

Self style Democracy n impossible democracy

Long Live Democracy: Stories from the North East

RETURN OF DEMOCRACY IN THE 'KARGIL OF MANIPUR'

Saikul is a sub-division under Sadar Hills Autonomous District Council of Manipur in the North East India. The famous name tag the town received was 'Kargil of Manipur' because of the enduring and perpetuated factional clashes among the insurgent groups and with the military. There was break down of all systems – the government machinery systems as the aftermath. Dysfunctional government buildings were standing tall and the police station was simply for the sake of it. Society was disorganised. The land of Canaan, as it was called once because of the land fertility, was eventually turning into the ghost town where angels fear to tread on.

There was a parallel government and democracy was at their mercy. Peace takes the back seat as a result of which development was a far cry for the land and the people. Bloodshed, killing, harassment and insecurity are the hall mark of the town. Nobody dares to visit, even the Chief Minister of the State – if he does so only with fool proof security arrangement. Imagine life gone through by the hapless and helpless people there at that point of time. There was nobody to bother for them. For them there was no government only what they would care was how to survive. Children and women, and youth are at higher risk. Youth especially boys are at double risks – they are the soft target of the insurgent group for force recruitment at the same time easy suspect when military counter insurgency (CI) operation takes place. Both side of their cheeks are not spare – one by the UG (Underground Group) and the other side by the military. Nobody ever thought of going for proper education and higher studies. The sad thing is that the fertile land is abused by the large scale plantation of opium (ganja) and poppy. The delicate brains of the children are polluted with the toxic odour of the plantation and youngsters become regular user. The sounds of the gun more or less becomes the music of the day. On mere suspicion, one's life can be taken easily by the UG (underground group) and the security forces/military under the immunity power provided by Armed Forces Special Power Act, (AFSPA) 1958.

There were regular skirmishes between the hill based UGs and Valley based UGs in another sub-division which made life so insecure. Hundreds of innocent villagers lost their lives and many other are maimed by the landmine planted by the valley based UGs in the suburb of the tribal villages. Imagine how hard life will be for those forgotten people. Fate seems to be cruel to them. In one tribal village called Parbung in Churachandpur district the valley UG went on rampage and committed mass rape to the women. But the world hardly noticed the trauma underwent by those ill fated women.

The sight of hip deep pit and thick wall made of mud at every house speaks volume of the suffering of the people and uncertainty of life. One has no say in the election of MLA and MP. They seldom cast their valuable vote – another person has to finish the voting in their name (proxy voting). Nobody dares to challenge this injustice because of fear of reprisal. Medical care and education were the hardest hit sectors that aggravated the suffering of the people. As if that wasn't enough, the people have to bear the burden of taxes from the UGs in varied form. There was nobody to tell the tale of this suffering people and the world is ignorant about it, even God seems to abandon them. In the absence of help from the government both the state and central, the people turned to God for rescue. They fasted and prayed at every mount and dale entreating God to send for helps.

In answer to their prayer help comes in an unusual and unexpected form. Indian Army made a flush out operation in the tribal areas in response to the rally made by the Kuki Students Organisation (KSO) in New Delhi, demanding the government to flush out the UGs from tribal areas and restoration of civil government. The Central and State government entered into a peace pact with the tribal underground organisations Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and United People's Front (UPF) by signing the

Suspension of Operation (SoO) that entails a set of Do's and Don'ts in the ceasefire ground rules. It ushers a new era in history of the tribals in particular and the state in general. Violence began to spiral down, Democracy makes it's come back and peace has its chance.

Now, one can vote for their own choice/chosen candidate. I feel elated when for the first time after about 10 years that I personally cast my valuable vote in the Legislative Assembly Election last year. Educational systems are reformed, the police station performed its duties and the government offices started functioning though not to the mark. The sight of girls playing football match in the ground is heart warming. It speaks about the peaceful environment and gender equality, because girls at one point of time were not allowed to play football because it's a "boys' game". One can shop till 7:00 p.m. which is unheard of in their history. People now have a voice in the administration.

Thanks to the innovative strategy of the government in their approach towards solving the insurgency problem. The wish of the people is that the peace negotiation with the Tribal UGs under Suspension of Operation (SoO) will bring amicable and permanent solution to their long standing problem. However, many are sceptic about the outcome taking into consideration the lack of sincerity from the part of New Delhi in addressing the confronting issues. Long live democracy!

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