

Editorial

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Bill to protect from mob violence - Will it work?

Whether the passing of the Manipur Protection from Mob Violence Act 2018 by the state assembly secretariat an appreciable a wise or appreciable one is a matter needs to be pondered. Even as the passing of the Bill is a good initiative that showed that this government takes the mob violence with extreme seriousness after witnessing series of such violence in the state, the question which is still being asked is whether the newly passed bill will be able to serve its purpose.

If one looks at the Bill passed by the state assembly today under the title - The Manipur Protection from Mob Violence Act 2018, it found that earlier the government did not have any legal measures to punish criminal if the crime was committed in the form of mob by gathering large number of people.

Already there are various sections in the IPCs and CrPC , which have already incorporated the punishment for any violence if causes grievous hurt to any individuals. But none of the victim of mob violence in the state had ever got punished. It is a matter of time whether the newly passed act will be able to give justice to victims of mob mentality criminals.

But if the Bill passed today lacked various sociological perspective than giving a hand to give justice to victims of mob violence with any new legislation will be like a tiger without teethes.

Well, "Mob" from the sociological point of the view is a short gathering of people who got into involved in a sudden upheavals or upsurges. It probably seems to have more negative impacts rather than the positive ones. Contextualising the situation in Manipur society especially, mob justice is the dichotomy of the solidarity which instigates a sense of fear psychosis to the whole of the family members of the culprits rather than bears the heat of social justice by the culprits themselves alone. Dismantling houses, ravaging properties and destroying the belongings of the culprits are the major ways of punishing the culprits through mob justice. It is an exemplary type of repressive punishment to the culprits so that the other members in the society could learn a lesson. It warns other members of the society to forbid replicating the same act or other heinous crimes.

Once a policeman remarked, "a mob has no heads, we were being taught like that in our training." The intrinsic meaning being very clear, people in a mob are irrational. This perspective may probably be the immediate cause for the time and again act of brutality of the state forces over the people who got involved in mobs or other types of sudden upsurges. Whenever there are social collectives or solidarity in movements, they might have interpreted it from the mob angle and so usually discharged with aggressive acts to subdue them. The traditional methods employed in controlling are arresting the trouble makers, using tear gas, lathi charge, deploying more military personnel creating an atmosphere of militarization etc. In a turbulent society like Manipur, sudden upheavals becomes very common and so mob control mechanisms also needed to become more strategic rather chaotic or inhuman.

Traditional societies are governed by strict social mores and sanctions. Customary laws provide ways of sanctioning against the anti-social acts. They stigmatised the culprits as an exemplary phenomena. Traditional ways of punishing culprits may be far from legal approval. And at some point of time such customary laws overreact and turn out to be destructive and disapproving. "Mob Justice" is a prominent traditional way of settling crimes and a violent way of punishing offenders. It justifies an anti-social act through another heinous act. It implies approval of the Hamurabi's code "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Criminals are punished through another criminal act.

Mob justice doesn't take into account the innocent dear and near ones of the accused. The dire consequence of the crime committed is made to bear by the whole family members of the culprit including the aged, women and children. When houses and belongings are burnt, dismantled, ravaged, ex-communicated or made to banished from the society, the fear psychosis that gripped the rest of the family member's minds and has an intense negative impact. Children, in particular are traumatised. In the sole attempt to stabilise a criminal act, the whole family members, except for the culprit, again become victims of the trauma. The fear psychosis inflicted by such irrational act is really criminalising. Thus mob violence is rather a victimising act rather than sympathetic towards the victims.

Thus, it remains a fact that mob violence is a crime which goes out of control many times besides having Laws for punishment which means it is a mass understanding which is required and not a hard punishment which will help preventing the mob violence.

Umanglai Haraoba: Traditional Institution for Local Self Governance in Manipur

Two day national seminar on Issues and challnges of local self government in Manipur 14-15 December 2018 Centre for Manipur studies, Manipur University, Canchipur

Introduction:

