

# Editorial

Monday, October 14, 2019

## Harvesting the green gold

There have been innumerable workshops conducted on sustainable development of medicinal plant that showcased the rich potential of the state regarding the abundant availability of medicinal plants. Experts opined that of about six thousand varieties of plants containing medicinal properties, about one thousand two hundred varieties are found in the state, a staggering amount by any yardstick. The possibilities these revelations throws up would only be limited by one's imagination. Such valuable information also presents a very positive prospect for the mushrooming entrepreneurs who are gearing up to make a mark in various fields, given the fact that employment generation rate by the state government is nothing to write about. And yet, if and when one decides to act on those possibilities, it takes much more than a fertile imagination, or even detailed knowhow and enthusiasm. One would certainly need a certain amount of investment. One would also require a support system from the government which is conducive to the initiative, hassle-free licensing and other formalities to speed up the activities. And above all, there would be a necessity of assisting the marketing of such products by the government so that the entire effort pays off. This is easier said than done, especially in as volatile and uncertain a state as ours. The government, to start with, could bring out a compendium on the available medicinal plants, their uses, local names as well as their natural places of occurrence which would give a very good idea of the significance of such medicinal plants to the general public. This will, in turn, enable them to help in the conservation and production of these valuable resources. There has been much talk on ushering of industrialization in Manipur, and yet precious little has been done for sustainable progress and economic development. Construction of a few sheds or buildings and labeling them as trade centers or business houses, without even the basic requirements and facilities for the proposed objectives does not count as contributing to development or industrialization, nor does the organizing of melas, fairs and festivals where the main emphasis has always been on displaying a few local products for the benefit and knowledge of the local people.

The world is waking up to the benefits and significance of natural and organic products, be it for food, cosmetic or medicinal purposes. There cannot be a better time to seize the opportunity to harness the yet untapped potential these vast resources of medicinal plants represent in terms of economic gains. In fact, it could prove to be the most profitable and sustainable means of income for the whole of the state. It only remains for the state government to draw up a roadmap to enlighten, encourage and ensure that such an opportunity to provide an easy, sustainable and limitless economic benefit to its people does not go wasted by setting up a Research & Development wing, an economic support system, an incubation unit to provide assistance regarding management and other administrative matters to the start-ups and a marketing cell to make sure the products are properly advertised and dispersed to every corner of the country and beyond.

The farmers and potential entrepreneurs need to be shown the bigger picture and their role in the whole system as well as the benefits they stand to enjoy which is one of the biggest incentives for taking up such initiatives. Given the track record and the penchant of the state government for promoting itself, the task should not pose any problem if it applies the same enthusiasm and effort.

## An open letter to the authority of BSNL

Sir,

I, on behalf of IWSC, Khumbong would like to draw your kind attention and necessary favourable action.

That, the mobile and broadband internet service provided by Khumbong telephone exchange is very irregular and disappointing. It is learnt that the exchange is now entirely depend on the electric power provided by MSPDCL. The DG set installed inside the exchange is not operational due to the stoppage of fuel supply. Moreover, the battery/power backup used in the exchange is now no more reliable as all the batteries are obsolete and they are in the condition of disposal. As such, the mobile and broadband internet services stopped with the outage of power supplied by MSPDCL leaving many customers disappointed.

You may aware that there are many BSNL customers (who trusted the services of BSNL) under the coverage of this telephone exchange. Further, there are different Government offices, school, bank and other business establishments in Khumbong and its neighboring villages who entirely depend on services of BSNL for their different routine activities.

I, therefore, request your goodself to kindly look into the matter seriously and take appropriate actions to improve the services provided by Khumbong telephone exchange in the interest of customers who trusted BSNL. We are looking forward a prompt and positive action in this regard. Thanking you.

With sincere regards,  
Atom Samarendra Singh  
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## Framing "Nattaba Lamchat", the Mob Trial of Women's Morality

