

Editorial

Friday, February 22, 2019

Traffic haunt Continues

Driving or walking, it does make differences one suffers equally if it is in the street of Imphal. The comforts expected from driving a car is now a distant dream with traffic managers in the state had failed to prove their efficiency. The construction of Bir Tikendrajit Fly over and the widening of the roads seem to have no use with the authority failing to manage the situation. We do not simply blame the authority, the people too have responsibility. But it is the paid government authorities who are assigned for the job to make the traffic flow smoothly.

The state of Manipur has been witnessing a phenomenal increase in the amount of vehicles- an indication of the rising social status of the public and improving economic conditions in the state. While these factors are a welcome sign, the fact remains that the concerned authorities have failed to keep pace with the times and the changing social scenario in the state resulting in heavy traffic jams and delays which needs to be addressed immediately.

The short term policies and systems being implemented from time to time in an attempt to ease the congestions and traffic jams have not been able to alleviate the problem in any way, on the contrary these ad-hoc measures have managed to confuse the public and compound the problem the authorities have been trying to solve. The formation of Traffic regulation and parking committee has not been of much help, and one can only wonder if they are functioning at all. Queries put up to the concerned departments have only resulted in more bewildering responses- a classic example of the effectiveness of passing the buck around that has been at work in all government set ups. While formulation of policies and systems to control and regulate traffic may be a beginning in the right direction, the fact remains that the increasing number of vehicles need additional space to accommodate them and juggling acts of the traffic system by the experts, however efficient and experienced they may be, will not bear fruit. Construction of additional parking spaces at strategic locations, bypasses and flyovers, and most importantly providing subways at important and crowded junctions will go a long way in reducing these problems. Construction of public utilities does not automatically guarantee improvement- their proper usage is as important- an obvious example being the use of footpaths by the vendors and shopkeepers to stock and ply their goods forcing the pedestrians to walk on the road.

The need to streamline and re-orient the traffic police personnels is also being felt by the public. Turning a blind eye to the irregularities being committed by the drivers of various public and commercial transport vehicles in consideration for a "quick handshake" has been well documented- despite the dangers and inconveniences such greedy acts causes. The present government ministers and high ranking officials may not be feeling the burden such traffic jams causes as they seem to have a prerogative of the right of use of the road over the common public but unless some concrete steps are taken up very soon, the only option that would be available to them would be to use their feet with their retinue of escorts and assistants wading through the impossible traffic- surely a distracting relief for the stranded common public on the road.

Conted From Yesterday.....

"Tracing the State through two indie films: *Loktak Lairembee* and *Soni*"

Also, the metaphorical image of the haunting *Lairembee* of the lake, who doesn't die even after being gunned down, represents the invincibility of the State as an overarching structure which transcends even the impositions of time (constantly churning, death-less). It's interesting that the mythical *Lairembee*'s invincibility somehow impinges upon Tomba's attempts, howsoever naive, to secure justice, which ironically places the *Lairembee* on the side of the State. This can be interpreted as power colluding with power (the *Lairembee* and the State), while indicating the powerlessness under them for being powerless. This appropriation of transcendental power by the capitalists gives scant space for the building up of 'class for itself' consciousness of the proletariat. Stray and individual attempts to reclaim a sense of power is thus, by the very configuration of the power structure, reduced to delusional and, even if real, non-threatening abortive attempts, amply illustrated by Tomba's meek coming to terms. The film indicates that the capitalist tendencies function very efficiently because the State and all its bureaucratic paraphernalia exist majorly for these interests, not for the overstated welfare functions of all. And these tendencies are always consolidated by none other than the high functioning psychopathic elements who come in the form of political leaders and their corporate backers, begging a disturbing question: is psychopathy an absolutely needed qualifier in the matrix of functional prerequisites to attain power?

ACTII:

In "*Soni*", we follow the story of two policemen in Delhi passionate about fighting crimes against women, but that doesn't mean they are to be bracketed as gender-specific police as they are efficient police officers in all aspects. Being women gives them the extra edge in comprehending certain nuances involving crimes related to women. Their job involves decoy operations at night while being undercover in the streets of the capital city. The title character Soni is the junior of her Superintendent rank boss Kalpana Ummat, and both share a warm, sisterly bond that cuts through the formal hierarchy. Both are passionately devoted to their job of fighting crimes but their temperament is diametrically opposite—Soni is the hot-headed, righteous rebel while Kalpana is the balanced and well-meaning officer who gives importance to protocol. This film is a character study of these policemen done in very realistic terms. The rational bureaucratic structure is being scrutinized by questioning its efficacy on the ground level (policy output vs. policy outcome). Several questions can be framed through the film: what is the root of crimes such as drugs-related, kidnapping, extortion, political and bureaucratic embezzlement of

