

Poetry section

The charge of sisters

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Wondering through the journey,
I knew not what predicts the most?
Feeling that 'm holding a position,
That position which none can replaced!
Tinting warming an elderly sisterhood,
Imparting a love sequence to all;
No brother and no sister's ahead all equal;
Telling and conveying them,
Relating and presenting all I have;
Giving and providing and granting all,
I see 'me, my and self' through them;
Every single second counts actively;
Ever moment of my a truth;
'm their eyes and 'm their witnessing;
My presence an example to them,
Accepting and acknowledging sisterly sisterhood;
I stood firmly and as I always do.

Floating and swinging youth all day;
Growing up immensely day after day all in one;
I grow older as they grow;
I step aside higher as they step upon;
I jump promptly as they jump onto;
I clinch neglected as they clinch within;
I pray less as they pray mature;
I hold hardy as they hold the position;
I surrender my emotions as they purchase;
I evacuate my space as they possess in;
I split all my wanting tears as they dot upon;
My presence an example to them,
Accepting and acknowledging sisterly sisterhood;
I stood firmly and as I always do.

Che!che!cheche! Summoning any minute,
Can't stop attending their wishes;
'm their warrior in acceptance;
'm their guardian in observance;
Advising and assisting even odds,
Comforting and collaborating their mistakes;
Standing forth firmly stretching my spirit,
Shadowing their succoring moments;
'Che! I want this, che! I don't want that'
Aiding them all love equally,
Showering upon their juncture with care;
Funding myself more to theirs' egos;
Facilitating their witness upholding;
Their love all sounding;
Their care with all effecting 'our che';
Miss me! Miss me not! I abet now and then,
'ts a failure to them, when 'm not serving;
My presence an example to them,
Accepting and acknowledging sisterly sisterhood;
I stood firmly and as I always do.

Know The Meetei

By: Heikrujam Nabshyan

One fine morning I was just going through the papers when suddenly I was struck by a terrible threat 'fight to the end' against the inclusion of the Meiteis in the ST list, posed by ATSUM.

Frankly I never had any intention to give my personal opinion on the matter and I thought that it was better left to STDCM. However I knew that even if Meetei are not recognized, they are tribal by nature and social anthropology says so.

However the threat of ATSUM compelled me to say something about STDCM demand. I also know there are some people among the Meitei who do not want to admit the fact that Meitei are tribal. They think, I believe — if Meetei are degraded to tribal status from the present Kshetriya status, they could no longer be able to visit Vrindavan, the birthplace of Lord Krishna and etc. They must be thinking Hindus cannot be tribal like I did some decades ago. I wonder which Hindu Guru taught this philosophy to the Hindu convert Meetei.

The point is, I was only reacting to the threat of ATSUM. Because I know such untamed hostile attitude against anyone, maybe Meitei or Naga or Zomi, etc. from any quarter would only create enmity among the people and nothing else. That was how I got stuck into this endless debate with ATSUM. And playing with words, they have even accused me of being provocative, what a luck!

Now, in the process, I do not want to leave the debate midway, because if I leave it they would believe that they are right and others are wrong. Thanks to ATSUM I have become more energetic. Thus quite accidentally I am forced to become a proponent of the ST cause. But frankly till today, I am not a member of STDCM, nor have I set my foot in the office of STDCM even once nor do I plan to be a member of it.

Now, I would like to say that ATSUM is unnecessarily indulging itself in a self-defeating exercise to oppose something which is genuine. And even when a much larger and more advanced group like Tai-Ahoms, the neighbouring indigenous group of Assam is being included in the ST list, how can ATSUM make such a hostile campaign against Meetei.

To tell the truth, I am a bit fed up to debate with ATSUM because they keep on changing their goalposts and repeat the same thing like a broken record; sorry, if I am blunt.

I have said earlier and I am saying it now Meitei are neither Aryan nor Kshetriya. They are only Hindu convert just like the hill people who are Christian convert.

Now, let us settle once and for all that the Meitei are made up of seven big families — Salai Taret, meaning seven clans, such as Khuman, Luwang, Manang, etc. All the seven Salai — Clans are on the same footing, i.e. have the same status, neither one is above nor below the others like seven children of the same father; which is indeed the mythology of the Meetei. And if someone from outside Salai Taret come and assimilate into the Meitei, naturally he becomes Meitei as practiced in any community of human beings.

