

Editorial

Thursday, May. 17, 2018

Reasoning without disparities

Times are a changing- as everything ought to. Stuffs that were not even dreamt about are becoming devices and gadgets for everyday use. The pace of development and inventions is increasing at a dizzying pace and in an unbelievably complex manner. Every single gene in the human body can be identified, isolated and manipulated. Electricity can be transmitted without any wires or cables. Cars that run for more than a thousand kilometers with only a gallon of fuel is no more a fantasy today. Space travel or space tourism is here. Humans with embedded microchips can now manipulate and control his environment, well almost, as of now.

Research and development in every field, being aided by sophisticated computers and robots, have quickened their pace and shortened their observation periods, leading to quicker results. It would not be much off the mark to say that the world as we know today is undergoing a paradigm shift in the way we live our lives. Through these radical changes and developments, one thing has withstood the test of time, proving to be an unseen and unaccounted yet determining factor that could make or mar everything else- the human mentality.

The workings of the human mind - emotions and feelings that cannot be quantitatively ascertained or expressed as an exactable scientific expression or equation, has remained an enigma- a mystery that has not been unraveled till date. Herein lies the genesis of every conflict and differences. Societies created laws and statutes based on the greater good of the citizens, and a system of checks and balances to arbitrate, enforce and amend them. It is a perfect set up- on paper. Unfortunately, the bitter reality is so far removed from the system so envisaged. We, the ordinary citizens are arrested and harassed for raising our voice against what we feel is unjust and wrong- even threatened and shot by those who purport to serve our motherland, whatever form that might take. The powers that be proclaim to work according to the wishes of the people, while the voice is subdued with threats and intimidation, or worse still, let the voice die out and be forgotten with time. And who are we to turn to for help when the terrorists are the army and police who are drug traffickers who are extortionists who are the influential and powerful?

For us mere mortals, complaints and appeals entail the inherent risk of losing limb and life. Is what we are experiencing a replica of the so called Jungle law? I'd like to think that a jungle law would be a far better option- each one would then have a place in the set up.

But then again, we are born equal. A prime minister is as human as a sweeper or a carpenter or a scientist. Each one is doing their bit for the society. The president of India or the Chief Minister of Manipur needs a weaver to weave a piece of fabric which will be sewn into a cloth by a tailor and sold at the market from where it will be brought for his use. We need to accept and embrace one another as our equals. The powerful ones wouldn't have had a concrete mansion to hide within were it not for the masons and plumbers.

Legislative Brief

The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016

The Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on July 19, 2016, and referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee on August 12, 2016. The report is expected on the last day of the first week of the Winter Session, 2016

Highlights of the Bill

⑥ The Bill amends the Citizenship Act, 1955 to make illegal migrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, eligible for citizenship.

⑥ Under the Act, one of the requirements for citizenship by naturalisation is that the applicant must have resided in India during the last 12 months, and for 11 of the previous 14 years. The Bill relaxes this 11 year requirement to six years for persons belonging to the same six religions and three countries.

⑥ The Bill provides that the registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may be cancelled if they violate any law

Key Issues and Analysis

⑥ The Bill makes illegal migrants eligible for citizenship on the basis of religion. This may violate Article 14 of the Constitution which guarantees right to equality.

⑥ The Bill allows cancellation of OCI registration for violation of any law. This is a wide ground that may cover a range of violations, including minor offences (eg. parking in a no parking zone).

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Reactions to the Merger of Manipur into the Dominion of India and Public responses

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The Merger of Manipur into the Dominion of India has become one of the most discussed and debated upon issues during the last five years or so. Various opinions have been expressed about the validity or otherwise of the agreement itself in various seminars, debates, symposiums, conferences, newspapers and journals. However, the intention of the present paper is not to contribute to the validity or otherwise of the Merger Agreement. It is only a humble attempt to assess the reactions of the people of Manipur in those times to the issue from a purely academic point of view.