funds etc. and gender-related crimes? Does one reinforce the other, or are they complementary? How does the perversion of economic base structure come into the picture while looking at the dysfunction of the politico-ideological superstructure? On top of the gritty law enforcement work they do, Soni and Kalpana also have to fit in the gender roles expected of them at home, more so in Kalpana's case who is constantly reminded by her mother-in-law of her wifely obligations such as bearing a child. Kalpana's more practical husband Sandeep who is also an IPS officer, with a higher rank than her, berates her for not being authoritative enough while dealing with subordinates (referring to her empathetic support of the "problematic" Soni). Now, there are certain important moments in the film which shape the characters' assertion of their organic selves (Carl Rogers), each time being cornered by the State's vested check and balances system (to maintain the anomic status quo, a false sense of societal equilibrium).

At a checkpoint, Soni slaps an uncooperative and misbehaving drunk Naval officer after several of her warnings were retorted by patronising threats. In the beginning scene, while undercover in a night decoy operation to check crimes in the streets, she beats up a molester chasing after her who also didn't relent despite being ignored initially. The checkpoint incident induces an institutional enquiry on her and she gets transferred to a desk job in the police control room. She gets reinstated to her normal post shortly after Kalpana bats for her. In the third instance, while she and her supportive boss Kalpana were in a restaurant having a quiet time, she again gets into a major fight when she found some pampered hooligans holed up in the ladies' toilet and consuming some Class A drug, thus causing public nuisance; in this case too, her reasoning attempts were futile and she was provoked to physical action when one of the hooligans breached the sexual lines (the provocateur being a corporate honcho's ward). As expected, the police unit's head (Sandeep) is pressurised by the corporate honcho, an influential election fund, using his political links. Sandeep, the practical officer that he is, considers the consequences and relents and the hooligan is made to go scot-free, which is resented by his wife Kalpana. Soni is put in the dock again.

So, it can be clearly seen how the very concept of law enforcement entails dysfunctional adjustments and accommodations that are concretised through the strict hierarchical set-up. And the Weberian rationalisation of bureaucracy prescribing one-fits-all framework is demonstrated by the inter-institutional consensus (the police and the Navy, in this case) on what is within bounds and what is

not. The Naval officer's drunk misdemeanour is sidelined as a stray and excusable thing while Soni slapping him for the very act of disruption of police work is seen as an act of excess; would this have been the case if in the place of the Naval officer was a civilian having no political or otherwise backing? Or rather, would a simple civilian have the motivation or nerve to display such privileged misuse of authority even in place where their authority, if any, is not in force? Highly unlikely, except in rare cases of psychological deviance. This exposes the beautiful lie of the so-called equalising effect of law enforcement (all equal before the law) because at the end of the day, the law enforcers are more like authority posers than anything else who are constantly kept in check by the State's various vested requirements. And all of these institutions are subservient to the State and its constant will to the maintenance of its power concentration.

In order to maintain this happy nexus, the State has to make several "small adjustments" such as the case of Soni's temporary transfer to a desk job to satisfy the inter-institutional equilibrium and also reinforce intra-institutional hierarchical role allocation's strict adherence. Also, in the case of the restaurant hooligan, Soni was supposedly at fault just because she responded physically to a serious nuisance causer, while the nuisance causing hooligan's ticket to exonerate from lawful persecution was not legal defence but extra-legal "adjustments". Police brutality, even to the extent of death, done on weaker sections of society rarely invites recall and reprimanding of the personnel(s) involved but even non-deadly physical escalation in cases involving the privileged sections results in consequences for the personnel(s) involved. This is the dangerous dichotomy that the State promotes.

In an interesting turn of events, in the penultimate scene, we see that Kalpana goes ahead and brings in the already let off restaurant hooligan and this time, frames several charges on him (drug trafficking, criminal trespassing, attempt to kidnap and assaulting an officer on duty), to the utter shock of the hooligan who still threatens her by invoking his privilege. It's a redemptive and cathartic act on her part and her own kind of rebelling within the bounds of the system (set protocol). Despite the potentially aversive consequences involved, she doesn't relent which is sort of an act of reclamation of her conscience. It can also be read as a reassertion of her "position" of an IPS officer that she had achieved through her own struggles which carried genuine meanings for her (righteousness, sense of duty, sensitivity for the less fortunate and so on).

