

Editorial

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Viral audio which confuse people: the two politicians should clarify

A viral audio record of a telephonic conversation between two politicians which reveal Chief Minister N. Biren Singh had finally signed against the CAB, 2016 to the memorandum submitted to the Union Home Minister along with other political party is perhaps a good news. Not because the signing to the memorandum which strongly demanded withdrawal of the CAB will stop the BJP led government at the center in making their effort of passing the Bill but because the people of the state felt that the stand of the Chief Minister is beyond the party dictate and if it happens so N. Biren Singh deserves appreciation from all the people of the state. But why the telephonic conversation is making viral some vested interested people instead of directly taking it to the newspaper or electronic media. The later part of the conversation between the two politician at which one seem to be camping at Delhi and another at Imphal confuses the listener as the one camping at Delhi seem to have stated that while meeting the Union Home Minister, the assurance given to them was that - the contentious Bill will not affect the North East States of Manipur. This means that the government at the center is all set to work out everything to pass the Bill despite the strong protest from all political party team of the state which was led by the Chief Minister N. Biren Singh of the state of Manipur.

Again news report appeared today in connection with the meeting of the Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh and the N. Biren Singh led team from the state of Manipur was total contrast. As per reported in almost all newspaper here in the state the political party team led by Chief Minister N. Biren Singh urged the Union Home Minister to insert a safeguarding clause in the CAB 2016 before it is place in the Rajya Sabha so that there is adequate safeguard for protection of the indigenous people of the North East states in general and Manipur in Particular when the Bill become an Act. It is also reported that the team welcome the clarification issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs which stated that the final decision to grant citizenship to immigrants must rest with the state governments concern.

As per the newsreport the stand of the Chief Minister N. Biren Singh in regard of the CAB still stand unchanged. And it is still not clear on why a telephonic conversation between two politician which says that N. Biren Singh had agreed to oppose the Bill and signed along with other political parties in the the memorandum submitted to the Union Home Minister.

This column has time and again argued the rationale behind justifying the bill saying that it will be exempted to the states of North East and that the people of the land will be protected.

Knowing the fact that the contentious CAB Bill had already passed in the lower house of the parliament, it is known to almost everyone that addition of clauses to the Bill should be done before it was passed in the lower house. Besides, it is everybody's understandings that - it does not matter whether an illegal migrant is not granted citizenship in the state Manipur as per the clause (if suppose), he will be still the citizen of the country and there is no law (as of now) to stop any citizen of the country to enter in this part of the country call Manipur. Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, the one time champion of Manipur peoples' right, would have certainly knew the impact, but it seem like the thrust for power compelled him to plan policy to divert the peoples' movement by saying things which are illogical.

Now this paper calls on the two politicians who spread their telephonic conversation through social media to clarify their motives of trying to make their conversation viral. This paper also know the name of the two politicians but due to ethical reason we withheld their names.

Contd. From yesterday Issue

WHY MEITEIS SHOULD NOT BE SCHEDULED AS TRIBE

Research Scholar Tata Institute of Social sciences (TISS), Mumbai

By :- Kulajit Maisnam

Claims that by scheduling Meiteis as tribes, the land, the people and its 'unique' 'glorious' culture will be constitutionally 'protected'. And there are 'freebies' attached: such as reservation policies, development funds etc. It is being argued that in the present 'political scenario' tribal status will be 'lucrative' and 'feasible' to achieve and 'protect' the Meiteis as compared to the present Protection of Manipur Peoples Bill (PMP) 2015 and three other supplementary bills which is lying in President of India's table. Even claims have been made to the extent that if Meiteis are scheduled as tribes and at the same time if 2015 bills turns into reality, these combination will complement each other and 'strengthen' the 'protection' provided to the Meiteis. No doubt the valley needs to be 'protected' and 'regulated' but the concern here is the possible negative dynamics within the Meitei society (yes within the Meitei society) and in relation to the highlanders if Meiteis are scheduled as tribes. I have a strong conviction that granting of tribal status will be perceived as more 'deadly' than the ILPS by the highlanders, as it has components of job and educational reservation and of course there is always the apprehension of structural territorial 'encroachment' which we have also seen in the case of ILPS bills (though the three bills are 'debatable', the politics surrounding the three bills has to be analysed in relation to the geo-politics of the state and is beyond the preview of this write-up) No doubt the scheduling of Meiteis as tribe is 'legit' within the bounds of the Indian Constitution and there is no concrete definition of tribe, rather it is conceptualised as comprising of various parameters which has been changing from time to time within the contours of the socio-political context. So any community falling under those parameters can legitimately claim the status and enjoy the constitutional provisions. But why claim this 'legit' demand which will yield a possible catastrophe in the State and further strengthen the hill-valley dichotomy? For this very reason the present move needs a serious scrutiny by dissecting the movement itself and engaging with the possible ramifications. So herein the line of argument opposing the move will be not on the thesis of Meiteis crossing the stage of 'tribe' guided by the Social Darwinism which projects a linear development of society, as sometimes such arguments succumb to labelling the contemporary tribes as non-contemporary stuck in a particular stage of societal evolution, static, or in other words 'denial of coevalness' in the words of Johannes Fabian; hence requiring 'mainstreaming'. Rather my arguments will be more on dissecting the movement and the 'promises' espoused by the Demand Committee and the grounds for possible conflict among the various communities in Manipur and even among the Meiteis. The Movement is premised on three core 'promises': Peace, harmony and equality among the communities (undoing the constitutional division is the loose phrase the demand committee is using in achieving the said 'promise') especially the highlanders and Meiteis; freebies and job opportunities in state services; protection of land and culture of the 'unprotected' Meiteis. First we need to identify these group of Meiteis who are demanding tribal status. The movement has been spearheading from the beginning by the 'creamy' section of the Meitei society who are well established

