

# Ema gi wari

RIVERS AND VALLEYS WHERE MY ROOTS BREATHE

This album "Ema gi Wari" is dedicated to all the Manipuris I was fortunate to meet during my visit to Assam and Bangladesh in early 2018. The many conversations that I had with them and their stories have culminated in this album. The songs were written and composed partly during my travel. The album looks at Manipur beyond the geographical boundaries. It opens with the song "Chahi Taret Khuntakpa". This song is about the Burmese invasion in 1819 that led to the period known as the Seven Years Devastation in the history of Manipur. The album talks about the subsequent displacement, migration, settlement, struggles and lives of Manipuris in the Barak and Surma Valleys. The album can be considered as a concept album in the ways the songs are connected following a trajectory or timeline. I am very thankful to India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore, for the grant, as well as support and encouragement that has enabled me to travel and create this album.

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- Akhu Chingangbam

## CHAHI TARET KHUNTAKPA (AWA INVASION)

Athouba singna ningthou khubam munnaringei  
Athouba singna kalak mehounaringei  
Ningthou machin manao na nungsinadringei  
Ningthou machin manao na yengsanaringei  
Awa na landarakpani  
Awa na tumna hatpani  
Khubak ta yairi lengduna Pukhi meeyoi kaya  
Nungpak ta thomduna hatkhi angang kaya  
Morok thaduna hatkhi Meeyoi kaya  
Khuntak Lansikhi Kangleipak  
Ching-da chenkhiba kayani  
Cachar-da chatkhiba kayani  
Pangdaba Ningthou  
Ka-da chatpa yao, ka-da lotpa yao  
Khuntak khunsirey Tampak  
Chahi taret khuntakley  
Pari-mamomsing phabirey  
Pubikhrey Awa leipak ta

### Translation:

While the aristocrats were conspiring for the throne  
While the aristocrats were busy in their rivalry  
While the princes were busy with their enmity  
While the princes were pulling each other down  
The Awa invaded us  
The Awa massacred us  
Able men taken captive palms drilled with yairi  
Babies smashed and killed against boulders  
Many made to suffocate in the fumes of burning chillies  
Devastated was Kangleipak  
Many fled to the hills  
Many fled to Cachar  
Spineless royals, cowardly king  
Hiding in Cachar  
Devastated was the valley  
For seven years devastated  
Sons and daughters made prisoners  
Taken as captives to Awa land

Awa : Burmese  
Yairi : long cane and used like thread

## TONGJEI MARIL / TING TING CHAORO

Hey hey hey ha hey  
Tongjei maril da chatkhi hai  
Epu eben kayado  
Barak mapal da takhi hai  
Surma mapal da leikhi hai  
Leikai kaya semkhi hai  
Epu eben kayana  
Kabok muri paktuna  
Barak turel gi mapanda  
Yum sarey  
Sumang semmey  
Sangoi sarey  
Lou lingley  
Phou surey  
Chempak surey  
Kabok pok eh  
Keithel phammey  
(traditional folk song)  
Ting ting chaoro  
Epa machum taro  
Epu machum taro  
Thabina karingei kahouro  
numitna wangingei wanhouro  
Ting ting chaoro  
Nungsa leima thorak o  
Urumleima changkhro  
Haoreibigi sumangda lashing polang phoubani  
Huina yenna sokkani  
Ting ting chaoro  
Thabina karingei kahouro  
numitna wangingei wanhouro  
Singjan-nasey, phou-punasey  
laigi thougal tourasey

### Translation:

They left along the Tongjei Maril  
The old folks  
Settled on the banks of Barak  
Settled on the valley of Surma  
They made settlements  
The old folks

### Contd...

Made kabok  
On the banks of the Barak  
Built the homes,  
The homestead  
The courtyard  
The outhouse  
Cultivated paddy  
Harvests of rice  
Prepared chempak  
Prepared kabok  
The market sprang to life

Ting ting chaoro (grow)  
From the stories of our fathers  
From the stories of our forefathers  
Grow as the cucumber entwines  
Grow as the sun rises up  
Ting ting chaoro  
Emerge O sunshine  
Fade away, O shade  
In the courtyard of Haoreibi the cotton bale is  
being dried  
Don't let the dogs and the hens mess it up  
Ting ting chaoro  
Grow as the cucumber entwines  
Grow as the sun rises up  
Let us gather the fire wood, let us gather the paddy  
grains  
Shower our offerings to the gods.

