

Editorial

Monday, December 31, 2018

Unforgettable Revolutionary NK Sanajaoba

It was a turning point of Manipur History when the first elites of modern Manipur started asking questions on the governance of the nexus of British colonial power and feudal authorities. At that time, the puppet king of Manipur tried fully to stretch his available muscles within the skeleton of British colonial administration. The king whose wings were cut to size managed to show the public that he was a powerful king. During the time when the progressive mind of elites started to think of a new Manipur and the king stretched his muscles within the colonial framework, NK Sanajaoba was born on 30 December 1936. No one, at that time, knew a star was born in an ordinary family of N Ibocha and Muktarei at the eastern bank of Imphal River at Singjamei Wangma Kshetri Leikai, Imphal. He was not born in a noble family who served the king and his men. His parents did not have any power to command, but were commanded on. It was when winds blew from different directions to form a storm in the dark sky of Manipur history, NK Sanajaoba, son of ordinary Manipuri family, was born. The storm of confusion over formation of new Manipur and continuity of feudal-colonial rule was the political atmosphere.

He was known of his witty comments on the administrative and political events in Manipur. His thoughts were reflected through his serious witty comments. His childhood friends still remember his courage to pass comments on political issues. His use of words to attack the wrongful acts of the men in power and his love of justice to the people of Manipur are still alive in the collective mind of Manipuri people. His experiments with justice and liberation for justice needed a medium of expression; expression without fear found *Lamyamba*, the monthly publication of Pan Manipuri Youth League (PANMYL). PANMYL was founded by progressive and radical youths of Manipur in 1968. NK Sanajaoba was one of vital key actors in establishment of PANMYL. He became first editor of *Lamyamba*, and he was driving force to critical observation of Manipur administration as Part C State and Territorial Assembly after she lost her sovereign status in 1949. The breeding of corruption in post-merger Manipur was shown tirelessly through *Lamyamba*. His fearless expression became model of educated youths day by day; but the government tried to suppress his expression in *Lamyamba*. He was kept many times under bar. His body was tortured in the dark cells. But his love of justice constantly encouraged him not to bow down to what he called injustice.

Who was afraid of NK Sanajaoba? Since 1970s till the mid-1980s, the talk of town was dominated by writings and rebellious tone of NK Sanajaoba. He was hated by those who were working in tune of the prevailing political ideology that based on making inequalities. His keen observation of corrupt practices of political leaders, administrators and bureaucrats of Manipur created a folk of enemies; still he wanted to show the people of Manipur that the corruption was inherent quality of the political system which the people lived in. To him, the injustice to the people was brought by the system and hence, he wanted wholeheartedly to change the system. He believed that fighting the injustice system required a new language and style of expression. His choice of words and coinage of new words to suit the quality of the corrupt system are still remembered by Manipur. The language of royal circle or well educated literary persons is not hard enough to fightback the imposition of corruption in political practices, administrative circles so also in mental activities. We need a new language to fightback the *haajibabis* of the men in power and system which legitimize the *haajibabis*.

Why did NK Sanajaoba take so many risks in his life? He was romantic lover of a revolution, a revolutionary who saw clearly the goal beyond the prevailing system, a blind follower of those who fought war to end the war between haves and have-nots. He was true lover of people of Manipur, true believer of secularism who had looked beyond the sectarian ideology of religion, revivalism, tribalism and clannish ideologies. His only vision was oneness of Manipur free from all forms of exploitation and inequalities. NK Sanajaoba's had the courage to fight for free Manipur from all forms of inequalities and to fightback all the injustices done on the people of Manipur. Young generations are still inspired by his works and words; new generations still hear the historical echoes of the great *Athou Licha Heppa*.

- Today's Writer : Sh Ajit

Letters, Feedback and Suggestions to 'Imphal Times' can be sent to our e-mail : imphaltimes@gmail.com. For advertisement kindly contact : - 0385-2452159 (O). For time being readers can reach the office at Cell Phone No. 9862860745 for any purpose.

Governance and Human Relationships in Multi-Ethnic States

By- Dr. Michael Lunminthang
Assistant Professor,
Ambedkar University, Delhi

Abstract: The Colonial divisions of the region into: (a) Frontier Tracts, (b) Excluded Areas (c) Partially excluded Areas, are still the main criteria of division in the Northeast region even after 70 years of Independence. The trajectories of the Colonial terms when politicalized have a deep impact on the ethnic relationships in states like Manipur. The paper asserts that Human and Ethnic relationships play a vital role in the dissemination of governance in the state. When relationships fail and reciprocations are ignored, we proved to ourselves that Governance fail.

