

Editorial

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'Go to Village' - a boon to people at grassroots level but a scourge for the PRI

Chief Minister N. Biren Singh new mission to reach out all the villages of the state for delivering the benefit of the government schemes to the villagers at their doorsteps is something which the state like Manipur has been awaiting since a very long time, even as the procedures appears as anti - thesis to the decentralisation of power to local bodies. It was perhaps because of the failure in the functioning of the local bodies like - the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) or the Autonomous District Councils (ADC) in Hill districts that people think the initiative taken up by the Chief Minister, the mission go to hill is the need of the hour.

Well PRI was passed by the Government of India for decentralization of Power which was generally described as the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992. It is a fact that the Act has ushered in an era of uniform system of Panchayati Raj throughout the country.

The PRI has been endowed with measures of continuity, certainty and strength but among others due to lack of proper devolution of power and financial resources, their existence is not felt except during election time for the local bodies. In conformity with the provisions of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 the Manipur Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 was passed and it came into force with effect from 23-04-1994. It extended to the erstwhile 4(four) valley districts, viz; Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur only. For administrative convenience, the Government of Manipur, has created 7 (seven) new districts in December, 2016 which include 2 (two) in the valley and 5(five) in the Hill areas by bifurcating some of the already existing Districts in the valley and hill areas of the State thereby raising the number of districts to 16 (sixteen) in Manipur.

The State Act does not extend Panchayat in the hill areas of Manipur where (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956 or the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971 is in operation. The Act provides for the establishment of a two-tier system of Panchayati Raj, i.e. Gram Panchayat at the Village level and Zilla Parishad at the District level.

As of now, creation of 2 (two) new Districts in the valley has not made any changes with the existing nomenclature of 4 (four) Zilla Parishads viz Imphal East ZP, Imphal West ZP, Thoubal ZP and Bishnupur ZP and also no changes have been made in the nomenclature of the existing 161 (One hundred sixty one) Gram Panchayats at the village level. The Panchayats at both levels are involved in the implementation of centrally sponsored and State planned schemes for creation of community assets, infrastructure development and employment generation etc; in rural areas of the State. The State Act does not provide for establishment of the intermediate/middle-tier, i.e. Panchayat Samiti at the Block level.

Article 243(G) of the Central Act and the Section 35 and 61 of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 empower the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to become vibrant units of local self-governance and play a vital role in the development of rural areas for poverty alleviation through the process of ensuring maximum participation of the general masses by holding Gram Sabhas for preparation of Plans for economic development and social justice.

When there is a legislation to reach out all the villages as per the provision for establishment of the PRI or the ADC, most villagers were reported not getting what they deserved due to lack of proper recognition as well as failure for devolution of power. State government has started mapping of around 6 departments for devolution of power but, reality is different as the Panchayat Institutions or the ADCs are yet to make functional.

Reasons on why there are no devolutions of powers to Panchayat Institutions or the ADCs can only be known by those in the government. It was amidst this crucial hours that the Chief Minister of Manipur N. Biren Singh launched the enthusiastic 'Go to Village' mission.

'Go to Village' mission gives special focus to schemes for social benefit, health and education and identification of left out beneficiaries for inclusion in Government programmes of housing and pension etc.

To assist the villagers, officials of different Government Departments are deputed at the camps organised on every Tuesday at selected villages of all the 60 Assembly Constituencies. The mission will cover all the villages and urban or semi-urban localities one after another.

Under the mission, the Government provides an array of services to the villages and the villagers which the government of India provides under various schemes.

The mission needs appreciation from all sections. However, on second thought, one needs to ponder on why the need for huge expenditure for conduct of Local bodies elections every five years. When the state can be run in the 'Go to Village Model' then why spend time for decentralization of power. The Central government too should think a way to end the decentralization of powers for running of the democracy if the centralisation already works here in the state.

Moreover, revenue collection system have also been already centralised and doing good to the economy of the country, as per statements from the present BJP headed government in the center.

Ethnic responses to merger: A historical perspective

By - Prof. Gangumei Kamei

1. Historical Importance of the Reassessment of the Merger Question

The importance of a historical event is judged by the interest shown by the posterity, the historians and intellectuals or common people in the form of continuous assessment, critical examination and new interpretation in the light of the felt social needs of a nation, country or community. The views of a societal group on the particular historical event also changes according to the changing perception of the event on the part of the ruling group or the social groups or the historians. Thus the Merger of Manipur into India in 1949 assumes importance with the changing perception of the question in the mind of the present generation in the light of the present social and political realities and the aspirations of the people. The ongoing reassessment of the Merger question, on a massive scale, is unprecedented and is of historic importance which will have definite influence in shaping Manipur's polity and her relationship with mainland India. It has great relevance to historiography and nation building process in Manipur.

