

Editorial

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The changing India and its impact on Manipur

Greed ruins not only the captain of the ship but also sink the entire ship devastating all his fellow workers. The changing face of democracy in the country is at the threshold of either in climax or in catastrophe. Greed for being oneness has forgotten existence of 'him' and 'she'. The definition of secularism is confused as the nature of secularism being followed by those in power in either at the centre or at states is interpreted with different understanding. The game players in the battle of power now ride the Hindu chariot. Voice of dissent has been disrespected. Any person who speaks against the ruling government is an anti-national. Person who has been fighting for the cause of the down trodden people are naxals. Human lives are meaningless when it comes to the rights of "Cows". India is changing today.

The arrest of activists Varavara Rao, Vernon Gonsalves, Arun Ferreira, lawyer-activist Sudha Bharadwaj and civil liberties activist Gautam Navlakha from various part of the country by Pune police on August 29 showed a signed of desperateness of the ruling regime to suppress all voice of the poor and deprived people. The arrest of a student for calling fascist to BJP instead of warning or guiding her to the right direction, if felt the girl wrong, has proven how desperate is the ruling regime in suppressing the voice of dissent.

To be precise, it is worth recalling how an RSS leader boasted of Killing 2000 Muslims in Gujarat to avenge the death of 56 Hindu in Godra during a public speech in March 2, 2017; how another leader people stated that crimes can be controlled by stopping eating "cow meat"; how an MLA stated in public that he will help kidnapping girl during a festival at Maharashtra, and how a Religious leader put blame the Karalites of eating beef as the cause of the devastating flood, showed that India is Changing. This is not being stated because these people make a change but because the ruling regime takes no action to any of those people who had spewed venom to communities belonging to different religions.

Well coming back to the state of Manipur, the wind that is blowing in the mainland reaches today. The idea of Manipur is seen slowly changing with the idea of fascism. The one time peoples' friendly Chief Minister now is shield with barricades. A war like zone is what is seen if any person passes in front of the Chief Minister Bungalow here in the heart of the town.

Introduction of schemes like go to village, or chief Ministers' scheme for needy people turns out as another irony to the local self government. The devolution of power to the Panchayati raj or the Autonomous District Council is still a dream and is leaving aside from the priority with the introduction of the new schemes which still is not of that help to the people.

Attempt to safronise the state has also put to a complete halt to the functioning of the education sector. Here it is being interpreted as attempt to safronise as the protection of one man seems to be more important than the career of thousands students by the government which is showing its safrone image in the public domain.

The 'today' of Manipur has little number of people who can speak against the government as it is being happen in other part of the nation. Yet, not everything is end, what the people in the government at either the center or the state should know is that Manipur is "indomitable". There are still thousands sons and daughters who will keep continuing the footprints of Paona Brajabashi, Bir Tikendrajit, Hijam Irabot, etc.

Peace is not the absence of war but the presence justice, let the voice dissent be respected.

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CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY OF INDIA & NORTH EAST FRONTIER AGENCY

Dr. Karam Manimohan Singh

---Contd from yesterday

Other solutions were also proposed on more imperialistic lines. It was at one time suggested that these Excluded Areas and the Hill Tribes would be treated as a Crown Colony. But this solution had not commended itself either to Delhi or to Whitehall. Another proposal was that the entire North East Frontier would be administered on an Agency basis under the Central Government at Delhi. From the view-point of defence security this solution had attractive possibilities. On 26th June, 1946, His Excellency the Governor of Assam wrote to Mr. C. Gimson, the Political Agent of Manipur:

I am not sure that the best solution of all might not be a compromise involving grouping with Bengal and the Eastern States in one compartment, and Assam and the North East Frontier States and Tribes in the other. This would probably also involve a certain correction of provincial boundaries Sylhet and the whole or part of Goalpara going to Bengal, and Darjeeling, the Jalpaiguri coming into the Northern compartment. In any such Groups as this the compartments will be much more equal than they are under the present arrangement, and this might well remove the principal objections to C Group as at present constituted.¹²

