

Editorial

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A view on “Go to Village” Mission: - Is this an anti thesis to the Panchayati Raj

Words of appreciation pours from almost every section of people when Chief Minister N. Biren Singh announced his government mission “Go to Hill”. Next comes the “Chief Minister Gi Hakshel Tengbanf” - an exclusively project to provide medical treatment to patient who cannot afford the medical cost due to poverty. Arranging specific days in a month to meet the people directly to listen to the grievances is also another laudable works of the chief minister. And now it is the “Go to Village” Mission begins.

Yesterday, the Chief Minister convened a meeting to review the mission which was launched on May 1. The enthusiasm to make every mission success is seen to the action of the Chief Minister. So far, so good. But certain things that the Chief Minister has taken up need to be critically examine. Mission go to Hill is a successful one and perhaps the need of the hour as the modalities of implementing it is simple and do not coincides with already existed system.

But when it comes to “Go to Village” mission something seems not right. As per Chief Minister N. Biren Singh the motto of the mission is to fulfil the desires of the people and to address their grievances at grassroots. His assumption to reach out the citizens by visiting them at their door steps by the official concerns. His mission is to cover all the villagers and find out the problems of the citizens. It is a real good initiative. But when one ponder upon why the chief Minister is starting then mission when there is a local body to take up what he had been doing so appears as his lack of understanding about the presence of local body like the Panchayat or the Gram Sabha.

There were also reports that some of the Panchayat members who were elected have not been invited at the launching function of the go to Village Mission at their places. This creates apprehension among the people if the “go to village mission” is strategy to skip the Panchayat body.

73rd Amendment Act, of the Indian Constitution, which came into effect on 23 April, 1993, created a three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj. The Act provided for mandatory conduct of panchayat elections to the three tiers - district, intermediate and village - every five years, the setting up of a State Election Commission, a State Finance Commission and reservation of not less than one-third of the elective seats of members and chairpersons for women, and for SC and ST persons in each district in proportion to their population. The Constitution, moreover, provided for devolution of powers upon panchayats. Article 243 G of the Constitution. A 243 G powers, authority and responsibilities of panchayats - Subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the legislature of a State may, by law endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibility upon panchayats, at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to (a) the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice, and (b) the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them, including those in relation to matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule.”

According to the Expert Committee on Leveraging Panchayats for Efficient Delivery of Goods and Services, headed by Mani Shankar Aiyar, which gave its report in April 2013, Article 243 G “calls” for “Panchayats” to be endowed with the required power and authority function as “institutions of self government” for planning and execution of economic development and social justice, pertaining to the 29 subjects listed in schedule XI, whether in respect of devolution to PRLs through Central Government schemes, or through devolution to the PRLs through State Governments”. The provision relating to grassroots planning contained in Article 243 ZD, is to be read with Article 243 G.

Twenty years down the line, many things have changed. The subject of Panchayati Raj was dealt with by a division in the Ministry of Rural Development till mid-2004. The earlier years saw focus on the implementation of certain provisions, such as conduct of elections under the 73rd Amendment as well as the Panchayat's Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, which was passed in December 1996. Even during those early years, the Central Government was mindful of the need for grassroots planning as well as devolution of powers and functions under Article 243 G. It was equally clear that the spirit of the law envisaged empowered panchayats and vibrant Gram Sabhas. It was also equally clear that empowerment would result not only from a generalised devolution from State governments, but that this devolution would work only if there was clarity of roles among the three tiers.

However, the Government of Manipur is today to implement complete functioning of the Panchayat till today.

In other words “Go to Village” appears as another anti thesis to the Panchayati Raj system enshrine in the constitution of India.

By - Dr Chirom Rajketan Singh,

The folk culture of Manipur is enriched by the presence of various distinct genres of oral literature. As we know oral literature is a field of investigation of folkloristics. This very term embraces myth, legend, folktale, folksong, ballad, folk epic and other verbal expressions. These categories of oral tradition abounds various aspects of society including the histories of the people which have been transmitted in oral tradition. Therefore, for those societies which are characterized by orality they are the most important sources to recapturing and understanding the past event of people. Oral history helps in building the history of a community or group of people. James H. Morrison, in his essay ‘Global Perspective of Oral History in Southeast Asia’, writes ‘all societies have a history and all history begins as oral.’

There are still today many groups of people who do not yet have a written history. However, these societies have their own oral histories. Oral history encompasses the accounts of the origin and historical materials related to their culture, community, lifestyle, etc., although it is difficult to ascertain the dates of the events. Even when there are written histories or chronicles, many accounts of history are found in the oral histories even though they are not mentioned in the chronicles. In many of the royal chronicles, like the ones in Manipur, only those of events are written down which have the assents of the kings and rulers, and thus lots of events are omitted. The wishes, sufferings, aspirations of the general population and other events that take place at the social levels are mostly not included. Thus, some folklorists have coined the term “Palace Paradigm” for those kinds of histories that are written with the sanction of the rulers which are ‘palace-centric.’ Therefore, in order to get a fuller picture of the history of a land, one should study both the written chronicles along with the oral history available.

