

Editorial

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Technology redefines unity

The present era of Information Technology has ushered in such irrevocably radical changes that the world is viewed as a global village, and rightly so.

Unrestrained and instant access to knowledge and information as well as coverage of communication facilities throughout almost every nook and corner of the world has indeed demolished the barriers to communication and information. Yet in such an era, ancient habits and archaic practices tend to subdue the logical and contemporary mindset which can only explain the developments in such a small and geographically challenging state as ours.

The Nagas, in their quest to bring together Naga inhabited regions, using various means- both fair and foul, are sculpting a new region as per their wisdom, which they claim is essential to fulfil their end without proper understanding of the repercussions and the collateral damages. Same is the case with the Kukis who are demanding a unified kukiland, and if tomorrow, the other groups like the Manipuri Muslims, Kabuis, etc. were also to start demanding a separate region out of this state, leave alone the Meiteis, what rational could support such a demand or demands? Shouldn't it be better to leave Manipur for the Manipuris- the Nagas, the Kukis, the Kabuis, the Muslims, the Meiteis and whichever group is residing in it.

Regressive thinking, although might benefit a section or group of individuals, ultimately will only hamper even their own development - mentally, spiritually and financially. A staggering amount of efforts and expenses have been utilized in raising and sustaining such issues as is evident from the scale of operations of these demands. What if these precious resources- financial and manpower- had been used for finding pragmatic solutions and answers to alleviate the way of life for everyone in this state- be it the scarcity of water, the insufficient and erratic power supply on which almost every modern equipments and gadgets are based on, the dismally prepared roads hindering travel and transportation- to be at par with the rest of the world and to prepare the future generation to compete and strive with fairness and intensity rather than to bide one's time and survive on another's misfortune and circumstances, as did our forefathers during the stone age.

Life is to be lived, not to merely survive, and to strive and grow and progress should be the endeavour of every human. Succumbing to rhetoric's about one's filial pride and privileges will only leave one behind in the quagmire one so deviously schemed to trap others in. Is everyone up for it?

The unforgettable training

By - Ngranthoi Lourembam

I always wanted to become a journalist and I was given a chance to attend training for 15 days basic course in news reporting, hosted by DIPR. I was really excited and eagerly waiting for 6th Jan, 2014, for the training to begin. I don't usually keep high expectation coz it always happens the other way round. So I thought the training might happen in a room of 30 to 40 people, like a school's class room with benches and desks. Ironically the room was larger than I thought without any benches or desks but chairs and a stage with podium and a microphone. Oh! I thought to myself, "see, never set any expectation." There was a function for the starting day and guests arrived and of course media people were there too. It is interesting to meet the person you've never met but you've always heard of. Journalism is something I always dreamt of, something I always wanted to do. And when your idols are in front of you, you become speechless and num. I wished I had a camera to capture everything what I was seeing. The training was conducted by famous media personalities and for everyday you get to meet two different faces. I never wanted to skip a single day coz I didn't want to miss those valuable speeches and of course I couldn't afford to miss the opportunity to meet them in real. It was interesting to listen to their speeches and their life experiences. After listening to the speech of crime reporting by Sir LCK Singh, even though I am not a reporter, I started to think like one and started to imagine things as an investigator. For me, the most interesting topic was photo journalism coz I really like photography and Sir Ratan Luwangcha did give an amazing speech and his short movie 'Unrest Manipur' touched my heart. I sincerely thank all the trainers and DIPR for giving me such a wonderful experience. It was very fruitful, it gave me a light of knowledge about journalism. Now I would like to learn more about Journalism. Though the training was short, it left me with a dream, a dream of me holding a camera on one hand, note pad and pen on the other hand and traveling round the globe for a better world.

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Democracy

The write up re-produce here is an excerpt from the lecture delivered by late **Prof. Gangumei Kamei** on the **Arambam Soemorendra Memorial Lecture** on June 10, 2006 under the title **"Pluralism, Democracy and Ethnic Relations in Manipur: A Critique"**

Manipur passes through three types of polity - monarchy (feudalism), colonialism and democracy. Democracy coincided with the attainment of freedom from the British in 1947. Manipur experience with democracy had three phases:

1. The first phase was the experiment with the constitutional monarchy (1947-49) under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1941.

2. The second phase was the post-merger period when the Indian Constitution was introduced followed by a long spell of central rule. Thereafter, a limited democratic institution in the form of Union Territorial Council (1957) and Territorial Assembly (1963) was introduced.

3. The third phase was the introduction of full statehood in 1972 and its concomitant paraphernalia like, the full-fledged Legislative Assembly, the cabinet form of government and a judiciary.

The participation of the people in the democratic process started during the interim period prior to the attainment of the Independence. The passage of the Manipur State Constitution Act of 1947 heralded a new era of democracy. This constitution envisaged a constitutional monarchy for Manipur. This constitution in the articles 44-55 laid down the fundamental rights and duties of the citizens. The subjects of the kingdom were guaranteed the status of free citizen.

