

Editorial

Saturday, August 3, 2019

Think about the future

Tragic is not the word to describe the present state of affairs of our state, even though the feeling in the hearts of the general public cannot be far from it.

The Government has shown, in fits and spurts, that things can and does happen if the rulers so put their hearts to any task, which begs the very relevant and necessary question: is the Government deliberately keeping the state on tenterhooks with engineered chaos and calculated mayhem?

Nothing that has been done for the development of the State so far looks and feels systematic or sustainable from the various infrastructures being constructed with shoddy workmanship and dubious results, to the haphazard and stop-gap measures in terms of the essential services being provided, mostly on paper to dispense off with the official requirements without ever taking the trouble or the initiative to check on the efficacies of such schemes and welfare measures. The reality we are undergoing today is a far cry from the trumped up reports and statistics that make up the records meant for display at the centre, the most obvious result being the promotion of Manipur from the least developed state category to the less developed one without having nothing to show for it.

Yet the Government, in it's quest to prolong the reign, have failed to address the situation with pragmatic solutions and progressive steps that would steer the state in the right direction of inclusive growth- the most prominent shortcoming being the failure to harness the potential of the youths- the future of the state. According to house listing and housing census data 2011, the number of youths between ages 18-22 in the country is 149.36 million. That's about one-fifth of the total electorate of 725 million estimated by the Election Commission. Stating that almost, if not all, the problems ailing the present society can be remedied by molding the youths of today to bring about the still elusive change and progress would not be an exaggeration.

No amount of resources or materials can effect change or usher in progress unless those who are to direct and utilize these resources be prepared and groomed to take on the responsibilities and challenges with confidence and determination. A radical mental revolution based on progressive thinking and broadened outlook beyond self preservation and personal enrichment, tempered with the spirit of equality and infused with the dignity of labour is the panacea for our society long festered with enmity, greed, doubts and subdued mindset. The Government should make the most and invest in the one true asset it ever has- the teeming youths.

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On Manipur Handlooms: A Clarion Call

By: S.Bhubal

The state level handloom day falls yearly on August 1 and the national level handloom day observes on August 7 which means that the 1st week of August is an important week for Manipur Handloom. All aspects of the state's handloom sector can be reviewed for better moves and futurity. The state and central sponsored schemes, evaluation of all their implementations, raw materials, and wages trends welfare schemes can be incorporated in the evaluation and planning. Because, out of the state's nearly 29 lakhs population, there is nearly 6 lakh population are weavers and artisans that indicate 20.7% are weavers and artisans. The handlooms and textiles sector are giving second largest employment in the state next to cultivators.

Manipur handloom sector of the textile industry is ancient practice that is still continuing at best at present juncture too with playing a major role in the quota free trade regime by getting rationalized and supported for bringing out with value added and customized products for consumers. For this a right type of support by the Government becomes inevitable. Directorate of handlooms and Textiles, Govt. of Manipur has been endeavoring with implementing selective projects and schemes through its implementing agencies like the Manipur Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation (MHIDC) a Govt. of Manipur enterprise and the Manipur Apex Handloom Weavers and Handicrafts Artisans C.S.Ltd., a state govt. identified agency as the sole Apex Society of the state's primary weavers and artisans cooperative societies, the handlooms and textiles entrepreneurs. Some individual societies and N.G.O's are also working for amelioration of the state's handloom sector at best capacities.

The power or strength of Manipur handlooms is its innovation and dynamism in relating itself to the changing market needs and requirements. Manipur textile industry, including spinning, weaving (and knitting), fabric processing and garment-making units, play for major outputs of the state's GDP likewise in the national trends that the handloom sub-sector in fabric output is around 35 percent and also contributes nearly 23 percent of the total cloth produced. The traditional significance of this sector along with its inseparable links with our ancient cultural heritage further expounds the vitality of this sector. This more than 2,000 years-old Manipur's cottage industry has a broad spectrum of production techniques — from hand-operated loom to throws shuttle loom to fly shuttle loom and further to automated technology. Important features include a dualistic structure including decentralized or unorganized small-scale segment in weaving, knitting and apparel/garment-making along with recently introduced semi automatic and second generation powerlooms (about 4000 numbers). Manipur Handlooms is a predominantly domestic-oriented industry with cotton and silk as the primary raw materials extending to wools, acrylics and other manmade fibres.

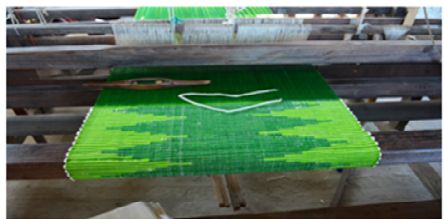
When the importance of the handloom sector is of such colossal character then the question is why this particular sector is facing so many problems? Why handloom weavers and handicrafts artisans today are not a happy lot with facing a series of problems ranging from unorganized nature of their business to threat from cheap imported items? Why such unruly situation has led to closure of many handloom units that will certainly be resulting in massive unemployment in the state. Some of the reasons may be cited as:
 (1). Raw materials: In the national



