

Editorial

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Has our countrymen forgotten the preamble of our Constitution?

The pride of India, for being the world's largest democracy is slowly derogating its character with the modus operandi of fascists Hindu who are trying to convert the entire country into Hindu Raj. The new regime governing the nation is giving no respect to 'Secularism' which is in the preamble of the Indian constitution.

One perfect example if the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016, which the ruling BJP is trying to passed. The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 is the direct violation of this Article 14 of our constitution.

The Bill also stated illegal migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. When it comes to the state of Manipur it is already a known fact that Protected Area Permit System which have been imposed in the state has been lifted but continue for foreign tourist from Afghanistan and China. When the country restrict tourist from Afghanistan in visiting the state of Manipur, what actually is the agenda of accepting the illegal migrants base on religion from Afghanistan be granted citizenship if they stay for 7 years.

This concept of staying in the country for seven years is also illogical when there are Foreigners Prohibition Act.

Preamble of the Indian constitution says "WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens: JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.

It is this preamble that the nation's constitution was framed 395 articles in 22 parts and 8 schedules at the time of commencement. At present the nation's constitution consist 448 articles in 25 parts, 12 schedules, 5 appendices and 98 amendments. All amendments are done under the preamble.

The equality mention here envisages that no section of the society enjoys special privileges and individuals are provided with adequate opportunities without any discrimination. All are equal in front of law. The word secularism which was added later says that India is a country where any citizen can chose any religion.

The world's largest democracy remains dogged by the twin legacies of feudalism and colonialism. It's no wrong to say that citizens are treated like subjects. Elected representatives (except some few), who are meant to serve the people often act like feudal lords than representatives of the people.

Under this legacy, Global capitalists are invited to exploit the lands and indigenous labour of some of the most oppressed downtrodden people. Since India was built as a nation, after driving out the British Colonial rulers nothing is change to the life of the common people. Common people in India still suffer from exclusion, discrimination and abuse under its caste, class, ethnic and gender system.

What is more horrifying is the open secret agenda of the fascists Hindu Regime which is making all sort of strategy to convert the entire country into one religion one nation. It is indeed a direct blow to the Constitution of India. As these group is utilizing all form of powers including the executive as well the judiciary, no Indian at present have the gut to challenge such unconstitutional activities.

Rate of women including minor girl are politicized by dancing in the communal orchestra. Minority are forced to distort the history for the cause of fascist's goal. One clear example is the controversial speech of Chief Minister N. Biren Singh - at which he connected the erstwhile nation state Manipur with that of the Aryan Mythology. The writing of letter to UP Chief Minister by Manipur Chief Minister also took everyone by surprise. The agenda of the Hindu Fascists is being reflected to the recent changes seen after the BJP which is the brainchild of RSS came to power.

There are good Hindu, but this is the first time that the country is witnessing a group of Hindu followers who are fascists and feudalistic in character.

Back here in the state of Manipur, voice of the Indigenous Manipuri who have been struggling hard for revival of the Indigenous Meitei religion has been almost suppressed. The titular King who had once converted to Sanamah religion now becomes a real bhak of Shri Shri Govinda. Many youth's leaders who had been advocating the merger of Manipur to the Indian Union on October 15, 1959 as illegal now are seen wearing saffron cap, khaki half pant and say nothing when the Mythology of the erstwhile nation have been insulted.

Saying so, it would be wrong to say that Narendra Modi administration is not doing anything for the country. Same way Manipur Chief Minister have also done many appreciating works and taken up schemes for the people. Only think matter is the amalgamation of the administration with that of religion. Being good does not necessarily mean that every people should wear the kind of shirt that the leader wear or every citizen eat what the leader eat. Let religion be separated from running the state.

Let's uphold the country's constitution by respecting the preamble.

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Northeast: Issues at Stake

The write up re-produce here is an excerpt from the lecture delivered by renowned Journalist **Manas Chaudhuri** on the **Arambam Soemorendra Memorial Lecture** on June 10, 2008 under the title "Northeast: Issues at Stake"

'I believe it is not important where the Northeast stands today, but what is crucial is which direction it is heading for- Manas Chaudhuri

As one who started a career in journalism around the time the Northeast was reorganized by the Government of India, I was literally baptized by fire. My initiation into journalism as a cub reporter when Bangladesh was fighting its liberation war was also a trial by fire. As a young enthusiast, I covered some of the operations in the Sylhet Sector and later became the first group of Indian journalists to reach Dhaka on 18th December, 1971 - two days after General Niazi surrendered. The savagery of the Pakistan Army, the mass annihilation of Bengali intellectuals and the privilege to meet Sheikh Mujibur's wife and son Russel (both since dead) in their Dhanmund House in downtown Dhaka will remain etched in my memory for ever.

