established by Heishnam Malemngangba Lokeshwar. The beginning of his career as a journalist also initiated and ignited his concern for socio-political issues. When I asked him the reason behind the name of the band, he replied, 'we living in the east are living in this dark, in every aspect it's dark socially, politically and anywhere you look. So the name came from that. Our lifestyle and geographically every aspect of our life are dark'.

When I met Lokesh, he spoke about his journey and recording. He said during his time cassette tapes were widely prevalent. Lokeshwar's first album, *The Monkey Lies*, never reached an audience. Before it was circulated the master copy was lost, and the album was banned. When asked about the kind of songs that got such attention from the government Lokeshwar said he has forgotten the lyrics. His second album *Monkey Truth* was released and widely circulated. One of the songs named *A su a ningbani* describes the situation in Manipur. Below are a few lines I quote from the song:

Kuki su kuki ningjabani

Naga su naga ningjabani

Meitei na Meitei ningbani

Pangal na pangal gi khanjabani

Mareibak ningbasu yaodana

Mareibak khanbasu yaodana

A su a ningbani

B su b ningbani

C su c bu ningbani

Nasa na nasabu ningnaraga

Translation:

Kuki⁵ is devoted to Kuki

Naga⁶ is devoted to Naga

Meitei is devoted to Meitei

Pangal⁷ is devoted to Pangal

Nobody is devoted to their land

Nobody is safeguarding their land

A is devoted to A

B is devoted to B

C is devoted to C

You are only devoted to your kind

When I enquired about his reason for singing songs on socio-political issues, he narrated how he felt about AMMIK.⁸ He told me that 'there is an association of artists who sing Hindustani music known as AMMIK. It organised a seminar and abused me and Tapta Jayanta. They accused us of erasing and tarnishing Manipuri songs. What we were thinking is that there is no particular way of singing, for them it was more of romantic songs, for us it was an attempt to bring social change. The genre can be whatever but we were thinking of bringing social change in some way'.

Tapta

Jayanta Loukrakpam, popularly known as Tapta, which is also the name of his band, started in the mid-90s. Jayanta's songs cover a wide range of topics. Tapta says 'I sing about the things I see, the things that are happening around us. I never thought of it as a protest'.⁹

His songs are directed towards the atrocities meted out by the State, the struggle against AFSPA, the problems in the State ranging from ethnic conflicts to corruption. One of the songs named *Oh Black Law* describes the situation under AFSPA. Below are a few lines from the song:

Bazaar da ambush tousille

Army na awu awuba kapkhair

Oh.. hakchangna machete machete tarare toirare

Angangba ikhengna wa wa chenthare

Shetna khainabagi kholaona Nillare

Translation:

Ambush in the bazaar

Army shooting anyone at sight

Oh, the pieces of human flesh scattered and smashed

Floods of blood

The day filled with the pangs of panic and separation

In a conversation I had with Tapta, he told me how he started singing about social and political issues. He said he never realised his songs had a message. He did not know what social issues were, when he sang *sou sou, bad boy* and did not know it had a message to it. He believes that the reason he sang the songs he sings which are based on issues may be because he was married and had three children at that time when he started it. He told me if he had been unmarried he would be singing romantic songs. 'It all came to me naturally, be it a role of a bad boy, a father or mother it came all naturally. When I sold Abok, there was huge profit and then it struck me that I could earn by singing about social issues. To be honest, my art is commercial. You cannot survive without money. But I am not like the ones who are in commercial music right now, those who are addicted to gifts and offering, I am not like that'.

A professor at Manipur University was the first person to tell him about it. He said he sang about the things he saw around him without ever thinking it to be political. Singing about socio-political issues to him was like a 'natural calamity' that happened naturally. I asked him why he named it Tapta. He told me what doing music meant in those times when he started out. At that time Manipur was engulfed with the rising presence of drug users. He told me about his family being restricted and his discomfort in using his own name.

Imphal Talkies and the Howlers

Akhu Chingangbam is the singer and songwriter of the band Imphal Talkies and the Howlers (popularly known as Imphal Talkies) whose first album *Tiddim Road* came out in 2009. Akhu Chingangbam says, 'I never think of it as a protest song or political songs. That is how I feel; this is about the world I live in'.¹⁰ Akhu's songs are direct, and he does not shy away from criticising both the State and non-state actors. His songs bring out day-to-day life under violence. His songs also bring out the need for peace and address the long term effect of violence on people and children especially.

Rolling Stone magazine named 'Imphal Talkies and the Howlers' as the voice of northeast India. Un-convention: In Place of War Project also selected the band for the music album compilation titled 'album of revolution' released in the UK. It was one of the 33 bands from 33 countries which got selected. Akhu and his team also organise a festival called 'Where have all the flowers gone?' every year. He says the purpose of this is to 'bridge the rural-urban gap, about the environment and also to promote

local independent music and artists'. Akhu also received a grant from 'India foundation of Arts' for a project to 'create a musical performance based on notions of Manipuri identity that lie embedded in the literature and folklore of the Meitei diaspora'.¹¹

Fake encounter is the name of one of the songs of Imphal Talkies which is dedicated to the families and friends of all the individuals who were killed in the alleged extrajudicial executions in Manipur. I quote a few lines from the song,

Micham kaya hatpagino nangna phiral da salute khatpa
Thawai kaya gi medal no nangi thabakta thetliba
Kananana hatlo haibano aduk penna hatpadi
Pellabara nang nang tumba yabara
Ngasi su khangli cheitheng lukhrabi kayana
Lising ama chounga khun nipan gi mikhatki achumba wayel ngairi

