

Editorial

Friday, September 25, 2018

Demise of a dream

Once again the people of the state particularly the Meitei observed the birth anniversary of Hijam Irabot, who had renounced all the worldly pleasure and spent the later part of his life fighting for justice of the common and the downtrodden people. It was with the sheer unstinting effort of this leader that the thin bondage between the Hill people and the plain people was strengthened. The virtue of patriotism among each Manipuri was first embedded by this leader.

Years have gone and some among the people still continue to follow the path once paved by this leader but majority of the people had forgotten what Hijam Irabot really wanted to see in the Manipur of today. The kind of tribute being paid to the pioneer leader today on the occasion of his birth anniversary is worth every effort, but seemed to have lost the essence of keeping his dreams and ideologies alive to each one of us. Just recalling his work, and praising him with cultured language by standing at the manmade podium is not really what is actually needed to remember Hijam Irabot, but to fulfil his dream should be the essence of remembering him.

Now Manipur is on fire. The bondage once tied by this leader is on fire and is on the verge of snapping off even while the blame game continues and nobody really cares to look back and reflect on what went wrong in the last few decades.

Is it the price of the merger of this erstwhile kingdom to the Union of India? Or is it the selfishness of the self proclaimed leaders who ruled the state after the merger of the erstwhile kingdom to the Indian Union?

A civil society organisation is blaming the merger of the erstwhile kingdom to the Indian Union as the root of all the things that is happening today. They now campaign the public to mobilise a movement to restore the pre merger status of Manipur, and this very well may turn out to be the right demand. But will this extinguished the fire raging today?

Sixty plus years of democracy and till today there is no proper road connectivity with almost all the important places of the state. It takes the whole day on a good day, and longer most of the times, if someone from the capital town of Manipur tried to reach Singhat or Tamei or Jessami. There are still many tribal people who never know that there is a place called Imphal which is the capital town of the state they are residing in. Many in the interior parts of the state had to spend the whole day fetching a bucket of water to drink or collecting firewood to cook for their family. These people really have no time to think about the future of this 'once upon a time' nation state while struggling to survive each dawning day.

The Government of India introduced a lot of beneficiary programme to improve the life of the common people living in the interior and inaccessible parts of the state particularly the tribal people. The absence of proper connectivity with these interior villages has built a communication gap. And not to be surprised, these benefits provided by the government for these disadvantaged people are being pocketed by few vested interested people. They hold the stomach of the poor people and played with any games they desire for their own narrow interests.

When there was enough time to check the missing link the rulers were busy building their houses and amassing wealth for themselves and their descendants. And now things seem to be going out of hand.

For Hijam Irabot who renounced worldly pleasures for the cause of the poor and down trodden, he certainly would have been crying in heaven or tossing in his grave, as the case may be, if only he can see the present state of affairs of the state we have come to be identified as Manipur.

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Dismantled ninth times and safer in the tenth times

By: - Mamta Lukram

Tears rolled down the cheeks of the women in shabby figure with untidy attire, high enough was her pitch, shaken and broke, as if the heart was about to burst from the blows of deception by the so called 'power politics' and its 'development induced displacement'. She seems to be a feeble self with monstrous intrinsic strength to defend one's self dignity.

"I am from a much marginalised background; this fact everyone knows. I used to collect wild vegetables from the nearby 'pat' (wetland) out of which I would make 'singju' (an indigenous Meitei culinary item equivalent of 'salad') and sold it as my meagre earning to support my family." (sigh...pause for a moment...restarting breaking the ice...) I brought up my grandchildren whose father was no more. Time had been unleashing boundless miseries in my never failing attempts to make them attain some level of formal education."

"Nine times, it was nine times that my house was dismantled and safer in the tenth times. We were being instructed that our settlement site were to be evicted for the construction of drain." (.....trying hard to control emotion...stops for while...resumes the talk with a heavy heart...)" "sara-thugaira, sara-thugaira, (meaning constructed-dismantled, constructed-dismantled), it was nine times that they (blaming the authorities) dismantled my house along with those of my neighbours. It was the tenth time of constructing my house as a challenge to the authority that we can settle. I have no problem as of now." She seems to be a woman ageing faster than the chronological reality, over burdened by the struggles shouldered solely for existence. She had been sharing her bitter life experiences mocked by development induced displacement in the 'Public Consultation on Tipaimukh Dam and Indigenous Peoples Rights,' jointly organised by Citizens' concern for Dam and development, North East dialogue Forum and Centre for Research & Advocacy Manipur, where I got the privilege to listen to her heart wrenching episodes of life.