The first suggestion, according to His Excellency the Governor of Assam was that, the Constitution making process in Manipur should go ahead in an orderly manner. Secondly, if violent resistances were to be avoided, Assam proper must remain essentially autonomous. In other words whatever Group was formed, the subjects that the Province would be prepared to hand over to the Group would be very limited. The Governor was of opinion that the small States and other Tribes bordering on Assam must look to Assam for administrative guidance, though considerations of defence and external affairs might bring the administration in contact with the higher levels. He was even ready to convince the Advisory Committee, when it came, that the Hill Tracts were not qualified immediately to take their place in a normally administered Province. According to him, if the new Constitution started with a strong Centre determined to maintain, or with the means to maintain a vigorous frontier policy, then the proposal to set up a North East Frontier Agency might conceivably be adopted and such an Agency would be the best possible arrangement for the future of the Hill Tribes.

From the material the British officers hoped to provide, it was considered that the Advisory Committee would certainly realize the peculiar position in which the Tribal Areas of Assam stood, and therefore, some arrangements would be made for the administration of these Areas in accordance with principles different from those adopted in a normally administered Province. The Centre had to extend financial help and perhaps special conditions of service were to be prescribed. In his letter of the 26th June, 1946, Governor of Assam had further informed the political Agent of Manipur.

I would remain content by saying that all planning whether material or political should be designed to fit our Hill Areas ultimately into a

normal system of Provincial Government, and that therefore, we should not embark on any extensions of territory, extension of influence should be cautious, in our material planning we should avoid extravagant commitments, and in Local-Self Government institutions we should not look much beyond the village or Tribal Councils for the time being.¹³

The area of the Manipur State in 1947 was only 8,638 square miles with a total population of 5,12,000. But there were as many as 12 different tribes all around the Hills of Manipur. The Kukis, the Tangkhuls, the Kabuis and the Maos were the most prominent among them. They spoke different languages and when the members of one tribe met with another, they used Manipuri which was the language of the plain Manipuris, as their medium. Their total population was only 1,80,000 or 35 per cent of the population of the State.

The Hills in Manipur formed the part and parcel of the State. The Tangkhuls inhabited the north east, the Maos the north, the Kukis the south of the Manipur valley. They could in no way be separated from the valley, nor could be joined up with the Lushai Hills, the Somra Tract, the Chin Hills and the Naga Hills on account of geographical or physical difficulties. As has been mentioned above, the Political Department was hatching a Wazeristan as the North East Frontier stronghold of British Imperialism. According to this plan, the Naga Hills, Mikir Hills, Sadiya areas, Balipara Tract, Manipur, Lushai Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills in Assam, and the Chin Hills and Burma Hills were to constitute a Buffer State between Burma and India. But in spite of the strong propaganda by the Political Department that plan had been almost frustrated by the anti-British and anti-Imperialist attitude of some of the prominent Hill tribes and specially the strong protests lodged by the Manipuris who knew the mischievous intention of enticing the subjects away from the Union of India and of creating division among the Hills tribes. But up to February, 1947, the political Department was still trying to create another disruption and division among the Manipuris by encouraging the Hills to secede from the plains and join those Hill Districts around Manipur State so that they might still carve out a Hills Zone to prolong their sphere of influence. It would be clear from the following facts by exposing their attempts at the furtherance of this aim:

1. A separate Hills Cadre was formed for the administration of the Hills apart from the valley administration, which was directly under the Manipur State Darbar.
2. Pro-British Hill men were appointed as Hills Welfare Officers who were paid from the State coffers, for propaganda of the Political Department.
3. No British-Indian were allowed entry into Manipur State and the adjoining Hill Districts without permission. Political workers were generally prohibited to enter these areas and when they were allowed, of course after the Congress coming into power in the Province, they were looked with suspicion and not even allowed to mix with the villages. The most irritating and obnoxious part of it was that Manipuri political workers of the valley were not allowed to go to the Hills within the

State territory itself.

4. Missionaries were also used by the Political Department to carry on their propaganda of mischief-making. The British missionaries were whole-heartedly co-operating with the Political Department to sow the seeds of discontent and separation. While preaching the message of exclusivism among the Hills in the name of religion as the self-made trustee of these Hill man, they did not encourage the Hill people to keep any political contact.