Translation:

For how many murders do you give salute under the flag
For how many lives hangs that medal on your chest
On whose orders have you murdered so foul
Are you now satiated yet, how do you sleep at night
The widows are still mourning facing the abuse of the powerful
Yet still fighting for justice for the 1528 who were killed

When I first visited Akhu, I asked him about his band and how he started his journey. He said that Imphal talkies did not start as a band; he lived in Delhi and did a physics honours degree in Delhi University from Sri Venkateswara College. He made friends there but never knew how to speak English or Hindi. So he deduced 'It was maybe that out of isolation I picked up the guitar which a friend from Bishenpur had left in my room. I started learning with that. I really sang covers of people's songs but I could never do it well'. He mentions that he tried hard to imitate people but all in vain so he started singing newspaper headlines.

His experiences in Delhi shaped Akhu's journey. While talking about how it all started. He remembers:

... and then I started to feel how we do not look like others in Delhi because of that it was not possible to gel with people and their culture. When we walked on the street people were disrespectful. So I started internalizing to write poems, I did not play the guitar much those days. At the same time, I was into

beat poetry, I like those in the beat generation so I started writing my own poem. Even though I was writing, I never thought I would sing.

Akhu recollected the time he performed in various protest events when he was in Delhi. He mentioned the protest related to Kashmiri issues and to the Bhopal gas tragedy. When I asked how he thought of calling his band 'Imphal talkies', he answered he had two reasons. He said:

we used to bunk school and went to watch cinema in Imphal talkies. We did not watch much cinema. Elders used to look at us as very naughty children who came to this place where vulgar cinema was screened. We used to go inside quietly and carefully. So that sense of innocence and nostalgia was there.

Another reason revolved around the style of songwriting. He said, 'I think if I was born somewhere else I do not think I will have this way of singing or way of song writing. If I was born in Kangpokpi¹² I might be writing but there is something about Imphal. I wanted my music to represent Imphal. I had this sense that I wanted it to be the talking Imphal'. When I asked him how he decided to sing on socio-political issues, he responded, 'People always ask why do you write protest songs, but the most important thing is I never think of it as protest song or political songs that's how I feel, it's the world I lived in'.

The above artists who are presently active in Manipur circulate their songs via social media, and concerts/crowd-funded events. These spaces play an important role in circulation of the songs and also in forming a close link between the artists and the audience. According to the interviews conducted and the conversations I had with the audience who came to the concerts, all my respondents agreed that the songs are political and an important form of resistance. However, they did differ in terms of the effectiveness of these songs in bringing changes. None of the artists I interviewed agree that they are protesting or resisting but say that they are singing about the things that are happening around them.

Conclusion

Songs have been used in varied ways. They are used to address a specific issue in society, to question a repressive structure, to promote a political agenda. This paper has attempted to highlight the use of songs to narrate a story of struggle and daily negotiation of individuals with their socio-political situation. The historical context gives a glimpse of the socio-political issue at the time when the artist wrote and sang the songs. It tells us the relevance of the songs at a particular point in time. Over the years,

the themes of these songs have changed. Each of the songs presents different stories and experiences of the people. It reflects the socio-political situation of the place. The reality of the place and its people are intrinsically woven into the songs.

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End Notes

1. Armed Forces Special Powers Act was passed on 22 May 1958. It gives power to the army to arrest, search and kill anyone on mere

- suspicion and the act provides impunity to the army from legal actions. AFSPA enables the armed forces to carry out counter-insurgency operations with impunity.
2. <http://matamgimanipur.blogspot.com/2012/08/irabat-and-social-and-cultural.html>
 3. <http://themanipurpage.tripod.com/history/irabat.html>
 4. Name withheld
 5. A tribal community in Manipur
 6. A tribal community in Manipur
 7. Manipuri Muslims
 8. Apunba Manipur Matam Ishei Kanglup (AMMIK) exercises significant control in the Manipur music industry. Music artists in Manipur have to be a part of this organisation if they want work in the Manipuri film industry. If they are not part of AMMIK then their music cannot be used in Manipuri films. A certain amount of money is also paid to AMMIK every time a member of AMMIK performs in a concert. It also screens the music before its release. Earlier, local TV channels did not televise any music videos produced by the artists who are not enrolled in the organisation. The organisation, on May 1st 2018, changed its rules to allow non-members to circulate their music via local TV channels but their songs still go through mandatory screening. Eastern Dark, Tapta and Imphal talkies are not part of AMMIK and are independent artists.
 9. Interview conducted on 15 July 2017
 10. Interview conducted on 8 July 2017
 11. <http://indiaifa.org/grants-projects/ronidkumar-chingangbam.html>
 12. A town in Manipur

URBAN ARCHIPELAGO

The boys rush to Quiapo;
 all summer they waited
 for waters to rise and soon jump
 in again. The underpass now
 closed to vehicles, trapped water
 as an Olympic-sized pool. One
 by one they dive
 into the brown, deep
 bombs launched
 with closed mouths.

Our seasoned driver waits
 until the tricycle makes it
 across the raging muck—
 it doesn't. We are on the
 same
 boat; the jeepney hopes
 it does not float. The trike
 captain makes a sign of the
 cross.

Under a flyover, the riding-in-tandem is stuck:
 No easy kills tonight. Our guns and money,
 we must not get wet. Your orange raincoat
 calls too much attention.

Vyxx Vasquez