

# Editorial

Saturday, December 8, 2018

## Fixing the broken window

Consider a building with a few broken windows. If the windows are not repaired, the tendency is for vandals to break a few more windows. Eventually, they may even break into the building, and if it's unoccupied, perhaps become squatters or light fires inside. Or consider a pavement. Some litter accumulates. Soon, more litter accumulates. Eventually, people even start leaving bags of refuse from take-out restaurants there or even break into cars. If the concept is to be applied to the law and order situation in our society with special emphasis to the prevailing system of administration and governance, one would find the same psychological response to the prevailing situation. This very social phenomena is termed the Broken Window Theory - introduced by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in an article titled Broken Windows, in the March 1982 The Atlantic Monthly following an experiment by Philip Zimbardo, a Stanford psychologist who tested the theory in 1969. Unsurprisingly for many, the test concluded that vandalism, or for that matter, most forms of social disturbances occurs much more quickly as the community generally seems apathetic. Similar events can occur in any civilized community when communal barriers - the sense of mutual regard and obligations of civility - are lowered by actions that suggest apathy. In other words, the theory posits that the prevalence of disorder creates fear in the minds of citizens who are convinced that the area is unsafe. This withdrawal from the community weakens social controls that previously kept criminals in check. Once this process begins, it feeds itself. Disorder causes crime, and crime causes further disorder and crime.

A lot of social discrepancies between the accepted social norms and the ground reality can be explained based on this theory. The snowballing effect of corruption, favoritism, unrest and elitism being increasingly experienced by the general public in the state can be understood more clearly and objectively when one understands the psychology behind the cause of such undesirable social occurrences.

But understanding the cause is not the panacea to the festering problem, it is rather the beginning of a long and tedious process of reforms and redressals which should be pursued relentlessly. But the task at hand is easier said than done. The present system of administration and governance which has been consciously shaped and engineered to comply and conform to the interests of a precious few having access to power and connections, with the added bonus of having in place various mechanisms to protect and cover the nefarious activities and conniving characteristics of those fortunate few, needs to be pulled down and a radical system to administration and governance has to be drawn up to be implemented without further ado.

In short, an overhauling of the deep rooted social evils and malpractices that has been inextricably intertwined with the present system is the need of the hour. If the present government does not have the gumption to own up and make the much delayed changes, the general public will be forced to act on their behalf. Time to fix the broken window is running out for the government.

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## KUKI CHIEFTAINSHIP IN DEMOCRATIC INDIA

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Courtesy - Beyond the Horizon

Kukis from North East India continue to practise a traditional chieftainship system, in sharp contrast to the democratic systems in the rest of the country. This has resulted in the impairment of democracy and development in Kuki areas. There is a need to rethink the relationship between the two systems and their prospects within the scope of India's democracy.

The Kukis live in Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 categorised them under the generic nomenclature "Any Kuki Tribes." In Manipur they live in all the five hill districts and in certain areas in the Imphal Valley.

They constitute the second largest population in Manipur. In Nagaland, they are found living in the three districts, namely, Kohima, Dimapur and Phek. Some live in Meghalaya. In Tripura they are known by different names. In Assam they live in Karbi Anglong, N C Hills (now Dima Hasao), Kachar, and other parts.

Generally, Kuki tribes continue to harbour a certain nostalgia for inherited traditional governance.

Chieftainship is considered inalienable for the 22 tribes that constitute the Kukis. In Mizoram the system was abolished by the Assam-Lushai District (Acquisition of Chief's Rights) Act, 1954. Tripura had replaced it with the panchayat system functioning under the

Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council. Chieftainship has been functioning among the Kukis despite the introduction of the representative system. The two systems are considered to be in opposition to each other. Their coexistence, however, had an impact on certain aspects of chieftainship. The chief is patriarchal and feudal.

He retains absolute authority over village land and the villagers. The relationship between him and the villagers is symmetrical to feudal relations seen between landlords and tenants. His words are law. Villagers could settle in the village so long as they please the chief. This system is considered antithetical to the practice of democracy. In short, villagers have

no freedom. Their fate is decided by the chief. At the same time chieftainship is an institution that is considered an inalienable custom practised by the Kuki tribes since time immemorial. A debate, therefore, emerges on whether to continue with chieftainship. The debate goes on without any resolution.

Historically, in the context of Manipur, the post-independence Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 was enacted which did not apply in matters where specific reservations of powers were made to any authority in the hill under the provisions of the Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947.

However, the government was

in a hurry to enact in the same year, the Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947 and later the Manipur (Village Authority in Hill Areas) Act, 1956, the Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chief Rights) Act, 1967, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960, the Manipur Land Revenue and Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1975. The regulation of these legislative acts are a direct attempt to end the continuation of traditional authority within the democratic system. While a democracy constraint is one aspect, the introduction of new administration has changed not only their traditional system but also their relationship with land, forest, and natural resources.

Therefore, there was strong opposition from the Kukis, particular the chiefs, which leads to freezing of the government regulations.

