

## Kang Ningthou (The Mosquito King) G.C. Tongbra

### **Brief Note:**

*Kang Ningthou is a prose piece originally written in Manipur by the renowned Manipuri poet, playwright and satirist Gitchandra Tongbra, popularly known as G.C. Tongbra. He was born on February 06, 1913. He was known for his socio-realistic plays. The present piece is an interesting prose allegory which talks about a very trifling insect which is the mosquito. It depicts that even a tiny mosquito can win over a strong person by virtue of its acumen.*

**Translated by  
Rebecca Angom\***

One dark night, as I open the door and go out, I could hear the sound of the clock striking- 10, 11, 12. It's the midnight hours of the day! I have resolved to write as much as I can till my body permits and in this resolution, much time has been wasted. To sleep would have been a better option. Is *Thasi*<sup>1</sup> today or tomorrow? Dark is the midnight of *Langbal*<sup>2</sup>*Thasi*. Is it because you (addressed to the moon) will be shining so bright in *Mera*<sup>3</sup> when even ants are seen moving in the courtyard that you are so dark tonight? Then maybe it is for the same reason that I am unable to compose an appropriate composition for my drama. Though I thought hard, I seem to have lost my focus. Tomorrow morning with the new rising sun shining brightly on the eastern horizon, certainly, lasting thought and most appropriate words will come overflowing. I will try to go to sleep now and see what's in store for the next day.

The unpleasant, melancholic sounds of dogs barking reach my ears this late night. Why don't they call each of their kind for a meeting, discuss about their sorrow, their lamenting, their barking and fighting with each other. What kind of nature is that? "Hai! Don't go, you-*arangbi*, *arangbi*<sup>4</sup>. Hoi! Hoi!" Look, it can't be stopped! Not only the dogs but animals, birds, insects, grasshoppers, *harou*<sup>5</sup>, *harinongnang*<sup>6</sup>, *tingkong kangkong*<sup>7</sup>, owl, frog, all croaking gogo—

gogo—following the play of time. It's just that I don't want to hear those noises. For them, (Oh! What awful sounds!) it may be a sweet soothing sound. 'Hum! Hah!' (sighs) if I go on thinking, sleep will not come (closes the door with a thud) 'Hai! Ho! Ho!' (sighs again).

'Haven't you mosquitoes stopped following me to this month of *Mera*? Have you entered my bed too? You better come out else I will bring down your wings.' (Phat!Phat! chases them out).

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(Gets up and lies down on bed trying to get some sleep and soon after...) Hey! A huge mosquito! Is the sound coming from outside or inside the mosquito net? 'Your sound may be melodious amongst your own kind but not to me. Don't try to seduce me for I dislike your repeated songs. I don't even know if the bachelors and the spinsters of your kind have the same voice. It's much easier to differentiate the male from the female mosquito. Does the sound originate in the mouth or are voiceless if they do not flap their wings? Their sound is heard only in flight, they are quiet when they sit on you. The mouth blows air to a flute and hand produces language likewise does breathing through mouth and nose along with flapping of wings produce a vibration to produce *Sa-re-ga-ma*? It's a pity that in such a short life, human beings need to know too many things. So much of obstacles at every step of life. Well, well, ...am I asleep or in some profound thoughts? When I decide to sleep, why even my thoughts act as an obstruction? Sleep, rest—my thoughts, hum... Um.... mm.... mm... (takes a deep sigh)

Oh! I thought you were outside the mosquito net but you are hiding secretly inside. 'Get out! Get lost.' I have commanded that none should remain inside the net and you are still here. 'Are you a spy—a suicide bomber?' In case of a war, you would be taken as a prisoner of war and shot at. Fine...hold on...hold on the face....be still...wait till I kill you with my heavy hands. (Strikes hard...phaak!)

So! How's it? A thin man's blood must be delicious. Eh! Where? Haven't you died yet? Just know this for sure....I cannot create you but I can certainly kill you. That's for sure. Eh! Not a sign of your death on my palm, you escaped cleverly. Just as the *Baadshah*<sup>8</sup> Aurangzeb could not easily overthrow the *rat of Maharashtra*<sup>9</sup> and so is the case with you.

