

Editorial

Saturday, December 15, 2018

The challenges

The greatest tragedy of our state is that nothing seems to move until and unless extreme measures are resorted to: be it implementing rules of law or conveying the aspirations and needs of the public. Same is with the people. The criticism sometimes has been misinterpreted. Being critical to the government should not be something that every programme or policy should be criticized. The Judiciary rejections to the PIL relating to the "Meeyamgi Numit" or "Hill Leaders Day" need to be applause. Every programme have merits and demerits, but if the programme serves the interest of the people than there is nothing wrong in appreciating it. Instead of challenging it would have been better to suggest better way to implement the initiative to a better way. Saying so misusing power to make the wrong to 'Right' shows autocratic or fascist character of the government. Anger is not the solution; it is only the beginning of the end.

Add to it the fact that we, as a collective, have yet to realize the undeniable truth that the centre is evidently more concerned with preserving its national territory rather than improving the welfare of its citizens when it comes to affairs of the north east region of the country, in effect, reducing the importance of the region to that of a mere geographical entity.

Death, destruction and tragedy continue to be the only means of drawing attention of the high and mighty at the centre to the region. None of the national media considers it relevant to highlight the improvements, or whatever activities and changes that can be attributed as such that has occurred in the state. Even the landmark decision by its government which led to the removal of AFSPA from Tripura was mentioned in the passing, even as the collective mind of the rest of the north east states still remain occupied and fascinated with the development, and the tantalizing possibility of it unfolding in their own states.

Despite the blatant indifference and continued ignorance of the centre, it remains an intriguing issue as to the question of why the state government still remains a passive bystander at best and a perceived stooge for the centre, while pressing issues needing immediate attention has been put on the backburner or dismissed altogether. While it must be said in its defence that the governance of a volatile and inherently unpredictable state as Manipur is easier said than done, this very situation cannot be used as an excuse to shy away from the challenges that is staring it in the face. The peculiarity of the situations confronting Manipur: from its geopolitical to socio-economic conditions needs to be tackled in ways that involves innovative and unorthodox methods. This calls for a more alert, swifter and sterner government capable of dispensing its plans and proposals more smoothly and effectively.

The frustrations being felt by the public for a long time now need to be addressed. Every aspect of public life and governance has been beset with corruptions, controversies, scandals, accusations of favoritism, despotism and cronyism. The sooner the present guardians of the state admit to the allegations and own up to such aberrations, the sooner it can address and rectify itself. Bringing in a system of governance that takes into confidence its people and their needs rather than dispensing administration by tweaking the system to suit its every whim will eventually prove to be the spark that lit up the fire of frustrations trampled expectations. The state government needs to stand with its people and work in synergy rather than to cloak its intentions and actions with the shroud of suspicion and mystery.

WITH A PROGRESSIVE CULTURAL WORKER IN MANIPUR

Bijo Francis, Executive Director.
Courtesy - Beyond the Horizon

When the system is oppressive, resistance erupts in various forms by various sections. Against the backdrop of crony capitalist offensives in Manipur—that explain the root cause of the horrible symptoms of corruption, militarisation and policing, destruction to ecological harmony, displacement, poverty, reactionary and sectarian assertions—many have chosen different paths of resistance.

Amongst these there is a section, composed of 'cultural workers' who are tirelessly endeavouring to assert resistance through the medium of music. They are different from commercial singers who are being forced upon by certain commanding forces to deliver at least one 'patriotic song' in every public performance; whose love for motherland and dedication for social change appeared too artificial and hypocritical as revealed in their body performances. Unlike these self-centred commercial celebrities, the 'cultural worker' are qualitatively different in outlook and objectives of works. Amongst them is one Akhu Chingbam of the band Imphal Talkies, a post graduate in Physics in academic qualification, who have left academics to fully concentrate in 'progressive' music. The following is transcript of an interview between Beyond the Horizon and Akhu.

Editor: Welcome and Good day to you Akhu!

Akhu: Hi good morning.

Editor: Your band Imphal Talkies is gaining momentum. What inspired or inspires you to form this band?

Akhu: It used to, but not anymore. The band is kind of passive now. During my early days in Delhi I used to write and compose songs. So when I get my Ph. D. scholarship I decided that I should record the songs. So I met my friend Sachin in Imphal and we recorded eight songs. We called ourselves Imphal Talkies. I am inspired by Imphal [capital of Manipur] in many ways and my childhood days.

Editor: Your lyrics, tunes and art of show is unique compared to other conventional commercial songs in Manipur. What according to you is the uniqueness of your style?

Akhu: I don't think our music is unique. If talking about injustice and addressing issues of militarisation, corruption is called unique then we may be.