The Merger was a great landmark and a turning point in the history of Manipur. The Merger was a political decision forced on Manipur through the Maharaja, by the Government of India to merge into Dominion of India, in the wake of rising Indian nationalism after India's independence which had echo in the political life of Manipur during the period.

The purpose of this brief note is to highlight Government of India's policy, either British or Indian towards the ethnic groups, specially the hill tribes during the post Second World War period, their participation in the democratic process in Manipur during the constitutional monarch and the impact of the Merger on the evolution of the political aspirations of the tribal people and their general attitude towards India and Manipur.

2. Two Trends in the Government of India's policy

The Second World War exposed Manipur and North East India to the outside world with its ravages and sufferings caused to the people. There were hopes and aspirations and at the same time of fear and apprehensions about the future of the hill people of north east India including Manipur. The Shillong based political leaders raised the demand of a separate hill state or province for the tribal areas of the region. Kohima based Naga National Council demanded independence for the Nagas. The Aizawl based Mizo Union submitted memorandum for integration of Mizo tribes in a single political unit. The ideas and opinions were not popular among the hill tribes of Manipur; though there grew up a number of tribal organizations which aimed at the protection of the tribal interest in the eventual withdrawal of the British from India. Major tribal organizations were the

Kabui Naga Association (later on renamed Manipur Zeliangrong Union), the Tangkhul Long, the Kuki National Assembly (KNA), the Khuls Union, Gangte Tribal Union, Vaiphei National Union, Hmar National Union, Paite National Union etc. However, NNC's demand for Naga independence and Mizo Union's demand for Mizo integration were not welcomed generally except among some sections like the Hmar and Mao leaders.

There were two elements in the Government of British India's policy. First, they wanted the hill tribes of North East India to exclude themselves from any political arrangements that might be created after Independence. They made the proposal for A Crown colony covering hill North East India and upper Burma. At the same time they offered autonomy for the Nagas as indicated in the 9 point agreement between Naga National Council and Governor Sir Akbar Hydari of Assam in 1946. Second, in the case of Manipur, they encouraged the establishment of a representative form of government under a Constitutional monarchy. The maharajah and some leading political leaders' including tribal leaders were involved in the introduction of the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. The British wanted clearly the continuation of the State of Manipur with internal autonomy with treaty relation with India.

There was active participation of the tribal educated leaders in the formulation of the democratic institutions in Manipur. Perhaps it was because of this wise policy that the tribal people's attitude towards NNC and Mizo Union was that of indifference.

There were three different trends in the policy of free India's attitude towards hill areas of North East India including Manipur. While Mahatma Gandhi's humanistic liberal approach was for that of non-violence and voluntary participation in the Indian union, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's policy was that of paternalism and autonomy for the hill people and for the protection of the political and cultural identity of Manipur within the Indian Union. On

Mahatma Gandhi's strong pressure and Pandit Nehru's strong support the safeguards for the tribal and VI Schedule autonomy was provided in Indian Constitution. On the other hand, Sadar Patel's policy was for 'integration' of the princely states with Dominion of India, which, in ultimate analysis, as far as north east India is concerned, was the extension of the 'Forward policy' of the British followed since the 19th century. He was of the opinion that the ethnic background of the region including Manipur was different from that of mainland India and he had deep suspicion of the loyalty of the people. Hence the strong Arm policy Patel was carried out by Governor Sri Prakash Paternalism, humanism and autonomy of Gandhi and Nehru were represented by Sir

Akbar Hydari. Nehru was not aware of the democratic process and the constitutional monarchy. So Patel had the last say on Manipur affairs. Pandit Nehru, of course made up, when he rejected the recommendation of the States Reorganization Commission for further merger of Manipur with the province of Assam and decided to keep the separate political entity of Manipur as a Union Territory a status the people of Manipur for obvious reasons did not like.

3. Reaction to the merger : The tribal attitude

For the first time in the long history of struggle for survival and a life subjugation and oppression under the feudal rule of the monarchy and the British colonialism, the tribal people of Manipur were given the democratic right of franchise for selecting their representatives to the legislature of Manipur under the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947. They had participated in the democratic political system of the state as MLAs and Ministers. There were 18

