

Identity And Crisis Of Identity : A Case Study Of Manipur

(An essay towards a redefinition of development)

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Twentieth century turmoils are understandable either in terms of a horizontal line of class struggle or a vertical one of crisis of identity that run through social formations - the two lines sometimes overlapping at other times intersecting one another. We are witnessing violent eruption of social tensions likely to extend over the next century. To understand these one has to go to their generative source.

A mechanistic interpretation of the classic Marxist model has led many Marxists to assimilate one phenomenon (crisis of identity) to the other (class struggle). On the other hand, angels of Free Enterprise, Liberal Democracy and Positivism looks at crisis of identity as one among the many problems of social engineering only, resolvable through clever manoeuvre of political decision boxes. The essence of the phenomena, its richness is thus lost to the protagonists of both schools of thought.

But the scale and intensity of the turmoils around is arousing us from our dogmatic slumber. Neither can a phenomenon be wished away nor its solutions found in an area of darkness.

Against this background the present essay is to understand the identity of society and its crisis. It will also be a case study of Manipuri society.

The questions to be answered are :

1. How to explain the identity of a society ?
2. Consequently, how to explain the crisis of identity ?

Finding answers to these questions will constitute the first part of the paper.

The second part is concerned with a case study of the Manipuri identity and its crisis. The problems to be tackled are :

1. Tracing the morphogenesis of Manipuri identity.
2. Identifying the crisis arising thereof.
3. Suggestions of possible solutions in a futuristic time scale.

Let us begin with the first part.

1. Identity : Morphology and Crisis

The phenomenon to be understood is a reality in process.

First we take two fundamental irreducible categories, biolo-

gical reproduction and production. Using these two, we will evolve a logically higher order category, namely, tradition or tradition making. These three categories in their organic unity constitute the key to understand problems of identity of a society.

Let us proceed along the logical order of the categories.

I.1 Biological Reproduction

Biological reproduction is the one we know of Nature's modalities to man's prayer for immortality, a process of man making himself in his own image. Individuals die, but the species subsists. Man is Nature's *the* species who can experience a sense of power in production and reproduction. Primitive symbolism is full of intertwining relation of the two. Peasant communities perform rites to make mother earth fertile. The *Lai Haraoba* of Meitei's is for agricultural and human fertility. The origin of the Universe and living beings from a primordial seed conceived in the womb of Cosmic Mother is a symbolic canonisation of reproduction as the act of creation in primitive cosmology.

Biological reproduction renews society's work force, through a natural process of replacement. On the other hand, the mode of production and distribution, creation of social surplus is the very foundation of human reproduction. Societies with a superior mode of production tends to propagate faster. In primitive times, when war was a mode of appropriation of the products of one tribe by another and hence itself a kind of production, the numerically superior had an edge over the smaller one. Human groups occupying fertile plains with favourable conditions of production and superior tools had again better conditions of acquiring numerical superiority. The growth of civilisation in the plains along the river-side is not an accident, but intrinsic in the logic of History.

If eugenics succeeds in improving a generation over the earlier one, they will be a better work force. If human abilities and propensities can be fashioned according to a predetermined plan, the result will be a revolutionary change in the production process itself. Computerised robots capable of replacing the human will also revolutionise production. If the homo - sapiens can be duplicated in ways other than the biological one, the problems of identity of human groups would have taken an entirely different turn.

Now the nature of biological reproduction as related to the make up of group identity. There are cases of unisexual reproduction in the plant kingdom. Human reproduction is bisexual,