comparatively and largely Imphalites. They include Ex-Army Men, retired Bureaucrats etc. Interestingly they are the propertied middle class unlike the standard sociological understanding of 'middle class' possessing feudal characteristics and mannerisms. Their sudden interest in ST status is quite intriguing. It has also been said that claiming ST status is a 'temporary' 'arrangement' until Manipur determines its destiny by its own and develop a mutually respecting polity among the nationalities residing inside the state. Anyway the issue here is the proposed 'temporary' solution and its 'temporary' ramifications in the state. I have left with no other understanding than saying that these section of Meiteis 'for the time being' sees the 'creamy layer' concept in affirmative action policies of India a road block for their 'progress' as I very much convinced that their 'promises' are mere rhetoric; cannot be operationalised within the larger political economy and the geo-politics of the state. Creamy layer concept is applicable to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) identified by the government of India, which any Meitei can be listed and many do hold the certificate. The creamy layer refers to the relatively wealthier and better educated members of the OBCs who are 'not eligible' for government sponsored educational and professional benefit programs. And this concept is not there for the affirmative action related to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) (at the state level there are segregations within ST and SC depending on depending on the socio-economic situations of the scheduled population). Thus the 'creamy' section of the Meitei society is not 'eligible' for certain aspects of affirmative action in India. Now if one has to escape this, the only option left is to move to scheduling as Tribal as Scheduled Caste categorisation adopts a different Episteme. Their issues with this concept of creamy layer already been expressed in public domains and is quite derogatory and beyond the idea of social justice. Affirmative action or reservation system otherwise has long history in India tracing it to the colonial times where certain 'depressed class' were given quotas in Jobs and Education to increase the opportunities for enhanced social, educational and economic status of the underprivileged communities to make in par with the 'mainstream' (many intellects still claims that Britishers have liberated the depressed class from certain practices of caste). In Manipur Meiteis are the 'mainstream'. Again on the other side Biharis, Bengalis, Malayalis etc are the mainstream in relation to Meiteis. And within these nationalities are class/caste and other form of disadvantages etc. so you have affirmative actions at the central level and state level; filtering it down to the grass root. If the state of Manipur is declared as a tribal state, we can have a contextualised affirmative actions ('quota within a quota' as expressed by the Demand Committee). Now the fact of the matter is that, and which I am trying to make is that the state level affirmative actions will not be that 'lucrative' considering the number and frequency of the state government job opportunities (this the Demand Committee knows). Currently Even the few jobs the state has, is being 'sold' to the 'creamy' section of the society which have enough 'capacity' to 'buy'. Whether one is scheduled as tribe or not it hardly matters in

