

# Editorial

Tuesday, July 2, 2019

## Van Mahotsav 2019, celebration of life

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In Manipuri, "Uoo" means tree. This means that if we do not see the trees, we will die and there will be no living being on the earth. Hence tree is life and thus the celebration of trees is the celebration of life.

I always remember the quote of the noted activist Amrita Devi Bishnoi that, "If a tree is saved even at cost of one's head, it's worth it". Simply, someone may say, impossible, but it proves truth. Van Mahotsav celebration in India from July 1 to 7 was started as a campaign with the meaningful ambition to save the mother earth. But, unfortunately the festival has become more ceremonial and ritualistic then taking care of trees after the festival is over. This is the most important point that we need to look into. Though, it was officially launched during 1950, the seed of Van Mahotsav was shown prior to our independence during July, 1947 after a mass tree plantation drive which was undertaken in Delhi, in which leaders like Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru were participated. In its original aim, every citizen of India is expected to plant at least one seedling during the Van Mahotsav Week. If it is really implemented, then the country could plant 1.36 billion more trees per year now.

Technically also, celebration of this festival in July has the beneficial due to the onset of monsoon and the active nature of cambium layer in summer. It is not the celebration of planting trees but it is the festival of life, peace and hope. As a part of the celebration, millions of seedlings are planted by people from all over the country and people are encouraged to plant trees than to cut them. One of the most important aspects with this celebration is conservation and protection of our existing trees. The need of the hour for the country is greenery. Thus, the preservation of nature has become an integral part of our life due to the present day numerous environmental challenges.

The planting of trees during the festival serves various purposes like providing alternative fuel, increase production of food resources, creates shelter for biodiversity, creates wind-belts around fields to increase productivity, provide food for cattle, offers shade and

decorative landscapes, helps to conserve soil deterioration, etc. It also inculcates tree consciousness and love of trees amongst the people, popularize the planting and tending of trees in farms, villages, municipal and public lands for their aesthetic, economic and protective needs. The festival educates the awareness of trees among masses and portrays the need of planting of trees, as trees are the easiest and best ways to solve the global warming and reduce pollution which is the theme for this year's World Environment Day 2019.

Trees have long served humanity in one form or the other. The very existence of mankind would not have been possible without trees and other green plants. Trees also play an important role in the achievement of human security. Whether it is through the provision of livelihood resources e.g. food, shelter, medicine, cooking fuel, construction materials etc. or ecosystem services such as water and air purification, soil and climate regulation and erosion control etc, trees undeniably provide security to humans and are a means for sustaining life. Consequently, loss of trees will certainly result in human insecurity leading to global warming, acute vulnerability to natural hazards and a polluted & unhealthy Planet.

The festival is not confined to cities and towns alone; it has seeped into the villages too, with the idea that trees mean better crops, better living conditions, more peace, improve health, better cattle and a more beautiful village. This is not like the other religious festivals, lasting for a day or two and thereafter developing into token rituals devoid of any meaning. But it is a symbol of unending movement for all caste, creed and religions towards a greener India.

Generally, during the Van Mahotsav, native trees should be encouraged and planted as they readily adapted to the local conditions, integrate into ecosystems and have a high survival rate. Besides, such trees are

helpful in supporting local biodiversity as well: to reduce conflict between man and Nature and man and animal, we need to increase green coverage by encouraging plantation. It is also the only viable option to promote fruit and timber trees. Open fields, river banks and barren lands can be slowly converted into integrated tree land or semi forests or orchards. Finally through Van Mahotsav, we can bring back our lost forests.

The survival of plants and animals is put now in danger as humans with their greedy needs in the name of urbanization and globalization of cities, cut the rich forest for a size of a football ground globally per minute for construction of flyovers, roads, hoardings, pavements and so many development works. This declining number of trees has brought a major change in climate and pollution. So, there is a dire necessity of festivals such as Van Mahotsav, to restore the forest cover in the country.

In Manipur the 70<sup>th</sup> Van Mahotsava festival was started to kick off on 1st July, 2019 at the Peace Ground Churachandpur as the state level function along with the rest of the country. Now the time has come to evoke every one of us to plant a least one seedling on the eve of this festival. The only viable industries that we hope to cope the huge unemployed educated youth of the state is tourism. Tourism means beautiful landscape and beautiful landscape means full of beautiful trees and wildlife. Therefore, we should observed the Hon'ble Supreme Court's ban of unregularized green felling, cutting of trees for firewood to feed numerous gutter brick fields, clearing of forest for poppy plantation, removal of hill earth just like making a scar on the face of a beautiful lady and killing of wildlife in hills of Manipur.

The state has now becoming vulnerable to floods, droughts, heat waves, cyclones, and other natural disasters and this trend is increasing with each day. This year, in our state, the temperature soar up to 36°C and we are getting only half of the annual rainfall up to the end of June and farmers are still waiting forculivating their paddies while it is already the start of July. With continuous human intervention

against nature, these disasters can no longer be considered 'Natural.' An immediate similar example is the colossal event of Chadong which claimed three important lives. So now, Van Mahotsav festival has become a vital and important initiative to save our environment, to which we owe a lot.