based on the unity of male and female principles. Whether reproduction is unisexual or bisexual is a contingent fact, but using this in the assignment of group identity to the offspring is a necessary outcome of social practice. Division of sexes is Nature's design, but making it socially functional by organising society either on patriarchal or matriarchal lines is a social reality linked with ownership of property. Another significant biological fact is that while animals can cross-breed beyond their species, men cannot cross-breed with other species of animals. But there can be cross-breeding between one human group and another. This fact is one important factor in the evolution of group identity. Man's institutionalisation of the biological process of reproduction in family is a revolutionary step towards the evolution of the group identity and assignment of the same to the individual. Systems of familial organisation on their part lay down the social conditions of group amalgamation and are again linked with fertility. At one phase of social development exogamous marriage helping the evolution of larger social groups than the endogamous marriages is not an accident but intrinsic in biological reproduction itself. It is well known that exogamous marriage helped the synthesis of the earlier seven Salais towards the evolution of Meitei polity. To sum up, the old generation renews itself in the gene and chromosome of the new generation. This is one ontological foundation of group identity. But the biological alone is not enough to give us the identity of a society. To think that this is so is the fallacy or racism that has misled attempts to understand identity. Nature has made man and had so mixed elements in him to be called a man. But nature and human nature is only the foundation of what man is to create. For, man is a being who not only reproduces himself but also creates his own world in the facticity of his existence. And the world he creates projects his identity. This creation is so fundamental and has corresponding impact on the social conditions of biological reproduction. This is evidenced by the correlation between structural changes within the institutions of marriage and changes in group fertility. As a matter of fact, biological reproduction is no longer merely 'natural'. Like any other humanly created object, it is processed through a technology of human relation.

Now let us see how man creates his own world.

1.2 Production

Production is actualisation of what is not from what is ai-

ready there, in a time axis, through the expenditure of mental and physical energy. This is not a definition but an exercise at a descriptive ontology of the production process. The elements in the process are ; man and human nature, means of production, and the social structure man is in. Let us take human nature simply as the foundation of the production process without entering into the controversy of whether man is the fallen angel or reasoned ape. To be precise, human nature has the capacity and a corresponding need to create a world from a given Universe. Raising the veil of the Universe is the means. Production as a mode of appropriation of the physical Universe amounts to creation of a recognizable world as his home. Technology is man's extended hand in the creation of his world. As such technology reflects man himself. Universe as existence is beautiful, but what man has created of the Universe is no less sublime. Man creates his material world existing in time and space. He also creates a world of ideas existing in a time axis and in a communication system as a mode of human relatedness. Material creations including the palaeolithic tools to high technology of the post industrial revolution era as well belong to the first category. To the latter category belong all products of art, aesthetics, science, religion - the total world outlook (weltanschauung) - in short all creations which have an ideational existence. There is of course a correspondence between material and spiritual products. The need for communication in man-to-man and man-nature relation has again given rise to language, an unique human creation.

Now let us single out those aspects of production process pertaining to the problem of identity.

Firstly, man's product acquires an existence independent of the creator, starts having a life of its own in a time axis.

Secondly, man's participation in the production process is a mode of changing himself, nature and society.

Thirdly, the development in the world of products generates surplus energy in a society. This in turn leads to encounter of societies. A society which cannot generate this surplus energy from within must receive the impact of external forces. A society impotent to create its own world of products is porous, penetrated by a world of products of an external society. This penetration means coming in of a way of life along with accompanying institutions. Failure to counter these external forces may gradually freeze the society at the receiving end to a passive medium. This is a crucial point in understanding the problem of identity crisis.

Fourthly, there is a necessary correspondence of the creation of superstructural institutions and the process of production and reproduction on which they are founded. The state, nation, legal institutions etc. are byproducts resulting from the fundamental process of production. With the transformation of the foundation, the superstructure is also more or less changed. The clear logical implication is that superstructural social institutions cannot be used as a category to describe the identity of a society. Just the opposite, their true character is revealed while tracing the morphogenesis of a society.

Fifthly, the process of production and reproduction is directly linked with the process of tradition making. Reproduction without production or production without reproduction could not have given rise to tradition or tradition making. A synthesis of both in the human mode of existence is what makes tradition possible. The body is the carrier of the biological gene ; tradition the cultural gene. What is this tradition ? To put it simply, tradition is development of man's creation in time, the world of his products using successive generations in a process of incarnation. This needs an elaboration. For herein lies the key to unlock the problem of identity and its crisis.

