Editorial

Tuesday, July, 10, 2018

MU community's hard stand on removal of VC Prof. AP Pandey: Why the CM is helpless?

Yes, the state government cannot do anything to the demand of the Manipur University community for removal Vice Chancellor Prof. A P Pandey as the University being a Central University is beyond the purview of the state government. To be précised so far there is no provision to sack any Vice Chancellor of any Central University even though the selection was done by the President of India as per recommendation by the Union HRD Ministry.

It's a general proceeding that the selection process of VC for Central University starts with the HRD Ministry setting up a search-cum-selection committee to scrutinise applications and invite candidates for an interview. The committee then submits a panel of finalists (usually 3-4) to the Ministry, which forwards it to the President. The President selects one person from the list, after which appointment orders are formally issued.

There are, however, no established provisions to sack the V-C of a central university.

But, is there any case of VC being dismissed in the History of Indian Universities. Well 2 Vice Chancellors – one of a State University and another from the Central University were dismissed. For the state University there are certain provision to dismiss the VC but for the Central University how it happened should be a matter that the government need to look upon as, there are no provisions to sack VC of a central University.

Well for the first time, Sushanta Dattagupta, the Vice Chancellor of Visva-Bharati, a central university was sacked by the President of India, who is also the visitor of all Central University in February 2016, seven months before the end of his term.

Dattagupta, was removed by invoking Section 16 of the General Clauses Act, 1897, which empowers the appointing authority under any central Act or regulation – the President in this case – to "suspend or dismiss any person appointed".

He was appointed after alleged complaints of financial and administrative irregularities committed by him. In February 2015, the HRD Ministry set up a three-member committee to probe the complaints. The probe found him guilty, and a showcause notice was served in June, 2015. Unsatisfied with his reply, the Ministry recommended his removal to the President on September 21, 2015, on the grounds that he made irregular/illegal appointments, with the appointees in most cases failing to meet eligibility criteria prescribed by the University Grants Commission. The committee also found Dattagupta getting personal bills for alcoholic beverages reimbursed by the university during his stay at the India International Centre in New Delhi during August-September 2012, which is a "serious case of financial impropriety". There are also other irregularities found by the committee.

The second case is of Mumbai University's vice-chancellor Sanjay Deshmukh .

He was sacked by the Governor of Maharastra Vidyasagar Rao, who is also the Chancellor of the University for failure gross negligence & failure to announce the results of the of the March 2017 university exams in time.

The government of Manipur may think they are helpless to give a hand to end the impasse going on for over 40 days at Manipur University demanding removal of the Vice Chancellor. Well the Chief Minister Knows that the MU community will not withdraw their stand for removal of the VC. In that case why the HRD Ministry is not being urged to recommend for resignation of the VC Prof. AP Pandey for the similar kind of allegations to Prof. Sushanta Dattagupta, of Visva-Bharati.

On the day, when police unleashed reign of terror to college students in front of the Chief Minister Bungalow, Governor of Manipur, who is also the Rector of the Manipur University had expressed serious concerns to the injury of the students. As stated by MUSU leaders, the Governor during a meeting on the day had stated that during her meeting with Prof. Pandey she said she cannot solve the issue by using security personels with guns and doing lathicharge to the innocent students as they are not terrorist.

The Governor had also reported the matter to the Prime Minister's Office last week with details of the agitation and to intervene.

When the governor is bold enough and is showing serious concern to the fate of the students why the Chief Minister could not stand up like him. Is the Prof. AP Pandey everything to ensure safety of his government? If so better throw a resignation as without people it is no use to be a leader.

Letters, Feedback and Suggestions to **'Imphal Times'** *can be sent to our e-mail : imphaltimes@gmail.com.*
For advertisement kindy contact: - 0385-2452159 (O)

Ecological and social impacts of the Ithai Barrage

By - Ramananda Wangkheirakpam

"The uninterrupted flow of power radiating from Loktak is transforming pastoral Manipur into an emergent industrialized state. Power so vital for economic and industrial growth, will play a catalytic ole in Manipur's overall development and in raising the quality of life of the people."

– National Hydro-Electric Power Corporation Ltd.

"We prefer to use kerosene lamp than suffer like this. Please find a way to destroy the Ithai dam, Loktak Lairembi is angry".

