

Editorial

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This will be an Acid test for N. Biren Singh

30 delegations of the state BJP led by the Chief minister N. Biren Singh is presently camping at Delhi to apprise the concern Union Ministry about the various crisis that is putting the state into a frying pan. It was not difficult for Chief Minister N. Biren Singh to solve matters which are under the jurisdiction of the government but the two important issues plaguing the state haunting his mind. Both the Border Pillar issue along the Indo -Myanmar boundary and the over 40 days impasse at the Manipur University seem to be the Chief Minister's greatest challenges as these two issue could not be solved without the blessing of the central leadership.

Since the many years-when National political party ruled the state the greatest tragedy of our state is that nothing seems to move until and unless extreme measures are resorted to - be it implementing rules of law or conveying the aspirations and needs of the public.

Add to it the fact that we, as a collective, have yet to realize the undeniable truth that the centre is evidently more concerned with preserving its national territory rather than improving the welfare of its citizens when it comes to affairs of the north east region of the country, in effect, reducing the importance of the region to that of a mere geographical entity.

The reality about the important of one person called Prof. AP Pandey who had been sent to administered the Manipur University as Vice Chancellor, considered as more important the 1000s students and teaching community is a clear indication of showing that we the people are still living even worse than the colonial British regime.

Death, destruction and tragedy continue to be the only means of drawing attention of the high and mighty at the centre to the region. None of the national media considers it relevant to highlight the improvements, or whatever activities and changes that can be attributed as such that has occurred in the state.

Even the landmark decision by its government which led to the removal of AFSPA from Tripura was mentioned in the passing, even as the collective mind of the rest of the north east states still remain occupied and fascinated with the development, and the tantalizing possibility of it unfolding in their own states. Despite the blatant indifference and continued ignorance of the centre, it remains an intriguing issue as to the question of why the state government still remains a passive bystander at best and a perceived stooge for the centre, while pressing issues needing immediate attention has been put on the backburner or dismissed altogether.

While it must be said in its defence that the governance of a volatile and inherently unpredictable state as Manipur is easier said than done, this very situation cannot be used as an excuse to shy away from the challenges that is staring it in the face. The peculiarity of the situations confronting Manipur: from its geopolitical to socio-economic conditions needs to be tackled in ways that involves innovative and unorthodox methods. This calls for a more alert, swifter and sterner government capable of dispensing its plans and proposals more smoothly and effectively. The frustrations being felt by the public for a long time now need to be addressed. Every aspect of public life and governance has been beset with corruptions, controversies, scandals, accusations of favoritism, despotism and cronyism. The sooner the present guardians of the state admit to the allegations and own up to such aberrations, the sooner it can address and rectify itself.

Bringing in a system of governance that takes into confidence its people and their needs rather than dispensing administration by tweaking the system to suit its every whim will eventually prove to be the spark that lit up the fire of frustrations trampled expectations. The state government needs to stand with its people and work in synergy rather than to cloak its intentions and actions with the shroud of suspicion and mystery.

Lastly but the least if Manipur is considered as an integral part of the country than the Central government should stop treating Chief Minister of Manipur as a mere puppet and to protect the identity of the Manipuri our Chief Minister N. Biren Singh should also show that he care more for the people rather than the political party that appoint him as the Chief Minister.

Historical Evaluation of Puya Meithaba: A Contemporary Re-interpretation

(Contd. from previous issue)

By- Dr. Lokendra Arambam

The presence of the Indian elements in the social structure was however to change the character of Manipur society in the years to come. The eighteenth century Brahmin presence was of a phenomenal nature, for Shantadas Goswami was no ordinary preceptor who would content himself with traditional priestly role of presiding over rituals and thriving on royal munificence. He would rather be a social and developmental activist, as well as a pro-active participant in the military struggle of the Manipur people. He participated in the war himself, and many Brahmin warriors were enlisted in the military arm of the state, some rising in ranks. Shantadas Goswami was also responsible for the marginalization of the indigenous institution of the Maichou (wisdom teacher). Since the withdrawal of Lourembam Khongnangthaba from the public affairs of the state, there was no longer the tradition of the indigenous philosopher. All subsequent scholars the state produced were focussed on the studies of astrology and as advisors on the auspiciousness of time and events, and not on the vision of the people as a whole and as philosopher of conscience, which Khongnangthaba held. The death of the indigenous intellectual tradition could not be retrieved since then, which reflected a serious crisis in the ontological history of Manipur's cultural strength.

