

Editorial

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We are for the people, for the society

Human being - being a civilised species should hold on with the concept of doing well for the community he or she has been living. Every human no matter good or bad think of doing something good for their community, some are exceptional thinking of the world as one, unlike those who create enmity among others for their mere selfish gains. The war between the rich and poor; between the higher class and lower class, between the Hindus and Muslims and Christians and the indigenous religions were the product of the selfish power hungry people. This is about India.

A matter that we need to ponder on the current happenings is about the so much war and enmity among us? Is it the religions, is it the greed or is it something that one think that a life of someone is useless without money?

Well Imphal Times was too much disturbed in the last two days. Reason - someone not from the government authority asked in hard tone about the source of our news we published. The news was related with the present happenings in Manipur University. Imphal Times pointed out things that have been going wrong in the University and has been trying to correct the wrong. Saying so Imphal Times does not understand discretionary power neither legitimate power to correct the wrong. Media is something that disseminates information news and information happenings around so that people react and those in the government listen to do the needful.

Considering the reality and the truth that media should follow, Imphal Times took up an issue prevailing around the crisis in Manipur University. April 24, 2018, the editor of this newspaper sought information about the Vice Chancellor's travel and till today his good office gives no reply. The impasse at Manipur University is something that has been expected.

Why? Some say it was because of the new regime's initiative to convert the country to Hindutva culture? Some differed in saying that it is a matter of livelihood. The latter have points and the agenda makes no difference.

Forest Rights Act 2006 in the Context of Manipur

By- JN Lai (Asst. Prof, International College, the University of Suwon, S Korea)

First, before coming to the Forest Rights Act, let me touch upon a few dimensions of the eviction of 74 houses belong to the Meetei-Pangal (Muslim) and other structures along the foothills of Nongmaiching/Awaching lies in the eastern side of Imphal. There provoke some implications. The implications are of the human rights for the so called encroachers, empathy of sudden homelessness and loss of property, coincident of ever growing attack on Non-Hindu elements and also ostensible skip of the bigger hot deal of border encroach by Myanmar authority, and overt double standard of the major community as well.

In this case, more or less, an implication involves a threat to the non-Muslim communities in Manipur. Although, it is undiplomatic fashion present my words in this manner, we should be sincere and be capable of acknowledging our flaw and fault irrespective of the creed and community we belong to. So, an anti-Muslim undercurrent attitude pulsated by the stereotype Islamic radical mentality, for example - practice of reproduction of offspring way more than other communities', constant dominant strategic activities against the non-Islamic neighbors, and violent conflict tendency that may explode anytime remain very active in the hearts and minds of the other communities.

At the same time, a loud hypocrisy of the major community does not help the challenges to be addressed affirmatively. I got a kind of good impression from a post of a Meetei Facebook friend; he wrote, "If you celebrate during their tragedy, they will dance during our tragedy too. What goes around comes around." He continued, "What's really troubling me is seeing many Meiteis on SM who don't have a single idea of this place called Kshetri/Bengoon start celebrating the demolition not because of their

genuine love for forest but for the simple reason that the place belong to other community...that's just plain wrong and insensitive.....As a normal and right thinking citizen, we should all be really disturbed by these questions not celebrating the demolition. Guess we the Meiteis would have certainly reacted differently had the affected locality belongs to us. Love begets love. And lastly...do we really care about our environment, lakes, forest and rivers?"

Secondly, now, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA in short) was passed by the Indian Parliament in December 2006. It aims at ending the discriminatory action and attitude from the forest departments in the name of forest and wild life protection upon the forest people and other communities who have been living in and around the forest.

Since the State appropriation of the forests in colonial India, the control of the forest people over their own forests and rights to govern their own forests were taken away by the State by the colonial Indian Forest Act. A forest bureaucracy and the forest department were instituted to manage the Indian forests and legitimate tenurial and access rights were severely curtailed. The post independent forest legislations such as the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 in the name of protecting the wildlife and the destruction and diversion of forests, actually, turned the forest people in to criminals and encroachers.

Under this FRA 2006 1. "Forest Land" is noted as land of any description falling within any forest area and includes unclassified forests, undemarcated forests, existing or deemed forests,

protected forests, reserved forests, Sanctuaries and National parks;

2. "Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes" means the members of community of the Scheduled Tribes who primarily reside in and who depend on the forests and forest lands for bona fide livelihood needs and includes the Scheduled Tribe pastoralist communities; and

3. Very interestingly, "Other Traditional Forest Dweller" means any member or community who has for at least three generations i.e. 75 years prior to the 13th day of December, 2005 primarily resided in and who depends on the forest or forests land for bona fide livelihood needs. Here, the Meeteis and the indigenous Meetei-Pangal who have been living nearby the forest of Manipur are included.