1.3. Tradition and Tradition Making

Let us take a simple example, Manipuri Rasaleela. Dance is carving out aesthetic forms in ideal space and time using the body as the medium. The carved out aesthetic forms in their turn are used as symbolic forms of communication. They are in every sense human products. Let us assume that a particular dance form, the Maibi dance for example is created say, in the first century A. D. Once created it has a life of its own reproduced through successive generations. As a created form it is pregnant with possibilities to be worked out by succeeding generations. For a new generation to understand this dance form is to decode all the possibilities encoded in the original creation, and encode new possibilities for a future generation to decode. Decoding means actualising the possibilities in new products through a process of production. Manipuri Rasleela we find to-day is the result of transmigration series of the early creation of Maibi dance in the productive process of successive generations. This is a simple illustration from aesthetic creation to elucidate a universal principle. The principle of encoding and decoding is universally applicable to all modes of production. Man produces on the foundation

already laid before him. For as a species-being man never allows his species experience to be wasted.

Tradition, then, is the active process of decoding the message in the world of products by successive generations, when it is their turn in time. The new generation creating their own world of products is the external manifestation of this decoding process. Another way of describing tradition is, it is man's world of products actively transmigrating using successive generations (i.e. the expenditure of their mental and physical energy) as its body. Tradition is change in continuity and continuity in change.

Tradition therefore, is that which lives in time. To speak of dead tradition is a contradiction in terms.

1.4 Identity

Now we can make our major thrust. The concept of identity belongs to a higher order logical type. The concept is a highly structured one, being an organic unity of constituent concepts as elements. Confusion is courted when we use a structured concept and its constituents without differentiating their logical types. The concept of identity logically implies the constituent concepts along with their structural unity. Whereas constituent concepts like reproduction, production, tradition making, severed from their structural unity by themselves are unable to throw light on the highly structured logically higher order concept. All the existing fallacies in explaining the identity of a society and the crisis thereof results from a fundamental error of identifying a unified-concept with one of its constituents, of trying to understand an integral concept in terms of one of its factors.

On the basis of what has been discussed already we can suggest an ontological description of what the identity of a society is.

The mode of existence of a society is reproduction, production and the making of tradition. This mode is the same as the process of identity making. The way how a society projects its identity is renewing its existence. Here we must remember that since man produces both in real and ideal space and time, identity projection is also both in real and ideal space and time.

The identity of a society appears to be a summation of what the individual has to give to the society. But the reality is exactly the opposite. The individual derives identity from the society through a process of conferment, while society uses the individual as a medium to manifest its own identity. As the projection is also a progression in time, a process involving both continuity and

change, to identify a spatio-temporally sliced perspective of the process with the totality of the movements is a fundamental error. The identity of a society is a reality in motion, unlike the mummified Pharaoh in the Pyramid. A society sustains its identity through a continuous process of projection in infinite space and time.

1.5 Crisis of Identity

Crisis of identity, then, arrives the moment a society ceases this projection. A throbbing society constantly in the active process of identity creation faces no such crisis. Nor does an acculturated, disintegrated corpse of a society. Only living societies on the threshold of death do have identity crisis. It is the problem of resurrection of those who can still afford to do that. The crisis of identity then cuts through the constituent elements already described above, namely: reproduction, production and tradition or tradition making. The crisis can be formulated in terms of three principles:

Firstly, an interruption of the biological renewal of a society by external forces. A generation reproduces its preceding generation in the natural i.e. biological way. The process can be disrupted by the spilling in of excess population from a source external to a society. This has a direct impact on the fertility of the existing group as the spilling in of excess population is also linked with greater consumption of a society's available resources, which again is linked with the reproductive or sustenance potential of a society. Every society is endowed, to a greater or lesser extent with a capacity to absorb external population. This absorbing capacity in its turn, depends on the relative factors of biological reproduction and production intrinsic in the society. That is to say that a numerically superior society is likely to have greater absorbing power of excess population than a relatively smaller one. Again societies with superior mode of production are likely to survive intake of surplus population than societies with less developed mode of production. Theoretically there is an optimal limit to this absorption. When the quantum of influxed population exceeds the absorption limit of a society, the incoming population is transformed into a catalysing agent of forces and institutions external to the society. This crystallisation of external forces and institutions is precisely crisis of identity for that society.