Shantadas Goswami also helped in the development of the concept of the body of the king as the rationalized icon of power and glory, which was attested by Pamheiba's acceptance of the title of Maharajah, and his being equated with God and territory as Manipureswar (God of Manipur), or Meckleyswar (Lord of Meckley). It was during his influence as close advisor to the king replacing Khongnangthaba that the theatrical magnificence of the body of the king as displayed over the public as symbol of divinity and power were accentuated to the extreme, to meet the rising needs of war and aggression, as well as authoritarian governance. The necessities of the martial culture to focus on individual persona of the leader as the deliverer of justice and dignity became a concern not only amongst the siblings from the multi-layered family system, but ideological conflict from religious affiliation and strong resistance from the Meetei believers in the dynastic system led to more than fifty years of internecine strife and violence. The state violence which was perpetrated in the wake of the forcible conversion led to intra-social violence within the lineage and clan networks and the Post-Pamheiba episode was of tremendous crisis in the elite leadership in Manipur society. Pamheiba himself and his Guru encountered violent deaths, as wont the internal crisis built up on the foundations of Indianism perpetrated during the regime.

The Indianization process and its institutionalization was featured not only on the structural modification of the societal and kinship structures, re-invention of the history of the royal lineage in a mythical relationship with the heroes of the Indian epics, and with the cosmic world designed under Hinduized principles, but also a far more physicalized disciplining of the Manipuri body through a systematic control over the dietary habits of the peasant population. To have a regulatory exercise over the food habits of the Manipuri people, which began with Pamheiba's prohibition of the eating of pork and chicken, but strict vegetarianism enforced by Bhagyachandra was not simply a regulatory conditioning exercise under sanct religious scruples, but as attempt to have a 'transformation of emotion and affect, so that the individual was expected to control his or her bodily behaviour through norms that implied a new consciousness' (Bryan S. Turner 1992). This process of Indianization therefore involved 'a training of emotion and a reduction of collective excitement in the interests of the centralized court affiliated to the higher culture,' which meant operation of the Weberian and Foucaultian thesis of the disciplining of the body for ideological purposes (vide Weber & Foucault). The Indianization process was therefore a multifaceted, multi-pronged appropriation and control over the native bodies, emotions, thoughts, cultures and possessions to transform the original people into an 'other' in

history.

What was the most important character in the Indianization process was the claim of the higher culture over the geography of the autochthons. The claim over the land and geography of Manipur, the naming of the place itself as a place in the epic story of the Mahabharata was a cultural imperialist project of appropriation over land and geographical imagination of the native. The acceptance of their own land as being the part of other people's history is the vital moment of colonialization servitude, 'inaugurated by the loss of locality to the outsiders' (Edward Said 1993). In the very words of Edward Said, the theorist of cultural anti-imperialism, 'imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by loss of locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through the imagination' (E. Said 1993). Anti-imperialist resistance which evolved in the future therefore was the focus on the retrieving of the geography of the land, when an appropriate name for the place was fought for with intensity and passion by the natives of the soil (viz the struggle over the name of Kangleipak).