Manipur the creamy sections become creamier. So majority of the people who cannot afford to 'buy' jobs in Manipur moves to central services. Here in the opportunities of central services lies the issue of distributive justice when you do not have the concept of creamy layer or 'quota within quota' in reservations for ST. wherein meritocracy within the ST population will hijack social justice. It will also disturb the existing status quo among the Meiteis who are already clubbed as OBCs and SCs, which has somehow maintaining an equilibrium in quota distribution. The 'creamy' Meiteis which has the capacity to send their wards to fancy elite private schools, tuition/coaching centers etc. will swallow the available opportunities at the maximum in central services and central sponsored educational institutes as they possess the 'eligibility' and 'merit'. One may justify meritocracy being the best method to exercise one's ability to its full potential leading to the best outcomes. But who are these meritorious people? Who decides merit? Is there any standard method to access one's ability and merit? These are pertinent questions that need serious attention and examination. The so called 'meritorious' people has been the creamy Meiteis in Manipur. See the data of the last ten years who has been in the top ten list of the State's secondary and higher secondary exams. How many are highlanders? And if one delves further, these 'meritorious' students will always be from the well to do Meitei families. In the history of Manipur among the Meiteis in the last ten years how many 'meritorious' students have come up who are the child of daily waged labourers? If this is the situation within the Meiteis, does the Demand Committee has any idea what will be the situation in relation to highlanders who are the 'periphery', when all the facilities and resources (health, education etc.) are centered around Imphal? Those who have the 'access' will be of course become the 'meritorious'. Meiteis will be 'meritorious' when you make Meitei language the 'official' and the medium of instruction in educational institutes starting from primary education. How many schools are there in the highland villages which uses their own mother tongue as medium of instruction? If it exists, how many teachers are there who are from that village speaking the local dialect? Imagine a child has to learn a foreign language and at the same time learn 'modern knowledge' to be 'eligible' for jobs. Is it not another road block to become 'meritorious'? When you have so much of socio-economic disparities between hills and plains and discriminatory policies from top till the grassroot itself how can one justify meritocracy? Meritocracy will breed elitism, class antagonism. The move by the demand committee is a tight slap to the idea of social justice considering the current political economy of the State. When there is no equity how can you talk of equality? The Demand Committee asserts that Meiteis will 'control' India if scheduled as Tribe. The Committee needs a serious understanding of what is bureaucracy and where it figures out in the polity of a nation-state. The move is not going to 'control' India by the 'Meiteis' (ironically the Demand Committee whose aim is to establish 'equality' among the citizens of Manipur does not celebrate presence of

highlanders in Indian bureaucracy or even at the state level) by penetrating into bureaucracy, rather it is going to reinforce and strengthen hegemonic 'control' over highlanders by Meiteis (the inequitable share in state assembly and bureaucracy will be self-evident). By which the Demand committee is solely responsible, not the larger Meitei society. For the very greed of these few Meitei who wants to pave a 'smooth' 'career' path for their already 'meritorious' child, these Meitei elites are putting the state into another turmoil rather than mending hill-valley differences and antagonism by whitewashing the mass with unrealistic 'promises', hence the 'promises' needs a serious observation. Hill-Valley divide will go away if Manipur is declared as tribal state has been the most 'catchy' promise made by the Demand Committee. The claim has no objectivity in itself. It seems that the Committee has no serious clue of what divides the hill and valley and which divide they are going to bridge and how. Does it mean in the social sense or the political sense? Or in a geographical sense? If it is in the geographical sense, are you going to elevate the valley to make it into mountains? Or flatten the mountains to turn it into a valley? Which will be more cost effective I leave it to the Committee. Let's pick up the social 'differences' and 'divisions', affirmative actions are meant for socio-economic upliftment of the 'disadvantaged' not to push them further into fringes. Meiteis who take pride in their 2000 old 'civilisation', might be the 'disadvantaged' in relation to mainland Indians but the Demand Committee must remember the highlanders are more 'disadvantaged' in relation to the mainland Indians and in relation to Meiteis. These highlanders are historically socially 'outcasted', 'orchestrated' for being non hindu by the Meiteis. Even some of them were brought into the valley as slaves to the Monarch. The genesis of heretical discriminatory outlooks and practices might be because of the evillest religion on earth: Hinduism, but has become more of a day to day social practice where one has ingrained those discriminatory outlooks in the psyche of the larger Meitei populace. The hierarchy has been acquired from the long socio-historical process, constitutionally tagging Meiteis as 'tribe' will never wipe the identity of being a 'Meitei' and its social relations with the highlanders. You are still a Meitei to the highlanders, they will not look at you as one of them: a tribe, which is just a mere categorisation for political and administrative purposes in India. Even in the central India the 'Scheduled as Tribe' calls themselves and by others collectively as 'adivasis' and the perceived identities of the 'self' in relations to the 'others' does not fade away till today. What I am trying to say is that the acquired identity form a long socio-political process is not going to go away and at the same time, how the highlanders perceive Meiteis and how they attribute identitie(s) to the Meiteis is also from the same or parallelly different long socio-political processes that Manipur has gone through till now, is not going to fade right away. This status quo cannot be easily challenged. And importantly cannot be challenged by Meitei merely scheduling as tribe. A social 'mingling' probably would.

(To be contd....)

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