

Editorial

Saturday, May. 12, 2018

Timber banned but no ban on firewoods and planks movement : Is it justified ?

In December 1996, the Supreme Court of India made a landmark ruling after hearing a civil writ petition (TN Godavarmam vs. the Union of India and others) with regard to tree felling, the SC verdict on the case included an interim order prohibiting logging without government permission.

The ban on the transportation of timber is for the protection of the forest. As forest should never be escalated in a specific political boundary as deforestation in the neighbouring country Myanmar will not only have serious impact to the climatic condition of the state but also to the world at large. So taking up measures to even ban transportation of timbers from neighbouring country Myanmar is also a much.

As the Indian Forest Act of 1927 empowered Indian state governments to enact rules regulating various aspects of forest management, rules differ from state to state. There are several national policies those working in the Indian forestry sector should be familiar with. Although not an exhaustive list, here are some relevant Indian environmental, forestry-related and trade laws and policies, among others.

Manipur government too passed Manipur Forest Act, 1971 to control deforestation and encroachment of forest areas for other purposes. Under the Act, afforestation programme, plantation of trees in all classes of forest land had been undertaken by the Forest department with funds from various sources.

Amidst strict order, there is no dearth for timber smuggling in the state. The more the arrest and seizure, the more is being smuggled through various route.

Strict vigilance is being seen taken up along Imphal - Moreh road by security forces including Assam Rifles and state police as well as the Forest department authority. Forest and Environment Minister Th. Shyamkumar, showed serious concern over the rise of the Timber smuggling in the state and he himself had led drive against timber business and personally led while seizing timbers being smuggled in the state.

The largest haul was perhaps the seizure of over 17 truckloads of timbers from Phungyar assembly constituency on March 23 this year. As per report the trucks were registered vehicles of Assam and Nagaland which indicated that the Timbers were planning to smuggle outside the state.

There were various other cases which the Forest and Environment Minister personally led and seized truckloads of timber while trying to smuggled out of the state.

Yesterday too Assam Rifles troopers too caught 4 truckloads of timber being illegally transported from Joupri to Imphal in Chandel district.

Forest department too is also seriously handling the case of timber smuggling issue.

Well everything being taken up is for the cause of humanity and its love for the Mother Nature.

But the very fact that the people have been experiencing is that despite the huge expenditure on forest department for plantation of trees almost all Hills and the so called forest areas or reserved forest area are almost similar to barren land.

Timber ban is giving some hope for the future, but while targeting the Timber transportation illegally, cutting of fire woods have been completely forgotten. When one travelled from Pallel to Moreh, fire woods cut from the forest area will seen piled up at many places. Many times movement of the firewood being transported using trucks were seen but no action has been taken up for such fire wood.

Everyday Buses were used for transportation of planks from Moreh towards Imphal. Timbers movement is banned but the planks which were cut into pieces from Timber are not banned.

The initiative of the government in banning timber movement is appreciative work but that what is the use when fire woods and planks cut from timbers were allowed to move freely. The motive is not clear. Whether the government particularly the Forest department is following the Supreme Court ruling to protect the forest areas or is it for bans of Timber only leaving aside the fire woods and planks. If it is so then the measures being taken up by Environment and Forest Minister Th. Shyamkumar is not for protection of the forest but there is scepticism on the motives as it is an open secret that timber business involves huge amount money.

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Continued from yesterday's issue

Sovereignty Struggles in Northeast India: Where are They Going?

(The write up published here is the paper presented by M. S. Prabhakara on the Sixth Arambam Somorendra Singh Memorial Lecture held in Imphal on June 10, 2011)

Nation State, Questions, questions

India is a Sovereign Nation State. But what is a Nation State? What is Sovereignty? The traditional, one may say, the classic view, of the Sovereign Nation State is derived from a series of treaties that ended the Thirty Years War (1618-48) involving what later came to be known as Prussia and still later as Germany but in mid seventeenth century were actually various principalities and city states in Middle Europe. As taught in elementary textbooks of political science, the two prerequisites for a sovereign nation state are a clearly defined territory, with clearly defined borders, in short territoriality, and an uncompromised sovereign status, which is the founding principle of the related concept, nationalism, prefigured in the expression, nation state.

The India into which I was born might have been a nation state of the imaginations of the Indian people, though 'the Indian people' may be seen in some perspectives as another imagined construct; but it was clearly not sovereign. Even its territoriality, one may argue, was also the result of colonial occupation, conquest and expansionist ambitions and security concerns over a 'border' that the colonial rulers themselves did not clearly know and kept on pushing outwards, though there was an 'inherent territoriality' of Indian nationalist imagination derived from myths, literature and memories. India of my birth included what eleven years later became Pakistan. Had I been born a year earlier, that India of my birth would have included Burma/Myanmar.

