

Editorial

Friday, January 18, 2019

Saving tomorrow for our children

The Day After Tomorrow, a science fiction movie directed and produced by Roland Emmerich which was based on the book The Coming Global Superstorm by Art Bell and Whitley Strieber, depicts a catastrophic climatic effects following the disruption of the North Atlantic Ocean circulation in a series of extreme weather events that usher in global cooling and lead to a new ice age.

The Hollywood blockbuster which had successfully spread the message about the deteriorating climatic condition is not the concern of this writer, as the concept of the necessity of being Humanism is also a message of the movie. This writing is a speculation about the fate of the Indians particularly those living in the North Eastern part of the country and Manipur. Like the way that the earth freezes in the movie due to lack of common sense and humanity to human kinds, we the people of this region see sometime see a total disaster of our children in the day after tomorrow. From being Manipuri, we have become Meitei, Naga, Kuki, Meitei Pangal. The concept of Manipuri is fading away slowly and the concept of Meitei, Naga, Kuki, Meitei pangal etc. has already taken its shape.

This writing is not about the probable disaster that the Human Being may face in the coming days depicted in the Hollywood blockbuster movie, but this writing is about forecasting the fate of our children of tomorrows.

After British left India 70 years back, India is yet to complete to sort out a workable policy programme which would make all the citizen - a sense of Indianess. The largest democracy which constitutional expert always pointed out still seem to have left out some provisions that would make all citizen felt that we are Indian. The continuation of the programme and policy that the British had adopted to rule the country making laws in their own conveniences disregarding the tradition and culture of the different ethnic community make the lower class and middle class people felt that "Are we a Free Citizen".

70 years the rich keep on earning more, the powerful gets more power, the farmers and lower class people continue to sacrifice unable to bear the atrocities committed the ruling regime. No matter the change of guard in the government make no differences in the country as the system still continue to exercise when it comes to the issue of lower class people. In North Eastern part of the country which was merged to the Indian Union people are treated better by the colonial British ruled. Various acts which lawmakers and activist called draconian law still impose to suppress the poor and harass people in the name of building the nation stronger.

The longer rule by a specific political party make stronger those who stood against their policy. And it was out of the anti-incumbency that another political party comes up and hold power in the center. All things expected did not happen. The people face more alienation from the nation called India as the rule and their policy incline more towards a specific majority community. The government which is running the country is no difference from those of the fascist authoritarian regime of the 19 century.

The need of the hour is a collective move for a change India. Untold stories of Adivasis have slowly come up in the limelight. Story of how indigenous people are slowly absorbing by major community is known by everyone. Quasi federal structure is slowly becoming history with the present regime centralizing all power. And the day after tomorrow may be an India with only fascist Hindu without Muslim, Christian, and Meitei. The logic for this speculation is that when the once upon a time Manipuri started introducing them as Meitei/Meitei, Naga, Kuki and Muslim, the pride of being Manipuri of the erstwhile Asiatic nation, the community will become meager which definitely meant that it will be surely dependable and some critic or activist may come up to take advantage by merging the identity with the majority one.

This was witness in the state of Manipur. Due to wrong; somewhere in the process of making the Manipur Nation, we had seen the NSCN-IM accumulated all minor ethnic community and formulated a Nation like character call NAGA.

Recent development in the Manipuri society is that the Meitei/Meitei now started demanding to become Schedule Tribe. This demand is coming up out of necessities and more likely - a struggle for survival.

The Day After tomorrow needs to be saved for the children of tomorrow.

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.....Symbolism in the Tribal Art of Manipur

Contd. from yesterday

Like other tribes, the Kabuis also distinguish many types of houses. They would construct not less than seven types of houses. They are (i) Pumchan Kai or Puntan Kai, (ii) Lakpui Kai, (iii) Sianlonpui Kai or Senloi Kai, (iv) Hoi Kai, (v) Thingpu Kai, (vi) Uche Kai and (vii) Khong Kai. The Kabuis at Khoupum understand the Pumchan Kai as one which consumed a lot of energy and dedication in work. Lakpui Kai is the house of the married woman. At the house-warming ceremony of this house, all the married women of the tribe would dance before it. Sianlonpui Kai is the type of house built with women going around and dancing, with eating discs in their hands. At the house-warming ceremony of this house, water is poured on the discs, and the women carry it around and dance. Hoi Kai is the house with the *hoi* shouts. There is the hoi chant wherever a work is started or finished. Thingpu Kai is the house constructed with planks of wood. The whole construction is of wood. Roofing is also done with wood. On the house-warming day the youths and girls gather inside the first room of the house and they sing and dance.