State Director of Handlooms & Textiles Manipir Lamlee Kamei with handloom entrepreneurs, master trainers & weavers

level scenario but affecting to the sates' weavers is, de-linking of yarn production from cloth production that s impacting upon the handloom industry in a number of ways. India became the supplier of raw cotton and importer of mill spun yarn during British rule, and the consequent development of composite mills in the country came up. This change in source of yarn supply — from local to distant — altered the very organization of the industry, necessitating a role of increased importance to the middleman. Today, the non-availability of adequate quantities of good quality yarn at reasonable prices since yarn manufacturing and supplying are in the hands of other entities. The gap between the supply and demand for hank yarn — which is what is used by the handloom sector — is around 150 million kgs. The government took certain measures to deal with this problem: (a) the setting up of co-operative spinning mills to ensure supplies to the handloom sector (b) the obligation on mills to pack 50% of their total marketable yarn as hank yarn but it is rarely done. Since the production and supply of yarn vests with the mill sector, the fortunes of the handloom sector get tied to this. The supply of yarn contracts or its price goes up whenever mills require

11.7%. In numerical terms, the growth was phenomenal, an addition of 2.3 lakhs new cotton powerlooms to the 1.93 cotton powerlooms already existing in 1975, with the overall addition of around 2.9 lakhs powerlooms, the total tall going up to 6 lakhs with another 1,60,000 awaiting regularization (Srinivasulu, 1996: 3202). Today, authorized (registered) powerlooms stand at 16.55 lakhs with the total being 34 lakhs inclusive of the unauthorized. Powerlooms have already entered into Manipur but without enforcement of state regulation. Besides about 300 powerlooms units established recently under state sponsorship, it is suspected that not less than 1000 unregistered powerloom units have been operating in the state. Though the remarks of powerloom units are beautiful that they are for producing cloths to replacing the importing huge quantity of cloths, many units are producing the cloths meant for handloom sector and selling them as handlooms products at cheaper rates without least thinking on the fact that an established powerloom unit in India kills the livelihood of 20 weavers every day. We support the entry of powerlooms into the state but we strongly put objection to any act of encroachment upon handloom



it, forcing handloom weavers in the decentralized sector to turn to private traders for yarn. The yarn availability scenario is also affected by the proliferation of the powerloom sector. Though powerlooms use one yarn, they seek to avoid high yarn duty imposed on it by buying up hank yarn and converting it to cones (the cost of re-eling being minimal). There is thus a considerable diversion of hank yarn meant for the handloom sector to other players, creating conditions of shortage, high rates, etc. Estimates of this linkage range from 15 to 25% to 40%. Manipur Spinning Mills which was closed down with malpractices and that the present government is struggling to revive even by planting cottons around the state for raw materials shall have to materialized to reducing the risks of materials. (2). **Competition from Powerlooms:** It is true that the fast growth of powerlooms in India in the recent years gives a fatal impact upon the unprepared and marginalized weavers. The Sivaraman Committee observed that between 1963 and 1974 the overall growth rate of powerloom sector was 9.67% and between 1975 and 1982-83 was

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marketing is truly there and it is to be seriously addressed. Declining of local markets for handlooms and unable to produce exportable qualities is realities of today and it is to be tackled both in terms of cost factor, skill factor as well as other scientific strategies. There is separation of producers from the market that is partitioned by middlemen. Of course they can be there but being trader entrepreneurs who know the market well with understanding market demands and so having capacities of marketing channels, they shall not have to block the trickle-down of benefits of producers even though the profit margin is quite high in realities. Equitable sharing of benefits should always be applied to and here the strong bodies like the MHIDC, the AWAS (Apex Society) and the handlooms and textiles entrepreneurs as state players shall have to take concrete roles. (5). **Lack of authentic and reliable data** in regard to number of looms, number of weavers, classification of weavers and productivity, etc. is another major drawback of the handloom sector. For Indias whole till 1964, the decentralized sector's production excluding khadi, was on the assumption that 90% of the free yarn delivered by the mills is consumed by handloom sector and the share of handlooms was computed on the assumption that 76% of the yarn was consumed by the latter. On the basis of the quantum of yarn consumed, the output of each sector was arrived on the basis of some accepted conversion factor (1 pound of yarn= 4.55 yards of cloth or 1 kg of yarn=10 metres of cloth) (Chandrasekhar: 2001). The number of weavers is often arrived at by multiplying the number of looms by an employment co-efficient. Likewise, there is also difference of opinion in the calculation of dormant and idle looms especially while taking into account the domestic looms of North Eastern India. Besides, if 2.9 lakhs powerlooms were added between 1975 and 1983, it should have displaced 17.4 lakhs handlooms but the Census of Handlooms show only a decline of 4.85 lakhs handlooms (Srinivasulu, 1996: 3202). In addition to all these, it is very interesting to note that the Abid Hussain Committee's field visits for the purpose of review did not include any of the handloom centers in the country. Manipur state need to develop a **Data base** for all realities that shall not only benefits to future planning but also helpful to scholars who want to extend academic intervention taking then as reference. To conclude, it is further suggested that the state authorities of Manipur shall have to enact the draft state textiles policy and in the while the Manipur Handloom Development Programme is in need of active implementation by incorporating the nook and corner of all dormancies into the budget planning.