

Editorial

Friday July, 27, 2018

Ripe opportunity for awareness and action

With the increasing pace of life and the corresponding increase in social as well as work pressures, food habits of the people around the world have taken a hit for the worse. The most glaring evidence of this unfortunate changing trend is the gradual increase in the number of fast-food joints and ready-to-eat snack bars as well as local kiosks catering to the public with mostly fried stuffs to satiate the hunger instantaneously. Food that can be had on the go is being preferred over those which are healthy and wholesome but takes time to prepare. However, there is also an increasing awareness amongst the conscious and connected public cutting across age groups and professions regarding the need to inculcate a good dietary habit in order to combat the increasing stress and strains of our daily life. The general consensus amongst the conscious eaters is that fruits and vegetables play a vital role in maintaining the health and even reversing the harmful effects of work and environment.

A very disturbing news doing the rounds about some unscrupulous elements using unfair and potentially harmful methods of ripening fruits in the state have however put a question mark on the safety and reliability of the food products being sold in the state. However, the incident should not come as a surprise to many as the practice has been carried on for decades without any significant restrictions or objections from the authorities. The failure of those authorized and entrusted to ensure the safety and usability of foodstuffs for so long have only emboldened these elements who would not think twice about using any and all means at their disposal, fair or foul to speed up their earnings.

The menace of food adulteration and indiscriminate use of chemicals to either speed up the ripening process or to slow down the rate of decomposition is not confined to fruits alone. If anybody would care to recollect, there had been news of farmers using chemicals to increase their products both in size as well as quantity, or even halt the process of decomposition by using formaldehyde as reported in the case of fishes being brought into the state. On the other hand, there is also the disturbing report of plastic rice and even eggs being dumped into the country. While most of the chemicals used for such purposes such as Calcium Carbide have been banned by the government, their use is still rampant. There is still the danger of misusing those chemicals which are still not banned such as Ethylene (if used within certain limits) as there is every chance of the chemical being abused in the mad rush for quicker profit.

Today, the threat of harmful chemicals contaminating our foods on a daily basis is a very real and disconcerting one, and such practice cannot be allowed to propagate and continue any longer. However, the issue is a complex one especially in a state like Manipur where the mechanism to ensure safety of food is almost absent as of now, and any means or effort to check such unfair practices requires the combined involvement of the whole community, government agencies, policymakers, fruit-sellers, farmers, scientists and consumers to find an effective solution to this matter. Meanwhile, the best and most satisfying option is to start our own fruit and vegetable garden.

Name changed

I, the undersigned, **Ruth Mungrei**, of Thawai Village, Ukhrul district, Manipur do hereby declare that, I have wholly renounced, relinquished and abandoned the use of old name **Peter Ruth** as I have assumed my new name **Ruth Mungrei**.

Sd/-
Ruth Mungrei

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Environmental Protection & Internal Displacement in Manipur

By- Homen Thangjam

The paper addresses the concept of "core" and "buffer" zone, which have become essential part of recent environmental protection drives undertaken by nation states. These have become a norm of standard setting, for example, in the name of tourism, to get aid and financial assistance from the World Bank or other funding agencies, and overall taken to be a part of the globalization process. The case of the induced displacement of the inhabitants of the floating huts locally known as "Phumshang" or "Champo" of the Loktak Lake on account of the imposition of the Loktak Protection Act 2006 and consequently, the burning down of these huts as a process of eviction is taken as an indicative case. The traditional floating huts have been in existence since time immemorial. The legendary story of Seven Incarnation in Moirang Kangleiroi recorded the human existence on the *phumdee* (floating biomass) huts. The recent protection drive has resulted in deprivation of traditional livelihood of the inhabitants, especially, fishermen, displacement and change in vocation. The paper argues that within the framework of liberal democracy practiced in India both as a set of accepted norms as well as an electoral procedure, consensus is needed not only from the victims also from the larger populace in the form of consultative meetings and debates.

This paper is divided into three sections. First section dwells on globalization as understood within the realm of social sciences, its varied aspects and debate surrounding the spatial dimension both in terms of time and space. Second section dwells upon the historical-cultural aspect of water bodies in the lifeworld of the Manipuris. Third section deals with the issue of whether modern-post colonial state of India replicates colonial rule or globalism. Within this section a brief analysis of the Loktak Protection Act 2006, the forced eviction drive undertaken by the Government of Manipur and consequent displacement of the people is reviewed.

