

# Editorial

Thursday, March 29, 2018

## On CM speech at Gujarat Saffronising the NE- Hindutva style

Any individual in the country is free to choose his or her religion. And any groups or individuals also have the right to spread the religion of his choice among other citizen of the country. The beauty of Indian democracy is its secular character. A nation, either it may be the most developed country USA, Japan, United Kingdom, France or China etc. have their own internal problem like things that has been witnessing in India every single day. Riots between followers of different religion are not new. Hindu-Muslim riots in India, riots between the Protestants and Catholic Christians, riots between Shia and Sufi Muslim religion followers are few of the examples. Hinduism is one religion which does not divide people - It is a religion that unit every individual who ever have faith in it. There are Hindu followers at many countries of South East Asia, Europe and United States of America. It is the highly advance philosophical ideology of this religion that people irrespective of which communities or nations they belongs to accept it.

After Babri Masjid demolition in early 1990s, the believers of Hindu started utilising the religion as a tool for political purpose. The rise of Hindu brigade then has been considered as the most powerful weapon for political purpose. These people were driven into illusion of building a nation by saffronising the entire country. The idea works as India is a land where the maximum population are Hindu followers at which over 80% lives under extreme poverty. There is nothing to be criticised to the Hindutva style of Saffronising the nation. But when it comes to North East Region of India it is a different. Extremity in the Hindutva style will not only make the people of the region surrendered the highly regarded Hinduism but might even strengthen the partition movement to segregate from the nation.

Yes we are talking about Manipur. History stands to tell the fact that even during the British regime Manipur was a separately administered and not under the Indian British ruler during colonial period.

Manipur of Today, formerly called by some scholars as Kangleipak in the early days have its history of 2000 years of civilizations. Some scholar said that Kangleipak was a nation state in the South East Asia might have existed for over 10000 years. This need to be reaffirmed but 2000s years of civilization is as per historical records. The entry of Hinduism in the erstwhile nation was only during the reign of Meidingyu Pamheiba (1709 - 1748).

It is also a fact that Manipur was annexed to the Indian Union on October 15, 1949, two years after India gets its independence. Before the expansion of Hindutva Belt in the NE region, the political party was hardly heard in the region and was among the most unpopular political party until it hold power at the center. Now the wisdom of the leadership has spread far and wide and even penetrated to the state where people have different faith. Of the seven states in North East India (excluding Sikkim) six states are now rule by BJP in one way or the other.

In the inaugural function of the Madhavpur Mela at Porbandar district of Gujarat some two days back, Chief Minister of Manipur made a statement which insulted the entire people of the region. No doubt majority of the Meitei follows Hindu Religion, but the leader of the state tried to connect the region with Hindutva mythology (perhaps a newly modified one).

May be intentionally or just a slip of tongue Chief Minister N. Biren Singh while talking at the inaugural function said, "In the time of Lord Krishna, there was no separate Arunachal Pradesh or Assam or Manipur. The entire Northeast was one entity, Now, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland are on the border of China. But Lord Krishna made them part of India during his time."

Mr. N. Biren was once a well known editor of reputed vernacular daily before joining to politics in early 2000. In almost all his writings he had advocated the merger of Manipur to the Indian Union - "Illegal". The entry of Hinduism in the country has been many times published at the paper at which he was the Editor.

It is no wrong to follow Hindu religion but connecting the Hindu Mythology with the region is something that will sabotage the history and culture of the erstwhile nation.

The Chief Minister might have been talking those very insulting words to the Manipuris particularly the Meitei thinking it as an appeasement policy to have better relations with the ruling government.

But the fact is that Mr. Biren as the Chief Minister of this state had knowingly tempered the history of this erstwhile nation - now a state of India.

N. Biren also stated, "Marrying Rukmini, Krishna had bound the Northeast with India".

Such statement amounts to accepting the otherwise rich cultural heritage of the respective states of Northeast region as 'Limping Cousins of Hindu', a hypothetical claim put forward by some Indian anthropologist.

Federalism should desirously be the strength of India's democracy. And it should holistically be reflected in social political, cultural as well as economic spheres. But what has been witnessing in the centre-state relation with the changed political wind at the centre is the growing tendency of centralisation together with the homogenising of other cultures at the pattern of the Hindi-Hindu heartlands. The process has the tendency of eroding and diluting the eroded culture of the politically marginalised nationalities. It goes against the spirit and ideals of India's democratic federal polity, 'Unity in diversity'. The statement of the NE CMs shows their political immaturity. By saying so, they have succumbed by weighing the worth of their culture through the yardstick of the Hindi-Hindu culture. This amounts to misreading the Hindi-Hindu homogenising process as acceptance.