Praja Santi Sobha

The praja Santi Sobha was also the ruling party in Manipur during the time of the Merger. It was also known as the Nationalist party. From the very beginning the clearly expressed opinion of the party was to let Manipur remain as a state enjoying responsible government with His Highness, the Maharajah of Manipur as the Constitutional Head and with her sovereignty undisturbed. Though the party said that 'Manipur State will have necessary relations', with India, it also insisted that it should be without merging Manipur into any province¹. Her geographical position, different language and customs, etc. were some of the reasons which, according to the party, necessitates her independent existence². The Sobha also feared that if Manipur got merged into India, they will not be able to run parallel with their fellow Indians because of their backwardness³. Besides, it also felt that the then existing relationship between Manipur and the Dominion of India was 'most satisfactory' and as the Manipuris were 'quite satisfied with it', there is no need for integration⁴. Again appraising the public opinion in Manipur about the issue, the party informed the Governor of Assam that "Almost cent percent of the people of the state is quite against the integration or merging".

Here, it may be remembered that under the then existing relationship between Manipur and the Dominion of India, Defense, Communication and External Affairs were under the control of the Dominion government of India. The Sobha felt that this arrangement was 'the best political handicraft' for the time being and was carrying on its duties well both for India and Manipur⁵. The party also said that the people of Manipur were not only satisfied with the then existing relationship but were also as well being inspired with a sense of responsibility for India⁶. Thus they favored the following⁷.

1. The Continuance of the relations between India and Manipur under the Instrument of Accession.
2. Home Rule by local figures under the democratic Constitution of Manipur State.
3. The representative of India, if there would be any, in Manipur should be bound by the Constitution and should not interfere in the day-to-day internal administration except when required constitutionally.

Apart from these, a meeting of the MLAs belonging to the party was also held on 25/18/1949. In that meeting the MLAs resolved to send deputation to the Government of India with enclosed papers substantiating the solid reasons against integration or merging of the State.

The Manipur State Congress

So far as the Manipur State Congress was concerned they were very much there demanding the merger of Manipur into India even before the transfer of Power. It has been reported of a public meeting held on 15/8/1947 at Pologround where the Manipur State Congress president said that if Manipur, by chance, was not included into India, the congress would launch a people's movement immediately

for it¹¹. Then there was also the time when the Congress resolved to launch a satyagraha against the Manipur State authorities as a protest against the dishonoring of the Indian National Flag and the Gandhi cap¹² simply because the Maharaja did not allow Congress men wearing Gandhi caps to take the Indian National Flag inside the Govindajee Temple complex. Beside their propagandas on the eve of their Satyagraha in November 1947, were also saturated with pro-merger overtones. It was their firm belief that the people of Manipur should take shelter under the National Flag which has been the symbol of National struggle against foreign exploitation¹³.

In spite of all these, there was a conspicuous absence of such pro-merger tones in their Election Manifesto of 1948 elections. There, regarding the relationship between Manipur and the Dominion of India, it simply stated that the party will always endeavor to preserve the identity of Manipur, her language, culture and civilisation¹⁴. A possible explanation of such a conspicuous silence is attempted in the later parts of this paper dealing with the attitude of the general public.

However, not so surprisingly, soon after the appointment of Major Raval Amar Singh to the post of the Dewan of Manipur on 16/4/1949, there was a revival of the party's activities for the first time since their failure to form the government after the 1948 elections. The Congress perfectly knew in which favor to wind was blowing. The new Dewan who had already become the most dominant structure inside the political system of Manipur will only be too happy to see their aspirations fulfilled. Soon they started complaining to the Maharajah for oppressing the people in social and religious matters, and demanded immediate abolition of the monarchy and integration of the state into the Dominion of India for the benefit of the people¹⁵. About two months earlier also, they had resolved the consolidation of the Government of India through integration and merging of the native states, especially Manipur State, as urgently required¹⁶.

The Manipur State Legislative Assembly and the Council of Ministers:

For all its highly vaunted popular basis, the Manipur State Legislative Assembly, as a body, failed to raise even a plausible murmur of protest against the merger of Manipur. Was it not supposed to be the true representative body of the people? Is it not mainly on the basis of having this popularly elected assembly that many have tried to invalidate the Merger Agreement? Of course, one finds the Speaker of the Assembly writing to the Private Secretary of the Maharajah: 'Since we have got an Assembly elected on adult franchise will it not be advisable for H.H. to call the Assembly to discuss the matter first¹⁷. But this too was after a local paper reported that the Maharajah may discuss with the Governor of Assam matters relating to the future of Manipur State when he visits Shillong. Otherwise the Manipur State Legislative Assembly remained silent for most of the time.