Pakistan that diminished the territoriality of Indian imagination and harsh colonial reality was, less than a quarter century of its birth, was also a Nation State. But its territoriality too was diminished by the emergence of another Nation State, Bangladesh. Put simply, nation states, like every other material and intellectual artefacts are constructs of the human history and endeavour, and of imagination, and also some cunning initiatives. Nation states are real, reflecting the memories of the past, real or imagined is immaterial, of the living realities of the present and the hopes and aspirations and, in many cases, the aggressive ambitions about the future. They are also, as argued by Benedict Anderson, imagined communities that are not the less real for being constructs of human imagination. Indeed, some Indian organisations still carry maps of 'India' in their offices whose territory, clearly going beyond the imaginations of theorists of states as essentially imagined communities, includes not merely the modern states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh but also Burma/Myanmar, Sri Lanka and even Afghanistan.

There is nothing surprising about the elasticity of these human constructs, nor about their imaginations and aspirations. After all, what are now, or till very recently, the stable borders of sovereign states of Europe came to be recognised so only in 1871, with the consolidation of the German state under Bismarck. And we all know what happened to that German State less than fifty years after Bismarck's death under a tyrant who imagined that his Reich would last a thousand years. We also know what is happening to other nation states in Europe and elsewhere that were viewed as inviolable, permanently cast in

stone. As a student of literature, I have found that the 'truth of fiction' sometimes tells me more than the more conventional historical narratives. Eric Ambler's "The Schirmer Inheritance" (1953) spans a period of over a century of violent European history, from the times of Napoleon Bonaparte to Hitler and the Second World War. One of its themes is the plasticity and elasticity of the concept of nationhood at a time when it was not unusual for a person born in a principality or city state of Middle Europe enlisting to fight for another principality or city state at war with his 'native state'. Nationalism was an unknown concept; there were no 'national armies' but only 'professional' soldiers, a euphemism for mercenaries, who were ready to enlist in the 'enemy' army, ready to die but hoping to survive, make money and return to hearth and home.

Eric Ambler's novel narrates the story of Franz Schirmer, rather of two Franz Schirmers, both Sergeants. The first, a dragoon of the principality of Ansbach, had enlisted in the Prussian army. He deserts after the Battle of Eylau in 1806 when the army was retreating in defeat. After many vicissitudes that include changing his name slightly towards the end of his life, an initiative central to the tension of the narrative, he survives and prospers and dies in his bed in the fullness of years. The second Schirmer is his great-great-grandson, also named Franz. Born in 1917, he enlists in the German army at the age of eighteen, and after being wounded assigned to non-combatant duties that he finds demeaning. Finally, while the beaten German army is retreating from Macedonia in October 1944 by when it was clear that Hitler had lost the war, the truck convoy he is leading is blasted by a landmine planted by Communist partisans, is gravely wounded and left for dead. He is not dead, fights for his life, survives and even thrives as a bandit in the Macedonian mountains straddling Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece, with a fantastically opportunistic cover he has created for himself as a revolutionary, still fighting away for liberating Greece from the new home grown fascists of Greece. Here is a passage from the opening pages of this novel:

The relations between this unit (The dragoons of Ansbach) and the rest of the Prussian army was absurd, but in the middle Europe of the period not unusually so. Not many years before, and well within the memories of the older soldiers in it, the regiment had been the only mounted force in the independent principality of Ansbach, and had taken its oaths of allegiance to the ruling Margrave. Then Ansbach had fallen upon evil times and the last Margrave had sold his land and his people to the King of Prussia. Fresh oaths of allegiance had had to be sworn. Yet their new lord had eventually proved as fickle as the old. In the year before Eylau the Dragoons had experienced a further change of status. The province of Ansbach had been ceded by the Prussians to Bavaria. As Bavaria was an ally of Napoleon, this meant that, strictly speaking, the Ansbachers should be fighting against the Prussians, not beside them. However, the Dragoons were themselves as indifferent to the anomaly they

constituted as they were to the cause for which they fought. The conception of nationality meant little to them. They were professional soldiers in the eighteenth century meaning of the term. If they had marched and fought and suffered and died for two days and a night, it was neither for love of the Prussians nor from hatred of Napoleon; it was because they had been trained to do so, because they hoped for the spoils of victory, and because they feared the consequences of disobedience. [Emphasis added]