The Kabuis who settle at Tharon and are known as Liangmei Kabuis build three types of houses. They are (i) Chapiyuki, (ii) Bankiyuki and (iii) Chungkiyuki. Chapiyuki is a rare type of house, which is difficult to build. Like other tribes, the Liangmei Kabuis also observe certain taboos for house construction. The owner would have to spend with only meat and drink during the construction time of the house. If he does not observe this taboo, and if he eats even vegetables, he is taken to be of inferior status. At Lukhambi, if a Kabui is able to kill tigers or men, he is entitled to build the talangkai house. At some other places, before the talangkai is built the owner should kill a tiger, ten mithuns and a hornbill. If the sods command him during his dreams to build a talangkai then he could forego the aforesaid customs. If any of the above conditions are not fulfilled, even a moneyed Kabui cannot build a talangkai. There is a belief that if anybody could live in a talangkai, his soul would go to heaven after death. All youths and girls in the village come to see the building of the talangkai and encourage and respect the owner. Especially, the women are the preservers of this custom.

The owner feeds the youths and girls with food and wine and they help in erecting the pillars all around the site. The pillars should not be less than thirty-five in number. Sometimes skulls of animals are hung on top of these pillars. During the construction of the talangkai, the eldest male member of the clan, the mailupao stays in the front room of the house. Before the end of feasting of all the participants of the house construction, he should not move away. If there was no mailupao in the village, it was customary to hire the services of the mailupao of the next village. Younger mailupaos however do not perform such functions. If he had to perform such functions, it was believed he would not have long life. If a mailupao was hired from another village, he would be taken to his village with full escort of the youths and girls after the construction. The Kabuis take the Talangkai (ohong r-une) as the house of women.

Cross Shaped Sign or Chirong

After the construction of the house, in order to add beauty and grace to the house and to self-identify the tribe this chirong or crossshaped piece is erected on top of tribal houses. After the addition of friezes of jhalur and the chirong on the roof of the houses, the completion of the house construction is formally recognized. For the Koide Purl and Oinam villages, either bamboo or wood replicas are made, with sharp pointed ends, projecting in front of the Jhalur. They call these points *Shou*. Unless this shou is added on top of the roofs, the house