### Chieftainship Debate

Despite the attempts by governments to either wish away traditional leadership or to actually attack it through various reform measures with a view to abolish it, Kuki chieftainship remained the centre of authority in Kuki inhabited areas in India's North East and in Myanmar. The post-independence dualism of political authority still continued without any major changes in the structure. There are modern state structures on the one hand, and indigenous political institutions on the other. This reality has sparked intense and ongoing

debate among policymakers, politicians, and academicians. The debate focuses on the relevance, role and place of these indigenous institutions of governance in political systems. Debates on chieftainship in modernity focus on the role and place of traditional authority in Indian democracy. How could the chieftainship system coexist with elected local authorities? How is this relationship mediated so that the two structures can work in harmony rather than in competition? These questions have generated intense debate between "traditionalists" and "modernists" in both academic and policy circles. The gist of this debate revolved around three positions. One which considers traditional Kuki chieftainship institutions as outdated forms of authority, an affront to democratic rule, and one that has no valuable role to play under Indian democracy. Such a position believes that they should not be accorded any recognition by the modern state, and must be abolished.

A pragmatic counter position asserts that these institutions are still relevant and legitimate, particularly in rural areas where the majority of the people reside. Consequently, they should not be abolished. The third group believes in both traditional authority and the democratic system, and that chieftainship system should evolve with democracy to remain relevant.

The reality is that among various Kuki tribes this indigenous institution exists

Contd. from yesterday

## Rebels of the Valley: Romance of insurgency in Manipur in 1970s and 1980s

Contd. from yesterday

However their plan of hurling grenade attack at AIR complex could not be carried out due to tightened security measures in and around Imphal town. The operation at Moreh-Pallel Road was a total success as rebel cadres launched a well organised ambush against a BSF convoy. These successes emboldened the spirit of the cadres and people also started noticing their seriousness.

The security forces in the aftermath seemed to have change their tactics and strategy in neutralizing the rebels actions in a disguised manner by carrying out operations in civil dress by army personnel. They also involved a local Meitei in carrying out the operation and identification of the rebels. The operation was successful as they could killed three rebels and arrested two at Thangmeiband, a locality in the neighbourhood of Imphal town. Having made success state and central security forces intensified their operation against the rebels. From that time onwards the insurgents were on the run. The modi operandi adopted were:

a. Isolation of guerrillas from the people supporting them;  
b. Destruction of the hardcore of the guerrillas;  
c. Complete cooperation among the various Government agencies; and  
d. Improve administration of the rebels areas [Ibid., 136] Thus it seemed the concerted effort of the security forces in close coordination

with civil administration had a major influence in marginalization of rebel activities for quite some time. Many of the rebel leaders were apprehended in course of time and imprisoned. Later on some of them from inside the jail contested elections to the legislative assembly and a few got elected. Government was confident in handling them in a fair manner. However one of the unsuccessful contestants got his group together again and went back to the jungle.

Everybody felt that peace had finally descended on Manipur, violence had reduced considerably and election of the extremists to the assembly gave relief to the people. Yet not long after, another bomb explosion took place in Senapati. "And two days later an ambush by the NSCN of an Army convoy on its way to Ukhrul from Imphal, in which ten army jawans got killed, brought back the sense of insecurity". Thus the novelist observed, "... in a fight between a lion and a fly, the fly cannot deliver a knockout blow and the lion cannot fly. This warfare in an insurgency area is something like that." [Ibid., 121] It is a truly prophetic observation made by the author as event of the subsequent years clearly shows. The rebels' actions appear in the scene with a greater vengeance.

There is nothing much to be proud about a revolution as it involves violence on both sides, yet certain sections of the society is attracted towards revolution. As the later colonial, history of Southeast Asia

shows, foreign domination was a constant spur for revolt. Whether linked with modern ideologies or associated with some quite traditional sense of national or regional identity, revolt against the alien is one of the most common, and the most successful of the appeals for action [Osborne, 1970: 11]. Maybe there is a distinct possibility of this pattern being adopted in Manipur and therein situates the romance of insurgency. (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup>. B. L. Vohra (b.1944-) was an IPS officer who served as Home Secretary, GoM, during the 1980s and 1990s in Manipur at the peak of insurgency. He authored 12 books and has been awarded by MHA and NHRC for his books on Human Rights and Police.

<sup>2</sup>. Lamyamba is a powerful mouthpiece of PANMYL having political overtones. The reportage in its pages regularly exposes the misdeeds and corruptions indulged in by high ranking officials of the government both at the Centre and the State. The journal also endeavours to inculcate the spirit of nationalism and patriotism among the youths of the state.

<sup>3</sup>. These two monographs had deep impact on the minds of the educated youths of Manipur in making them understand the complex realities in the 1970s and in finding solutions for an alternative.

<sup>4</sup>. Ph. Nandalal Sharma's 'Meitrabak' is a passionate introduction to

Manipur which portrays the emergence of Manipur as a nation state. It instills the spirit of nationalism among the youths with a personalised account of the known and the unknown heroes of the land, their heroism and sacrifice.

<sup>5</sup>. 'Bir Tikendrajit', a drama is based on the life and activities of Tikendrajit, who is considered the hero of the Anglo-Manipuri War 1891. The drama had such influence that state authorities seriously considered putting strictures on staging it fearing that could potentially incite anti-national feeling amongst the youth.

<sup>6</sup>. Joddha Chandra Sanasam's novel,

'Akanba Safugee Irei (1981)' portrays the romanticism through the daring acts of violence committed by nationalist youths fighting for the liberation of Manipur from exploitation. However it lacks in analysing the philosophy and rationale of the reasons for the youths taking up arms to further their cause.

<sup>7</sup>. 'Eigee Punshi' (2002), an autobiography by Mayanglambam Babudhon Singh a retired police officer known for his commitment, ability and shrewdness in dealing with those who are against the established laws of the state, written in a chronological sequence the author records important incidences connected with the rebels, and also provides information on the initiative taken up to neutralise the actions of the rebels. (Concluded)