Similar to hiding behind the ridges of mountains, you lie among the old folded, stitched and thickened area of the mosquito net, awaiting my sleep. Thinking that I have killed you, I hit my face so hard and in the process, mistakenly hit the nose that it starts to bleed. What a shame! You make me look like the stupid monkey who watches over the king taking his afternoon nap. I am usually slow to anger, but since you made me bleed, I cannot control my rising anger. You did not hit me to bleed but I have to blame you *Bhaiya*<sup>10</sup>. Come again this time, just as anti Aircraft gun strikes at the Japanese Bomber in the blue sky, your eyes, ears, and beard....nothing will remain. You'll come to know my masculinity. Now, now, where is the sound coming from? Is it from the front or the back of the bed that a bomber sound is audible? Come, come, this time I'll leave my chest bare, come and shoot at the bare bones of my chest with your machine gun. Melodious songs of famous films were unable to soothe me, so how can a skinny female mosquito's song which is also like a *basikhongba*<sup>11</sup> lull me to sleep? Though tired and sleepy you must know I'm not going to sleep unless I kill you. Don't

simply hum and fly away; do sit on the face or the chest one more time. You'll be rewarded appropriately this time, my accurate hand. You have received innumerable certificates for killing mosquitoes striking them hard even while sitting, waving while in flight or by chasing with a lighted candle. Why hands, today you are unable to kill the ignorant and illiterate mosquito when it was on my face? Strange! Even a clever, strong human is liable to make mistakes so be more careful. Why today! Of all the other days, when the body is feeling a little down, very sleepy too, and having lost the trail of my composition and feeling so off the mood—it is at this critical time that the enemy strikes. You who have come to wage a war, you are foolish, blood thirsty and shameless. Don't just bite anywhere, anyplace. Good. Be what you are, strong, clever big mosquito. Not even once have I donated my blood for the sick and needy, guarding it selfishly. So, I'm not giving a drop of my blood to you. This blood which has been passed down to me for seven generations both paternally and maternally will bear witness to my promise. I see you have not perched on me mosquito? Are you waiting for me to sleep? Ok then, I'll start my attack. Get ready....Be on your guard and protect yourself. I know you have kept your *Dharma*<sup>12</sup> intact biting only after informing by humming near the ears. I too will try to kill you through a war of *Dharma*. Where is the candlestick? There's a piece under the bed. Litit. Only you brave mosquito remained when all your friends escaped thinking the war in

Kurukshetra will not end anytime soon! Seek Indrajeet's grace to hide you, or the magic of Olympus change you to a weed....use all your strength and power. Where are you? Let me at least see your face however strong and intelligent you may be. Oh! There you are you...go on perch on the stitched and thickened part of the torn mosquito net. However poor my eyesight is, with the lighting of the candlestick, also aided by a pair of spectacles, you cannot succeed in hiding Mister Mosquito! It doesn't matter if you're an Anopheles or a Culex. You cannot avoid catching fire when I lit you with the candle. 'Right hand'...you made a mistake sometime back....this time do defend the dignity and honor of your friend. Put in your whole heart into it. Without touching the net, lit just the two wings of the HUGE mosquito and put the candle off. After the wings are burnt down, it will drop on the cotton mattress. At that very moment, I would take sweet revenge for breaking my sleep, for the nasal bleed it caused, with a massive kick. READY....one.....two.....three...Oh! Away, it flies! Why? You hands remained shivering just to kill the cheap mosquito? Are you afraid thinking that they are the great grandchildren of the mosquitoes who killed Alexander the Great in Babylon? Wah! What a clever mosquito! Just on receiving a little heat, it flew away like a helicopter. Hide....hide...where will you hide? Beside the pillow? Oh! No! with this terrible headache, where shall I look for you? Ah! So you're yawning? It's past the sleeping time. But when the enemy