Historical Analysis:

To summarize briefly the political development, Manipur was a full-fledged sovereign, independent kingdom till the Burmese war of 1824-26. Her independence was restored after the British forces drove the Burmese out of Manipur. A political agent was posted and even though he was supposed not to interfere in the internal affairs of the State, the Political Agent did not always remain strictly aloof.¹

Misunderstandings began to grow and swell between the political agent and the palace and finally in 1891, the Chief Commissioner of Assam (Mr. Quinton) who went to Manipur to solve the Palace-intrigues was killed. She became a princely native state in 1891 with the liability to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 50,000/- to the British Government.² She merged with India on September 21, 1949 after two years of autonomous constitutional monarchy. In 1963 Manipur became a Union Territory under the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963. On 21st January 1972 it became a full-fledged part - C state as a result of the passing of the North Eastern Areas Reorganisation Act 1971.³ Manipur covers an area of 22,327 square km between Latitudes 23.32' N and 25.41' N and Longitude 93.2' E and 94.47' E. There are nine districts of out of which five are in the hills and four are situated in the valley. Manipur is basically a home of three ethnic groups viz Meiteis, Kukis and Nagas.⁴ Within the Kuki and Naga tribes there are thirty-three recognized tribes and some still asserting for recognition. They settled mostly in the hill regions

which comprises of 90 percent of the total land area and no clear cut boundary line can be drawn between them. They are specified under Scheduled Tribes of India and constitute the Tribal population of Manipur.

(a) Colonial period: When Manipur became a princely state of the British Empire in 1891 the hill areas were administered by the British Officers. From 1891 to 1907, the Political Agent ruled these areas as regent during the minority of the Maharaja; but even after 1907 when the Maharaja took over the administration of the State the hill areas remained the special responsibility of the British I.C.S. officer who was the President of the Maharaja's *Darbar*. After the suppression of Kuki Rebellion, in 1919 the administration of the hill areas was re-organised. Four sub-divisions were formed; of which three were administered by officers of the Assam Provincial Civil Service appointed on deputation terms and the fourth was directly under the President of the *Dabar* (the British ICS officer).⁵ Under the new scheme, three new sub-divisions were formed: Churachandpur, Tamenglong and

Ukhul.⁶ Further the President was responsible for administration of the entire hill-areas of Manipur assisted by some officers of the State on behalf of the Maharaja.⁷ The new administration was abolished later on as it was difficult to find European or Anglo-Indian officers to fill the posts. Later on the three sub-divisions were amalgamated into two with headquarters at Ukhul and Tamenglong, leaving the rest of the hills surrounding the valley which were easily accessible to Imphal to be administered by Manipuri Officers. The government of India Act 1935 did not make any significant change in the hill administration of Manipur. There was a long correspondence and discussion about the implementation of the act between the Maharaja and A.C. Lothian, a special representative of the viceroy between 1936 and 1939 and one of the principal controversies was the issue of 'hill administration'. Ultimately, the hill areas were put under the 'Excluded Areas'.⁸ Dena asserts that throughout the Colonial period, the hill administration did not form an integral part of the general administration of Manipur state. (Contd. on Page 3)

Contd. from Yesterday

Tikendrajit – The Lion of Manipur

Manipur – A Geo-strategic Victim of the Operation of Empire.

By - Dr. Lokendra Arambam

The Manipur episode of the defiance against the pride and glory of the world's biggest empire hurt Britain deeply. The disaster of the sudden murder of four British military officials at a strange, exotic enclave contiguous to the imperial territory, was followed by the symbolic destruction of the vestiges of the empire i.e. the existence of telegraph lines and offices being destroyed. The telegram officers being murdered, a sanatorium burned down and British graves desecrated. As reprisal the Government of British India sent three columns within a fortnight, destroyed opposition on all three fronts, looted the royal palace, razed it to the ground to make way for a permanent military camp. The empire restored its authority, but the event became a scandal in the nooks and corners of the empire. The House of Commons and the House of Lords debated the event in all their heat and temper. Charges and counter charges were mutually exchanged in all the interstices of the Empire, of the values of western civilization, of the roles and responsibilities of the representatives, their action and behaviour in times of crisis, of all intents and purposes, the sole defence of the Government of India in the sordid episode was succinctly put in the House of Commons by Sir John Gorst, Under-Secretary of State for India who spoke that the Senapati was removed for the simple reason that he was 'an able man intriguing against the Paramount Power'. In the words of Caroline Keen 'In an extra-ordinary critical statement for the second most senior official at the India office, Sir John maintained that the Government of India was merely acting in accordance with their customary policy of cutting down the tall poppies, setting aside the man at ability and strong character in native states in favour of the mediocre or incapable' (Caroline Keen 2015, P 140). Tikendrajit, therefore, was the sole motif for the imperial action against Manipur. He was to be hanged in front of the public, along with his mentor the old General Thangal, with whom Tikendrajit was reported to have quarrelled on the decision to execute the Sahibs. The