Secondly, a society that cannot create its own world of products is encroached upon by the world of commodities created elsewhere. A society whose process of production is arrested easily succumbs to silent but effective invasion of the world of commo-

dities from elsewhere. There is a deep rooted vicious circle here. There can be a strategic supply of products to arrest a productive community's creative process, and then use this stagnation as the reason for further invasion. The plain truth here is underdevelopment is used as the reason for further perpetuation of underdevelopment. This is the underlying gamut of colonialism, classic or modern. The invasion of the world of products with accompanying crystallisation of social forces and institutions not only renders a society incapable of projecting its own identity in a recognizable world of products, but also a prisoner of alien world of products, forces and institutions. Everything in this world happens magically, products become fetish, institutions use man. An inverted logic pervades which defines development in terms of imposed diagrams. Man's creative spirit repressed in a compressed, disintegrated, underdeveloped society also gives rise to the compressed, disintegrated underdeveloped individual.

As a corollary to the first and second principles, we have a third, the failure to continue tradition making. A society whose process of production is arrested is unable to continue tradition making in the sense outlined above. The past in spite of giving birth to the future, becomes a deadweight on the present. Herein lies the crisis.

2. Manipuri Identity : Morphology and Crisis

Using the principles gained so far, let us proceed to the second part, namely, a case study of Manipur.

2.1 The First Principle and Crisis of Human Reproduction

In 1981 Census Manipur returned a total population of 14,33,691 within the enclosed space of 22,356 sq. km. The first sectoral division that we come across is that of Manipuri/Meitei (M) and Non-Manipuri (NM). There is a group of people who know among themselves that they are called Manipuri by others. There is the other group whom the former calls Non-Manipuri. Non-Manipuri may further be divided into two, namely ; (1) Foreigners who are mainly migrants from Bangladesh, Nepal and to some extent Burma, (2) Indian nationals from other states in India.

The group of people whom others call Manipuri presents a complex structure. Important to note is that, the people never call themselves 'Manipuri' while referring to one another, although it is the name by which they are known to outsiders. The controversy over the name is not dwelt upon as that would be absolutely irrelevant to the development of the thesis. Let us simply concentrate on describing the structure as it is.

We notice four major components forming the structure now called Manipuri. They are (1) Meitei (2) Meitei Tribal, (3) Meitei, Bamon and (4) Meitei Pangal. The appellation Meitei added to the other three groups (2,3,4) signifies that the Meitei group forms the organising clan through the operation of three principles : (1) principle of integration, (2) principle of superimposition, (3) principle of co-existence. The group Meitei itself is a highly structured one and a result of a long morphogenesis. That morphogenesis is founded on the structures of seven Salais (tribes), namely, Mangang, Luwang, Khumen, Angom, Kha-Nganba, Changlei Leisangtham and Moirang - which were already in existence. Historically the Mangang (later known as Ningthouja also) acted as the catalyst in the process of fusion. The historical necessity that demanded this role of the Mangangs as well as the law of development through interactions leading to the fusion of seven distinct structures into one organic unity is an area where a lot of research remains to be done. For, herein lies the morphological problems of Manipuri identity. Apart from the difficulty of travelling backward in time in tracing the morphogenesis there are problems arising from the nature of social structure itself. The geologist can rest assured that layers of rocks and fossils superimposed upon one another will wait for him to narrate their tale. But social interpenetration, and co-existence of social structure conceal more than they reveal.

Among the Morphological questions to be answered are ; who were these Mangangs originally called Meiteis by the rest of the Salais ? Are they themselves immigrants into this valley ? Budhi traces their original habitat as far as Yunnan.¹ They are projected as imposing themselves upon an even earlier pre-historic structure, that of the Chakpas.² Questions of paramount interest are : How the internal dialectics started ? What are the inner urges (for the Mangangs) for this project of synthesis ? was it because of superior technology of production ? Or was it the quest of expanding population for pairing with females of other tribes which subsequently led to integration etc. Questions yet to be resolved through further in-depth research.

A broad outline of the morphogenesis of Manipuri identity however, can be delineated in the following manner.

There has been an interaction of the Seven Salais (Mangang, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Kha-Nganba, Changlei-Leishangthem and Moirang) extended in a time axis. Of these the Mangangs acted as the catalyst of the integration process that resulted

in the emergence of an organic unity latter known as the Meiteis. Possibly the ethnonym Meitei is first applied to the Mangang vis-a-vis the remaining groups. That is to say, the ethnonym Meitei is first applied to the Mangang Salai by the remaining six Salais. The progression of integration in time synchronised with the application of the ethnonym Meitei to the other six Salais also. Thus, the ethnonym Meitei acquired a content directly proportionate to the development in the integration process.

