

Editorial

Wednesday, May. 16, 2018

Are we waiting for the "Go-dot"

Times are a changing but the sort of changes happening in our state is nothing to write home about or rather everything that should be made public.

It has become a breeding ground for unscrupulous elements where the name of the game is "instant wealth". Gone are the days when enterprising people, by dint of their sheer tenacity and unwavering pursuit made fame and fortune. The "get rich quick" mantra being increasingly subscribed to by the younger generation has begun to bear fruit rapes, murders, extortions, thieves and burglary, drug trafficking and corruption the list growing longer by the day.

The race to amass wealth even at the cost of giving up one's peace of mind and the hearth and home have taken precedence over the concept of a peaceful and fruitful easy life. Conscience and morality have been shoved off to the furthest corner of one's mind shedding the last remnants of humility to enter the temple of mammon. The result is a society where might is right and truth is relative.

Honesty and sincerity is at a premium and the ideology of high thinking simple living having been replaced by the reckless aim to attain power and influence. Humility and respectfulness has begun to be looked down upon and is being equated with weakness a trait to be avoided. Truths are being sold and brought at a price and the collective mentalities have started to revert back to the Stone Age where survival of the fittest holds true.

Making things worst are the growing number of indolent youths accustomed to luxury and exhibitionism influenced in no small measure by the western cultures but failing to capture the essence of the dignity of work and the regard for fellow humans that underlines the basic principles of these western societies. Abusing the powers entrusted to them and turning their official domain into their personal fiefdom is the order of the day for bureaucrats and politicians while the common people are left in the lurch with a feeling of betrayal and alienation in their minds. This has created a chasm that is growing wider with each passing day leading to a feeling of suspicion and getting cynical of the steps of the public. This social turmoil paves the way for a breed of human parasites living off the sweat of another's labour intimidation and fear being their weapon of choice and not thinking twice about taking lives if their whims are not catered to.

Shouts of negligence and deprivation trying to drown out the screams of the unfortunate public destined to lead a life of uncertainty and fear. Tolerance is no longer a virtue and wealth is the benchmark of a person's worth never mind the means one used to acquire it. Public memory has inexplicably shrunk to let matters pass if only to wash their hands off the trouble of facing the bitter reality or to rectify it. Rationality has succumbed to power and ethics is an alien notion. A bleak future is in the offing it is for us to stand up and stand fast for the life we lead the way we want to. It is in us to walk with our heads held high and taste the sweat and the fruit of our own labour.

At the end of the day what really matters is an unburdened mind and a good sound sleep.

Editor's pick

Global Warming: News, Facts, Causes & Effects

Global warming is the term used to describe a gradual increase in the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere and its oceans, a change that is believed to be permanently changing the Earth's climate. There is great debate among many people, and sometimes in the news, on whether global warming is real (some call it a hoax). But climate scientists looking at the data and facts agree the planet is warming. While many view the effects of global warming to be more substantial and more rapidly occurring than others do, the scientific consensus on climatic changes related to global warming is that the average temperature of the Earth has risen between 0.4 and 0.8 °C over the past 100 years. The increased volumes of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases released by the burning of fossil fuels, land clearing, agriculture, and other human activities, are believed to be the primary sources of the global warming that has occurred over the past 50 years. Scientists from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change carrying out global warming research have recently predicted that average global temperatures could increase between 1.4 and 5.8 °C by the year 2100. Changes resulting from global warming may include rising sea levels due to the melting of the polar ice caps, as well as an increase in occurrence and severity of storms and other severe weather events.

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Rights of the indigenous people and the merger problem

By- Dr. M. Horam
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1.a. Secretary General of the United Nations declared 1993 as the "International Year of the World's Indigenous People". The motto is; "Indigenous People; A New Partnership".

1.b. Indigenous People are those who first inhabited in a particular country before other races having different cultures arrived or invaded to that country. The indigenous Peoples, for want of better name, are also called Aborigines, or Natives. For examples, the Red Indians are the natives of Two Americas (the North and the South), the Maoris are of the New Zealand, the Eskimos are of the Northern Europe, the Tatars are of Russia and the Adivasis are of the Indians.

2.a. Who are the Indigenous peoples of Manipur.

This is a tricky question to answer. It needs a serious and unbiased systematic study of early history of Manipur. Manipur has past Written history, particularly of the Valley. It had its kings and queens playing their parts in shaping the destiny of its people. Manipur had also a political system of its own which was basically feudal; a system in which land was granted by a king to a subject in exchange of for his military and other services. This system however, was badly jolted by the British arrivals in Manipur. A word may be mentioned here that system was primarily enforced and practiced in the valley of Manipur.