In the final scene, Soni is back in the police control room with a book in

her hand which was gifted by Kalpana: '*Rasedi Ticket*' written by the acclaimed Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam. It's a symbolic gesture because the book is the autobiography of a non-conformist of a different era who lived her life on her terms and so in a way, the solidarity and solace that Soni and Kalpana shared between them is solidified by the historical link of another person they mutually admire. They trace their own turmoil and inner dissonance arising out of their being in acute contact with harsh social realities to an identifiable figure who, to them, sort of lived through similar turmoils in her life.

Conclusion:

In "*Loktak Lairembee*", the State manages to subdue Tomba and his nascent rebellion which anyway was borne out of his psychological disturbance rather than a real, concerted will on his part to better his life chances. His inability is not something personal to him because like him, his *phundi* dweller ilk does not have the intellectual and physical resources to match up to the State. Their material conditions bring them down, the reversal of which they attempt through investment in their children's education. But then, they are unable to ensure top-notch education for their children because education is also a pricey commodified enterprise meant for the well off and the burgeoning middle class. Tomba's attempt to reclaim his lost ground through the discovered gun results in cognitive dissonance, which gets resolved through his act of abandoning the gun, out of his view and reach, deep in the lake's waters. And so, the meek resolution seals his fate and we are not given any hopes of betterment of Tomba's life condition. Tomba's story is just the tip of the iceberg.

On the other hand, Kalpana and Soni, even though they are bound by the dysfunctional and self-serving dictates of the State, are better off as they still have a scope to right things in areas they can to compensate for the areas they cannot. The State's bureaucratic machinery intends to make and expects of one to become depersonalised, efficient work cogs. The invisible hand that sustains the iron cage of capitalism doesn't allow for conscience to function. This way, many young and bright people who initially were principled and optimistic get absorbed into the system's tentacles and become either psychopathic converts or regress back to the unconscious realm of void, with no personal stand or opinion on anything. In "*Soni*", we see the struggles of Kalpana and Soni to remain sane and maintain their integrity while bearing the onslaughts of the State's dysfunctional adjustments. Their triumph lies in the fact that they do not relent as easily as the State might want them to. And maybe, it is because of the existence of many actual Kalpanas and Sonis in the real world that the State has a slight semblance of humanity.

All in all, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the State as we know is a repository for potential and actual criminalities, with its existence necessitated by the human need for a representative and symbolic consciousness, and sustained by absence of fairer, viable alternatives.

"*Loktak Lairembee*" won the National Film Award for Best Film on Environment Conservation/Preservation at the 64th National Film Awards in 2016, among many other accolades. "*Soni*" won an award in debut category at the Pingyao International Film Festival, 2018. Both the films were received positively in various international film festivals. (Concluded)

ILP will be applicable in the entire state: Governor

Agency Dimapur, Feb 22, Nagaland Governor PB Acharya on Thursday said the state government has decided to make Inner Line Permit (ILP) applicable throughout the state, including the commercial hub of Dimapur. "ILP will be made applicable to the entire state including Dimapur and we are committed to streamline the system of issuing ILPs to ensure that no illegal immigrant is able to come

to Nagaland," Acharya said in his address on the first day of the state Assembly budget session. Under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1853, non Nagas should have ILP in order to visit the state of Nagaland but Dimapur district was not included under the provisions.

The governor said "while the government will be taking all legal and administrative steps to ensure this, we would also need active

support of civil society, village councils and people in achieving this objective."

He said that while Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) was of serious concern to all sections, "we are also aware of the threat that is posed to our society by illegal migrants in the state."

Accordingly, he said, the government had set up a committee to suggest measures to strengthen the existing system of issue of ILP in the state as well as to recommend modalities to check influx of illegal migrants.

The committee has submitted its report and the government has accepted the same and has directed to ensure framing of rules and

guidelines for its implementation, he said.

The strengthened ILP system will be able to ensure that no illegal immigrants will be able to enter our state, he said.

Acharya said that faced with the challenge of the proposed CAB, the Nagaland government had opposed and rejected the bill and likewise in a consultative meeting with mass based organisations, civil societies, tribal hohos, NGOs and political parties on January 31, the CAB was out-rightly rejected.

On the unresolved Naga political issue, the governor said "With the concerted efforts of the Tribal Hohos and mass based civil society organisations, the church, NGOs

and the Naga national political groups (NNPGs), the different groups (Naga factions) have now come together and this seems to be the most opportune time for the Naga political groups to resolve the decades old Naga political imbroglio ..."

The governor also appreciated the efforts made by the Centre for ensuring that "we move closer to a solution that is inclusive, honourable and acceptable to Nagas."

On government functioning, Acharya said "my government has decided that with focus on transparency and good governance, we will ensure accountability of government to the people."

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