By the 16th century the synthesis is realised and the institution of Meitei Kingship is its conspicuous external manifestation. There has been structural fusion at the level of the base as well as superstructure. A technology of biological reproduction in the form of exogamous marriage is one fundamental principle of integration and identity conferment as Meiteis. Integration of the production process around the institution of Kingship is the second. With the king as the nominal owner of land (a means of production), productive relations were organised around Kingship as the central locus. The third is the creation of social surplus which enabled the Meitei polity generate a considerable force of attraction in group interaction. By 16th century a tangible shape has taken, the Meiteis having evolved not only the social technology of biological reproduction but also the mechanism of absorbing the inflow of population from other sources.

From time immemorial, Manipur had been one of the trade routes between the East and the West, a place where immigrants from both directions mingled with the sons of the soil and were absorbed in their turn. To the people migrating from the East tradition gave the name *Rongpok Haram*, while those from the West were called *Nongchup Haram*. Kingship was instrumental in Meitei identity conferment to the immigrants. The king usually assigned a place to the immigrants (giving a family name, a function in the transactions of the State etc). In the *Bamon Khunthok* (an account of Brahmin migration) there are interesting accounts of assimilation of Brahmins from the West. Look, for example at the following :

During the reign of King Kyamba, Misri Pitambar migrating from Takhel (Tripura) marries a tribal girl called Hongbi. His family title is Pitambar Mayum. Sri Nath from Calcutta marries a girl from Yairipok. His family title is Samulailatpam.³ Similarly Muslim prisoners of war were given land for settlement, family titles and women for wife. There were assimilation of the tribals also. Immigrants from East and West other than Brah-

mins and Muslims were given Yumnaks as well as Salais. Bishnu-purjyas, low castes from Bengal were thus given Yumnaks along with the corresponding Salais.⁴ The quantum of inflow within the limit of absorption inspite of presenting a crisis provided the genetic and cultural pool from which Meiteis could draw for enrichment of its human material.

Even under the yoke of British imperialism, custodians of Meitei polity however enslaved they are, show a deep concern of the number of foreigners in their land. A separate register of foreigners was strictly maintained. In the 20th sitting of the first session of the Manipur State Legislative Assembly which met on 7th March 1949, there was an interesting reference to the foreigners and the then Chief Minister Hon'ble Capt. P. B. Singh gave the figure of foreigners who entered Manipur during 5th August to 31 December 1947 as 759, and those who entered from 1st January 1948 to 15th December 1948 as 1960.⁵

As contrasted against this; let us look at the situation when the quantum of influx is more than the Meitei structure can absorb. To-day the situation is the social organism fighting against heavy odds with its assimilation mechanism paralysed, chances of resurrection running out with every precious second. A look at the following table will make it clear :⁶

* Shamu - Elephant. Latpam - Worshiping family. The title is given because of worshipping Lord Ganesh, the elephant-headed Deity.

Percentage of Variation of Population : Table 1.

State/Union Territory	1901-1911	1911-1921	1921-1931	1931-1941	1941-1951	1951-1961	1961-1971	1901-1971
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Arunachal Pradesh	..	..	..	..	..	..	38.91	..
Assam	16.99	20.47	19.93	20.37	19.87	35.06	34.95	344.54
Manipur	21.71	10.92	16.04	14.92	12.80	35.04	37.53	(2.66) 277.11
Meghalaya	15.71	7.21	13.83	15.59	8.97	27.03	31.50	(2.14) 197.10
Mizoram	10.64	7.90	26.42	22.81	28.42	35.61	24.93	(1.52.) 303.22
Nagaland	46.76	6.55	12.62	6.04	8.60	14.07	39.88	(2.34) 238.20
Tripura	32.48	32.59	25.93	34.14	24.56	78.71	36.28	(1.84) 797.93
All India	5.73	0.30	11.00	14.23	13.31	21.52	24.80	(6.15) 129.64

The figure in the parenthesis is the number of times of the respective states over All India figure. Source - N. E. C. Shillong.