[Akhu presented one of his songs entitled LULLABY produced by Imphal Talkies in 2013. This song is dedicated to children around the world in conflict zones. Those interested may download it from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-j7CkG5to>]

Blood soaked streets That's my ground That's where I play around Sound of gunshots That's my song That's my lulla- lullaby Your revolution has snatched away My right to education Te te tenouwa Kangleipakki tenouwa angang na mullaga tenouwa na haraowi oooooo oooooohhhh Uhdei saba nongmeini mana pangba makhoini Blood soaked body That's my daddy You just shot him You just killed him We don't need your guns and bombs We just need songs of love Your constitution has nothing for me All you do is kill my innocence Te te tenouwa Kangleipakki tenouwa angang na mullaga tenouwa na haraowi oooooo oooooohhhh Uhdei saba nongmeini mana pangba makhoini Fallen bodies like Fallen leaves of October But you don't care You bomb a town That's my town That's where I play around Don't fill our lives with throes of pain Share a smile so we can bloom again



Editor: Why are your lyrics usually very short?

Akhu: Life is too short for long lyrics [laugh].

Editor: People say your lyrics and tunes are mundane. Are these intentional or accidental?

Akhu: I don't know. I write what I feel like. People are there to critique. It is not nice me defining my own music. The audience should do it.

Editor: People say your songs lack artistic or aesthetic appeals but for a peculiar genre of resistance. Is this true? Against whom, for whom and what for?

Akhu: I don't think much of artistic or aesthetic appeal. My songs are simple. I derived my inspiration from things I see around. It may be anything under sun. Who do I sing against? I am not against anyone but I am in favour of justice. Be it against the state or non state I will sing and express what is wrong is wrong.

Editor: What brought you to compose *Qutub Minar* and what impacts you have realised from it?

Akhu: Qutub Minar stands tall in

put up the festival annually. I don't think I am in a position to point out the achievements. It is a long term process. We are trying to bridge the gap between urban and rural lives;

reminding the urban where we came from and what culture and roots we had once. The festival believes in community participation which still very exists in these places unlike in Imphal. I can talk of it for hours.

Editor: Have you composed any song against the onslaught by international finance institutions?

Or, may be you may be pleased to share any familiar song by anyone addressing this issue.

Akhu: Yes, I have composed several songs and will be releasing soon. Many songs by legends like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger talks about the issue also. Rage Against the Machine is one band who takes the issue to another level through their music.

Editor: There is armed revolutionary attempt in Manipur. However, revolutionary mass movement seems to be comparatively missing. Relatively, though some artists mechanise patriotic songs for name's sake, we are not able to notice consistent activism, if there is, of revolutionary cultural workers who perform in music. In the light of other advanced revolutionary movements in other parts of the globe, what according to you are the missing that had to be overcome if there had to be qualitative contribution via songs and music? In other words, how is revolutionary movement reflected in songs and music?

Akhu: There is a gypsy band called Tinariwen from Sahara Desert. Some of their members were trained under

Gaddafi regime as soldiers and they have also fought against Mali government as part of some rebel groups. Their music carries all their stories and struggles around the world and introduce us to their pain, love, angst and struggles; this is where music plays an important role. These people have gone through sufferings of all kind and their music is so beautifully telling their stories. In Manipur among the contemporary artists I don't see much of engagement in such issues. May be we need to suffer more to open our eyes. But Taptia [either the name of a band or pseudonym for singer Jayenta, who introduced western genre fusion song in Meitei society in early 1990s] has been consistently reflecting upon various issues in Manipur.

Editor: Finally, do you have any proposal in mind of creating and popularising a common song of the diverse contentious sections in Manipur? What would be the tentative composition so as to make it representing the sentiments of diverse sections?

Akhu: It is coming out soon. I have been working with children from various ethnic tribes from Manipur, both from hills and valley to come up with a song.

Editor: Thank you, and all the best.

Akhu: Thank you



Delhi and proudly represents the Indian civilisation. In the song I wanted Delhi

to feel "how does it feel when something very dear to you has been snatched away by some external forces"? That's what exactly AFSPA has been doing in places like Manipur and Kashmir. The Act kills innocent people who are very dear to you.

Editor: What is the concrete message conveyed in your composition *Lainingthou Laimembi Machasa* (Children of God and Goddess)?

Akhu: It has many elements. I talk about futility of armed revolution, hypocrisy among politicians, ethnic conflicts, militarisation, etc.

Editor: We have been witnessed to at least four editions of your festival of music entitled *Where have the flowers gone* held at Chingnungkhok, Andro, Phayeng and Khurkhu! What have you achieved from it?

Akhu: It is a struggle for us still to

Editor: Protection of indigenous rights, abundant production of food, ecological harmony and social equity are some of the burning issues? Have you composed any lyric addressing these concerns?

Akhu: I think I have some songs on these lines. But at the moment I am taking a break from music. It will take me a year or two to put out new music.



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