Kabok : Puffed rice  
Chempak : Rice flake

## WAHOUDOK : SINGERBAND/HOJAI

Barak turel torbanda  
Singerband gi khulda  
ningkhairaba torbanda  
Khangpoksangsing leihouwi  
Manlaba yumdagi thorakpa  
Thorakpa mangalna  
Thasi gi ahingsey

### Contd...

Kayada phajahanlaba  
Nungsi wari sahouwi  
Khamba thoibi torbanda  
Ema keithel phamhouwi  
Singju chempak yolhouwi  
Elisha phahouwi  
Umang lai haraowi  
Emalon nganghouwi  
Kayada nungsiraba

Leirak kaya leirammi  
Tasan khomjan leirammi  
Kabok muri poklammi  
kabok khoikum sarammi  
Keithel khuding lairembi  
Ningtham khuding yongchak  
Yumthong khuding sumban  
Sumang khuding sangoi  
Yaosang mei thai  
Ema singna esei sak-e  
Angang na nakhadeng  
Numidangna Thabal  
Ho Hojai

### Translation:

On the bank of Barak  
In the village of Singerband  
On the crumbling river bank  
I saw many old cottages  
The feeble light that spilled from those cottages  
Illuminating the moonless night  
Mesmerizing!  
Khamba and Thoibi were exchanging words of affection  
On the river bank  
Ema keithel was bustling

Singju, Chempak were being sold  
Elisha were being fished  
Lai Haraoba was being celebrated  
And the sounds of my mother tongue  
Enchanting!  
Many streets and lanes  
Crisscrossing the communal land

*Contd...*

Making kabok muri  
Making kabok khoidumA female deity for every keithel  
Yongchak in every winter  
Sumban in every household  
Sangoi in every courtyard  
The ritual bonfire every Yaoshang  
The mothers sing the hymns  
The children go for nakatheng  
And Thabal in the nights  
Ho Hojai

*Sumban* : Traditional rice pounder

*Sangoi* : Out house

*Nakatheng* : Door to door money collection by children during Yaoshang

*Thabal* : A traditional form of community dance

## KHAMBA THOIBI TANGKAK

Kegey Moirang Leipak ki warini  
Khamba thoibi ani gi wari ni  
Nungshi warini  
Pangjadraaba nanai eihakna  
Barak tampakta gi lijarakkey  
Tabiyu meeyamna  
Laira macha khambani  
Kao phaba khambani  
Mama yaoda mache khamnuna yokpa Khamba  
Barak magi hiden da  
thoibi na en chingduna leiba, phajeida epalsing  
Asom wangmadana kamdowui; Khamba khoi chop  
tuna lei do  
Langon da amuk yeng, Thoibi da amuk yeng  
Mapung marei pharaba Elisha amana  
langon do khap khap hekta laknaba  
Amuk lup amuk tao  
Khanghoudana langol do jiri jiri hekta chingkhi  
Kambana khoije du haigatli  
khoije tek e

chenpham khangdraba Elisha  
khamba na chongtharaga kit hekta nammi  
Khamba mana phajaba Elisha do  
Sanapun pubi wangmagi thoibida pitkho khi  
chak na taksi sonhouwi mache khamnu na  
Elisha Elisha Elisha ama gi mahao

*(Inspired by Yumnam Ilabanta's poem  
'Barak Nangdi Phajei' and short story "Elisha amagi mahao" by N. Kunjamohan.)*

*Translation:*

*This is a story from the land of Kegey Moirang*

*The story of Khamba and Thoibi*

*It is a love story*

*And I, your humble servant*

*Narrating from the valley of Barak*

*Hear me out, my elders and companions*

*Khamba was born into poverty*

*Khamba was the one who tamed the bull*

*Orphaned and brought up by his sister Khamnu*

On the bank of Barak  
Thoibi cast her "en", captivating to behold  
On the opposite side, Khamba with his fishing rod  
Alternating his gaze, at his "langon" and then at  
Thoibi  
A full grown Elisha  
Caught by the hook and tugging at the line  
Bobbing up and down - now it's above the surface,  
now it's below  
In a flash it dragged the line 'jiri jiri'  
Khamba sharply flicked the rod and line  
The hook snapped  
Nowhere to escape for the Elisha  
Khamba jumped in and there it was within his palms.

The Elisha that Khamba caught  
Gifted to Thoibi, the woman with the sanapun on the  
opposite bank  
His sister Khamnu muttering with disappointment  
Elisha, Elisha, the taste of an Elisha.

*En* : fishing net

*Contd...*

*Langon* : a small piece of wood which is a part of  
fishing rod that keeps floating until the fish is  
trapped

*Sanapun* : Brass water container

Elisha : Hilsha fish

## THIRI EMAGI KHONGUL (SEARCHING FOR MY MOTHER'S FOOTPRINTS)

Leeri eina Ema gi khongul  
Chinglon mapan gi wangmada  
Barak turel gi mapanda  
Surma tampak ki leihaoda  
Thiri eina emagi wari  
Laininghangi warengda  
Thiri eina ema gi saktam  
nachasinggi seirengda

Manjunara phanek setpi Ema Wo  
Akhang kanbi eigi Ema Wo  
yempak tuppa eigi Ema Wo  
khulang esei sakpi Ema Wo

Lamyamba Irabot ki wari  
tarak e bisgao gi Pabung dei  
Chandrakala gi wari su  
lirak e banubilgi oja na  
Chigonglei gi esei su  
Tarak e Sylhet ki ema dagi  
Kaikhraba manglan kayasu  
Yenning amuk hunlak ley

