

Editorial

Saturday, December 22, 2018

Lessening credibility

The air is thick with anticipation of the arriving Christmas festivals particularly in this State with a perennial presence of occasions for celebrations. That the people pour their hearts out in their celebrations might very well be a manifestation of their frustrations and hopelessness of the present situation.

Wishes and messages of peace and harmony, not to forget development and progress will be doled out to the public with unerring accuracy and seemingly empathic statements, both by the ruling leaders elected by the people, as well as by those who have taken over the cause of fighting against the injustice and independence of the people upon themselves. The ideologies, have they been practiced as propagated, could have propelled this small state into a league of its own, one which the rest of the world would have looked up to for inspiration and guidance.

The reality that lay around us couldn't be more different or ironic. In spite of so many patriots and pioneers of freedom and justice, why is the common man in Manipur still could not live a decent life? Why is efficiency and hard work not being regarded with the same venerability as the ability to cozy up to power and riches? Why is fear and violence being viewed as the preferred mode of getting things done-for those who can, or profess to have the power, to unleash them? What is the meaning of peace and independence when the common people, far removed from the company of the powerful government, live in fear and uncertainty, deprived of their rightful stakes, their share of the benefits being utilized, albeit without their consent or knowledge, by the bureaucrats and heads of departments as well as those fighting for independence to further their professed cause of development, justice and independence? Why, despite the teeming guardians of truth and equality, the majority of the public is still reeling under injustice and oppression? Is extortion and use of force-lethal force at times a prerequisite for attainment of peace, freedom and independence? How do these opposing forces, purportedly working towards the same goal, envisage the participation of the public for which they are supposedly carrying out their pursuits when the trust and empathy have all but evaporated into thin air? The frightened feelings and uncertainty of the people should be allayed first.

The change of guard in the government makes no difference. When 1528 cases of fact encounter or extrajudicial killing case in Manipur still remain pending in the Supreme court, another civilian was allegedly killed in police and AR custody. A journalist of the state has been arbitrarily detained in custody by slapping National Security Act (NSA) just because he spoke something against this government.

The present practice of holding a gun to the head of the public while enquiring their allegiance will not work in the long run.

Well not every human being is good. Some have criminal mind, some habitual offenders, some never bother for the suffering of others. Only few are beyond these perception and these few people are the one who will be remembered by the future generation. Fame and fortune by committing abusive activism fooling others will not last long. On the initial stage Kishorechandra arrest for his dissent to the government gets no support. But with some including Imphal Times taking and another highly decorated Imphal based newspaper called Imphal Free Press have take the matter seriously and now the matter is taken as an issue by almost all the National dailies and electronic TVs. Yet the cry for justice by all the media across the country and abroad has been trying to mislead by some self style vested interested leader of Manipur based Journalists' body by leaning to the government side, for reason best known to them.

Everybody knows that, yet people of the contemporary days never bother what the future will say about them. One thing most believed is that - Live a life with comfort and luxury is the need of today's contemporary society. Who cares after death? After all there is no guarantee that we will have a next life or not? If it does happen who cares, nobody is going to remember what they did in their last life. It is this perception that people of today did every odd thing to make huge money using any means even to the cost of somebody's life.

The Government should cleanse itself by correcting the wrong and not by forcibly making the wrong to correct using force by releasing Wangkhemcha Kishorechandra with an apology to the media fraternity across the world. This will be the only means to regain that dwindling confidence of the people by N. Biren Singh Government. Or else "the Little Dictator" which the Former Supreme Court Justice Markandey Katju called will be remember when ever N. Biren Singh names come up by the future generation.

Name changed

I, the undersigned Mohammed Shahir Khan, do hereby declare that I have relinquished and abandoned the use of my old name Shahir Khan, as I have assume my new name Mohammed Shahir Khan. Hence I shall be called and known as Mohammed Shahir Khan from today.

Sd/

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Developmental Schemes and Challenges of Panchayati Raj: A perspective on Bishnupur District, Manipur

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The main target of the study is to insight different issues of developmental schemes that many schemes have been implementing in the state but it is very much questionable on the achievement in the rural areas of Bishnupur District. It is also to study the issues and challenges of local self government in Manipur in general and Panchayati Raj in particular. Besides, there are issues of unable to submit utilization certificate by Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department. Even in the administration there is lot of confusion that the issue of devolution of power is still alive.