construction is not complete. After the preparation of the shou, later erection of the chirrong and fixing of jhalur is done. Then and then, only the house is regarded as complete. The chirrong on the tribal houses are of two kinds. One is the type made from the extension of jhalur and the other one is which is fixed separately, at a place slightly lower than the front end of the roof. These chirongs on the top of tribal roofs are easily designed from traditional motifs like insects and flowers. On the top of them, cock and bird representations are carved. The plainer models of insects and flowers have holes like eyes. Because of the larger size of these eyes, the Chirongs are not disturbed by winds or gale. Larger size Chirongs have supports at the rear portion of the same. At Thangal (Koira) houses also, these chirong, are customary. At the umanglai temple of the Meeteis, and also the rath structure of Jaganath (kang) have chirong on top. At Andro, the panam Ningthou Snong, (f., Ahallup pana Shang, and the Kosos, (dormitory of boys and girls with raised platforms, for the Panam Ningthou haraoba festival) have all Chirongs fixed on the roofs. Most of these Andro shangs (houses) have customary practice of fixing Chirongs in front as well as the rear of the roofs. The tribals of Manipur could have had an earlier practice of this kind, but nowadays it is not visible. The Chirous also had a peculiar practice of using coiled thatch leaves as the Chirongs. At traditional Meitei houses, thatch roofs have extended coils which are kept hidden below the front portion of the roofs. The tribals of Manipur often give sacred names to the Chirongs. The Mao term it *Ki kai*, the northern Mao call it *Ki chai*. The Tangkhul *Lengcheng* and Phen; the Marings *Indrika*, the Kabuis *Kai chai*, the Andro *Luichi*, the Meetei *Chirrong* or *Kai*, the Chiru *Koungnap Riki* and the Purl *Chiki*. After painting or carving beautiful figures of the flowers on the jhalur. It was customary to follow the traditional practice and continue the motifs. At some areas it was also customary to paint spears on these jhalur. Some of the colours used of these jhalur are red, white and green. Instead of painting the jhalur there was also another practice of carving different human forms as relief on the same. There was however no carving practice on these Chirongs except at Purl (puki -chief's house). The Tangkhuls used the practice of having different geometrical designs and star symbols on the Chirongs. Most of the colours used are white. At some Tangkhul villages, only the Chirongs, on the roofs of tribal chiefs were painted green, and others don't have the colours. For the Kabuis there were geometrical designs on the Chirongs, in the same manner as the designs on the houses. The Kabuis used the colour white and black. The Kabuis used to fix these Chirongs only during the marriage or ceremonial seasons. At other times, the Chirongs were removed and kept fixed on the main roof support of the house. The Kabuis of Nungadang do not refix the Chirongs, once their elders died.

Soul Figures and Effigy
The tribal of Manipur associated carving and painting traditionally with mortuary rites too. In order to represent the soul of the dead ancestors and to reflect on their achievements and qualities, the tribals used to carve on wood and these were erected with due ceremony and pomp. The Kabuis remembered their dead ancestors with the erection of large stone slabs with engravings of various kinds of pictures on them. The experiences of tribal heroes during their lifetime were consecrated by their families after the death of their fathers, with the carvings of these experiences on wood, along with the soul figures being placed beyond the village gate, in the middle of the village, and also at the burial site of these dead heroes. The Tangkhuls-near the Manipur Myanmar border used to perform a ceremony called *Kisida* before the

end of the yearly cycle. They place the carvings or paintings of the experiences of the dead hero in middle of the village in order to communicate the achievements of the hero. If the dead man had been able to take the heads of enemies, they search for a type of wood in the jungle which has forked branches, cut it and bring it to the village.

They carve the soul of the dead hero, just below the fork and erect the wood in the middle of the village. If the hero had also killed animals or tigers over and above head hunting, the animals were drawn on the banana pulp with charcoal and kept aside the erected wood. The tribals inhabiting the Choro village near the Myanmar Border celebrate *thadamtha* ceremony a week after the death of the man when the achievements of the same are carved and consecrated. If the man had killed a tiger, the head of the tiger was carved on wood and tied to the post erected on the grave of the man. If other animals had been killed, certain bamboo strips were planted on the grave, and the number of animals killed are represented by pieces of wood fixed on to the bamboo. Over and above this, his family kill a lot of animals, and these heads of animals are hung on the forks of wood, the flesh having been fed to the community.

In the Senapati District of Manipur at the Oinam village inhabited by the Paomai tribe, there is celebration of the thidui, which is performed beyond the tallao area - a place of live megalithic culture. This thidui is the consecration of the soul figure of the dead hero and feasting of the community in the month of kaho (October). If the man dies in September, the thidui is performed in the next month. If the family is not in a position to perform the ceremony, it could be postponed for a future celebration as well. The members of the community go into the jungle for carving the soul figure and effigies for the thidui and finish the same within two days, and they would bring the figure and place it near the site of the tollao. There are also versions that the same would have to be completed within one day have to be completed within one day itself. The family members feed the persons involved in the ceremony, and the left overs of the food should not be brought into the village.