About a month later, Indira Gandhi, riding her wave of success, Balkanized Assam and the new State of Meghalaya and Union Territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram were born. Simultaneously, the Union Territories of Manipur and Tripura were upgraded into full-fledged States.

Since all those thirty-six years of my humble career as a journalist was spent in the region, I have been a witness to some of the key developments in the Northeast, including the Anti- Foreigner Movement in Assam and its cascading effect on the neighbouring States, the tripartite talks between All Assam Students' Union (AASU) - Indira Gandhi and Zail Singh (the then Union Home Minister), signing of the Shillong Accord between the Naga National Council (NNC) and the Government of India in Shillong (hence the name Shillong Accord) in Shillong; visit of Pope John Paul II to Shillong. Other insurgency-related events are some of the developments that come to my mind readily.

It has truly been a roller-coaster experience which I shall cherish all my life. Maybe, someday, I shall attempt to put down these irrepressible memories of the birth and aftermath of what is today euphemistically called India's "North East".

Thirty-six years after the vivisection of Assam, the region today finds itself in a strange bind and a perpetual search for direction. On one hand, there is unabashed penchant to blame New Delhi for all the deficiencies in the region, while, on the other, is the stark failure of the civil society and the political class to address the core issues plaguing us. I believe it is not important where the Northeast stands today, but what is crucial is which direction it is heading for.

It is nobody's case that the Centre has not added to the region's woes. Who can deny that the destiny-makers in New Delhi were philosophical, to say the least, towards investment in and attention to the country's Northeastern corner's accelerated growth! But equally pathetic is the region's own image of itself which hovers between belligerence and unabashed reliance on Delhi's 'altruism'. Until the launching of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) movement, for the rest of the world, the Northeast virtually existed only in the political map of India. After AASU's embarrassingly unbending stances and the resultant stand-off with the Government of India, did the political masters in New Delhi wake up to its responsibility towards this strategically important part of the country. Separate ministry for the

development of the region (MDONER) was created. It will hardly be an exaggeration to say that the Government of India has been over-indulging some of the States thereby encouraging financial profligacy, fiscal indiscipline, political promiscuity and even to the point of ignoring the anti-national stances adopted by radicals and tolerating the slow erosion of the values enshrined in the Constitution of the country. To buttress my point, let me cite a few tell-tale instances.

Meghalaya with a population of 2.3 million (2001 Census) has received at least a whopping Rs. 1 billion crore over the past thirty six years. This includes, Plan Non-Plan, State's share of Central taxes, etc., but excluding the allocations from the North East Council (NEC) Budget. For a mere two million population, one billion crore is a staggering amount, enough for making a major turnaround in the destiny of the citizens of Meghalaya.

But the critical question is has it made the kind of impact expected of such huge investment? The answer, you guessed it right, is sadly "No". Where has all the money gone then? Your guess is as good as mine. If we were to distribute the amount on per capita basis, each person would by now become richer by Rs. 5 lakh and the marginalized tribal families perhaps would have been in a happier situation than they find themselves in today T

I suspect it must be the same case with most of the six States in the region. It's case of "know one, know all!"

The Biggest Bane

It may not be an exaggeration to say that the political class in the region as a whole has been a major disappointment and one of the primary factors contributing to the mess that the Northeast is today. It is galling to find how the politicians in the Northeast are frittering away the opportunities for developing the region. In fact, there are reasons to believe that a clever section of the political animals in the zoo have developed a deeply entrenched vested interest to keep the Northeastern pot boiling. After all, in all these thirty six years, only a small privileged section, notably the politicians, the bureaucrats and the middlemen have generally prospered at the expense of the common people.

Corruption to my mind, is the single biggest bane of the region. And I dare say that corruption is not confined to the "privileged class" alone. The 'aam aadmi' in the region has been a big help. They are ever eager to lap up the crumbs that come their way. In fact, in most parts of the region, it is a common experience that the common man, especially in the tribal belts, is ever too keen on selling their votes against petty financial consideration. What is appalling to me is that the lure for easy money has almost completely eroded our value system. When money talks, common sense flies out of the window and we all listen like dumbstruck animals.

It is nobody's case that corruption exists only in our region. The world knows that corruption is ubiquitous in this country. What disturbs me is that the peoples in the Northeast, known for their home-spun values and ethos, seem to be getting swept away by the avalanche of modernization that has descended on them during the past three and half decades. Today, everybody is ready to accept corruption as an inescapable part of modernity. Few, only a few, are ready to stick their necks out.