2.b. Manipur, from time immemorial, is geographically divided into two Regions: 1) The Valley and 2) The Hills. The Valley was peopled by various clans, now called the Meiteis, the Hills were/are peopled by the various tribes. These Tribes are now called the Scheduled Tribes by according to Indian Constitution's definition. The Hill Tribal's administration was/is entirely indigenous based on their age-old traditional un-written laws and codes. Each village was/is a republic (like the ancient Greek City-States) for example, a Naga Village. A Naga Village has its own

administration besides the tribal customs; well-demarcated land and land use system. The tribal way of life continued uninterrupted for centuries till the extension of the British Colonial Rule to the Tribal Areas of Manipur. Nonetheless, the British adopted the "Non-Interference Policy" towards the Tribals respecting their cultures and customs.

The Hill men and the Valley men lived in peaceful co-existence for centuries. These Hill Tribals were not directly under the control of the Manipur King though they had friendly relation with the exchange of good will missions from time to time. Gifts were exchanged by the visiting members.

2.c. From the above statements we can arrive at the conclusion that the Meiteis are the Indigenous people of the Manipur Valley and the Tribals are the Indigenous people of the Hills. Needless to remind ourselves that the word "Tribals" are of Westerners concept which they often used to the first settlers of a place. The Westerners called the first settlers as 'tribals', uncouth', 'barbarian' and uncivilized whenever they came into contact with them. Therefore, these words have derogatory attribution and contemptuous appellation. The Indian Government and the Indians coming from other parts of Indian Sub-continent still use these colonial phrases with a sense of superiority complex.

3.a. Objectives of the International Year of World's Indigenous People are:

1. To protect their birth rights such as land, forests, culture, religion, language, education, social and economic conditions, self-government and self-determination.

2. To recognize their contributions.

3.b. Today many Indigenous Peoples are threatened by systemic development process, distortion of History, artificial creation of boundaries (e.g. Burma

and Manipur boundary), forced occupation, military atrocities, erosion of cultures by stronger communities in the name of bringing them into the 'mainstream'.

3.c. Peoples of Manipur consider that they are the Indigenous Peoples of the Valley and the Hills of Manipur. If, that proposition is correct, then the Peoples of Manipur have the right to defend their cultures, forests and land.

The Charter of the Indigenous passed and adopted in Penang, Malaysia reads; "We, the Indigenous Tribal Peoples of the tropical forests, Present this Charter as a response to hundreds of years of encroachment of our territories and the undermining of our lives, livelihoods and cultures caused by the destruction of the forests that our survival depends on". "It further continues to say; "We declare that we are the original peoples, the rightful owners and the cultures that defend the tropical forests of the world".

4.a. During the past years, the peoples of Manipur have witnessed the application of Special Arms Acts such as Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 and amended in 1972. This Act is supposedly to contain the various Underground Organizations. According to this Act, "Special Power" are conferred to the Armed Forces that any "Warrant Officer" can arrest without warrant, can enter and search without warrant any premises...and no prosecution, suit or other legal proceeding shall be instituted, etc. etc.

Recently again, the Punjab Security of the State Act, 1953 has been imposed on Manipur to 'flush out' the Insurgents. In the name of curbing the Underground Activities and "knocking out the sympathizers", many innocent men and women have suffered both psychologically and physically. Many persons have been arrested, tortured and beaten. And fear-psychosis has been created in the

minds of the law abiding citizens of the State. There is a general suspicion in the minds of the public that, while applying this Act, wittingly or unwittingly, powers can be misused.

More often than not, the Government officials and the Armed Forces misconstrue and misinterpret the grievances of people as 'anti-social activities', or 'sympathizers' of the Undergrounds thereby painful and unwanted punishments are inflicted on them. In such eventuality, the eternal question of the public; imposition of Armed Forces Acts against Human Rights?

Unimaginative and dictatorial application of such Acts can be counter-productive. Problem faced by the Peoples of Manipur are not only military or political problems. They are also human problems; and therefore humane approach to ease the situation is the utmost importance.

4.b. On the Merger Question. Much has been said and much has been written on this issue. I need not go the same story all over again. However, it must be admitted that this is a controversial subject and thus it needs to have serious dialogues among the Indigenous Peoples themselves and then with the Indian Government. For further debate, I would like to pose the following questions to the learned members. They are:

1. Who appointed the "Dewan"? Was he appointed with the consent and approval of the Maharajah?

2. Did Maharajah sign the Merger Agreement with his own accord, or, under duress?

3. Was Merger question placed to the people of Manipur for their considered opinion, or, were they by-passed? These are a few questions. The validity and legality of the Merger may be questioned and debated.