Twisting narrative of history is at the cost of history itself. Falling in Hindutva line at the cost history by the new converts of the rightist ideology is destroying the history of Manipur. This can lead to the downfall of the present Governments in NE.

Perhaps CM Biren needs a lesson in history.

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## Powerlooms' entry should not be invasive upon Manipur Handlooms

By: S. Bhubo

Shintha Handlooms and Handicrafts, Manipur.

A crystal clear definition of Handloom (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act 1985, as "Handloom is any loom other than powerloom" and contrary to it Powerloom is defined by the Factories Act, 1948 as "a loom worked by Power".

It is true that in this Era of LPG (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization) there is advantage of powerloom in the larger economic perspectives but it is also equally true that at the advent of powerloom the question of livelihood of weavers, has always been an Issue with the implications factually made of Powerloom Lobby which could succeed in reducing the 22 reserved items of 80s to only 11 items in the mid 90s. These remaining 11 items are further impacted relentlessly to be loosened for powerloom productions- powerloom's lobbying for removal of Saris and Lungis from reserved items exemplifies it.

See, while weaving occupation provides the second largest employment, next to agriculture, the actual scenario of the weavers are that 87% of the household units (27.83 lakhs) are located in the rural areas; nearly 47% of households are BPL; 29 lakhs weavers constitute 76% of the adult workforce; 9.38 lakhs allied workers are 24% of the adult workforce; 67% weavers are engaged in full time occupation; 75% of handloom workers are women and 60% of adult handloom workers have little or no schooling. Nowadays, a weaver earns Rs 150 per day from weaving a dhuti taking whole day but one powerloom can produce 200 dhutis per day meaning each puts 20 handloom weavers out of work as a powerloom needs only one worker to operate it and so the livelihood of 20 crore weavers across the country are at stake just to benefit a few businessmen. Cases of looting reserved handloom items and deprivation of the rights of weavers are now a

burning question.

North-East in general and Manipur in particular occupying 60% of India's weaver households have already been impacted by powerloom operators. Manipuris living with Handloom as the largest cottage industry will definitely be hunted by negligently introducing powerlooms if not the Act of 85 is strictly enforced and reserved items be clearly proclaimed under a powerful monitoring cell. Separate Handloom Directorate the prolonged demand of the state's weavers is the need of the hour before eloping with powerloom.

The state's 5 lakhs weavers will never allow powerlooms to replicate the rich, culturally linked motifs and patterns of the hill and valley communities. As presently, over 70% of fabrics sold as Khadi and handloom, is powerloom; the intervention of the O/o the DC Handlooms, Hon'ble Minister of Industries, Manipur, DIC Govt. of Manipur, WSC-Imphal and the state's CSO's, is unfaithfully required before introduction of powerlooms in the state. Experienced chaotic situations like the Calton Weavers' Massacre (1787 AD) and the Saalkuchi Protest of 2013(Assam), should not unnecessarily be invited by nothing but negligence. It is good to hear the Hon'ble Minister of Industries, Manipur, has stated that powerlooms' entry will not affect the traditional handlooms and he has advised the concerned department of handlooms and textiles to strictly monitor in it and it is also true that the upcoming state's textiles policy has incorporated enforcement of the handlooms' Act of 1985. But, it is equally true that many powerloom units in the state and from outside states, have started illegally producing of reserved items like Phaneks, Mayek naiba, khudei, chadders with moirang phijin motifs etc. and

have begun overcoming local handloom products. It is time that list of state's handloom reserved items be declared in no time that should not be produced by powerlooms. Because of the traditional values, the Ashok Mehta Committee constituted by the central government has been keeping sarees exclusively for handloom sector even against strong powerloom's lobbying for legal permission to produce it.

The handloom reservation Act, 1985; the handloom marks introduced in 2000; the GI Act in 2003; and the most recent All India Handloom Brand, 2015 and the state handloom policy (2013) should be actively enforced in the state to protect handloom from mechanical imitation. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been declaring August 7 as World Handloom Day since 2015 and now the day is observing as National Handloom Day and now it is for us to know why it is made so which is because of the danger is not only to specific product identities but to the handloom sector itself. Manipur is a state which has population of nearly nine lakhs unemployed persons. Handloom sector alone has been facilitating employment opportunities to about four lakhs weavers.