Showing State of Influx : Table - 2

State/Union	Area (S . km).	Population 1971	(In persons) 1981	Density 1971	Density 1981	Decennial growth 1971	Decennial growth 1981	Sex Ratio female per 1000 males 1971	Sex Ratio female per 1000 males 1981
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Arunachal Pradesh	83,578	167,511	628,050	6	7	38.91	34.34	861	870
Assam	78,523	14,625,152	19,902,826	186	254	34.95	36.09	896	900
Manipur	22,356	1,072,753	1,433,691	48	64	37.53	33.65	980	972
Meghalaya	22,489	1,011,699	1,327,874	45	59	31.50	31.25	942	956
Mizoram	21,087	332,390	487,774	16	23	24.92	46.75	946	936
Nagaland	16,527	516,449	773,281	31	47	39.88	49.73	871	867
Tripura	10,477	1,556,342	2,060,189	149	196	36.28	32.37	943	948
Total :	2,55,037	19,282,296	26,613,655	77	104	..	..	..	..
All India	3,280,483	547,949,809	683,810*051	177	221	24.80	24.75	930	935

Source : N. E. C. Shillong.

Illegal immigration mainly from Nepal and Bangladesh entailing this population boom is now universally recognised. The spill-over population is writing catastrophe for the indigenes of the region. Manipur is the second most affected state. Nothing could be more eloquent of the anguish and crisis inherent in the human condition than the following excerpts from an article :

Nepali colonial expansion has already subverted the original ethnic character of the hills in North-Eastern India, and it now threatens to swamp the Mongoloid and other Non-Europoid autochthons of the region altogether. Nothing poses greater danger to the survival and autonomous development of the people of the North-East than do the Nepali interlopers. The Nepali immigrants are land-grabbers and nature-despoilers ; and of course, more than anything else, they are colonizers in a hurry. Time was when the Nepali immigration into lands to the east of the Brahmaputra was all but an occasional trickle. And it was all done on the sly. But in the early sixties that occasional trickle gave way to a massive influx. The colonial expansion of the Nepalis in our part of the world in recent years has been truly exponential. The authorities, who have all along been looking the other way, have described the immigration as clandestine. The truth is, it never was clandestine, the Inner Line and similar obstacles notwithstanding. Apart from the minions of the bureaucracy in Manipur, a variety of Meitei truck drivers and the police officials posted to Mao Gate and Kangpokpi have greatly benefitted in pecuniary terms from the 'clandestine' Nepali-running. Given the ethno-political and geo-political realities of the North-East, it is not too difficult to link the influx of Europoid, Sanskritic Hindu Nepali peasants with politically inspired attempt at demographic manipulation. And it is clearly this which invests the whole enterprise with a disquieting, even deadly aspect. Demographic manipulations are at the same level of political morality as forced population shifts. Thinking the unthinkable and doing what is normally unthinkable *all for reasons of State* have been the features of modern times. Hence the weird body counts in Vietnam, and the necessary murders elsewhere.⁷

We may sum up the point as follows :

Tracing the morphogenesis of the Meiteis using both the retrogressive as well as the progressive method has shown that the social technology of biological reproduction is one fundamental

principle in the synthesis of group structures. This synthesis is in constant interaction with a corresponding integration of productive structures.

The active operation of the assimilation mechanism augmenting the process through the absorption of influxed population. The Post Independence Era witness an abnormal increase in the quantum of influx on the one hand and an enveloping paralysis of the built-in assimilation mechanism because of the superimposition of newer structures (in the so called democratisation process). The influx of population is now inversely proportionate to the non functioning of assimilation mechanism.

Individuals embody in their existence the social structure of which they have been products. The universal law of social morphology is that whenever and wherever the influxed population is not assimilated, they act as the catalyst of alien forces and institutions. It is clearly reflected in the illegal immigrant's mode of participation in the decision making process, production and distribution of commodities and cultural life. The Left has exhibited a tendency to look at the influxed population as proletariat - a classic twisting of Marxism. They are in reality Toynbee's 'external proletariat'. In a crisis situation, the external proletariat act as the catalysing agent of the bourgeoisie of their country of origin. Take, for example, the case of Assam. The land labourers illegally inducted from Bangladesh presented a competition to the indigenous Assamese peasant on the one hand thereby cheapening agricultural labour. On the other hand they operate for and on behalf of the land Sardars responsible for their clandestine illegal induction and when favourable situation arose they sprouted Bangladeshi life and culture. Classical Marxism must creatively analyse this perversion of the historic role of the proletariat in concrete situation.