Like someone who is made to observe the bubbles over the surface of a water body defying the knowledge of currents and the velocity of the water flowing underneath the bubble covered surface; I have been listening to her heartfelt stories without much knowledge about what had happened to her, yet very sure in my personal understanding that it was inhuman and unjust to dismantle a marginalised house without appropriate arrangement, snatch it coercively and make their plight miserable, vulnerable. An atmosphere of hatred must have hovered all around inciting strong senses of distrust, discontent and untold miseries. Gripped by curiosity,

I try reopening the forbidden pages of development injustice history. I realised that the woman was one of the 'Lamphelpat Eviction 2011' victim. On June 6, 2011, fourteen (14) houses of Yaipha Leikai village, Lamphelpat Wetlands near Employment Exchange, Imphal West District, Manipur had been destroyed by Manipur Police from the Lamphel Police Station under the orders of the Government of Manipur on the pretext of construction of drain along Lamphelpat under Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). The eviction was carried without any rehabilitation and resettlement arrangements for the affected community of the Lamphel Yaipha Leikai. It is described that the properties of the affected families were confiscated during the eviction rendering the already impoverished families to more physical and mental anxieties. Lamphelpat Eviction stories, have long years back, been wrapped up beyond cognizance from the state's timeline. However, the recurrent exposure to prolong trauma engulf with a sense of insult, galore with disrespect to the dignity of lives makes the victims still pass on with deep scar in their hearts. Psychological instability reeled through the everyday lives of these people.

Forced migration has been the fatal blow to the pursuit of happiness. Eviction drives like the Lamphelpat Eviction, Laktak lake eviction etc, internal displacements arising out of the mega structure like the numerous dams and other infrastructure constructions have been the essences of human miseries in this state. At this stance, the feasibility in the implementation part becomes highly questionable. Development activities without proper mitigation measures resulting in mass pauperisation will prove illogical.

Impacts of Displacement in the lives of Women Women and children are the first of mankind to be worst hit during a natural or an artificial catastrophe. They are known to be naturally inherited with some sort of physical weakness or differences. Documentations have revealed that women are doubly discriminated during any aggression or oppression, firstly because of the discriminating system, and secondly, because of being women. For children their implicit meanings are interpreted as a 'taken for granted' part of the women. Maybe this due to the innate emotional bond that develop out of the caring, nurturing facts of the women or else, this bond binds the women within limit. Though the world has been advocating for gender mainstreaming and gender equality, gender based impositions remains a cultural construct. Compounding the challenges of the women is the children.

The intrinsic explanation is not to instigate against the development

moves sloganeering anti-development stands. Development optimally should be welfare oriented taking into account the possible uncertainties; affected communities would be facing. It shouldn't be a deemed mechanism for aggressively oppressing an already marginalised group. It should pay a heed to the effective implementation of the alternative arrangements. Twisting the fate of the welfare oriented programmes into profit seeking, business oriented assertion will propagate endless disorientation, disorganisation and conflicts in the society. Internal displacement arising out of the various development projects in the state jeopardised the integrated lives of women in a traditional society. Distrust, frustration and helplessness have deeply impacted the life of the woman that she relieves the avenging self with the mystic oracle of cursing the government. She expresses herself as a mystical woman, 'maibi' the one who is believed in the Meitei society of possessing some sort of supernatural power to communicate with the supreme soul, carry out religious rituals and foretell one's fortune. She manifested a big blow will befall the fate of the government and the authorities concern. She finally concludes her sharing with a curse, *"(.....in a shaken voice, trying hard to subdue her exaggerated expression....) Now I am no more afraid of anybody or anything, once being born then, we are destined to die someday, my father and mother deities will never forgive them and the government will end splitting and clashing from my curse."*

Socio-cultural, economic and political perspectives corrode in a displaced community. The intrinsic entirety constituting the vital social fabrics, rip apart in disoriented societies, tangling into endless chaos and conflicts. The plight of the women and children become vulnerable and are prone to fall prey of oppressions. Personal experiences with Displaced Women

Short experiences with shallow understanding limit my experiences with the women affected by forced migration. Chadong is an upstream affected community of the controversial Maphitel Dam. The commissioning of the dam has submerged vast tract of land including prime wetland agricultural land, forest, homestead land, grazing grounds, heritage sites and many more. It directly affect 6 (six) villages, out of which Chadong is the worst affected village. The unwarranted ascending water from the dam has deluged the whole village. The impounding water took away every belonging of the people in the chadong village. They shifted their village up to the higher Maphitel ranges. The only means by which

the village connect with the rest of the world is through a boat and bamboo rafts.