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remains hidden nearby, how will I sleep? I got to wait a little longer. Oh! Eyes, why are you so drowsy? Forget the mosquito for a second; imagine the situation in case the net catches fire from the candle? In *VirataParv*<sup>13</sup>, Sanakhomba asked for a *boon*<sup>14</sup> by which Arjun shot at the Kaurava army making them fall asleep. Is this the same kind of condition that I face now? Is it similar to the degree of drowsiness that they felt on that very day? What about waking Gogon's mother and child to catch the mosquito while I take a short nap? But again, is it *Dharma* to engage others in your own personal struggles and quarrels with friends and mates? I AM A MAN. To do that is below my dignity. How long can it hide? I will confer the title of "the king" to you, my enemy—"the mosquito king". Now, if you have guts enough, come bite on my cheek or rest on my chest or will the calves be tastier? Will you succeed in hiding long? That's a strange way of hiding, mosquito king. From your ways, you are no ordinary mosquito, I know. But, however clever, quick, smart, alert you might be, how can you be more intelligent than I, whom the children call 'teacher, teacher'. You may be very strong, but with marble and catapult I have killed many *mayang*<sup>15</sup> bats, crows etc. who are much stronger and faster than you. So you cannot underestimate me at all, ha!ha!ha! I am a man who has fed on innumerable *ngamu*<sup>16</sup>, *ngakha*<sup>17</sup> which in turn have caught and ate the multitude larvae of you mosquitoes. Well then, my eyes-my

weaklings will take a minute's rest while you hide yourself. After that they will be refreshed and awake; they'll pull you out from your hiding place, catch hold of your shoulder, raising you high up to be thrown down the *teramonpak*<sup>18</sup> banging your head (with a "kok" sound) and bursting it open, you'll see. My fair weather friend *Mombatti*<sup>19</sup> must be tired, put it out for a moment. 'Eyes', take rest for a minute each. Not more than a minute. I don't know about friends but family and insects cannot underrate me. Please be awake! Please be awake! I will not sleep tonight before killing 'the mosquito king'. I've murdered many wrong doers; mighty men making them appear in *Sumanglila*<sup>20</sup>. Mosquito king! You cannot befool me. (Somewhat cooler) I'm not asleep, don't come now, let me rest a bit. Don't sing near my ears yet. Eh! No more sound. Are you gone? Or are you behind my back? Oh! Hand, just wake up once and move stealthily to see if the mosquito is there. You must be tired. I've used you more than your capacity. I will never forget you. (quietly) I am not asking you to kill the mosquito but just so that it doesn't suck away the blood from the lower area of my head. Please! Just once, try to touch the part and the coward will fly away on its own. Thank you my hand, that's it! You need not kill, just chase it away. Where! You've killed it easily while touching? My able enemy who has won over Alexander, farewell! Ashh.... 'Nanthokhre!'<sup>21</sup>

Endnotes

- 1 New moon in Manipuri Calender
- 2 It is month falling usually between August-September in a Manipuri Lunar Calender. It is also a month dedicated to the memory of the dead and departed members of the family.
- 3 The month falling between October-November which is also held to be an auspicious month.
- 4 Way of calling out to his dog (bitch) who is multi-coloured.... 'bi' ending word is usually refered to the feminine gender.
- 5 cricket
- 6 cicadas
- 7 A bird of the cookoo family producing such sounds as 'tingkong kangkong'.
- 8 Meaning 'king of kings' in Hindi.
- 9 King Shivaji who ruled the Maratha kingdom in present Maharashtra
- 10 Brother in Hindi.
- 11 Manipuri folk song accompanied with flute
- 12 An aspect of truth and reality or a cosmic law underlying right behavior and social order
- 13 The fourth of the 18 books of Mahabharata
- 14 Here, arrow to make one fall asleep
- 15 A word commonly used in Manipur to mean people from mainland India
- 16 Banded snake head fish in Manipuri
- 17 White bait: a small silvery fish in Manipuri
- 18 Cotton mattress
- 19 Candle in manipuri
- 20 Plays/dramas performed on stage etc.
- 21 Undershoot again