The consequence is for all of us to see. The Northeast seems to be turning into a bottomless pit and what is worse, resistance is becoming weaker by the day. I wonder sometimes, whether it is a familiar case of "If you can't beat them, join them". And joined we have the rat race for self and pelf. The people of the region are happy to look for the easiest way out. Few seriously question the ways of the government, far less try to stonewall the political chicanery and obscurantism which have impeded the citizen's right to better governance and an improved living standard.

Low Aspiration

As I see it, the Northeast suffers from a peculiar predicament manifested in the low aspirations of its peoples. Whether it is good infrastructure or better opportunities for education, health-care or amelioration of our economic condition, the aspiration level is painfully low. In Assam, even today, the farmer is happy with mono cropping, while in most other parts of the country multi-cropping has become the mantra for over half a century. After harvesting one crop annually, the Assamese farmers celebrate with much fanfare as if they have reached the zenith of their aspirations!

One of the common sights that is noticed along the Highways of Assam, particularly in the agrarian belts, is that men idle away their working time in tea stalls or in front of paan shops. For hours together they remain occupied in having tea, paan and smoke while discussing spicy stories in the day's vernacular dailies. These happy go-lucky lot who seem to be having all the time in the world to indulge in endless "adda", are mostly the rural people who are a contented lot. Indeed, life has given them all they need for their subsistence-land, a roof over their heads, one annual rice crop, round-the-year kitchen garden, cattle for milk and meat, a pond for fish, women in the house to weave and, to lace it all, adequate paan and supari in the backyard. After all, what else does a man need for happiness? When we have limited aspirations in life, we remain contented with what we have.

The urbanites fare no better. Guwahati - the major city of the region - suffers from inundation of habitation areas following a downpour of 30 minutes due to unscientific sewage system. Yet, except for occasional whimpers, it is back to business as usual until the next big shower disrupts life. Similarly, the people of Shillong are

required to travel for four hours on a narrow bumpy road to catch a flight from Guwahati Airport. At times they miss flights because of unforeseen road accidents which result in long traffic snarl-ups.

Initially created by the British as a one-way road and subsequently converted into a double-lane highway during the days of the erstwhile Assam Government, the highway has failed to keep pace with the volume of vehicular traffic which has increased by leaps and bounds in the six decades since independence. This lifeline of Meghalaya should have been converted into a four-lane National Highway long ago, but for the lack of public aspiration. When the people don't voice their concerns, the government too remains insouciant.

Incidentally, why has Meghalaya not developed Umroi airstrip (15 kms from Shillong) to be used as a regular airport to ferry passengers? Why should the people take the strenuous four-hour road journey to Guwahati spending time and money? The answer, as you might have guessed, is again our low aspiration. We in the Northeast have lived to believe that we are destined to have such a wretched life.

Another case in point is Nagaland, the second oldest State among our 'Seven Sisters'. Nagaland has remained in the backwaters of development, even by our humble Northeastern standards. While the Nagas are crying their voice hoarse for sovereignty and are fighting a senseless fratricidal battle, the State has been languishing on all fronts. Despite generous Central aid, the Nagas have failed to build up their State or even groom their people to meet the challenges of the 21st century. For argument's sake, if Nagaland were to be a free country today, what kind of country would it be? A country bereft of basic infrastructure and its people stymied by lack of inspiration to acquire basic skills to negotiate at the international fora? Is this all that the Nagas are capable of? Certainly, the Nagas have not realized their potential and strengths.

The point I am trying to make is that Nagaland must first equip itself in terms of development of manpower and modern infrastructure while allowing their political fortune to take care of itself. This is what Nagas have not managed to do so far, and I attribute it to low aspiration of her people and a strange lack of foresight of the community leaders. But, at the same time, we cannot deny that the political leadership of Nagaland has escaped public accountability by diverting the people's attention towards the Utopian dream of a 'sovereign Nagaland'.

Nearer home, Manipur too betrays a similar mindset, as is manifested in the festering insurgency 'industry', hijacking of the delivery system and lack of intervention by civil society in an objective manner. If these are too hot to handle, I wonder what prevents the citizens from asserting themselves against the stark failures of the civic authorities in keeping the capital town, Imphal, clean and creating better roads, and sewage system. My observation is that the peoples in the Northeast are afflicted by some infectious indifference syndrome towards the core problems that have made life a lot more difficult than elsewhere in the country. This is one of my fundamental concerns about the Northeast.