Note:
Dewan : Major General Rewal Amar Singh.

The Fate of Press Freedom in India Over the Years

By- Sharif Rangnekar
(Courtesy- The wire)

About a fortnight ago, on World Press Day, the fourth pillar of a democracy was celebrated. It was around then that the press freedom rankings were released by Reporters Without Borders (RWB), where India had slipped two points to 138, just ahead of Pakistan. While this continued low ranking is worrisome, Chandramauli Kumar Prasad, chairman of the Press Council of India (PCI) rejected it claiming the rankings "were based on opinion or perception" and not on statistical data.

What the PCI seems oblivious to is that there cannot be any data to establish how free the press is or how muted the views of journalists are or their freedom to report. And there never can be, as fear in any case leads most people – including a journalist too – to turn a blind eye to incidents and facts, a pattern that establishes self-censorship. And 'censorship' is rarely defined in 'company' policy, as it whispers, chatter and informal messages that establish the dos and don'ts in many organisations.

The drop in ranking has been linked to the existence of India's seditious law that encourages self-censorship particularly in a period of heightened nationalism. The ghastly murder of senior journalist Gauri Lankesh and the state of media outlets in Kashmir where some organisations have reportedly become the "targets of violence by soldiers acting with the central government's tacit consent", has also been cited as reasons. In

addition, RWB highlights the killing of three journalists in 2018 while they were involved in professional activities.

There is no doubt that the media freedom is under greater threat. Noted lawyer Fali Nariman told a gathering at the Press Club of India in New Delhi last June: "Freedom after speech – that is really what freedom of speech is all about". He emphasised that "you are allowed to speak, speak as much as you like, but there is a fellow waiting there to nab you and out you in so you can't speak again"! Even the RWB points out that hate against the differing views of journalist is dangerous for a democracy. Yet the decline in journalism and the state of freedom within the media is not a creation limited entirely to 2017 or the past four years alone. Even the UPA government in 2012 had sent out advisories to broadcast media on the criticism of the then prime minister Manmohan Singh by the opposition after his Independence Day address. But the truth is that the genesis of the situation goes deeper to several years earlier.

Let us rewind a bit – almost three decades ago – when a leading English daily embarked on an ad campaign stating it cost less to buy their newspaper than a *samosa*! This instantly turned the newspaper into a product – a fast moving one – which was as spicy (and oily) as the street snack. As the media space expanded in the '90s till now with over 400 channels and tens of thousands of newspapers and journals, competing with the price-point of a

samosa, the Fourth Estate quickly reduced to a competitive business, finding a way to sustain itself. That at one time India's cable network was the least expensive in the world and free to air channels even now cost less than a rupee a month – indicate the perils of a business that should not have been a business. As a result, prime time news was (and is) littered with advertisements which at times come with the power of submission to a corporate agenda. And every other daily gave up the sanctity of their mastheads and front pages to put business in the form of ads, way ahead of news.

After a Supreme Court order in 1995 ruling that airwaves were public property and therefore a regulator was required to govern the broadcast sector, Parliament and various groups debated a policy. One of the main aspects of the various proposed notes was ownership of media outlets be it distribution such as cable networks and transponders or media houses – electronic or print. Examples from the US to UK to Australia were considered particularly when it came to cross media ownership or the ownership of multiple media companies across print, television, radio, Internet and so on, by a single entity. Such ownership patterns, as was seen world over, were in contravention of freedom of speech and plurality as it allowed significant control over opinion and perception of what is and what is not by a single powerful organisation. The policy never came and the question of ownership was not raised. An explosion of media took place,

turning the Fourth Estate into an industry of competitive market forces. Price points of media defied actual cost and inflation, leading to greater competition and the trivialisation of content, particularly news. No wonder headlines changed, becoming as attractive as ad lines, aimed at garnering eyeballs, chasing audiences defined largely by marketing departments. This also meant the representation of news was bound to change. Journalists disengaged from the farmer and other minorities and powerless sections of India, reporting less and less from the ground. In fact, most recently, a senior journalist with whom I shared a panel, claimed his channel 'also' covered rural issues 'even if they did not generate TRPs' – sounding a lot like a corporate head speaking on social responsibility claiming that the balance sheet was not the only focus!

But as the changes occurred in the '90s and later, many journalists started to lose their objectivity, getting as excited by a tax cut as a consumer would, describing budgets as 'dreams'; expressing elation by the fanciness of a new car entering the market or the rank of India as a country to do business and the rise in the GDP or the success of Indians who had left the nation. When foreign exchange reserves touched \$100 billion in December 2003, the press screamed it out prompting the noted economist, Kaushik Basu to write "Never before has dry economic news been celebrated so widely".

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