MLAs from the hill areas, two ministers in the council of ministers. The tribal people were grateful to Maharajah Bodhachandra and his younger brother Chief Minister Priya Brata Singh for the 'gift of democracy' to them. The tribals who were for centuries neglected and downtrodden were hoping for new life. They wanted a successful working of the democratic system. There were two opinions among the tribals - one represented by Mr. R. Khathing, the Hill Minister and Mr. T.C. Tiangkham, the Speaker of the Assembly; the other represented by Mr. A. Daiho, a young leader from Mao was for assertion of tribal rights and for independence. When the agitation for the abolition of monarchy and the merger of Manipur with India was going on, there were a lot of speculation and misgivings among the tribal leaders about the Government of India's attitude towards the Maharajah vis-a-vis the future of Manipur. Mr. T.C. Tiangkham, the Speaker of the Assembly expressed his apprehension in a letter to the Maharajah and stressed that the future of Manipur should be decided by the Assembly which represented the people of Manipur. The Merger came the tribal leaders were left in total disarray. They could not and did not react jointly. Mr. A. Daiho was against merger. He was put into jail in connection with the Mao Agitation and released later on to become an Advisor to the Chief Commissioner. Mr. R. Khathing, the Hill Minister and a war hero went back to Civil services, Mr. T.C. Tiangkham also joined the Manipur Government services.

During the post-merger period, one does not notice and organised ethnic responses to it but there were sporadic reactions from the individual tribal leaders. Then came the all India political parties; the Congress had achieved their demand for merger with India with great relish. The Socialists (P.S.P.) which demanded further

integration of Manipur into the province of Assam. Mr. A. Daiho in 1954 made a proposal for a hill state comprising of Manipur, Naga Hills and Lushal Hill with a University. He incorporated this demand in a memorandum submitted to the States Reorganization Commission (SRC). Meanwhile, Mr. Rishang Keishing, a young Naga MP from Outer Manipur (1952) led a sizable section of the Hill people in the agitation for statehood for Manipur. While his party was for integration of Manipur with Assam, Mr. Rishang Keishing was for the maintenance for a separate entity of Manipur. Mr. Yangmasho Shaiza, another charismatic leader from Ukhrul joined the Manipur Nationalist Party which demanded revocation of the Merger Agreement and independence of Manipur.

Deprivation of the tribal people of their democratic rights as given under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 (alongwith other people of Manipur) was a great loss for Manipur. Some sections of the tribals were pacified by the Commissioner's administration by offering them official jobs. But when, Mr. R. Suisa came into the political scene as am MP from Outer Manipur (1957), he started to organize the Nagas of Manipur into a political union known as the Manipur Naga Council in 1960. The MNC made the preparation for the participation of Manipur Nagas in Phizo's Naga Nationalist Movement. He and his Secretary, Mr. Z.Ramyo and other protégé Mr. Th. Muivah joined the NNC and the Naga Insurgent outfit while the Merger had ceased to be an issue in Manipur politics, the outcome of the Merger namely, the Central rule in Manipur which did not have any democratic base, created a political vacuum in the hills of Manipur. Naturally, the Nagas joined the Naga Nationalist Movement. However, the moderate elements among them, including congress and Socialist, both Naga and Kuki participated in the Political movement for democracy leading to the establishment of Union Territorial Council (1957), Territorial Assembly (1963) and Statehood (1972).

4. Conclusion

While there was no immediate ethnic response to the Merger, the Central Government's colonial attitude towards Manipur during the long central rule (1949-1971) was the major cause of the political turmoil's, economic backwardness and social tension in the hills of Manipur. Though 'if' history is a wishful thinking, none can deny the fact that had there been no merger of Manipur in a crude and imperialistic manner, reminiscent of the British conquest of Manipur in 1891 and had the internal autonomy under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 been allowed to continue without interference from India Government the painful course of the history of the last 44 years would have been different.

NEFIS TO PROVIDE ADMISSION COUNSELING TO DELHI UNIVERSITY ASPIRANTS !

North-East Forum for International Solidarity (NEFIS) is providing admission counseling through telephone helpline for Delhi University aspirants in Manipur, Assam, Tripura, and Delhi. It is to be noted that admissions in Ph.D., M.Phil., Postgraduate and Undergraduate courses in Delhi University have been announced. Delhi University aspirants can register online for undergraduate courses from 15th may. Admission to Postgraduate programs will start from 18th may. Online registration into M.Phil. and Ph.D. programs will commence from 20th may.

It should be known that in recent years NEFIS has helped a number of students in enrollment and registration. This year too NEFIS will provide counseling through telephone helpline to admission seekers. As students have to face a lot of trouble during admission time, our activists will help aspiring students and provide them with the necessary information so that they get hassle-free admission in Delhi University. Our activists will be counseling students desirous of seeking admission in Delhi University and Punjab University, Chandigarh. **The helpline number for aspirants from Manipur-9818053352, 7630075520; Tripura- 8750344302, Assam- 9818689635, 8130814799; Delhi- 7838983871, 8860274641, 8368974532.**

Thanking You
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