Sometimes similarities are found between oral history and written history of a society; however, there could be conflict between the two also. The written history in the form of chronicles written with state sanction, tend to exclude or modify those accounts that could be damaging to the prestige of the king or the ruler. On the other hand, oral history is the first hand account of the events as they take place and they survive through the generations by word of mouth. Accounts of such events persist in the oral form in secret or in the open and later there could be conflict between the two versions of history. For example, there is one event connected to King Pamheiba which we know from oral history, but is not mentioned in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* or *Ningthourol Lambuba*. These two chronicles are written by sanction of the palace. It is said that King Pamheiba forcefully took a woman as his wife by killing her husband. This account represents Pamheiba as a dictatorial king who would do anything to get what he wants. However, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* and *Ningthourol Lambuba* do not make any mention of this event anywhere. This does not necessarily mean that oral accounts are not true. In fact there are lots of instances of the presence of accepted evidence and events that goes along with oral history that certainly makes it profoundly important to study it in order to get a bigger picture of the history of a society. With this fact in mind, the oral history of the different communities of Manipur is being studied to find out the similarities and trace a commonness in the

origin of these communities.

If the population of Manipur is divided on the basis of the topography of the land, we can see that there are two types of populations - those living in the hills (*Chingmee*) and those living in the plain (*Tamnee*) in the middle of the state, also called the Imphal valley. There are evidences that the plain area was filled with water in the ancient times and the people lived only in the hills surrounding the valley as they were higher and dry. As the central area filled with water began to dry, some people from the surrounding hill region came down to stay in the dry valley. Although it is not known which group of people settled first in the valley, it is evident from the oral literature and the written chronicles and manuscripts that the general Meetei community, which is an amalgamation of seven clans, has stayed the longest in the valley. That the present Meetei community once lived in the hills around the Imphal valley can be known from the fact that many of the important places of sacred worship are located in the hills surrounding the valley and the story of legends related to these places of worship.

The written history of Manipur starts with accounts from 33 AD when Pakhangba became the king of the Ningthouja clan and started his reign from Kangla. The unification of the clans started during this time. During the reign of King Pamheiba (1709-1748 AD) the name ‘Manipur’ was given to this land. Cultural and religious differences between the *chingmees* and the *tamnees*, and also among the *tamnees* began to take root when King Pamheiba introduced Hinduism as the state religion. These differences were quite pronounced when Manipur was captured by the British in 1891. More divisions were made due to the constitution as Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and General, etc. within the population of Manipur after Manipur was formally merged with the Indian union in 1949. In the present situation of Manipur, we can see noticeable differences, distrust and disunity among the various communities in Manipur. In order to bring out the unity and the similarity in origin of the communities of Manipur from the oral histories of the different communities, an attempt is made here to study the oral history of Tangkhul, Mao, Maram, Thangal, Paomai and Kabui communities that are mostly settled in Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong districts. All the above mentioned communities of Manipur are said to have originated from a place called Makhen in the Senapati district. The people from this place were said to have moved out and settled in the South-eastern regions of the state.

The Kabui people inhabit many parts of the valley and most parts of Tamenglong district. The Kabuis, also known as the Rongmeis, have a very close relationship with the Meeteis. They form a part of the bigger group called the Zelianrong which is made up of Rongmei, Zeme, Liangmei and Puimei. According to oral history these four groups lived together at Makhen, after which they migrated to different places and based on the direction of their migration, they were named into their respective names. Those who went south came to be known as Rongmei; those who went west were called Zeme; and those who migrated to the north were called Liangmei. The Kabuis call their supreme god as Haipou Ragong (also Tingkao Rangong or Tingkao Ragwang). He created Dampa Pui and gave him the task to create the world. Dampa Pui created the world and all the creatures that will live in it, but he

was not able to create the human beings. At last he created human beings after seeing the image of Haipou. In the beginning human beings lived together with the gods. When the time came for the gods to leave, they kept them in a cave and closed it with a big stone because they thought that the humans were weak and had inferior intelligence. When the humans became more intelligent, they wanted to come out of the cave. They could open the entrance of the cave only with the help of a bull. The cave was called ‘Ramting Kabin’ or ‘Mahou Taobei’. The cave is still present near Salong in Senapati district. After coming out of the cave they lived in a place called Makuilongdi. There were supposed to be 7,777 families living in this place. From here they migrated to different directions.