I quote Article 52, which states, "There shall be guaranteed to all people, Justice social, economic and political equality of status and opportunity before the law, freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, vocation, association and action, subject to law and public morality"

The Constitution provided for a 53-member legislative Assembly elected on adult franchise, a council of ministers headed by a chief minister appointed by the Maharaja and a Chief Court. Election was held in 1946 for the Assembly. A council of ministers was appointed. And democracy, for the first time in the history of Manipur, started functioning.

By a coerced Agreement imposed on Maharaja Bodh Chandra Singh, Manipur State was merged into the Dominion of India on 15 October, 1949. The merger put the constitutional experiment to an abrupt end. Manipur was placed under the category of Part 'C' state and was administered by a Chief Commissioner on behalf of the Government of India. The state was transformed into a Union Territory in 1957 and granted full statehood in 1972.

A limited form of democracy which was resented by the people, both pro-merger and anti-merger was introduced. It was an arbitrary action on the part of the Government of India. India adopted her constitution and was declared a Republic. A full democratic system was introduced in India. However, Manipur was given a step-motherly treatment. Elections were held in 1952 to send representative to the Parliament. An Electoral College of 30 members was also elected. The status of Manipur was downgraded to that of a Union Territory with a powerless Territorial (1957) which was transformed to the Territorial Assembly in 1968.

The long control rule of 23 years (1949-1972) was condemned by the people as extension of the colonial rule, instead of the Political Agent or Dewan, there was the Chief Commissioner (later on Lt Governors). Manipur's Legislative Assembly was abolished. There was a prolonged agitation for the grant

of statehood to Manipur. There was resentment and bitterness coupled with a sense of betrayal in the minds of the people.

Denial of the democratic rights produced a feeling of deprivation among the people. They resorted to different kinds of rebellions and insurgency; this led to the emergence of ethnic nationalism, which was a challenge and threat to Indian nationalism.

We have to note that the Legislative Assembly of 1948, the Electoral College of 1952, Territorial Council (1957) and Territorial Assembly (1963) provided the experience to the people in the democratic and electoral process prior to the emergence of full statehood. Yet the leaders of the Government of India entertained a notion that the people of Manipur were not mature enough for democracy and Manipur was not viable as a state. Therefore, Manipur experience with Indian democracy from 1952-1971, produced resentment and alienation among the people.

The electoral process provided the opportunity for the establishment of political parties, both national and local, including ethnic based political parties. The aspirations and the interests of the people were to be promoted and projected by these parties.

The statehood in Manipur since 1972 saw the full working of the legislature, the cabinet form of government, the judiciary of a state of the Indian Republic. People's representatives had become the rulers of the land. People had high hopes and expectations from statehood. However, statehood was followed by frequent defection of the legislators which created instability. The eight Assembly elections held between 1972 and 2002 did not produce absolute majority for any party. Ministries were constituted by cobbling a majority of legislators. No ministry had ever completed a full term before the passage of the amended Anti Defection Law of 2003.

Democracy hurled up new leadership from amongst the majority Meiteis, minority tribals and Muslims. The people's representatives are in the saddle of government. Luckily, Manipur had a free press and an independent judiciary which strengthened the roots of democracy. There were various civil societies which acted as pressure groups on specific issues, compelling the government to accept the people's demand. The pressure groups which sometimes created headache for the government ultimately strengthened the working of democracy.

However, one notices that democracy, democratic process and democratic values of freedom, equality and human rights are not adequate to fulfil or accommodate the aspirations of the people for development, employment, protection of their identity and their rights. It is a test for those who believe in democracy. The electoral process was sabotaged by corrupt practices, money power, muscle power, misuse of government authority, use of gun culture both by the wielders of state power and those who are opposed to the state authority. This has weakened both the democratic system and state structure.

Moreover, the state of Manipur is a highly subsidized state. The state government is dependent on financial resources and the security provided by the Government of India. Politics have come to be more a process of capture of power through the so called democratic election, formation of ministry with a cobbled up majority, and management of power and extraction of benefits, mostly financial, for the

developmental works carried out with the assistance of the Planning Commission and other ministries. The task of government is confined to lobbying for fund in the centre and other central agencies. A successful leader in Manipur is the one who can convince the central government to give more money to the state. The huge investment of resources did not lead to development in the real sense; it created more corruption and led to the emergence of an extremely rich class of political leader, and bureaucrats who conspired to retain their position of power.

It is sad but true that the state of Manipur and its governance cannot function without the protection provided by the police and security force. Yet there is no alternative to democracy. And people now have a deep love for freedom and democracy. Democracy can solve the problems of a pluralistic state like Manipur.