The question is if the introducing few powerloom units are illegally producing the reserved handloom items and thereby abandoning many weavers from their limited weaving occupations to incur the number of unemployment, the rural migration to urban and the anti-social activities etc. that have already happened in other states, who will take the responsibilities and what might be the catastrophe of the possible unrest. It is again the fact that the only argument to support the decentralized industries can always be the genuine economic logic as in the centralized

mechanical production units, one can only be worker, a cog in the wheel and can never aspire to being an owner of a product and here there is beauty in the traditional modes of productions that are organically structured where the process and product are integrally linked to the producer meaning the weavers and artisans. It is the reason why it is demanded that powerloom marks should be labeled to powerloom products instead of seeking to tag handloom marks only to handloom products at this time there is no fool proof method to certify handloom products. When talk about the quality of handloom, it is yet to be understood that if two fabric pieces of weavers are same and equal, then that is not handloom, which means handloom's being handwoven not machine made and its being societal values, heritage and identities thereby indicating the truth that large scale productions of handlooms cloths is simply an emotional idea as it is only to be maintained with the available manpower and its sustainability.

We do not oppose incoming of powerlooms into our states but we honestly endeavor to defend the painful experience of powerloom lobby which has enormously affected the lives of millions of weavers and the continuing of its sameto our tiny state of handlooms. Ownership of a few hundred decentralized powerloom units shall definitely devastate the aged old traditional handlooms of Manipur if not it is taken with full proofs. State's well equipped handloom policy as unorganized sector and powerloom policy as organized sector are yet to be enacted but the few already existing powerloom units have begun handloom products that are to be certainly categorized as handloom reserved items. Hope, anyway, that the state's emerging powerloom units shall be ethically taking up their noble jobs by thinking of the marginalized state's weavers who are still achingly awaiting for grassroots interventions.

### More State News

## Minister Biswajit inaugurates Powerloom Unit at Takyelpat Industrial Estate

**Imphal, March 28:** Textiles, Commerce and Industries Minister Thongam Biswajit Singh inaugurated a Powerloom Unit, having 11 looms, at the Industrial Estate, Takyelpat on Wednesday. Addressing the inaugural function, the Minister expressed the need to encourage and promote weavers in the State, and said Manipur has the highest number of weavers in the country.

He said that introduction of the powerloom will increase production which will increase the income for the weavers. However, there are also concerns over the survival of traditional handloom due to growth in powerloom sector, he said. Observing that there is a need to protect the traditional handloom weavers, he said that certain items should be reserved for production through traditional handloom weaving process only and should not be touched by powerlooms. He appealed to the powerloom entrepreneurs not to produce these reserved items.

He said the government is also trying to release the list of items (to be included in the Manipur State Textile Policy under the Reservation of Articles for Production Act 1985) which are reserved for traditional handloom weavers by April. He further expressed that the traditional weavers need not worry over the growth of powerlooms.

Minister Biswajit said industrialisation is a must in every society, however, the State is today facing unemployment problem. He also explained the Mission for Economic Empowerment of

Traditional Artisans/ Craftsmen (MEETAC) and said that it is aimed at promoting the traditional crafts/arts sector of the State. MEETAC is the branch of the State Governor, he said adding that the mission also aims to provide market for handloom and handicraft products in bulk quantity. Lauding the State handloom and handicrafts artisans, the Minister also said that today handloom and

handicraft products of the State have reached the international market. The main objective of the Handloom and Textiles is growth of the State's economy and increase production of weavers, he said.

Minister Biswajit also said that it is his firm belief that the cotton plantation at Kwatha will be a success and that plantation at Jiribam will soon start.

He further said that the main objective of the government is to improve production, increase income and to generate employment.

Minister Biswajit also announced a power incentive for powerloom weavers as encouragement. He also said that the Apparel and Garment Centre will also be set up at Imphal East and Industrial Estate in all districts.



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**Imphal, Aug 15** - The Government of India has announced the formation of a new ministry to look after the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the country. The new ministry will be headed by the Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, Shri. Jualanda Singh. The ministry will be responsible for the implementation of various schemes and programmes for the welfare of the ST population in the country. The ministry will also be responsible for the coordination of the activities of the various departments and agencies working in the field of tribal welfare. The ministry will be a part of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.

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