Among the Meetei hindus, there are "Bamon" who take care of the hindu idols and perform hindu rituals. They are not Brahmins, they are Meitei Bamon, for centuries they are assimilated into the Meitei community. They are Meitei, if someone wants to claim himself as Brahmin, then naturally he cannot be a Meitei and cannot be a tribal. But, that is one's choice.

Whereas Rajkumar is only a Sanskrit designation meaning son of a king or prince, it is a sort of a self-styled title. It has no connection with 'Salai', rather it is an after effect of conversion.

But let there be no confusion in everyone's mind that whether one assume a Sanskrit title or a Christian title or Buddhist title, every Meitei belong to Salai Taret — the seven clans.

I have already stated that the Hindu social system has divided the Meitei Khunai-Society like never before. It has even destroyed the honour and respect of one's family. Yet one cannot deny the fact that they never allow to let go the Salai Taret — the seven clans, till this day which has indeed preserved the Meetei as a distinct group till today.

The argument of ATSUM that 'Meetei are the most advance community' because the Meitei

hindu society is based on hierarchy and "Brahmin" class being on top, etc. Now this idea is a complete misconception. ATSUM must know that clan is determined by birth and class by merit, etc.

Among hindu Meitei, the Bamon not Brahmin, are on top, true; but it is by birth, not by merit, it is not a case of an 'advance race/community based on class rather than clan' as insisted by ATSUM; in Meitei Hindu Society an illiterate Bamon is placed above a Meitei scholar.

Of course this appalling practice of the stupid Hindu culture in Hindu Meitei will not easily go away. And to enlighten those who are in confusion as to what the present Meitei society is all about, let me take you to some day to day experience, like in the manner to address among the Meitei people. When someone address a Bamon or a Rajkumar they would address 'Aigyia' — a Sanskrit word to both of them and 'Sanakha' — a Meitei contraction word which is better not told, only to a RK. To simply put, both the forms of address says something like, My Lord.

Now, is this what ATSUM appreciates as 'the most advance race/community Based on class' I believe, ATSUM would be fooling themselves.

In fact, to get rid of such remnants of Hindu culture many Meitei have returned to their original Meitei form of worship which is known as Sanamahi Laining or Meitei Marup and quite a sizable population have embraced Christianity and Bhudhism, as well. And as ATSUM has pointed out, the Meitei are a talented lot. Some hundreds years ago, a Meitei dance master invented a dance form based on Meitei folk dance, especially the movements of the hands, the fingers, the legs and the feet to portray the sublime love-story of Radha-Krishna of Hindu epic. Later after independence this dance form now called Rashleela, struck the chords of the Bharatiya Nritya Gurus and thus they ordained that this Rashleela be given the classical status in Indian dance.

During its last legs, the congress govt. seemed to have realized that Manipur has a rich cultural heritage,

having more than 3 dozens indigenous groups of people, each with their own styles and beautiful costumes and hence it passed a bill and established a Cultural University. It is not a Meitei culture university or a centre for the Rashleela. It is established to preserve and develop the various cultures of Manipur and not connected with the allegation of ATSUM — 'eclipsing other cultures within India'.

In the olden days, the Sagol — the pony horse or the local horse was a necessity of every Meitei household, like today's motorcycle. It was used for many purposes — for the perennial warfare, for carrying heavy loads, for transportation, etc. And it was the most favourite thing for the boys. There was an old saying 'Eppa Sheeni Khanglamlabadi' Sagol Leijaramgadabani' — if I knew my father is dying, I would have bought a horse. Not only boys, even among girls horse riding was popular.

The boys played with their horses, with long cane sticks hitting rounded dry bamboo roots in the open fields — that was how Sagol-Kangjei, the progenitor of modern Polo was born and grew up in the fields of this Chingleipak among the Meitei Pakhang.

Later in the 19th century when the British came, they picked up the game from Yumphan — present Imphal and popularized it as the game of Polo. In fact all of us must be proud of it.