The beginning phase of the history of origin of the Kabuis bears lots of resemblance with the story of the exodus of Poireiton of the Meeteis; the difference being that Poireiton's exodus is available as written history in the form of manuscript and is called ‘Poireiton Khunthokpa’. The Kabuis, like the Meeteis, worship Lainingthou and Lairembi. Both the communities have accounts of their stay at the Koubru hill a long time back. Another oral history of the Kabuis say that in the ancient times there was a man named Iboudhou Khunthoulemba who had two sons. The elder brother stayed back in the hills and remained as the Kabuis, while the younger brother moved down to the valley and became Meetei.

According to the oral history of the Tangkhuls Meetei, Thangal and Tangkhuls had the same origin. In the old language, Tangkhul was called Hunguomwo, a name which is no longer used. One group stayed back at Makhen and they became the Thangals. Another group migrated and passed through Khongte, Kachai, Phungtham and settled at Hundung. There were two brothers in this group. One day the younger brother went searching for a pig and found that it had given birth to its young ones at a place bordering the hills and the valley. The place where the pig gave birth came to be known as ‘Oknao-pokpi’. This place is now called ‘Yaingangpokpi.’ The younger brother asked his elder brother to let him live in the valley as it was fertile and had plenty of water. Thus he came to the valley and became Meetei. The three brothers met every year and presented gifts to each other so that they remain close to each other. This event has continued till date and it is now known as ‘Mera Hou Chongba’.

The oral history of the Thangals is more or less similar to that of the Tangkhuls. The old name of Thangal is Koirao. In the beginning after they came out of the cave, they stayed at Makhen. Then they changed places to Angkaiwang then to Angkailongdi. It is said that while staying at Angkailongdi, they could never reach 1000 families and the maximum number of families would always stop at 999. There are close historical relations between the Thangals and the Meeteis. The sacred place in the Thangal cave forms a part of the culture of the two. Legend has it that the Thangal cave is connected to Kangla through an underground tunnel. The Mao people believe that Makhen is the first place to be settled by human beings. In their language, Makhen is called ‘Makhriphi’ the last place on earth where the gods talked with humans. Mao oral history says that god created woman who gave birth to three sons of god. The youngest son married a goddess and gave birth to three sons by the names of Khephio, Choro and Shipho. Shipho also gave birth to three sons named Emeppope, Kolapope and Mikriipope. Emeppope remained back at

Makhriipii (Makhen) and the others moved away. Mikriipope went south taking with him a food packet, eggs and yam because it was believed that the place where the yam germinated and the eggs hatched was a good place to settle. The place where the food packet was eaten was called Mikrii Todu. ‘Mikrii’ is the Mao word for Meetei and ‘Todu’ means the place where food was eaten. This group followed the Barak river and stayed at settled at Karong (also called ‘Krafii’ which means the place where Meetei got lost) for some time. When the group reached Karong, the Senapati river which flows from the north to south, meets the Barak river and then takes a sharp turn to the west. Because of this they got lost and didn't know where to go anymore. So they settled at Karong. From there they climbed a tall peak and saw the Imphal river flowing. They tried to find the Imphal river and on their way reached Senapati from where they were led by a big snake to the Imphal river. They followed the flow of the river and reached the Imphal valley. When they reached the valley, the eggs hatched and the yam germinated. Thus they settled at the valley. The oral history of the Mao community invariably proves that the Maos and the Meeteis are related through origin.

The Paomai community is also another group that has its origin at Makhen. They believe that many other groups of people living in Manipur and Nagaland also had their origin at Makhen. There is a pear tree at Makhen which the Paomais legend says was planted by the first ancestor named Pou after he planted his walking stick to the ground. Pou is also called Shipgo by the Maos and the Angamis call him as Shapvo. The name ‘Paomai’ is also derived from the word ‘Poumai’ (*pou* = old, *mai* = people). Therefore, the Paomais are also called Shipgo by the Mao people. In the oral history of the Maos, Shipgo is the person who gave to the ancestor of the Meeteis.

In the oral history of the Marams, god created the world and the first people were placed at Makhen. When the population of Makhen increased, they formed groups and migrated to different directions. Two brothers by the names of Tingsimaraba and Makikhangba also went out in search of new places to settle along with their families. The planted sticks of the *heimang* (Chinese sumac tree, *Rhus chinensis*) along their way as they went on their journey. They came to Maram and settled there for a long time. Later Makikhangba, the younger brother, went to live in the valley while the elder brother stayed at Maram. Those who went to the valley became the Meeteis while those who stayed became the Marams.

One thing we can know from the oral histories of these communities is that all these communities along with the Meeteis are in fact very close to one another and have the same origin. Studying the culture, music, dance and religion could also give more evidence in this advocacy.

There are also other communities in Manipur whose oral histories say that they also

ntance, but they couldn't. Then they used a pangolin and a cow to dig out a tunnel underneath the stone and thus they came out. After coming out of the cave, they lived in many places like Mongmangli, Rangrengbung, Runglewaisu and then they came to Manipur. They worship pythons as a god. The Kharom community also has a similar history. It is said that they also once lived in a cave which they call ‘Khurpui’.

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