Words will fail to describe the pathetic plight of women in that displaced village. Their values of lives overturned in a messy whole with a distorted and deformed means of sustenance, directly appraising multiple impacts in every possible spheres of life's pedagogy.

Undermining every other odd, the most disheartening reality in this village is the life threatening maternity challenges and sanitation concerns of women. Approaching due dates of expecting mothers haunts every while of their lives. They have to arrange a place for short stay at a relative's place, an acquaintance or a rent around the valley, preparing for days to come. Having other little kids multiplies the challenges with the increasing negative social elements evolving a mental insecurity. Dichotomy of desperately striving for livelihood with simultaneous doubling of expenses glared at this stance. This tangent of life struggle splits life from the real pursuit of life. Frequently, women are compelled to opt for or voluntarily resign to the traditional method of childbirth which put to risk both the mother and the infant. The drastic increase in infant and maternal mortality rate in the village is of the artefact of development injustice. One woman from the village shared their experience,

"We cried sleepless nights with due dates approaching and helplessly resign our fate to God for safety. Hatred filled our hearts for rendering helpless and miserable in the name of the larger good. Are we not human who are excluded from the understanding of 'larger good'?" A house is built by hands, a home by hearts. Merciless dismantling of a poor man's house is not merely an apprehensive physical threat but a symbolic mental oppression. The dumb walls have witnessed the epitaphs of life events of its members. Standing upright for years, the blind walls have sensed the laughter and silent tears. Destruction without proper resettlement measures will injure the core of human hearts. Such acts will aggravate the conflict situation in the state, backtracking the disbelieved in the development activities taken up by the government. The helpless victims bear the burnt in their heart with subdued voice of queering 'whose development?' Someday those subdued voices will burst and echo, shrilling into the deaf ears of the development stakeholders.

(Footnotes)
Representation on victimization of Women and other Members of Communities due to Forced Eviction by the Government of Manipur on 6 June 2011 at Lamphel Yaipha Leikai, Imphal, Manipur (28 April 2013).
By: Joint Action Committee Against Eviction of Yaipha Leikai, Lamphel, Manipur.

R & V Art House curates 'VOICES FROM THE LAND OF POLO' (A part of Manipur's first book of art/ Art Fest 2018)

By Thangjam Sanjoo Singh

The first extensive survey of contemporary art of Manipur was exhibited outside the state, at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, TISS Mumbai on the 22nd of September, 2018. It was the 2nd exhibition by the Art house under the project and the 1st exhibition was held on 9th September last in Imphal, Manipur. The 3rd exhibition under the same series will be held in Florida, USA at the earliest.

This 2nd exhibition was opened to the public and attended by art lovers, curators and art collectors from various parts of Mumbai along with the youths of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, TISS, Mumbai. The theme of the exhibition was related to Manipur, environmentally focused, community based or critical issues related to the

public. Artworks of 30 professional artists of the State of Manipur were displayed during the exhibition.

The main objective of the exhibition is to promote Manipuri Artists at National and International levels. Moving outside the conventional method of displaying artworks only in galleries. The exhibition was held in the lawns of TISS. The art house also focusses on linking art with nature and uses natural and ecofriendly products as a part of the art installation.

Rupa Chinnai, author and journalist says, "Beautiful artworks, powerful art that speaks of Manipur's pain and sorrow, it is deeply moving. Please come again to Mumbai". Students- It was truly inspiring and good to see artworks explaining real life struggles in the state of Manipur.

"We are very moved by the amount of support that came in from the people of Mumbai. There are so many issues about Manipur that they were not aware of, which was depicted through the artworks. It was definitely an art movement rather than a mere art exhibition since each picture carried the voice of different social issues of the State," said the Co-Founders of R & V Art House- Robin Wahengbam and Dr Vijita Ningombam.

Dr Vijita Ningombam co-founder R & V Art House added, "It's a indeed a moment of celebration for Manipuri artists, because the amount of opportunities we are receiving at the moment have definitely opened the doors for us to enter the global scene of Art.

We are looking forward to collaborating with art lover from across the globe who have approached us for collaborating future projects."

"These artworks will be a part of Manipur's first book of art. A book which will contain a compilation of artist from the past to the contemporary artist along with the history of Art in the State. There's a big gap in the history of Art of the state which has never been filled before. We are trying our best to fill that gap with the help of historians and archaeologist from the Manipur," said Robin Wahengbam co-founder R & V Art house

The writer is a lay Buddhist and a Vocalist of a Rock Band called 'No Name.