The FRA mentioned the nature and specificity of the rights vested to forest people. Under the Section 3 of the Act there are a bunch of 13 rights guaranteed. Some of them are (i) rights to secure individual or community tenure or both; (ii) right to hold and live in the forest land under the individual or common occupation for habitation or for self-cultivation for livelihood; (iii) community rights such as nistar; (iv) right of ownership, to collect, use and dispose of minor forest produce; (v) right to protect and regenerate any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use; (vi) rights which are recognised under any State law or laws of any Autonomous District Council or Autonomous Regional Council or which are accepted as rights of tribals under any traditional or customary law of the concerned tribes of any State; (vii) right of access to biodiversity and community right to intellectual property and traditional knowledge related to biodiversity and cultural diversity; and (viii) any other

traditional right customarily enjoyed excluding the traditional right of hunting.

Third, in Manipur, the natural-ecological differences between the hills and the valley came to acquire political overtones, became the separate bases for political mobilization, spreading antagonism and conflict at all levels. A dichotomy has come to be inscribed into the very structure of the society among the different indigenous communities. In such situation the implementation of Schedule Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 is becoming a real difficulty to the stake holders especially to the government of Manipur. Again, already the provisions of the Fifth and Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution have vested most of the rights of the schedule tribes hence, there is some questions to the actual importance of this new law.

In the rest of India, the forest communities including the movements and groups supporting their struggle for the last few decades feel that the FRA looks like bringing in a paradigm shift not only in the nature and scope of the rights conferred but also in the governance and management of forests from the hand and control of the forest bureaucracy to that of the community. For the first time, forest legislation recognizes the rights of the forest communities to make sustainable use of the forests for their livelihood while protecting the forests, wildlife and its biodiversity from destructive practices and projects.

Yet that will mean coming together to discuss and arrive at a correct interpretation of the FRA, identify problems, and dispel apprehensions. We need to be aware of the Act, its provisions, its impact, its benefits and pitfalls, if any, and take collective noises.

The Evolution of the Meetei State

Dr. K. Manikchand

Introduction:

The ancient kingdom of Manipur ruled by its sovereign monarchs uninterrupted for about two millennia under a single dynasty has now become a state of India consequent upon its merger with the latter on 15th October 1949. Manipur has now an area of 22,356 sq. kms only. But in the days when Manipur was a sovereign state, its territory was much bigger. The areas comprising the three sub-divisions of Upper Chindwin District of present day Myanmar (Burma), viz., Thangdut, Khambant and Kale were integral parts of Manipur and river Chindwin (Ningthi) formed the international boundary between Manipur and Burma till 1834 AD. The said areas continued to be bone of contention between Manipur and Burma till Manipur was merged with the Republic of India. In west parts of the plains of southern Cachar were included in its empire and in the North the forest between Doyang and Dhunsiri was the boundary between Manipur and Assam.

Manipur consists of both hills and plains. The Central plain known as Manipur Valley and its adjacent hill areas were the homeland of the Meeteis since time immemorial. Meetei by now are inhabiting only in the plain, the hills being made the exclusive abode of the Nagas and Kukis. It was in the heart of this central plain of Manipur that the Meeteis since the dawn of history began to evolve from a petty principality to a powerful kingdom with a vast geographical area comprising not only the valley and

the surrounding hills but also of other territories that lay beyond its present frontiers. It was their high sense of ethnocentrism, inherent martial tradition, spirit of heroism and soldierly qualities that led the forefather of the present day Meiteis to engage in frequent encounters even with their bigger and powerful neighbour, the Burmese. It was no mean achievement for such a numerically small nation to plunder and lay in devastation frequently areas right up to the walls of Ava, the then imperial capital of Burma.

The age-old Meitei political organization and social setup was a model of excellence. Since the first century AD, the Meiteis developed a monarchical form of government. From the 5th Century it was monarchy with an unwritten constitution. But from the 11th Century it was monarchy with a written constitution. The constitution is still known as 'Loiyumba Shinyen' after the name of King Loiyumba (1074-1122 AD) who promulgated it. 'Loiyumba Shinyen' was based on earlier codes and conventions current during earlier reigns with further additions and improvements enshrined the state duties of the crown, the administrative duties of officials, the administration of justice, functions of various state departments, the social distribution of economic occupation, etc. The Constitution was in force till the British occupation of Manipur in 1891 AD. The old Meitei religion has the characteristics of a national religion having elaborate system of religious acts, especially sacrifices, prayers

and hymns, etc. It was the state religion of Manipur and was professed not only by the Meiteis but also by the Lois and other communities including some tribal communities. The religion was evolved from tribal polydaecnomism to polytheism and thence to a monotheistic tendency. The Meitei supreme Lord, Shidaba Mapu, like the Shang Ti in the old Chinese religion is the 'Father of gods and men'. The Meiteis, however, came within the fold of Hinduism extensively since the beginning of the 18th century on account of proselytization. But Hinduism had taken roots in Manipur in such peculiar and superficial way wherein the Meiteis rejected many of its tenets while at the same time, keeping up most of their traditional basic elements which formed the core of the Meitei religion. Dr. S.K. Chatterji has compared such a Manipuri brand of Hinduism with the Japanese Buddhism or 'Mixed Shinto'.