By-Rubani Yumkhabam

Few civil society collectives in Manipur punishmen and women from time to time for committing nattaba lamchat. What is nattaba lamchat? It does not have aname; we do not call the supposed "offender" a rapist, a murderer, a drug peddler, a hacker, and so forth. For the most part, nattaba lamchat is a vague attribution of immorality to people's intimate concerns, especially sexual conduct. What is moral and immoral is defined by the norms of the particular society, here the Manipuri society, and it is not always associated with violation of law. More fundamentally, the construction of moral/immoral agenda is distinctly coded in the language of women's sexual morality. In this context civil society collectives are playing a custodian part in preserving the morality of women. The article is a reflection on the mobtrial and punishment (mostly violent and humiliating) of women accused of sexual immorality, framed in the concept of nattaba lamchat. Men are also victimised by the construct of nattaba lamchat, however given the centrality of women in the culture of moral censorship in the Manipuri society, the article addresses the women's question. The 21<sup>st</sup> century Manipur is ridden with mob violence-lynching, punishing, trials - which is often projected as delivering "justice". Whenever an unfortunate incident happens in the neighbourhood - it could be a petty instance of thievery, or a gruesome instance of inadvertent killing - people waste no time, and the self-made platoon of justice raises its fangs and sets on beating, humiliating and even killing the persons involved. In

order for a fruitful critique of such a violent behaviour to emerge, it will be required to analyse the socio-psychological motifs of the people occupying an unstable political and economic zone. Given the festered bureaucracy of the land, deliverance of justice is often difficult and delayed. Such a frustration enthruses people to take law and order in their hands. We live in a time in which we can rely on neither the governmental rationality nor the "mob justice". (The moral decline of the revolutionary ideals of justice and liberty in the hands of the mob has previously been seen in many intellectual movements in human histories, like the French Revolution that ultimately descended into the Reign of Terror.) Can a frustrated society like ours handle mob justice? However, we are fed with many manifestations of mob trials. That being said, nobody needs a telescope to see that the culture of dialogue and construction in the Manipuri society is dead long ago! Many people in the mob brigade are driven by a misguided sense of justice, verging onto retaliation thereby ending in a complete disregard for humanity. It is in this violent culture of mob trial, which involves physical punishment and public humiliation, that we see women's morality being monitored in the public domain. In one of the most unfortunate incidents in the past few days (happened at Bishnupur district), a man and a woman became victims of a mob "trial", the crime being nattaba lamchat. There was a filming of the entire trial and the video became viral on the social media. Lame is the age deluged by smart phones, unemployed and frustrated

youths looking for heroics! The law of the land intervened and the culprits, the locale mob, mostly women, were arrested by the police. Many such incidents of a violent mob trials have happened in the past, but the public anger at the particular incident is almost unprecedented. What angers the public? The anger rises from the beating, humiliation and the spectacle of the shameful trial to which the man and the woman were exposed. More critically the exposure of a child (of the woman being punished) to the public humiliation of the mother, and the resultant abusive handling of the child was particularly distressing for the people. The culprits may legally be punished in the days to come. But the lessons we learn are not just about the inhumanity of the mobtrial and the punishment of the culprits; policing of women's morality in the public domain is the critical issue at the core of the incident. What fares as tenacious in such cases is civil societies' taking on the role of moral guardians (not benign though), especially when women's sexual morality is involved. We as a society believe that public morality will be kept intact if women's sexuality is kept under control. From the dresses women wear to the tone of their voice, women's presence in the society is sexualised and moralised, and is linked with the larger project of cultural cleanliness. Women are continuously projected as having potential for moral/sexual offences. Subsequently women's sexuality is channelised within the sanctity of marriage, the failure of which leads to the public (read mob) trial of the moral aberrance. So, when a married woman is found out to be engaging in an intimate relationship with another man, she is charged with nattaba lamchat. Such women are given speedy trial in full vista of the public, by civil society organisations. Some regular proceedings of such trials are keina katpa, shaving off the women's hair, slapping, and beating. What the moral league reads in these cases is the punishability of a woman's sexual relationship with a man other than her sexual owner, the husband, and this act of punishment must be carried out in the public. In the process, a victimless crime is made, the one in which the supposed offender is victimised, much like the way rape victims are portrayed as inviting the rape upon themselves by wearing this and that, going here and there. Burqa donned women are also raped, so dress and outings cannot be considered as logically proven antecedents of rape crimes. The pivotal place of women's sexuality in constructing women's morality, and by extension morality of the society, is followed by the straitjacket classification of women into two constructs - virgin and whore. In the name of preserving the moral aesthetic of the society, the guardians are continually monitoring the private ecology of a woman as either a virgin/virtuous wife or a "lamchat naidabi" whore. The virgin will extend into the ideal of a sexually loyal wife, we are continually creating an image of an ideal wife, an ideal mother, an ideal girl. On the other side, a whore is constructed as maramhenbi, lamchat naidabi, oktabi, all built around the notion of sexual "excesses" - adultery and pre-marital intimacy. Women's sexual conduct is looked upon as a taboo that has to be kept hidden in the polite society. Ironically when such an "excess" is detected, it is exposed to a chaotic degree. In