Community Response

If dams are 'temples', some were definitely laid at the altar as sacrificial lambs. When the impacts of the project started becoming visible, there were reports of the government handing out rice to some of those who are affected by the dam in order to appease the locals. The residents did accept the rice because they are powerless. As the wetland gradually deteriorated the effect became alarming, even to many who supported the dam. Various organizations and groups were formed to look into the problem. In July 1985 elected MLAs of the fifteen affected constituencies in the 3 districts of Imphal, Bishnupur, and Thoubal formed the Loktak Flood Control Demand Committee (LFCDC) to protest against the inundation of the cultivable land. As a response to this development, the Government of Manipur constituted the 'Loktak Development Authority (LDA)[1] in 1986 (Singh, N. L., 1993). Efforts of de-silting and de-weeding by LDA did not satisfy the affected people. On 5th December 1990, representatives of some of the voluntary organizations from the three districts submitted a memorandum to the then Governor of Manipur to look into the problems created by the inundation of paddy fields and to take corrective measures (ibid.). Response from the social scientists and activists and the local people was the formation of Action Committee- Loktak Project Affected Areas, Manipur in 1991. The fishing community of Thanga village also formed an association called the Loktak Khangpok Fisherman Association in 1992 to protect the social, economic, and cultural life of the inhabitants at Thanga Island (ibid.). In the same year, in view of the increasing deterioration of the socio-economic problems of the affected people, various organizations and academicians of the state constituted the All Manipur Ithai Barrage Peoples Organization (AMIBPO).The main aim stated was 'mobilizing the people to pressurize the government to formulating a means to mitigate the hardships of the affected people'. Recent developments include demand for compensation for inundated patta land by the peoples' organizations.

In many parts of India, particularly in the Northeast, access to and control and management of land, land based resources, and water bodies were linked with the communities that lived on it. With the coming of the State, such rights became the property of the State. More often than not, such rights are not recognized or are suppressed by the state. There is even a general feeling among State functionaries that de facto communal resource holding systems have stagnated development activities in these areas (Roy Burman, B. K. 1999). The new ownership has led to a 'take-over' of the more productive resources by powerful individuals and groups and opened access to resources that were previously managed by communities (Swallow and Bromley, 1995; Moorehead, 1998). A closer look at the land acquisition at the local level reveals the State's role in dismantling the common property resource use system and its effect on the people and the eco-system managed by these communities.

The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act was enacted in 1960 to establish the State's right over the entire landed area in Manipur. The Act declares that "All lands, public roads, lanes and paths and bridges, ditches, dikes and fences on or the same, the beds of rivers, streams, nallahs, lakes and tanks and all canals and water courses, and all standing and flowing water and all rights in or over the same or appertaining thereto which are not the property of any person and are hereby declared to be the property of the Government" In Manipur, waterways and water-bodies have traditionally been held as community property. This clause has been specifically inserted to invalidate community rights that have been customarily held by specific clans/villages. Women have traditional inheritable fishing rights in the community. With the State de-recognizing these rights and enforcing individual ownership system, the traditional indigenous systems seem to be in disarray.

The Wetland and the People

The Imphal valley, originally a wetland fed by the numerous rivers from the encircling hills is drained by a single river, the Imphal river[2] . Over a period of time, according to the oral histories of the Meitei, the valley partially dried itself out and was settled in permanently by some of the peoples of the surrounding hills, who later evolved into the Meitei people. The settlers then proceeded to harness the waters of the valley, channelling the major rivers into more permanent courses by the construction of massive earthwork dikes. Some lands were reclaimed as permanent dry land for agriculture and habitation, some were left open to seasonal flooding so as to facilitate wet rice agriculture, and some areas were retained as pat[3] or reservoirs of water or wetland, with the capacity to absorb the annual monsoon floods and conserve the source of water through the dry months. The greatest such reservoir is the Loktak-pat to the South of the valley, from where the Imphal river drains the entire valley. Regretfully, this is now almost the only such reservoir left, the rest having fallen prey to reclamation of land for unplanned urban expansion in the last few decades, or fallen into neglect by the disintegration or deliberate disconnection of the feeder channels that replenished them.

Moirang principality, now Moirang Sub-division of Bishnupur District, in southwest Manipur near the Loktak Pat was the homeland of the Moirang clan. As some historians suggest, the people who came from the east and west settled here primarily for ecological reasons. There were abundant resources for Moirang to build and sustain an independent principality for several centuries (Kabui, 1991). The surrounding hills in the west and the south with its vast forest resources gave protection, and the Loktak offered its varied flora and fauna, especially fish, easy means of water transport and rich agricultural lands. The Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba, the chronicle of Moirang, records the digging of Nongangkhong canal to connect the Loktak with Khordak River; this was to drain away the excess water from the Loktak (Kabui, 91.p.184). The word Loktak is suspected to have been derived from loklou, the Moirang word for water. (Singh, W.I.1986. p.202).