Ethnic Relations

Ethnic diversity, ethnic competition, ethnic conflicts and ethnic alliance or ethnic compromise are the basic components of the ethnic relationship within a plural society. An ethnic relation was created when diverse ethnic and cultural groups willingly or through coercion or conquest, were brought together under a state. This relationship produces both positive and negative effect. And the state imposes its power, authority and resources to keep the ethnic diversity in check in order to harmonize the relationship of the plural parts. The relationship covers both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic relations. The greatest factor in plural society is the capacity of the state to manage the ethnic relationship - social, economic and political - within the body politic of the state. The recent trend is that non-state structures like the church and interfaith organizations and civil societies forward to harmonize the ethnic relationship. The state encourages the non-state groups to help manage this complex relationship.

History shows that the evolution of the state occurred in the valley of Manipur among the Meiteis, who built up chiefdom, principalities, kingdoms, nation state and even empire. In the hills, the tribes did not or could not build up state due to the lack of resources, and were confined to the establishment of the village level polity. Naturally the tribes were engaged in the intra-village and inter-village relationship among themselves, mostly hostile in nature due to the practice of head-hunting. The inter-village and tribal solidarity did not emerge before the modern times. The tribes lived in independent village polity which was described by William McCulloch as "village republics". The loyalty of a tribesman and his world view were confined to his family, his lineage, his clan, his dormitory and his village.

With the expansion of the Meitei state into the hills of Manipur, a relationship had emerged between the Meitei State- to be more precise, the Meitei monarchy- with the hill tribes, there are traditions and historical accounts which manifest the cultural relation between the Meiteis and specific tribal groups at the clan level. Myths exist (and perhaps, they were sometimes created or invented) to show the close relation between the monarch and the individual tribal village who extended allegiance to the monarch. The political and administrative relation was created when many hill villages were conquered and brought under the political control of the kingdom of Manipur.

The writ of the monarch was imposed on the villages situated along the lines of communication

and trade routes. He imposed nominal tribute over them. As R. B. Pemberton recorded, when the Meitei forces were withdrawn again after the raid, the hillmen once again returned to their free polity. It was King Garibniwaj who imposed Lallup (feudal service) in 1735 over the hill villages like Khullakpa, administrator of the village, Khunbu, owner of the village, and Lulakpa among the Naga villages. And the title of Ningthou (Chief) was discarded.

At the people to people level, the Meitei relation with the tribes was maintained through the barter trade. Commercial relationship was institutionalized into social relation system of 'Mangai' meaning 'friendship/ relative'. A prominent tribal family always had a 'Maagai' among the Meiteis families living in the foothills or even with some families of the nobility in the capital. The Mangai relationship continued for generations. The items of the barter trade were mainly the minor forest produce, bamboo products, boats brew out of timbers, fruits and vegetables like cotton, ginger and chilly. And they were exchanged at the markets of the foothills. In return, the plainsmen exchanged salt cakes, dry fish and cotton textiles. The barter trade created commercial relationship which was mutually beneficial and socially congenial.

The Meitei traders, including women, conducted the long distance trade with the tribesmen in the hills. The Princes took shelter in the hills whenever there was political problem in the capital. There were instances of inter-marriage, which are not many, but there was no barrier.

Hinduism created a cleavage between the hill tribes and Meitei plainsmen. With the conversion of the ruling families and the people into Hinduism and the introduction of the caste system the intimate social relation between the Hindu Meitei and non-Hindu tribes underwent a great change. Social barriers cropped up due to caste and difference in dietary habits; the non-Hindu tribes were looked down upon by the Kshatriya Meiteis as they were outside the Hindu Varna system. The liberal social policy of the ancient Meitei Kings was abandoned and replaced by, orthodox caste-oriented attitudes towards the hill tribes. So the population of Manipur in the 18th century was grouped into two: Hindu Meiteis and non-Hindu hill tribes.

During the colonial period, the inter-ethnic relation assumed a new dimension with the Kuki influx and the settlement of that Kuki migrants in the hills of Manipur, juxtaposed to the Naga village and some early Kuki-Chin villages. The British Political Agents were entrusted by Maharaja Nar Singh and subsequently by Maharaja Sir Chandrakrit Singh to manage the affairs of the hill tribes. The Kukis were given land to establish villages under their chiefs. They were recruited into the Manipur army in a separate regiment known as the Kuki Irregulars. Land had become a bone of contention and cause of friction between the Nagas and the Kuki immigrants. The Nagas resented the loss of their lands and fought back against the frequent raids committed by the Kukis throughout 19th century and early 20th century. The Kuki immigration added a new complexity in the ethnic diversity and created rivalry ad conflict between the two ethnic groups. The Kuki chieftainship coupled with their feudal rule were recognized by the state. The Kuki chief established their ownership of the land settled by the King or the Manipur State Darbar to them. After the British conquest of Manipur and introduction of British rule in

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