Introduction

Local Self-government is the management and governance of local affairs by a local body or authority. These local bodies may be municipal corporations or panchayats. Local government may be loosely defined as a public organization, authorized to decide and administer a limited range of public policies within relatively small territory which is a subdivision of a regional or national government. (Nico, 2015) A nation develops from its roots and for a nation to develop we need a strong base and in a country like India, the base is the local self-governments like municipalities and panchayats etc. These are the grassroots of a democracy in our country. It gives a good amount of exposure to the people who participate in the governance and running of these institutions, in both political and social aspects. (Geeta and Sanjay, 2017). In rural areas the self-governing bodies are the Panchayats and in urban it is the municipal corporations etc. Panchayati Raj System in Manipur comes into existence since the time immemorial as an organized institution to provide justice to the villagers by the elders Gram Sabha (Khunja Mipham). However, present Panchayat system of elected representatives in Manipur was introduced in the year 1960 under the provisions of the United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) Panchayati Raj Act 1947, which was extended to the state. In Manipur, the Panchayati Raj institutions are functioning in accordance with two Acts namely, the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975, and the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. The later was passed under the general guidelines provided in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. Although the Act of 1975 had provided for a three-tier system i.e. the Gram Panchayat at the village level, the Panchayati Samiti at the Block level and the Zilla Parishad at the district level, only a two-tier system is actually functioning. The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, replaced the Act of 1975 in the districts of Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal and Bishnupur. The main objective of the Act was to ensure the participation of the people in the effective implementation of rural development programmes. At present Manipur panchayat consist of 161 Gram panchayats (Shyamsunder, 2017: 19) and 4 Zilla Parishad, (Ishani & Suresh, 2015)

Statement of the Problem

The Bishnupur District is one of the smallest Districts in Manipur, having a geographical area of 496 kms. and only three sub divisions. It has one Zila Parishad (consisting of 11 ZP Members) and 24 Gram Panchayats, 4 Municipal Councils and 3 Nagar Panchayats and 89 villages. Different developmental schemes have been implementing in the state but it is very much questionable on the achievement in the rural areas of Bishnupur District. There are issues relating to difficulties in implementation of certain schemes/projects, such as IAY (Indira Awaas Yojana), NREGS, (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) SGSY, (Swarnajayanti Gram

Swarojgar Yojana) IWDP (Integrated Watershed Development Programme), NRHM (National Rural Health Mission), SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), PMGSY (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana), Food and Public Distribution, Banking, Youth Affairs & Sports, Minor Irrigation, Commerce & Industries, Water Supply and Sanitation, Fisheries, RGGVY (Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana). Besides, there are issues of unable to submit utilization certificate by Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department. (Sanjoy and Tomba, 2013). Mention may be made that under the twenty point programs of the government of India, the centre has been providing fund through Tribal Development Department for implementation of scheme to assist Schedule Caste families in Manipur. However, the actual implementation of the scheme is being taken up by Rural Development and Panchayati Raj/ Zilla Parishads and the performance level has been recorded 'nil' following the failure of submitting the Utilization Certificates in time. Even in the administration there is lot of confusion that the issue of devolution of power is still alive.

Concept

The local self government being organically linked and necessary power devolved upon them to enable to function as unites of self government for bringing all round development in the life style of the rural masses. The Gram Sabha, recognized as the basic unit of democracy consisting of all adult residents of the village, should not only deliberate but also participate with its executive, namely the Gram Panchayat, in planning and implementing various development programmes for causing socio-economic transformation.

In Manipur we have two tier system of Panchayati Raj, i.e. Gram Panchayat at the village level and Zilla Parishad at the district level. The Panchayat at the both levels are involved in the implementation of centrally sponsored and state planned schemes for creation of community assets, infrastructure development and employment generation etc. in rural areas of the state. As a unit of local self government the Panchayati Raj Institutions play a vital role in the development of rural areas for poverty alleviation through the process of ensuring maximum participation of general masses by holding Gram Sabhas for preparation of Plans for economic development and social justice. The Gram Sabha is the general assembly of the adult villagers. It is through this forum that the rural poor, women and marginalized get an opportunity to participate in the discussion and expression of their views on common problems they face in their villages. The State Act, provides for not less than 4 Gram Sabha meetings in a year. In the dispensation of Panchayati Raj, the Gram Sabha takes the model of being a forum for direct democracy in rural governance. Characteristically, the Gram Sabha can be compared with the citizens' forum of democracy in the ancient Greek-city-States. Active Gram Sabha is a must for participatory democracy and transparent village

administration. Rather the Gram Sabha is to function as the basic platform of the Panchayati Raj system.