The Umanglai Haraoba (in short, Laiharaoba), a ritual festival or the performance of ceremonial rites to appease the Umanglai (sylvan deity), is counted as the unique contribution of Meitei to the domain of world culture. The Meitei peoples in Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Bangladesh and Myanmar also, celebrate Umanglai Haraoba. The worlds famous Manipuri dance (Ras Lila), polo and Meitei Pung Eshai Pala (also known as Nat Sankritan which is recognized by UNESCO), etc. are the products of Umanglai culture. The ritual festival is the greatest single key to the religion, culture and history of Meitei people of Manipur. Lai Haraoba itself is a university preserving and imparting knowledge on a variety of subjects. In short, Umanglai Haraoba is the biggest original source of all the cultures and traditions of the indigenous people i.e., the Universe of Knowledge in the Meitei society. Identity and civilization of the Meitei are reflected in this festival. It is widely helpful in the socialization and nation making process of the Meitei. It embodies the elements of common ancestry, integrity and communal harmony among the various communities residing in Manipur. Thus, it is the greatest repository of spiritual insight and wisdom of the indigenous peoples of the region. As a matter of fact, it may be said to represent the epitome of the cultural ethos of the Meitei society, (Ratan Kumar Singh, 2001). It is a vast complex of oral literature, dance and music, ceremonial and rituals, which represent a unique pre-Hindu world-view which has remained in its aesthetic sensitivity and reveals the heart of Meitei culture. (Parrat, and Parrat, 1997). Laiharaoba is an ancient Meitei fertility rite celebrating cosmic union between male and female principles. In later days it is enlarged to incorporate cosmological and ideological categories of the Meitei nation, assuming an intense and complicated ritual theatre structure. This festival is still a living legend in Meitei society till the dawn of Hindu Vaishnavism. It is one of the very distinct cultures and only the one in the entire world of its kind. The only form of conservation of forest in the prehistoric and early part of recorded history of the Meitei people was the practice of worshipping local deities known as "Umanglai", which formed the important aspect of the religious customary practice.

Umanglai Haraoba as a Traditional Institution:

Before discussing the Umanglai Haraoba as a Traditional Institution, let's have an idea about the significance of the Umanglai Culture in Contemporary Manipuri Society. Among all the various ethnic groups that have settled in Manipur, the Meiteis are credited with having the greatest number of population. But inside the Meitei ethnic group there are two religions, e.g. Meitei Hinduism and Meitei Sanamahism. One follows Hindu religion and the other follows indigenous Meitei religion (Sanamahism). Even if these two religious groups profess two different religions, the unique thing is that both of them worship Sanamah deity and Umanglai with the same rites and rituals in equal measure. The Meitei Hindus make it

mandatory to preserve the South-West Corner of the house as the abode of Lainingthou Sanamah which is considered as a sacrosanct area and every day they worship this Home deity with rituals which is same as what is practiced by the followers of Sanamahism in the same corner of the house and in the same manner. Moreover, the said Meitei Hindus and followers of indigenous Sanamah religion together pay obeisance as one, to the local ancestral deities (Umanglais) with awe and reverence with much merry-making. Both the members of the two religious groups in unison give financial contributions when Umanglai Haraoba or merry-making of the sylvan deities takes place for day's to-gather in the locality. The Meitei Hindus and the Meitei Sanamah take keen interest in such festivals and they perform it with ecstasy. In the Umanglai Haraoba, the origin of the Meiteis, their coming and settlement on the earth, their evolution as a social group, the struggle for existence by hard labours, agricultural works and weaving for a civilized existence along with multiplication of progeny are clearly depicted through dance. To commemorate the younger generation of these things, the Lai Haraoba is performed every year in Manipur with pomp and gaiety accompanied by offerings of fruits, flowers, prayers, songs and dances down the ages. But this should be performed under certain rules and strictures. It was greatly feared that anybody who violates these rules and practices intentionally or unintentionally will suffer and receive the scourge of God. Not only this, strict rules are observed to maintain discipline in the precincts of the Umanglai. All those who are taking part in the Lai Haraoba as also the spectators are to observe this discipline. There are beliefs galore that if the participants fail to conform to the prescribed sites and rituals along with the rules and regulations governing the different aspects of the Lai Haraoba, misfortunes are sure to befall the village people. Unfortunately, the change of time and emergence of modern society has brought about undesired influence into the festival and its sanctity has been at threat. Modern people are heavily influencing in transforming the festival into an entertainment festival. This undue influence has disturbed the psychical of tradition and culture loving citizens of the society. But during the past 40/50 years it has been seen that with the march of time there has been an almost lack of enforcement of discipline in regard to such a very important aspect of the Lai Haraoba. As a result, non-conformity of the accepted rules and standards of observance of the rites and rituals in Lai Haraoba has become very common now-a-days leading to a very unhappy trend of deterioration even to the extent of creating a complete mess. There is a tendency for the disappearance of the right kind of dress, costume, folk songs, prayer, dancing style, rites, rituals and festival materials. Most of the social disciplines present earlier during the Laiharaoba precincts are crumbling. Many irresponsible fellows have appeared on the scene acting according to their whims in complete disregard of the pristine

purities of the important facts of Lai Haraoba and in violation of the sacred practices of this great festival. It is very unfortunate to think that the Laiharaoba has been slowly reduced to a mere amusement piece or entertainment programme by inserting many items quite unconnected with it. The purpose of the paper is to highlight the significance of Umanglai culture in the contemporary Manipuri society. Umanglai Haraoba is a ritual and religious festival consisting of fertility rites and ancestors' worship. It also reveals the cosmogony-theory of the creation of the Universe then the Earth; Evolution theory of the living creatures specially human being; Self-understanding and meditation plus the abode of the almighty lord; School of philosophy and thoughts of Meitei community; Publicity for the high ideals of the Meitei; Annual conference of a Meitei village; Training Centre for leadership of Meitei; Democratic ideals of Meitei; Defence, sports and health education system of Meitei; Integration and understanding among the villages i.e. Oneness of the village; School of financial management; School of social discipline and observance thereof; Protection of forest and environment; School of agriculture, handloom and handicraft of Meitei; School of oral and folk literature, dance and music; school of the various culture of Amaiba, Amaibi and Pena player; and many more. Thus, Umanglai Haraoba is the oldest traditional institution consisting of the different facets culture and tradition in Meitei society.