It is here that Hinduized populations in contemporary geography of the world react in varying proportions to the spread and practice of Hinduism. Whereas in Bali in Indonesia, the Hindu populations live with pride and dignity with proper cultural synthesis because of the non-possession of their land by the source-holder of Hindu civilization, i.e. India, but in Manipur the hold over the territory and population by the 'Indian civilizing process' is associated with violence and suppression thereby lending deep credence to the Saidian theory. The ownership over the land and territory by the proponents of the higher culture, the claim over the geographical imagination of the indigenous people, the incorporation of the geography, history and original impulses and emotions of the people are therefore clear examples of the imperialistic project in South Asia, from which the historical necessity for reclaiming of land, territory and culture became a compulsive engagement for the decolonizers of the land which is part of a global phenomenon today. The culture discourse is therefore much deeper than what is normally felt and perceived by the contemporary academia of the Universities.

General patterns of the Indianization of Manipur and Northeast India which had primordial Southeast Asian cultures were somewhat different from those of other Southeast Asian nations affected by the same cultural influences. The concept of Indianization was popularized by Indian and western cultural historians in the early twentieth centuries. There were however differing interpretations of the historic influences themselves, and on the nature of responses by the receiving cultures as well, according to particularities and specificities of the varied communities and nations. R.C. Mazumdar, in his thesis of a Greater or Further India in cultural terms perceived the advancement of trade, colonization or conquest theories, even though Indian sources did not provide evidence of a colonizing process in South East Asia....C.C. Berg argued that Indianization was the result of conquest and settlement and intermarriage and N.J. Krom, in his Hindu-Javanese History, saw it as a result of expansion of Indian trade and consequent settlement and intermarriage. On the other hand, Paul Mus in 1933, theorized on the existence of a common, primordial substratum of belief and culture in both Indian and Southeast Asian societies. Thus, when Hinduism and Buddhism became, as it were, available, there was a local basis in Southeast Asia for the acceptance of the beliefs and for their absorption into the local totality of beliefs. J.C. Van Leur, however in 1934 insisted that Indian influence in Southeast Asia, and subsequently that of Islam, powerful though they may have been, were nevertheless comparatively superficial when seen in the context of the societies they were affecting - 'a thin and flaking glaze' under which the

main form of an older indigenous culture continued to exist.

.....Indian influence (according to Van Leur) was a court matter and the process, in consequence, could only have been one of deliberate borrowing by South East Asian rulers seeking ideas, rituals and organization, not an example of general cultural diffusion. The view that foreign influences did not transform indigenous culture but were a thin and flaking glaze imposed on it, followed from the idea of local initiative.

.....In spite of the growing conviction carried by these arguments (Leur's & Bosch's thesis etc.), the idea of Greater India had considerable staying power and was re-affirmed in the synthesizing work of Coedes in 1944 (L'Inde Exterieur). He saw Indian influence as manifested not through conquest or colonization, but initially through trade; thus laid the foundation for the subsequent transmission of the higher culture associated with the development of indigenous kingdoms able and ready to receive, or to take an initiative in acquiring Indian conceptions of royalty, the sacred language of Sanskrit and the prescriptions of Hinduism (Cambridge History of South East Asia VI -ed Nicholas Terling 1992).

These theoretical formulations are cited just to throw some comparative light on the general patterns of Indian connections with Southeast Asia. All these studies however were extensively revised by later scholars of the western universities and local scholars in the post World War II periods, which emphasized shifts from earlier Indo-centric and Euro-centric studies to a far more original focus on the strength and originality of the local cultures themselves. In the early sixties Harry J Benda laid the foundation for addressing the 'structure of Southeast Asian history as distinct from the mere charting of dynastic circles or the chronicling of wars, as ends in themselves'. He sought to establish a periodization based not merely on political developments but on major structural changes in the social, economic and political relationships of the region. J.H. Remein urged historians of Southeast Asia to adopt a comparative approach as a means of developing a more systematically scientific method and of coming to grips with such processes as nationalism, revolution and social change in Asian societies' (Cambridge History of South East Asia VI - ed Nicholas Terling 1992). The focus on the autonomy of South East Asian History was thus a compelling intellectual move. O. W. Wolters 'Confronted the Indianization question more directly in a consideration of the processes by which Hindu India were received in Cambodia, 'he introduced the idea of 'localization' to characterize the way in which external influences might be absorbed into the local scene restated in a local idiom where a local-external antithesis becomes irrelevant' (Smith & Watson 427). Mabbett also emphasized the lack of a single homogeneous 'India', and that, in India itself, 'Sanskritization, was uneven and patchy' (Cambridge History of South East Asia VI -ed Nicholas Terling 1992).