Queen Victoria, the empress of India was an avid follower of the Manipur story, as reported in the newspapers and debated in the two houses of Parliament. She gave a private reception to Mrs. Grimwood in the Windsor castle on July 1, after her escape from Manipur, sympathized with her plight in the loss of a fond husband, and heard her admiring estimate of the character of Tikendrajit. She was not happy with the actions of ignorance and imprudence of the authorities of Calcutta in the whole affair. Manomohan Ghose's 'The Appeal of the Manipur Princes' was published in July in London in 1891, along with a transcript of the trials of the Senapati and the Regent, and when the findings of the court were communicated to Queen Victoria, she immediately despatched a telegram to Lord Cross, the Secretary of State for India 'Trust Senapati will not be executed. He was not found guilty of murder and the effect is sure to be bad in India' (Caroline Keen, Ibid p. 158). This was on the 1st of August 1891, twelve days before the hanging of Tikendrajit at Imphal. On the 8th of August, Lord Cross informed her of the Government of India's decision that the Viceroy (Lord Lansdowne) had commuted the sentences in the case of the Regent and Angousana, but the sentence in the case of Tikendrajit had been confirmed. On the 12th August, Manomohan Ghose himself appealed directly to the Queen for clemency. The Queen was reported to have sent a telegram to Lord Lansdowne if it was possible! Lord Lansdowne replied on the same day. 'Your Majesty's telegram on 12th I entertain no doubt commutating of sentence would be a grave public misfortune, and I regard as now absolutely impossible' (Quoted by C. Keen P. 159). Caroline Keen quotes again the letter that Lord Lansdowne wrote back to the Queen after the telegram, 'the case was not one for the extension of your Majesty's clemency. The Senapati was the prime mover, both in conspiracy which led to the downfall of the lawful ruler of the state, and in the rebellion which led to the massacre. Your Majesty will have noticed that while the

fighting was in progress on the 24th, and at a time when it was impossible to contend that the Senapati was merely acting in self-defence, he brought up guns from their position inside the palace, to a position on the outer wall, from which, at a distance of a few yards, fire was opened up on the British Residency, a defenceless building, which at the time contained several wounded men, and a English lady it would be impossible to show mercy to one convicted of these crimes without greatly endangering our supremacy in this country'. (Ibid P. 160). The correspondences between the Queen Empress and the Viceroy Lord Lansdowne reflect the inner dynamics of the operation of the British empire, that Manipur was geographically in the Indian sub-continent, but it was in fact an independent Asiatic state, not politically dependent on the same. However the geo-politics of the Empire over-ruled all considerations, and Lord Lansdowne's was the voice of the real politik of the empire, though the Queen represented the conscience of the western civilization. Lord Lansdowne was hell bent in safeguarding the territory of British India by maintaining a firm hold on frontier states such as Sikkim, Kashmir and Manipur to be used as buffer zones against foreign aggressors. Any unrest within Manipur was perceived as a threat to such a strategy (C. Keen 2012 P. 147). Many scholars, mostly foreign and the international media reported that Manipur was a province of British Assam. Indian newspapers like the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* differed, and noticed Manipur's independence in the 19th century. As a princely state, Manipur did not belong to the family of the princely states of British India. The formal entry into the scheme was only in 1921, when the Chambers of the Princes were constituted in that year. Manipur issued Passports to Indians or Nepalis till 1950. When Manipur became a part of India since 1949, it was removed. This article is a revised and updated version from a talk given by the author in the All India Radio Imphal on the 23rd March 2017.



References:

1. Rajkumar Sanahal Singh 1973 – Bir Tikendrajit Singh, Friends Union Press, Imphal.
2. Gangmumei Kamei 2015 – A History of Modern Manipur Vol. – I, Akansa Publishing House, New Delhi.
3. Lal Dena Ed. 1990 – History of Modern Manipur 1726-1949, Reliable Book Centre, Imphal.
4. John Parratt & Saroj Nalini Parratt 1990 – Queen Empress Vs Tikendrajit, Prince of Manipur: The Anglo-Manipuri Conflict of 1891, Har Anand, New Delhi.
5. Gunachandra Kakchingtabam 2016 – The Manipur War of 1891: A Media Narrative, International Printers, Thoubal.
6. Caroline Keen 2015 – An Imperial Crisis in British India: The Manipur Uprising of 1891. L. B. Taurus, London.
7. Caroline Keen 2012 – Princely India and the British – Political Development and the Operation of Empire – L.B. Taurus, London.
8. Manmohan Ghose 1891 – The Appeals of the Manipur Princes, Manipur State Archives – 2005.
9. Chanam Hemchandra Ed. 2017 – Mashline (in Manipuri), Ching-Tam Press, Uripok, Imphal.
10. Dr. Laishram Suresh 1998 – The Man who rocked the British Empire – 107th Bir Tikendrajit Celebration, Natun Bazar, Hojai, Assam Pradesh Manipuri Association.
11. Maung Htin Aung 1967 – A History of Burma, Columbia University Press, New York and London.

(Concluded)