The entire figures carved for the purpose of the thidui are made from the *zn* (uningthou) tree. In order to fix these figures on the ground, a 2.80 m. full krathii (Manipuri Name: sayi, Scientific name: *Castanopsis hyxtris*) tree pole for its base trunk. On this krathii pole, three bamboo are fixed horizontally in three levels, tied by bamboo strips. Before affixing the soul figure on these, an oval shaped split bamboo frame is fixed on to the pole, where the two horizontal bars are tied. There sword like protrusions made from *zn* (uningthou) wood are affixed on to the frame, and pointing out to all directions and these are no less than eleven in number. Another semicircular piece is added on to the head of the soul figure headgear, and of all the decorative un piece. The headgear is most prominent. Just in the middle of the headgear, a small spear point is affixed on to the pole with its point up. Of all the figures affixed on to the contraption, the headgear is most prominent. Right in the middle of these contraptions, the soul figure is affixed. A headgear is fixed on to the soul figure itself. On the tips of both sides of headgear a small bunch of paper decorations are affixed. The soul figure is carved in such a way that the body is prominent and the legs are shortened and made smaller. There are no two hands. Black thread is used in a coiled manner to simulate the hair. White and black mixtures of thread are used as necklace, and that too in three rounds. The figure is clad in black, and waistband which protrudes down to the legs below is used as decoration of the middle portions of the body. This decorative piece is made like the necklace with the intermixture of black, white, red, and green likes of thread

coiled against the other in short patches. On his right side of the soul figure is an incomplete, easily carved nude figure without the head and legs, but represented only with the breast and enlarged hips and two of such effigies are hung, on the left side, a full figure of a man with his head upside down, but basically carved with an avowed intention to highlight the hands is hung. On the lower portion of the contraption two easily made tiger with their heads upside down are affixed on to the right and left sides of the figure, tied with bamboo strips. These figures are round shaped in their bodies, and strips are made by painting black colours in a slightly bent manner. These figures are made with the bodies and tails being given prominent form, and the area between the tail and body is smeared with perpendicular black lines. These black lines are adjusted with beautifully spread polka dots in a balanced eye - absorbing design, and the lines are not strayed. On the head of the tiger, wavy carved lines are drawn, along with the smearing of polka dots. Two short spears made of *zn* wood are affixed on to the respective tigers. On the lower horizontal bar near to the heads of tigers, are affixed two bamboo strip baskets, on both sides. The celebrants of the thidui ceremony, in order to communicate to the dead that they had accomplished their task hung thinly prepared pieces of an wood on an extended line. These pieces are 30 cm. long, and 5 cm. board, with their heads thinned and are hung with differences in length, with variations of thread connections, affixed on the long horizontal thread line spread for quite a distance. When the wind blows these pieces of wood produce a croaking sound as they hit one another, these sounds are believed to have been the means of communication to the dead. When the thidui ceremony is performed for the dead, these figures which are carved on wood represent the accomplishments during his life time, and the brave deeds are being heralded to those who did not hear of or see any of this brave man's activities.

What has been carved of his soul figure of the thidui, the representation at the shortlegs and non representation of the hands are symbolic manifestation of the passage of the man to the ripe old age, that he died a normal death, after having accomplished his bodily tasks, and had proper incapacitation of his limbs due to old age. The display of prominent headgear is symbolic of the valour, richness and possession of wealth of the hero and vital energies radiating from the personality, of his dead hero. The figures who are hung upside down are representing effigies of his sons who died an unnatural death, who had been killed by enemies, or who had been lost without trace. The female nude figures are representations of the activity of the hero to molest these women, of his having captured his wife without her consent. The sexy nature of his victim is prominently signified by these emphasises on the sexy carving itself. These two tigers in whose bodies spears are pierced are representative of their having been killed with spears by the hero or having been captured alive by him. The two baskets are for food and edibles for the dead soul. In some areas, the baskets are representative of the skulls on the enemy, resulted from headhunting. At some graveyards the celebration of the dead man's ritual ceremonies are also related to the carving from a big plank of the head of a buffalo or mithun and soul figures of the dead and erection of the same. These carvings of the thidui ceremonies are left on the other side of the village *panthong* without area disturbance, untouched, and without deliberate attempts on destruction. They are left to the elements of nature for them to take the natural course for withering away. This itself is a pointer to the intrinsic relation between nature and man's creation. (Concluded)