5. The British officers in the Hills sub-Divisional Head-quarters acted as agents of the Political Department. Moreover, the Political Agent and the President of the Darbar toured the Hills for days together and invited some Hill Chiefs, gave them money and offered them feasts and tokens of loyalty.¹⁴

With the vast resources of men along with the help of the above agencies the British were in a position to create a psychological make-up among these Hill people which led to so much enmity and distrust towards the plains people. The separatist tendency was so strong among these people as in the case of the whole of India. The agents of the Political Department had incited the innocent Hill men by engineering communal and religious hatred among them. Serious clashes were apprehended at one time on account of British mano Cuved attack of the Hill men over the plains, of which some were much afraid because arms and ammunitions were in the hands of these people. The timely and prompt handling of the situation by the Bordoloi Cabinet and the Assam Provincial Congress Committee and the immediate attention of the Interim Government, particularly of Pandit Nehru, had averted any untoward incident.

Although the problem was of a very subtle and complex nature, the findings of enquiry on the separatist tendency among the Hills of Manipur might be described as follows.

1. The Hill men were naturally poor and backward owing to the scarcity of water for cultivation and bad communications in the Hills. A Hill man not necessarily quarrels with a plains man. Used to endless suffering rain, cold and heat, he thought of his family's stomach problem and when he was in want of food, he generally superstitiously resigned to his fate.
2. The British Government took up the administration of these Hill areas directly in their hands from 1919. But they could do nothing to improve their lot. Though the sources of income from these areas were very small, the Manipur State Darbar had to pay for their education, social and economic uplift. On the other hand, the Political Department was importing British officers to carry out their imperialistic motives by propping up some Chiefs or educated Hill-men to suit their purpose. Innocent Hill-men were made to believe the baseless insinuation that their backwardness were due to the plains-men and their administration.
3. The Hill-men were not allowed to freely mix with the outsiders. As in the excluded and partially excluded areas in other parts of Assam, they were not given any scope for cultural and social contacts. An idea of exclusivism and separatism was always encouraged. The British officers looked with suspicion at any attempt for mutual contact and

understanding.

4. Some educated Hill-men from the northern and western Hills of Manipur raised the question of cessation from Manipur State partly as a sort of political bargaining and partly due to British diplomacy. They did not, of course, represent the general Hill opinion. Other Hill tribes in the east and the south raised objections to their proposal. These so-called educated Hill-men's view about separatism did not even reflect the opinion of the whole population of their own tribes. The Chirus and the Marings vehemently opposed this move and added that their close social, economic and administrative contacts would nullify any such suggestion and any separatist policy would be just suicidal.

5. They made claims for political safeguards in the course of the Constitution making process in Manipur. They demanded a separate electorate and a coalition ministry with individual responsibility were also being contemplated for the administration of the State in the new Constitution. But these political and constitutional safeguards would not solve the problem as the common Hill-men's problem of stomach could not be solved in that manner and spirit.

From the above considerations it was clearly evident that the Hills-problem was an economic one. They were ill fed, ill clad and uncultured. Their life was short, shabby and brutish. Their social and cultural backwardness was an adjunct of their economic backwardness. The economic and social uplift of these tribes was an all India problem. Their backward condition was an instrument in the hands of the British Political Department who exploited the situation for their own ends. The division of the Hill-men and the plains-men was a creation of that Department. The Hill-men had suffered a great deal due to the INA attack during the Second World War. Their house had been burnt down and their farms uncultivated. They were living on roots and fruits due to scarcity of food stuff. The responsible British officers instead of relieving them in their intensified economic struggle during the period of rehabilitation and reconstruction were just fanning the flame of separatism by putting the blame to the plains-men. But the economic interdependence between the Hill-men and the plains-men could never be permanently weakened in spite of their propaganda and insinuations. It would be a folly on their part to join other Hill Districts of Assam as the communications were very difficult and their social, economic, culture and ethnic connections with the plains Manipuris were closer and the communications easier.

Dr. R.M. Lohia in his draft proposal during the Congress Socialist Party Conference at Calcutta in February, 1947, concluded with the following remarks.

These Tribal are militant people like the Manipuris on the plains, and if they are taught how to fight their day to day economic struggles, we will gradually be able to install self-confidence among them and the inferiority complex with them can be finally removed. The exploited classes in the Hill have a common cause with the exploited classes in the plains. Only through class organizations can we get rid of the economic and social exploitation of the Hill-people. (Concluded)