As a symbol of respect to trees, one tree each is still growing within the boundary of this year's World cup cricket ground at St. Pietermaritzburg in Kent and another at City Oval in South Africa. But here in Manipur, our attitude and concepts really opposite and everyone acts at their own. It is not the law to stop them but it is their mindset to do so. Schools and colleges should adopt "one student one plant" scheme, where the responsibility of growing the plant lies with the student. This will be morale and learning experience for the student as well.

Now it is our turn to reverse the damage that we have caused and restore the balance between nature and man and the first step towards this change is to plant trees. Here the role of the civil societies and NGOs are very important. As an initial step, they may organize house to house tree plantation campaign. So, let us all welcome this coming monsoon by planting at least one tree during this Van Mahotsav and nurturing at least 3/4 standing tall trees.

Van Mahotsav festival gives us the opportunity to fulfill our duty towards environment and towards trees, on which all of us and our coming generation depends. In the words of John Milton, "Accuse not nature, it hath done her part, do thou but thine." Therefore please come and join us in Van Mahotsav celebration 2019 to bring back our lost forests and ultimately our environment for sake of the mother earth and future generation. We much take part in the Van Mahotsav celebration along with all of our family members to take care of the planted trees and keeping in heart that they are just like our own children, right from this moment for a beautiful and green Manipur tomorrow.

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## Are our Journalists Safe & Secured?

According to IFJ report in 2012, about 73 Journalists have been killed since 2005 and 95 Journalists were slain during 1990-2004. According to a report of the Committee to protect Journalists (CPJ) in 2016, "Getting Away with Murder: 2016 Global Impunity Index" in at least 40% of the cases, the victim reported receiving threats before they were actually killed. Neither the police nor the management of media house have ever taken these matters seriously. This kind of apathy makes it an all the more important case for an imperative study of several dimensions involved in the indispensable "Security and safety of Journalist" reporting on sensitive matters such as crime, corruption and politics.

A report published by the Press Trust of India (PTI) in 2014, carried out the news that among 23 Journalists killed in 2013 in South-Asia, 12 were from India alone. The report also indicated the government for not solving the mystery of the killings of the Journalists. The PTI report in 2014, quoting the IFJ report of 2012, said that most disturbing development is the increasingly targeted nature of violence in both Pakistan and India. The report of PTI in 2015 and 2016 also said that most of the murders of Journalists remained mysterious and unsolved. Actually in many cases, the trial of the accused did not even take off. The latest report of CPJ said that about 11 Journalists identified as working on corruption and politics were

killed in the last 10 years and their murder mystery is not yet resolved by the police. It means that they were perfectly planned murders destined to escape from the long arms of law. The CPJ report (2015) published in "The Hoot" portal under the title "Getting Away with Murder", has stated that India's impunity index rating is 0.08 making India's presence among the countries known for killing Journalist with impunity for eight successive years in a row. In 2017, the IFJ demanded that the Central Government should bring in a law that ensures the security and protection of the working Journalists and freelancers operating in Maoist or extremist infested areas such as North-East, Central and South India, as reported by PTI in 2016. It also demanded the Government to bring in an insurance scheme of not less than 100 million rupees for scribes so that their families do not suffer economically if something unfortunate befalls on their families. A report by Freedom House in 2016 said that with the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world, the freedom of press touched its lowest point in last 12 years owing to political criminals and terrorist forces seeking to co-opt or silence the media in their struggle for power. The report further analyzed that heightened partisanship and polarization in a country's media

environment and the degree of extra-legal intimidation and physical violence against Journalists. Reporters Sans Frontiers in their report held the view that mafia and cartels began to pose the biggest threat to media freedom worldwide.

In the case of North-East India, the media was caught between various militant outfits as well as police or military. The Manipur press also confronts a similar threatening situations. On the one side, the media personnel get threats of killing from different militant outfits and on the other side, the police and the military threatens media of dire consequences including threats of encounter. There are twin reasons for this: first the militants' outfits wage war with the state of Manipur and Government of India and second, they enter into conflicts with other militant outfits to gain upper hand in the region. As a result they send different notices of threats and blockades to media for publication. If media publish one outfit's notice, it will invite the wrath of rival militant's outfits. Against the backdrop, the media associations have promulgated a code of conduct for all its media personnel on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2005 which is still in force. Besides this, Journalists in Manipur also got threats from the coteries of high profile and powerful politicians for exposing their loopholes and wrong doing to the public. One such a case has been

reported that the editor of a leading English Evening daily was questioned by two close associates of a heavy weight politician of Manipur for allegedly reporting misappropriation of MP Local Area Development (MPLAD) fund on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019. Recently one Manipuri Journalist was also booked under NSA on the ground that he used derogatory words in social media against CM of Manipur and PM of India. A journalist in western Uttar Pradesh's Shamli was beaten up on camera by a group of GRP, personnel led by SHO Rakesh Kumar in the night of Tuesday the 11<sup>th</sup> June 2019 when he went to cover a train derailment. He was forced to strip, thrashed and even urinated in his mouth. In another incident, Mitali Chandola a female journalist was shot at in east Delhi's Vasundhara Enclave by some masked men inside the car and three eggs before speeding away. She was then admitted to hospital. Killing and threats to Journalist are due to different reasons. The reason arises from the depth of Indian Social and political complexities. Government needs to enforce a law for safety and security of the Journalist so that what is called 4<sup>th</sup> pillar of democracy (Journalism) can work proactively for good Governance and welfare of our people.

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