The idea of "core" is nevertheless lost in the agenda of globalization if we accept the theory that international organization create/diffuse/script policy models to states and states adopt these models as mentioned above. The issue at stake, however, is that such policies, even in the case of environment; do not take into account ecological dimensions to the pattern of human development. Ideas about environment and movement aimed at focusing attention on the causes of its degradation and ways to protect it needs to be set in the specific socioeconomic and political contexts which gave rise to them. Guha is of the opinion that it is important to understand the often fundamental differences that separate Euro-American environmental activist and theorists and those who argue from the perspective of the post-colonial societies (Guha 2000).

Significance of Water (Bodies) in the Lifeworld of the Manipuris

Simmering voices of resistance have emerged against the Loktak Protection Act 2006. The Act has been justified on the grounds of heritage, as a fulcrum of ecological balance in the state and most specifically as a biodiversity hot spot. The Act has been implemented within the larger framework of the "Save Loktak Campaign". Consequent upon the implementation of the Act, livelihood of the people who have traditionally been dependent upon the water body have been affected. Government while denying the affected people a place for their voice, which they raised in response to the disturbances to their life, work and department (displacement), has also horrendously misrecognised these voices. They are now framed within the volt of state's own language and categorized as anti-development, anti-government and anti-state. In this habitual framing, the victims are now identified as a security threat, not as ones demanding their rightful places. Within this order, also developing is a body of legalities and illegals. Loktak is now more than a lake. It has already transgressed the nature that it was once lovingly understood with. It has been now metamorphosed into something that closely looks like an economy of "illegality" built around to check anti-government and anti-state elements. Cleaning the Loktak is cleaning these elements off, not about saving a heritage.

Riverine civilization, that is Manipur, evolved through the art of dredging the waterbeds, from time to time, periodically in a more emphatic sense, since ancient times. Apart from dredging, the demanding job also included digging of new water channels and joining of streams and rivers for human consumption and irrigation, and finally, changing the course of streams and rivers away from human habitats so as to avoid disasters during the rainy seasons. Such feats are unimaginable today, if one looks from the perspective of modern science and technology, given that earth movers, technological marvel of modern science, were absent in Manipur of the yore. Onus of the taxing work was on the people (citizens, prisoners and slaves included), whipped and dragged by the task masters under the command of the king. Apart from the *diktats* of kings, primary association of the nature as a part of human consciousness, thus informing its culture and spirituality, call it animism, also greatly contributed in preserving its surrounding with a kind human touch. Thus, riverbeds had to be dredged so as to allow their normal course of flow, new channels had to be dug so as to feed the plants and human beings, and at times, river courses had to be changed so that there is harmony of life. Water ultimately was/is an inseparable part of the Manipuri world view not only as a source of life but one that also sustains life.

Ihoukatpa or Lai loukhatpa (welcoming a deity to its abode, the temple) is the first ritual of *Laiharoaba*, in which the particular deity, thus far roaming in its spirit form in the water, is "pleased" and taken to its man-made abode, so that its holy presence brings prosperity to mankind and stave off-disasters. Significance of water in our cosmology lies here. Spirits of the deities are not taken down from the heaven or sky, neither are they plucked from the air or wind, nor, for that matter, dug up from the earth or sand. Centrality of water in our world view is further enacted by the spiritual attendants, including the myth of creation universe as well as life created out of water/fluid, in the unfolding days of *Lai Haroaba*.

Colonialism & Disruption of Harmony

Varied aquatic food, in addition to water creatures such as fish, mollusk and others, consumed in Manipur have been a matter of amazement to outsiders, who regard Manipur as a jungle-mountain state. Legends talk of how various water bodies have supported livelihood to the general populace of Manipur. For example, the destitute Khamba and Khamnu survived on water plants of Loktak

Lake. Moreover, people living in the vicinity of such water bodies, developed skills, which later on became traditional occupation of the area, passed down from generation to generation as forms of knowledge.

Access to water bodies for livelihood purposes, except sacred ponds, was an unrestricted affair until the arrival of the British in Manipur. Monetization of economy from 1891 had a tolling effect on the colony. Colonial administration demanded revenue from any available source, and thus, imposed upon the people taxes such as water tax, fishery tax and so on. People's survival rights were neutered. Over and above, the kind of devotion paid to the water bodies, at least in the domain of maintenance such as dredging and channeling, in the erstwhile era of free Manipur came to an end.