2.2 The Second Principle and Crisis of Production

We have considered production not merely as an economic category but as human creativity in a total sense. Therefore the crisis of production is best understood as the arrest of a society's creative clan.

The Meitei society is characterised by high consumption and low productivity. Like an ageing baby whose mouth is ever growing but whose other organs will not grow.

The situation simply is this. At the level of material production Manipuri society is at a state of inertia, maintained through

the operation of forces external to it. In the agricultural sector something is being done. But here the pressure of population on land is approaching the optimal limit. The army of agricultural labourer uprooted from the soil is appearing on the horizon, without, however, a corresponding development in the industrial sector to absorb them as the future army of industrial proletariat. But this society which has failed to deliver goods to itself is receiving everything. Ostensive consumerism-worship of the golden calf-is the way of life. The purchasing money ? Is again infused through extraneous structures only to be pumped out through a commodity distribution mechanism. The society is robbed of its capital forming potential. On this point classical Marxism must know its terrain. Circulation of commodities and externally infused Capital (money-form) does not necessarily lead to the release of productive process. A market that does not generate its own capital but is an appendage to a capital operating externally is a captive market. This capital to the hinterland people vis-a-vis the captive market loses its liberating character. Capital as the international force crosses all barriers yet even so every society must crystallise it in its own way. That is the uneven development of History. Never shall History recognise society appearing its examination by proxy.

Viewed from this standpoint, the case of Manipur is not that of underdevelopment even, but one of suspended development. The process of development somehow frozen, the wheel of History somehow not turning. The people is passive if the definition of passivity is existential relativity, that the passive is constituted only as the action of some other thing than itself. In a state of passivity, men's relation to the world of objects and institutional structure is a magical one. Things and institutions around do overwhelm, as if beyond his rational control. Their perverted logic compresses him. Like vampire they sleep away man's day time, but springs to life in the night to suck his blood.

Let me quote what the State Planning Department, Government of Manipur has to say on the development of Manipur.

Since the State is virtually depending on other States for consumption and construction items, price levels are higher in Manipur than to all India average prices by about 25 per cent. Taking into account the general effect of inflation and the price rise, the cut-off line for determining the percentage of population living below the poverty line in Manipur in 1973-74 was estimated at round Rs. 60 in rural areas and Rs. 70 in urban area. Superimposing the

cut-off points in the NSS data on household consumer expenditure of the 28th Round (1973-74) the State had 66.59% of population in rural areas and 59.16 in urban areas below the poverty line⁸.

Assuming that the same percentages of the population i.e., 66.59% in rural and 59.16% in urban Manipur live below the poverty line in the 1980 the State has 9.26 lakh persons 7.58 lakhs in rural areas and 1.68 lakhs in urban areas below the poverty line out of an estimated 14.22 lakhs in March 1980. This means to say that about 60 of every 100 people in the State have to go without enough food, without proper home and adequate clothes, without education and jobs, without in short the dignity which is inherent in belonging to the human race. It means that we live in a place which is only partly free.⁹

Let us look again at what the said document gives as the indices of development - India and Manipur.¹⁰

Sector/Item	Unit	Manipur	India
1	2	3	4
1. Road Density per Sq. Km. of area (1977)	Km.	14	40
2. Per Capita Power consumption (1979)	K.W.H.	9	101
3. Irrigated area to total cultivated area (1979)	P.C.	10	25
4. Motor Vehicles per lakh population	No	258 (1971-72)	260 (1968)
5. Motor Vehicles on Road per 100 sq. km. of area	No	1206 (1971-72)	341 (1968)
6. Bank office per 100 sq. km. of area	No	0.06 (1972-73)	3.7 (1971)
7. Infrastructure availability index	No	79	100
8. Per Capita Incomes at 1970-71 price (1978-79)	Rs.	467	712
9. Literacy	P.C.	32.9	29.5
10. Population Declared as Industrially Backward.	P.C.	100	58
11. Area Declared as Industrially Backward	P.C.	100	71