The Indianization process in Manipur was a prolonged interaction between cultural carriers of the two entities with unique manifestations in the social and political milieu of the times. The similarities with the other Southeast Asian nations were in the nature of the reception by local centres of power who utilized the philosophies, texts and ritual systems as necessitated by the developing internal logic of polity expansion and theatricalization of authority. Internal needs for transformation of the indigenous ritual systems to incorporate other cultural forms to meet the cosmic and mundane requirements of the growing polities were earlier features of the invitation to the other culture and assimilation of the interacting influences. Local idioms of a strong aesthetic character developed in the performance forms, which acted as instruments of political co-hesion and ritual control. The earlier phase of Indianization in the eighteenth century was notable in the sense that the local polity was able to negotiate with the incoming culture in their own terms without a hegemonic, authoritarian presence of the mainstream source in the receiving culture area. However, the surrender of the geographical imagination of the natives by

ideological attachment to the pan-Indian mythologies, and the relentless drive by the priestly literati to hierarchy and power under royal patronage, the resulting divide in the social structure, and later political and social movements to destroy the source of local authority in politics and culture led to another shift in the Indianization process in the early twentieth century. The loss of the independence status through defeat in the Anglo-Manipur war of 1891, the destruction of the indigenous elite, the development of a servile social order, and the growth of an apologetic middle class and the ascent of political and business intrigue from the crafty colonial subjects, and physical and geographical integration into the Empire, along with submergence of the seemingly 'subsistence economy' in the colonial umbrella led to structural changes in the Indianization process. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the colonialized subjects of Manipur were substantially Indianized.

All these were strongly affirmed by acceptance of the Aryan thesis of the origin of the Meiteis, the consolidation of the Hindu orthodoxy in early twentieth century Manipur society, and proliferation of the ritual forms in the rites of passage of the converted, and complete restructuring of social and political movements under the direction of the nationalist movements in mainstream India pre-dominated the actions, behaviour and thought processes of the upper strata in Manipur society. The gradual unfolment of the oppressive, exploitative and manipulative character of the bearers of Indian culture were discovered much later through the physical experiencing of geographical, political and economic integration into the mainstream, which was made sharper and more violent through the intrigues of political administrators and business classes from Indian society. The relegation of decision making authority to the 'other' in the far-distant powerful centre after post-integration hastened the movement for self-realization and retrieval of the lost identity of the Manipuris. The movement from 1930 onwards for re-assertion of cultural identity had to be re-oriented with a much more scientifically designed, and comprehensively structured movement for self-location and self-assertion and self-apprehension, commensurate with the demands of global developments. The present however is a milieu of crisis, confrontation and disarranged amalgam of emergent forces, without a clear perception of contemporary cultural and concomitant realities. The pain and suffering, the devastation of indigenous knowledge, the strong undercurrent of forcible re-assimilation into the complex features of pan-Indianism, and the powerful presence of the instruments of an oppressive Indian state provide the milieu of contemporary predicaments of Indianization. The formulation of a Manipur affirmation, the re-Manipurization of Manipur and the restructuring of a counter-culture able to subvert these strong repressive forces accompanying cultural forms of dominance however need a much more deeper self-reflection and refined movement or renaissance. Simple reminiscence of a lost memory of the burning of indigenous knowledge is not enough. The recovery of that lost knowledge for a transformed reality of social and political emancipation is the need of the day.

(Concluded)

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