The development in Manipur is not an isolated case. What happened in the west, by 19th century, was that the centralization of political authority and the formation of nation states allowed experts to intervene more broadly, on a national scale, in planning and management of natural resources. It began to make sense to speak of "national forest," or of "rivers as the property of the nation," where previously these resources were recognized largely as being locally owned and controlled, by villages, tribes, or communities" (Guha 2000, 27). The first-ever "international" environment took place in 1900 at London for the protection of wildlife in Africa. Characteristically for the times, there were no Africans present, the delegates to the meeting being the foreign ministers of European colonial powers who then controlled the continent: France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and pre-eminently Great Britain. The parties to the conference signed a "Convention for the preservation of Animals, Birds, and Fish in Africa." The London meeting was followed by the establishment of the first multinational conservation society, "Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the Empire" in 1903 to halt the destruction of wild animals in the British colonies. Through the colonies, wildlife conservation followed a set pattern. The first step was to moderate demand by specifying closed seasons when animals could not be shot, and issuing licenses, the possession of which alone allowed hunting. The second step was to designate particular species as "protected". The third step was to designate specific territories as "game reserves" meant exclusively for animals, where logging, mining and agriculture were prohibited or restricted. The final and most decisive step was the establishment of national parks, which gave sanctity to entire habitats, not merely to animal species dwelling within them. The creation of reserves was dictated by sentiment as well as science, to simultaneously allow space for wild species and to affirm a shared human past. In other words, the progress of conservation was linked to the development of distinct settler identity.

In these schemes of conservation the African did not fit anywhere. The white settler identified with the land but not with the men and women who had dwelt there long before their arrival. Wildlife conservation cemented a union between the Dutch and the English in southern Africa, but it also consolidated on the whole, white domination over the majority black population. In game reserves Africans were barred from hunting, while in national parks, they were excluded altogether, forcibly dispossessed of their land if it fell within the boundaries of a designated sanctuary. Conservation was even viewed as a part of white man's necessary burden to save the nation's natural heritage from African despoliation (Guha 47)."

Harmonious relationship between man and nature, environmental consciousness as modern-day understanding put it, came under severe attack during the colonial period. On one hand was the non-intervention of the colonial state, in terms of maintenance and preservation of natural surroundings, as mentioned above, along with denial of the general population a free access and involvement. With the abolition of *Lallup* system, (claimed as an emancipatory act informed by humanity and liberal ethos), which colonial British termed as "forced labour" or "corvee", without understanding the socio-cultural and economic context of Manipur, the erstwhile practice of an individual's involvement in creating a harmonious relationship with nature came to an end. On the other hand, as a continuous part of the colonization project, there was the parallel phenomenon of overt commercialization and exploitation (unmindful) of the natural resources. Holistic understanding of the universe, where every being and innate object has a role to play came to an end during the era of British colonialism.

However, it would be wrong to assume that there were no resistances against such form of alien rule and practices. Chronicled incidences such as the Thoubal Resistance against water tax and denial of fishery rights is an indication of the hardship faced by the people during those days. Unrecorded but popular stories of resistance, passed down from this repressive and exploitative era, are stuffs of legends, which can even draw the attention of scholars like James Scott who theorise on "weapon of the weak". Our grandfather fondly remembers Amuchoubi of Yaikul and her antics.

During the times when Maxwell flexed his muscles not only as the Political Agent of Manipur but also as one who made sure that colonial subjects paid their taxes (water, kapok, chilly, etc.) on time, Amuchoubi of Yaikul was a major challenge. When the wave of water tax struck hard upon the people, Amuchoubi of Yaikul was also one among the victims. Grandfather says:

She cleaned her *Sanabul* (brass pot with narrow ends at the top which the *Meiteis* conveniently used for fetching and storing water) until it glittered. After the morning bath, daily, she fetched a *Sanabul* of water from the Imphal River and leaves it at Maxwell's gate. Mind you, the *Goras* are polluted, neither did we allow them to enter our homestead nor did we enter theirs! At the end of each month, when Maxwell is on the errand to collect water taxes, Amuchoubi used to demand money as charges of fetching water for (from) Maxwell. Although, Maxwell forbade her, she continued and never paid water taxes.

(To be contd.)

(This article was first published in the book called "Loktak Lake and Manipuri Lifeworld: Putting the Ramsar Sites to inconsequential abyss".