The picture is all too clear. But what I propose is a different way of looking at the given. Economists, Statisticians and Planners etc. have uniformly exhibited a tendency to quantify the meaning of development. As if quantification in palpable figures is the strategy towards the definition of development. This, I am sure, violates one fundamental truth, an article of faith. What ultimately matters in the game of development is the players themselves, their finding themselves in the game again. The development of man himself is the whole point of the process, the resurrection of Man the Artist to his rightful place, 'in the scheme of things entire.' The quantification strategy alone will not reveal the truth that enforced development (as if this term is not contradictory) and enforced underdevelopment are in reality one phenomenon looked at from two different standpoints.

Crisis at the level of spiritual production is glaringly reflected in our literary creation (sic). As early as 1983, I wrote describing the mode of literary production in contemporary Manipur :

The paralysis of material production has its counterpart in the paralysis of intellectual and artistic production. Many of our artists and poets want to believe that they are creating something while in reality they are middlemen of products from elsewhere. The psychological uneasiness of having minted counterfeit coins destined to be out of circuit soon, is benumbed by awards whose glamour normally fails to outlive the first round of felicitations. If communication with people is how you deliver spiritual products, here we have a case of communication gap between the artist the producer and people the consumer, because his product and their needs are poles apart. The mushroom growth of mutual admiration societies subsisting on financial grants is not an accident but a logical corollary of the crisis in production. Awards killing artists is perhaps a reflection on a global scale, of how the ethics of bourgeois salesmanship corrodes the healthy texture of art. But this is the most obvious trend in Manipur. "

Even to-day, I am seeing no reason to change my view.

2.3 Crisis in Tradition Making

That the crisis in tradition making is felt so real is evidenced by the emergence of the revivalist movement. Overwhelmed by an alien world of commodities and bogged down by alien structures functioning without their participation, the Meiteis feel them-

selves a stranger to their tradition.* Hence the necessity of paying a visit to one's tradition as if to an anthropological museum. The revivalist's romantic obsession with the past betrays his tragic failure to relive it.

Let us take for example, the crisis in tradition making at the level of symbolic forms, e.g. myth making reflecting a Weltanschauung. The Lai Haraoba ritual is a synthetic organisation of various elements. As a ritual to make both man and land fertile, its motifs are production of crops and the reproduction of human beings. For the same reason, it is a folk memory extended in time of the beginning of agricultural settlement and the growth of the collective life of the Meiteis. As a device to intervene the operation of the elements through a propitiation of the controlling deities it is a rudimentary form of control-control of natural elements and destinies of man to ensure the continuity and expansion of collective life. As the organic model of isomorphic morphogenesis of man, society and cosmos, it is cosmology. In its creation of sensuous forms as the medium through which the collective can share the transcendental experience of communion with the Deity, it is creation in accordance with the Laws of Beauty. To be precise, it is a highly complex and structured creation of symbolic forms which is the embodiment of Meitei Weltanschauung.

But to-day, the Meiteis are confronting a problem - their created world of symbolic forms are not finding its transmigrating body, i.e. the creativity of a generation for them to be realised in new forms and contexts. It is not that Lai Haraoba rituals are not performed. On the contrary, there has been a spurt of ritualistic observance. But it is gradually becoming an empty form rather than collective spiritual experience, unable to respond to contemporary needs. To live continually the created world of symbolic forms must pass through a new phase of transformation. But this can be done only through the rewriting of the Weltanschauung embodied in the earlier creation that will now act as the living spirit of the time. This has not been done which is exactly what one understands by crisis in tradition making. Tradition is not reproduction of lifeless forms, but a living spirit that like a jelly like substance takes on its newer and newer forms.

* A tradition presenting itself as not tradition. If this is contradictory that is because the phenomenon we are facing is contradictory.

By now we have traced the morphogenesis of Meitei identity and its crisis but by no means at our journey's end. For we have promised suggestions of possible solutions in a futuristic time scale. This promise we will fulfil in a further continuance of the present work. At least we have formulated the problem and a problem rightly formulated is a problem half solved.

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