Review of Literature

Different studies are found on the concerns of local self government and Panchayati Raj institutions, some of the literatures may be reviewed as the following: Geeta & Sanjay (2017) analysed to understand the impact of the constitutional amendment on the empowerment of women. It is true that reservation for women in PRIs have opened up huge vistas for their empowerment, particularly women belonging to the weaker sections. However, there are many challenges and issues. Entrenched patriarchal system and mindset, rigid caste divide and rampant caste discrimination in the rural society, massive female illiteracy and female dependence on male have ensured that, by and large, the real levers of power are still in the hands of males. Studies have been cited to show that some of the southern and western states are far more advanced than the northern and some of the eastern states. The study found that women in Gram Panchayats represented highest in Bihar (54.6 per cent), followed by Manipur (43.5 per cent), Karnataka (43.0 per cent), Sikkim (39.9 per cent), Arunachal Pradesh (39.4 per cent), Dadar & Nagar Haveli (39.4 per cent), Assam (39.2 per cent), Himachal Pradesh (39.1 per cent) and least in Kerala (30.3 per cent). Haokip and Ananda (2017) argued that decentralized governance is an instrument for multifaceted development and it can ensure effective and equitable development at grassroots level. This is because, locally elected representatives know their small constituency better and are in advantageous position to provide better services according to their electorate's preferences.

Development refers to the progress achieved in decentralized governance per se equitable and sustainable delivery of services to the satisfaction of the people. Effectiveness is understood as the ability of decentralized governance to produce results that meet the future needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. Sustainability means the ability of decentralized governance to generate and to maintain the development process for a longer period. This paper focuses on the effectiveness of service delivery by the panchayats in the State of Manipur. Nico (2015) analysis revealed the increased status and role of local government, intergovernmental relations through the three levels of government have not only become more complex, but also critical for the demarcation of responsibilities and effective cooperation in service delivery. Although India has given recognition to local government in the 73rd and 74th amendments, the manner of allocation of powers to local government appeared crucial. When powers are granted by another sphere of government, the granting authority often perceives the transfer of powers as a loss of its own authority. Although local government powers are listed in the

Indian Constitution, they are still dependent on allocation by the state governments, which has resulted in slow progress regarding the empowerment of local authorities. Stina et al (2015) argued that for inclusive growth, livelihood security and democratic empowerment as envisaged in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the state of Manipur is implementing the scheme with the mandate to provide at least 100 days of demand based guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work and creation of durable social assets in the process. Their study examined the performance of the scheme in that state with respect to extent of employment generation, efficiency in work completion rate and efficiency in fund utilization through analyzing official records. The finding shows that the shabbiest parts of the scheme were detected in the forms of provisioning of 100 days employment to only 7.39 per cent of job card holders and failure to complete 95.55 per cent of the undertaken works by scheduled time. This calls for playing of more responsive role by the state authority so that very purpose of MGNREGA is not defeated. Ishani & Suresh (2015) emphasised on the women members of gram panchayat and the changes in their involvement in politics particularly after the 73rd amendment of the constitution of India. The experiences and views of the members of panchayat are important for a successful rural development process. Most of the people are not well educated and easily get influenced or worked under the guidance of a second person, be it an influential male member or respective husbands of the women representatives. Some of the women came without even having the knowledge of local self-government but just to fulfil the privilege of reservation policies for women participation. This has definitely created many loophole in terms of using the funds as well as devaluation of the functions authorised to them. However, it is also true that some of the women representatives gained knowledge and confidence and became assertive in the politics of Panchayat and little scope has been given for them to try and make efforts for a genuine participation due to the lack of various social and mental inspirations or readiness towards the women folk of the Panchayati Raj System. The analysis suggested that there still needs to orient and encourage such women despite being very enthusiastic and vocal to bring confidence and assertiveness among them so that they themselves become the one who can play active participation in the decision making and administrative process of rural development.

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