About the Council of Ministers, it was worse. They can't say that they did not have any idea about what the Maharajah and the Governor of Assam may discuss at Shillong. Yet it also remained silent. Even after the signing of the Merger Agreement become public knowledge, the Council of Ministers did not bother to call a general session of the Assembly to discuss the matter. And though it had its

weekly sessions till Oct. 12, 1949, their proceedings shows the discussing appointments motivated by personal interest or matters like levying tax on liquor, fire-arm licenses, war compensation etc. and not the merger.

Why the Manipur State Legislature Assembly and the Council of Ministers remained silent? This question still evades a satisfactory answer. It may remember that earlier the two did not resist the appointment of Major R. A. Singh as the new Dewan of Manipur on 16/4/1949. Once he was appointed as the Dewan, the administration was to be done 'under his general superintendence, guidance and control'¹⁹. They should have realized earlier that the appointment of such an official will be in contradiction not only with the provisions of the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947, but also with their own existence. Having failed to do this, perhaps, they realized that it was too late in the day to assert their meaningful existence by the time the Merger Agreement was about to be implemented.

The General Public

There were very few, if any, protest from the general public against a possible merger that was in the air before the Merger Agreement was signed. One such instance can be seen at a public meeting held on 31/8/1949. The Congress Leaders had called a public meeting on this day saying that they would declare the mandate of the Indian government as to the abolition of the Gadi and integration of the state, with written assurances from Dr. Pattabi Sitararmaya and Sardar Patel². But when the meeting started the people realised that the meeting was not going to be a public meeting but a congress meeting with the President of the Manipur State Congress appointed as the President of the meeting by the Congressman. Then the congress also announced that the meeting was a congress meeting and not a public one, contradicting their notice calling the meeting. They also revealed to the people that the assurances of the government of India was 'for' and 'not against' the merger of Manipur. The result was that there were chaos and confusions. Feeling justly annoyed at this undesirable conduct and behaviour of the Manipur State Congress, the assembled people of several thousand moved to the Gandhi Meidan and held a public meeting there, leaving the handful of congressmen²¹.

The result was that the congress organized meeting at Rupmahal Theatre ended in a fiasco with only five speakers out of a scheduled eight speaking and with no resolutions passed. On the other hand regular resolutions against the proposed integration or merger were unanimously passed in the public meeting at Gandhi Meidan²².

Then the was the Manipur daily Bh. iabat Patrica, trying to moud

public opinion against the merger. It said that Manipuris do not want to be sub-servant to another nation. It also repeatedly voiced its opinion in favour of maintaining the distinct identity of Manipur and that the monarchy must be preserved. It also appealed to the king not to surrender the dignity and honour of the Manipur nation to India²³.

There are the two instances of protest of some significance from the public. Otherwise, by and large, the people were ignorant of the historic significance of the merger. But still, perhaps, there was a possibility of the common people for becoming anti-merger. For, as noted earlier, there was conspicuous absence of the issue in the Congress Election Manifesto of 1948. One may take it for granted that the Congress do not have to put up the issue specifically and that the party was bound to endeavour for it because of its parent body. However, it may also be that the Congress deliberately refrained itself from raising the issue actively fearing that the mass, through ignorant as it was then, might become against the merger if they were made conscious of the significance of the issue. Certainly, if the Manipur State Congress had confidence in making the people conscious of the issue and their subsequent response to it, then they would have done it without any hesitation.

Conclusion

While examining the response of the people to the issue, one has to remember the fact that Manipur. During the time of her merger into the Dominion of India, had a very low level of political culture. Except for a small politically aware section of the population who were showing signs of having subject political culture, the common people remained politically ignorant. What with the low degree of literacy, their tradition of participation in the political system, etc. The fact that they remained more or less completely silent when major R.A. Singh was made the Dewan of the State clearly shows the type of political culture which the people had. It was sadly a parochial type of political culture. Therefore, it will not be fair to expect them to understand them significance of the political problems posed to them by the changing times.

However, for the elected representatives of the people, they had no excuse. They should have at least done something for or against the merger keeping in view the best interests of those people whom they represent. They were the elected representatives of the people enjoying privileges which were not entitled to the common people and were getting paid for their duty of looking after the welfare of the people. Their responsibility cannot be equated with that of a common man. Their apparent inaction in connection with the issue is an example of monumental failure by a popularly elected legislative assembly and a council of ministers originating from that assembly in the due discharge of their basic duty.

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Editor