In Manipur, in the valley area, traditional institutions like the *Ahalup* (group of elders), *Naharup* (group of youth), *Singlup* (locality clubs), *Keirup* () formed the local self-government. They looked after the general administration of the village and also resolved petty disputes. The time has come to re-look, critique as well as recommend certain reforms towards a better functioning as well as understanding of these institutions. The main objective of the present paper is to find out the roles of Umanglai Haraoba as a traditional institution for local self-governance in Manipur. The socio-cultural aspects of the ritual festival regarding its Lai Thougallup (organising committee of the Lai Haraoba) and its office bearers (Phamthou- Phamnaiba-Khullakpa, Shellingunga, Keirungba, Choubon, Pakhanglakpa, Ningolakpa, Singloi, Laro, etc.), Laijisenkhai, Lai Potlannaba, LaiphamthouMapan (9), SageiPiba, etc. are the main issues in the paper. The administrative set-up and the organisational structure of Umanglai Haraoba are closely related with the political and administrative affairs of the Sanakonung (the Royal Palace of the Manipur). Lai Thougallup, organising committee of the Lai Haraoba, is a tradition of local administration under the supervision of the Sanakonung. Before fixing the schedule of the Lai Haraoba, the Lai Thougallup of every UmanglaiLaikon must inform to the concern authority of the Sanakonung and must get the official order of the schedule and the required Amaiba, Pena Asheiba, and Amaibi for the festival. There is also a tradition of exempting official duties of the Phamthou-

Phamnaibaof the Sanakonung during the Lai Haraoba festival of their village.

The office bearers of the Lai Thougallupare selected under the supervision of the Sanakonung.

There are also rules and regulations framed by the concern Loishang of the Royal Palace for the selection of the Phamthou-Phamnaiba and their administrative set up. The various posts of the Lai Thougallup i.e., Phamthou-Phamnaibas are: Khullakpa, - Shellingunga,

- Keirungba,
- Choubon,
- Pakhanglakpa
- Ningolakpa,
- Singloi,
- Laro, etc.

Laijisenkhai, collection of money or other required materials for the Lai Haraoba form each and every family of the locality, is a tradition of *shinglup* (locality clubs) consisting of the concepts of Annual conference of a Meitei village; Training Centre for leadership of Meitei; Democratic ideals of Meitei; Integration and understanding among the villages i.e., Oneness of the village; School of financial management, etc.

Lai Potlannabais also a part of village administrative set up. It is an exchange of gifts during the Lai Haraoba festival among the villages and ethnic communities for integration and understanding among us. *KangleiPibarel* (the King of Manipur) is head of the *SageiPibas* (administrative head of a clan/sagei). This tradition of the SageiPiba is still preserved in the Umanglai culture. The tradition of the LaiphamthouMapan, Nine important Umanglais, is also an administrative set up for the Royal Palace introduce by NongdaLairenPhakhangba and his queen Laisana. Indigenous sports meets are also organized as a part of Lai Haraoba by *Ahalup* and *NaharupPana*, mobilised by the *Pakhanglakpa* and *Ningolakpa*.

Conclusion:

An institution should be formed under an Act like the Manipur State Umang Lai and Sanamah Council Act (a proposed Act) to restore Lai Haraoba in its true and original form and also to keep on record the roots, stories and accompanying religious practices of this indigenous people. As a safe-guard against these blows on the pristine purity of Lai Haraoba, the institution should try its level best to protect, preserve and propagate this valuable gift of our forefathers in its original form by taking up various action programmes. This institution would be the only one of its kind in Manipur which is working very hard for the survival of this great festival in its true self by maintaining the social codes during the religious functions around the Umanglai precincts. The institution should also firmly believe that if the correct rites, rituals and devotional services as also the social discipline associated with Lai Haraoba are strictly observed and the merry-making of the sylvan deities are rightly performed, then our society will be peaceful, prosperous and progressive. Only then the traditional institution of Lai Haraoba for local self-governance in Manipur can be preserved. (This article was published by Dr. Thounaojam Kuchiband Assistant Professor Department of Umanglai Haraoba, Manipur University of Culture).

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