I conclude this section with a brief account of two other narratives of Indian nationalism, one from Bengal and the other from Karnataka. Vande Mataram, from Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's novel, "Ananda Math" (1882), is India's National Song. It was, and even now is, sung regularly at sessions of the Indian National Congress. As is well-known, when the issue of free India's National Anthem was discussed in the Constituent Assembly, a strong case was made for adopting Vande Mataram as National Anthem, though many Muslims were averse to the song because of its blatant idolatry which, for Islam, is an anathema. In the event, "Jana Gana Mana" by Rabindranath Thakur was adopted as the National Anthem while Vande Mataram was given an 'equivalent position' (whatever it means) as India's National Song. Normally only the first two stanzas of Vande Mataram are sung. When I was very young, in the years before independence, we used to sing the full song, for by singing the song we were defying foreign rule, though technically as citizens of the princely state of Mysore we were only under indirect foreign rule. However, even at that age I was puzzled by these lines that follow immediately after the first two stanzas:

*Sapta koti kantha kalakala ninada karale
Dwisapta koti bhujaidruta kharakaravale
Ka bole ma tumi abale
Bahubala dhaarineem namami tarineem
Ripudalavarineem maataram*
What puzzled that seven year old boy was the reference to the 'seven crore voices' crying in unison in celebration of Goddess Durga who symbolises the Nation that was, is and will forever be India, and the fourteen crore hands bearing arms in defence of that Mother. I knew even then that India's population was substantially higher than seven crore, for I also knew the Kannada poem, *makkalivarannamma makkalivarannamma muvattu muru kotti*, [Are these the thirty three crore children I have given birth to...] by the highly regarded Kannada poet, Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre, and included in gari (feather), a collection of his poems published in 1932. Bendre too, in the words cited, invokes Bharata Mata, who plaintively wonders why despite giving birth to thirty three crore children she is still enslaved. In the Vande Mataram narrative, to the extent I have been able to understand, Ma Durga, symbolising the Indian nation, has about seven crore devotees to do her bidding, bear arms in their fourteen crore hands for her defence. Around the time the poem was written, the population of Bengal, east and west, and perhaps including in the Bengali nationalist narrative those inhabiting territories further to the

east, would be about seven crore. In other words, the Bengali nationalist narrative is the Indian nationalist narrative. In contrast, the Indian nationalist imagination as found expression of a Kannada poet living in Dharwad, then and to some extent even now a small town in North Karnataka envisaged an India that was inclusive in every sense of the word, thirty three crore being approximately the population of India when the poem was written. I leave it to the audience to make what inferences it wishes.

I end this section with its over-soldmn discussions involving very learned sounding terms like nationalist imagination and narrative with a bit of comic relief encapsulated in the two photographs above. The one at the top is from the website of a fervently patriotic website with explicit Hindutva orientation, [<http://yuvashakti.wordpress.com/>], celebrating some Indian triumph, perhaps an Indian victory over Pakistan in a cricket match, perhaps some other real or imagined Indian victory over issues more serious than Pakistan. What matters is not the context, but the image, for the image is all. The one below is the famous photograph of the planting of the US flag atop Mount Suribachiyama, the highest point on Iwo Jima, a Japanese island in West Pacific ocean, after it was taken possession of by the United States Marines during the Second World War, also a triumphal image, but the triumph is real.

The celebration of patriotic fervour in the simulated first photograph where the Indian tricolour appropriated a triumph to which it is not entitled raises interesting questions about the nature and direction of extreme nationalism, and its implication not merely for the smaller nationalities that may feel oppressed, but even for the very triumphalism of the kind represented by both the pictures, one fake and ersatz, the other all too real.

Such triumphalism creates its own victims. What happened after the end of the civil war in Yugoslavia to Serbia, the largest republic of the former Federal Republic, when Croatia, Macedonia and Slovenia declared their independence, may or may not have relevance to the variety of struggles going on in this region, their aspirations covering a wide spectrum from demands for autonomy or when such autonomy already exists shifting gears and seeking independence. The inescapable fact in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was that the Great National Chauvinism of Serbia had consistently diminished the smaller nationalities of the Federal Republic and had alienated them. This combined with other factors like foreign intervention and also, one should admit, the insular Little National Chauvinism of the smaller republics like Croatia led to the unilateral declarations of independence, civil war, open and covert foreign interventions, and in the end the destruction of a sense of nationhood that had served Yugoslavia well, even to the extent of enabling Tito (not a Serbian but a Croatian) to weld a Yugoslav nationalism in opposition to the perceived oppression of Great Russian Nationalism that could not be eliminated even by Stalin in the Soviet Union.

(Contd. on page 3)