Ningtam lan gi wari su  
Tarak-e Vanugach-ta  
Loumi singgi ehou gi wari  
Tarak-e Vanugach-ta

Korbak mangda tha  
khorjei khutta pai  
Eeragey emagi wari  
Liragey ema gi wari

*Translation:*

Mother, I am retracing your footsteps  
Beyond these nine ranges of hills  
On the banks of Barak river  
On the soil of Surma valley

Mother, I am searching for your story  
Within the prose of Lainingham  
Mother, I am looking for your vision  
In the poems of your children

O mother clad in a worn out Phanek  
O mother who is persevering  
O mother who carries the Yempak  
O mother who sings our folk songs

Stories of the great leader Irabot  
I heard from the Pabung of Bisgao  
Stories of Chandrakala too  
Narrated by the Oja of Banubil  
Songs of the Chigonglei flower  
From the Ema of Sylhet  
Broken hopes and dreams of the past  
Dare to renew and rejuvenate  
Stories of the freedom struggle  
I heard in Vanugach  
Struggles of the peasants and their uprising too  
I heard in Vanugach

Korbak in front of me  
And armed with the khorjei  
I shall write your story, Mother.

*Lainingham* : a title given to Naoriya Phullo

*Phanek* : Traditional Manipuri Sarong

*Yempak* : Traditional bamboo umbrella

## EISU NANGI NACHANI (I AM ALSO YOUR CHILD)

Ema eina tariba khonjel sey nangira  
Ema eina tariba esei sey nangira  
Eisu nangi nachani  
Nongmatasu ningsingak-uh nungsina  
Esing khujok ama penna pithak piyu  
Chak chakhom ama nakhutna enbiyu

Eisu nangi nachani  
Nongmatasu ningsingak uh nungsina  
Lapna lakpa nacha ni  
Ahing ama yarek chagey  
Wana thirakpa ema bu  
Thengnarey ngasidi  
Ema eina thirisey eigi hourakphamni  
Ema gi khuya khada changjari nachana  
Eisu nangi nachani  
Nongmatasu libiyu warido  
Ching kaya paat kaya lanna lakchabani  
Tamhouraba yam da ligei wari  
Eisu nangi nachani  
Lirugey wari eisu

*Translation:*

Ema, is it your voice that I hear  
Ema, is it your song that I hear  
I too am your child  
Remember me with affection just once  
Let me drink to my fill water from your hands  
Feed me a mouthful of rice with your hands  
I too am your child  
Remember me with affection just once

I have travelled far to come to you  
Let me rest one night in your fold  
I have searched far and wide for you, Ema  
And today we meet at last  
Ema, I come searching for my roots  
I seek your blessings at your feet

I too am your child  
Share with me the stories just once  
Across numerous hills and lakes I have come  
I shall carry your tales to my distant home  
I shall narrate your stories, Ema.

## ANGANGBA KOROU (THE RED SUN)

Nangi puwari, Nangi phunga wari  
Nangi wareng, nangi seireng  
Nangi harao minok, Wangna kappa  
Nangi esei, nangi wari  
Libiyu ee-phamda Oijagey eigi thouna  
Tambiyu ee-phamda Oijagey eigi thouna

*Contd...*

Bisgao khungi wari, Banubil gi wari  
Jaribond gi wari, Lakhipur gi wari  
Ningtam lan gi wari, Loumi singi wari  
Apikpa phurup oina hingbagi wari  
Libiyu ee-phamda Oijagey eigi thouna  
Tambiyu ee-phamda Oijagey eigi thouna  
Ngamkhei kaidorey pakhatnarey  
Adubu marachetna tari khun kaya chinglon mapan  
gi wangmada  
Bangladesh ta, Assam da, Tripura da, Burma da,  
Meghalaya da  
Setna khainakhraba su chahi cha kaya mangda  
Amuk hanna punjanba oirasanu eikhoi amata oina  
ngamkhei gi wangmada leiri eigi nangisu wari kaya  
Thorakhini Angangba Korou Ema gi atiya  
Tinlakhini eikhoi punna amuk ema gi tampakta

*Translation:*

Your history, your folk tales  
Your prose, your poetry  
Your joyful laugh, your tears  
Your songs, your stories  
Narrate to me, let them fill me with courage  
Share with me, let them fill me with courage  
The stories of Bisgao, of Banubil  
Of Jaribond, of Lakhipur  
Stories of freedom struggle, stories of peasants  
Stories of stuggles as a minority people  
Narrate to me, let them fill me with courage  
Share with me, let them fill me with courage  
Fears of fragmentation of our land  
But beyond the nine hills hope and belief in unity  
In Bangladesh, in Assam, in Tripura, in Burma, in  
Meghalaya  
Though torn apart decades ago  
May we be united once again  
Beyond these boundaries are stories of you and me  
The red sun will rise in the sky yet again  
We shall be together in mother's fold.

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