The Meitei language which originally belonged to the Meitei tribe (Ningthoujas) ultimately became the official and Court language of Manipur as it is to-day. It has been the lingua-franca among the hill tribes since very early period. The civilization, the Meitei built up in the valley of Manipur was amazingly magnificent. Sir Charles Lyall described it as a singular oasis of comparative civilization in the midst of barbarous people. Bowers also subscribes to the same view when she says, "Manipur is an oasis of civilization among head-hunters, aborigines and predatory and warring neighbours".

The Process of Evolution:

The erstwhile Meitei nation was formed by the assimilation of seven different but closely knit and allied tribes once settled in different parts of Manipur both in the plains and the

adjacent hill areas having well defined principalities, each independent of each other. The components of Meitei confederacy were: The Meitei, Angom, Khaba Ngamba, Chenglei, Khuman, Moirang, and Luwang. Beside these, there existed several other tribes such as Mangang, Monding, Chairen, Khende, Heirem Khunjah, etc., each of the reigning on their own principalities. In course of time these principalities were merged into one or the other of seven principalities. Then seven tribes again underwent an age-long struggle against themselves till the Meitei tribe finally established supremacy over the rest and absorbed them one by one in a period that covered several centuries. After their assimilation, the name Meitei became the common nomenclature for all of them. Those seven tribes were what are now known as the seven sannies of the Meiteis, viz., Ningthouja, Angom, Moirang, Khaba Ngamba, Chenglei, Khuman and Luwang. It may be noted that the Meitei tribe was and is still known as Ningthoujas in terms of 'Salai'. The remaining six salais retained their tribe names.

Though the different salais were once ruling their own principalities independent of one another, the people of one salai could reside in the principality of another salai by owning his allegiance to the salai, he resided. Thus a Khuman could live at Moirang and vice versa. In spite of maintaining their own distinct identities, these salais, as noted already belonged to a closely knit and allied tribes having more or less similar social set up, political organization, religion, language, customs, traditions, usages, food habits, dress etc. Inter-marriage among these different salais has been a very common feature since time

immemorial. Besides matrimonial ties, political alliances were not uncommon among them. During the time of King Khumbomba (1263-1278 AD) the Burmese attacked the Khuman Kingdom. The invasion was repulsed by the united force of the Meitei, Moirang and Khuman. However internal feuds among themselves were the order of those days till the Ningthoujas (the Meitei tribe) gradually annexed all the principalities. The recorded history of Manipur begins from the second quarter of the first century of Christian era when Pakhangba became the first historical king of the Meiteis. Though the pre-history of Manipur, is still under investigation, all evidences point to the fact that the Khaba Ngamba, Angom, Moirang, Chenglei and several other tribes were already in existence by establishing their strong holds in different parts of Manipur years before the accession of Pakhangba to the throne of Kangla, the historic capital of Manipur.

The evolution of the Meitei nation was started with the accession of king Pakhangba in 33 AD. The first Salai (tribe) into the Meitei fold was Khaba. Till the beginning of the Christian era, the Khaba Kings were ruling at Kangla. When Pakhangba arrived at the outskirts of the capital with the intention to seize the throne, the Khabas resisted fiercely. In their first encounter Khaba Nungjenba, the king of the Khabas, defeated Pakhangba and the latter fled to the Moirang kingdom. When he took refuge in Moirang, he left two progenies Mungyang Chaopa and Tangkhrom Limyipa. Both of them were observed in the Moirang Salai under the Sage is of Mungyancham and Lairenjam respectively. The fact that, the Ningthouja Salai, the descendants of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, do not marry these two 'sages' of Moirang

salai is a living trace of what had occurred in early times.

Meanwhile Pakhangba organized and trained an army at Moirang and with the latter help Pakhangba attacked the Khabas. Khabas Nungjenba was shot dead by Moirang Chaopa Shapon Sharoupa by a stroke of arrow. Thus Pakhangba usurped the throne from the Khabas. Afraid of the wrath of Pakhangba, most of them fled to different places in the hills and the valley. Some of them fled towards, the eastern hills and became Tangkhul Machiya and the others who tied towards, the western hills became Kabui Nungnang and those who fled toward, the south became Mahou Londai. Some of the Khabas took shelter in the Angom Court. Khaba Nongnamba, the youngest of the Khaba princes, besought the mercy of Pakhangba and was pardoned. Thus Pakhangba usurped the Khaba principality and since then the latter ceased to exist as an independent tribe and were absorbed into the Meitei fold.

When Pakhangba defeated the Khaba king and usurped his principality, he also overran the Angoms and Chengleis. In ancient Meitei texts and Chronicles, the three defeated Chiefs were referred to a 'Soraren Asiba Ahum'. But while Khaba salai was subdued permanently the Angom and Chenglei however, continued to preserve their political identity for several centuries. While the Angoms continued to be a powerful Salai and it entered into several conflict and encounters with the Ningthoujas (Meiteis), not much was recorded about the Chengleis in the annals of Manipur. In the fifth Century AD, King Naokhomba had forcibly taken away and married the wife of Chenglei King,

(to be contd.)

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