this scenario, a woman earns the non-existent crime of "nattaba lamchat", a fragile framework that strikes virgin-whore dichotomy. The virgin/whore dichotomy is a neurotic split that plagues the male perceptions of women. Is the punishment of the sexually immoral, lamchat naidabi woman in the public view enough? No, for the moral guardians, the public trial and the consequent punishment are not enough. Shaving off the hair, slapping (an extremely insulting physical response), beating, complete with keina katpa (a form of saving grace after disgrace) are acts of mutilation of the female body. These acts are a writing of a shameful history on the ecology of a female body. The informing ideology behind the mob trial of lamchat naidabi woman isa humiliating attrition, an inculcation of fear and stigma in women, just as much as cutting up the human body in a penal revenge, so that she will atone for all time to come. (Fear is a powerful weapon that is continually fed to women; the fear of rape and the fear of public disgrace are two powerful breeders of sexual control over women.) There is no legal and moral justification for keina katpa. Keina katpa trials neither aimed at delivering justice to the injured parties nor encouraged ethical order in the society. Such trials are a fascistic reaction born out of "moral panic" around the body and sexuality of women, the idea that if women's sexuality is not monitored, they are going to corrupt family, culture and tradition. Infidelity and adultery are not claimed as virtues to be appreciated and cultivated, but our worldview towards such complex human decisions points to the misogyny of the Manipuri society. From a technical angle, it is meaningless to forcefully marry off a wife to another man, even if the man is a lover. It is no measure of sapient moral restoration. Has our society consented to polyandry? Patriarchy can have keina katpa, shaving off the women's hair, slapping, and beating. What the moral league reads in these cases is the punishability of a woman's sexual relationship with a man other than her sexual owner, the husband, and this act of punishment must be carried out in the public. In the process, a victimless crime is made, the one in which the supposed offender is victimised, much like the way rape victims are portrayed as inviting the rape upon themselves by wearing this and that, going here and there. Burqa donned women are also raped, so dress and outings cannot be considered as logically proven antecedents of rape crimes. The pivotal place of women's sexuality in constructing women's morality, and by extension morality of the society, is followed by the straitjacket classification of women into two constructs - virgin and whore. In the name of preserving the moral aesthetic of the society, the guardians are continually monitoring the private ecology of a woman as either a virgin/virtuous wife or a "lamchat naidabi" whore. The virgin will extend into the ideal of a sexually loyal wife, we are continually creating an image of an ideal wife, an ideal mother, an ideal girl. On the other side, a whore is constructed as maramhenbi, lamchat naidabi, oktabi, all built around the notion of sexual "excesses" - adultery and pre-marital intimacy. Women's sexual conduct is looked upon as a taboo that has to be kept hidden in the polite society. Ironically when such an "excess" is detected, it is exposed to a chaotic degree. In

### Acknowledgement

Thank you, Santa Khupri, for the poignant outrage.

## SheChef Season 2, Shirui Lily Festival 2019



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SheChef (earlier called ShiChef) is a cooking competition organised by the Exotic School of Cooking in collaboration with Pops Restaurants part of the Shirui Lily Festival. In its second season this year, SheChef 2019 is being organised with an aim to carry forward the famous slogan of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao." This platform aims to unearth the culinary skills of many women and help them turn their passion into profession. This is an attempt to facilitate financial independence and confidence for women in Manipur. The competitors will cook using locally produced ingredients which will also eventually help the farmers by adding value to their produce, while altogether promoting indigenous cuisine.

The competition will take place at TNL Ground, Ukhrul Town, during the entire duration of the Shirui Lily Festival, i.e. 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> October

2019. After a public call for interested participants, final six contestants have been selected for the competition through a process of screening. They are from the ages of 18 to 26 and their names are as under:

1. Nimri Marchang
2. Rinchiula Tuithung
3. Yurinchon Keishing
4. Rumunhoi Tubung
5. Zingyathphil Hungyo
6. Neiso yang Rangla

The competition will be held for 4 days with 4 different themes for cooking. The judges meticulously selected for the competition are Chingyo Shinglai, Rupali Longjam and Dr. Changmei Shadang. The first two are qualified chefs while the third is an expert in nutrition. A unique feature of this season is that the entire organising team is made up by only women. The winner will be awarded a cash prize of Rs. 30,000 while the second and third prize recipients will receive Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 10,000 respectively. The consolation prize will be Rs. 2000 each.