The Loktak Wetland System

Loktak is situated 38 km. south of Imphal and between longitude 93.46 degree, 93.55 degree east, and latitude 24.25 degree to 24.442 degree north. Isotopic data indicates that this wetland may date from the middle of the last glacial period, about 25,000 thousand years ago (NEC, 88.p. 4.01). The accepted version is that once the entire Manipur valley, which is some 2,000 sq. km. (9% of the area of the total area of the state) was one vast wetland. With natural eutrophication, human settlement and agriculture what remained was patches of water bodies, with Loktak being the largest. It is reported that the present Loktak has shrunk from 495 sq. km. in 1971 to just 289 sq.km. in 1990. As part of this system, there are other marshy and water bodies on the other side of the Manipur river, the major ones being Ikop Pat (2,600 ha.), Lousi Pat (450 ha.) Waithou Pat (275 ha.) and Phumlen Pat (3500 ha.). The predam Natural water rhythm of the Loktak ecosystem spreads over an area of 82.9 sq. km. during lean season and expands to 275.52 Sq. Km during the rainy season (Sarat, L., 1999). Existing at 768.5 m above sea level, the area comes under the sub-tropical monsoons, and the annual rainfall varies from 982.21 mm to 1980.8 mm. The rainy season is mostly from April to September, with the maximum rainfall recorded in the month of July. The mean daily minimum and the maximum temperature recorded were 1 degree centigrade and 29 degree centigrade respectively (Singh, R.N. et al 99). The Loktak pat acts as the only natural reservoir of water from the different rivers and streams of the valley, and the hills of Manipur. Some of the main rivers that flow into the pat are the Nambul River, Yangoi River, Tagjoi Macha, Thongjarok, Ningthoukhong, and Khuga River. Loktak is the largest freshwater inland natural reservoir in the eastern region of the country and has been identified as a major wetland of India by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). An important feature of this wetland is the aquatic vegetation; 86 species recorded (Sharma, B M., p.14, 1999) that cover a large portion. Bhatia et al. (1979) listed 172 macro species: 14 floating, 15 submerged, and 5 rooted-floating.

The areas around this wetland include Moirang, Lammangdong (Bisnupur), and Mayang Imphal, and the islets of Thanga, Karang, Sendra and Ithing. These areas include 65 villages and an almost contiguous stretch of Phumdi land of about 40 Sq. Km. forming the present Keibul Lamjao National Park. The park is the only natural floating National Park in the world, and also the only habitation of the endangered deer known locally as Sangai (Cervus eldi eldi). Though the government has de-reserved some areas of the pat for distributing it to the local people who are not traditional holders, much of it continues to be held, in practice, under the traditional system. Understanding the pat and the effect of the Ithai barrage on the pat and the people requires an understanding of the larger ecosystem that surrounds it. Other than the various streams, the other pats situated nearby are particularly filled by monsoon water from the Manipur River, which is connected by the Khordak channel making Loktak a natural reservoir. The importance of the pat to the people of Manipur is such that without this wetland the densely populated valley will be under water during monsoon and will face drought during dry period (De Roy, R. 1992)[4]. The Manipur River further downstream is blocked by Sugnu Hump, an 8 m. high rocky barrier at Sugnu, which reflects the water back to Loktak again. During lean season Khordak channel also acts as an outlet from Loktak, maintaining a delicate balance of water. This is the time when one can identify the various pats that otherwise make the vast water of the Loktak.

(Endnotes)

It is clearly visible here that the state has totally disregarded the existence of wetlands systems, and instead calls them ditches or Nallahs which removes them of them of their importance.

Is also known as the Manipur Rive The word pat is a Meitei word for natural water bodies, differentiated from pukhri which are stagnant and artificial water reservoirs. Pat can vary in sizes and shape or depth

Annual flooding in the valley has increased in severity, inundating lands. In 1997, the floods affected over 50,000 hectares of paddy land and thousands were made homeless.

(To be continued)

(This article was first published in the book called "Loktak Lake And Manipuri Lifeworld: Putting The Ramsar Sites To Inconsequential Abyss" edited by Shukhdeba Sharma Hanjabam, Aheibam Koireng Singh and Rajkumar Ranjan Singh and published by Conflict and Human Rights Studies Network- Manipur and Centre for Manipur Studies, Manipur University)