Now let's talk of ATSUM's 'seething situation'. What is this seething thing? I believe ATSUM do not work for NSCN (IM).

Let us remember creating seething things will not do any of us good. What we need is sensible debate and dialogue. We can talk and discuss like any sensible human beings. And for that, I am sure STDCM would welcome the move.

Finally, it is only natural that every Meitei — Sanamahi, Loi, Hindu and Budhist, become ST, not SC nor OBC in the event.

(Views and ideas expressed here is of the author and has nothing to do with the editorial policy of this newspaper)

Contd. from yesterday

Statement by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation Mr. Léo Heller

Access to drinking water and sanitation in informal settlements is concerning in various slums that I visited in Delhi, Lucknow, Kolkata and Mumbai. Like in the case of Mumbai, India's most populous city, slums are the homes of more than half of the city's 18 million inhabitants. In this context, it is important to highlight that, in many cases, particular groups (including but not limited to special castes) disproportionately populate slum settlements. In general, adequate access to water and toilets does not exist within most of the slums that were visited.

In fact, the conditions of access to water and sanitation in those areas can differ greatly and can be considerably influenced by the legal recognition of the settlement and land tenure associated to it. "Notified", or legally recognized settlements, at times receive some sort of services from public authorities (e.g. water tankers providing free water a few times a week), while non-notified settlements are denied any intervention from public water service providers. While some stand posts and boreholes are available within or close to some non-notified settlements, they are not always constructed by the public authorities and it is uncertain if the quality of the water is

monitored. In an informal settlement located in Bhim Nagar, Maharashtra Nagar (Mumbai), access to water for a total of 160 houses came from a variety of sources, some closeby (including holes dug in the ground to access poor quality groundwater) and others farther away.

In several cases that I observed, people's reliance on sources of drinking water outside their premises means that persons of all ages are forced to queue at specific times of the day to fetch water from public taps. Taking advantage of the acute availability, they bath outdoors and collect water in buckets and jugs. Children and elderly people, in particular, physically struggle to carry water back to their households.

Community toilets are often available in small numbers in relation to the number of families that require those facilities. Moreover, according to reports, they are usually not disability-adapted, maladaptive and unaccepting of transgender persons, and lacking adequate facilities for handwashing and for menstrual hygiene management. Moreover, the quality and safety of those facilities is usually very precarious; in some cases, community toilet infrastructure has collapsed while people have been

queuing to use them, making them fall into the pits containing excreta and die. Obviously, where infrastructure exists but is not safe and accessible to users, the right to sanitation is not being realized and, in the case of India, open defecation may be unknowingly perpetuated.

During my visit, I received several reports and observed in many cases that public places, including schools, transport hubs and police stations lack sufficient and adequate facilities for water and toilets, affecting India's large "population on the move", which includes homeless, street vendors, rickshaw drivers and seasonal migrant workers. Whether homeless or workers, access to water and sanitation in public spaces must be guaranteed by the Government.

Discrimination against manual scavengers is another concern. Through the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013, the Government has made efforts to identify and rehabilitate manual scavengers into different occupations. Having done this exercise, it is widely believed that manual scavenging no longer exists.

Yet, concerns continue to exist. During my interaction with civil society, several surveys

identifying the number of manual scavengers were presented to me. There are discrepancies in those numbers, as identified by the Government and surveys by civil society. From a human rights perspective, whether individuals are engaged in manual cleaning of open pits, septic tanks or sewer lines, with or without protective gear, in direct contact with excreta—as per the definition in the Act—is not a relevant factor to ascertaining that manual scavenging is a caste-based discrimination.

During the visit, I met several people that indicated that either themselves, their relatives or neighbours continue to be employed in manual scavenging practice. I met with a number of current manual scavengers in Uttar Pradesh from various districts (Mainpuri, Hardoi, Bareilly, Firojabad) who are engaged in manual scavenging. I heard from several family members, during meetings in Delhi and Lucknow, a number of relatives (husbands, brothers, and sons) that died during the hard work of emptying latrines or cleaning sewer lines, without receiving adequate compensations from the State and having faced much difficulties in filing cases for compensation.

(.....to be contd.)

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