A CRITICAL OBSERVATION IN THE ACTIVITIES AND APPROACHES OF A CSO FOR MANIPUR’S TERRITORIAL AND EMOTIONAL INTEGRITY

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ABSTRACT

In the present paper, the researchers critically observed and analyzed the activities and approaches of UCM (United Committee Manipur), one of the most influential civil society organization of Manipur. An informal interview was conducted with a focus group including the current president and other member of the organization for the primary data. But, the researchers also resort to secondary sources like written records and texts provided by UCM. Besides referring relevant articles, reputed journals and other secondary sources. Through the study, it has been revealed that UCM has a Para-political character and faces various constraints from being a low range entity, limited social domain and non-political party. Besides, UCM has taken up initiatives like bringing territorial and emotional integrity of Manipur, communal harmony, settling boundary issues and strengthening people’s resilience.

KEYWORDS: UCM, CSO, Para-political, Public sphere.

INTRODUCTION

Jürgen Habermas (1974) says that “civil society locates between family and state”. He further stated that the public sphere encourages rational will formation; it is a sphere of rational and democratic social interaction. Jillian Schwedler (1995) also points out that civil society emerges with the resurrection of the public sphere when individuals and groups begin to challenge boundaries of permissible behaviour-for example, by speaking out against the regime or demanding a government response to social needs—civil society begins to take shape. In the backdrop of this theoretical perspective on civil society, the present paper attempts to explore civil societies’ influential initiatives into the ongoing conflict situations in Manipur, a land in the far North-East region of India, once described as 'a burning-cauldron' by Ghurey (1980). The state has witnessed innumerable issues and clasqness from time to time since its inception as a state within the Indian Federal System. And as a response, endless claims and counter-claims over a range of sensitive issues have been reported and many civil society organisations, has thus, come up on the scene to take their active participation in keeping harmony and order between the state and the conflicting groups. Territorial and emotional integrity of Manipur seems to be the main objective of these civil societies in Manipur.

Objective of the study

The main specific objectives of the study are:

i) To ascertain the status of the UCM as civil society organisation.

ii) To highlight the constraints and initiatives of the UCM.

Theoretical perspective

How are we to define civil society? The term "civil society," often equated with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or citizens’ movements in everyday political parlance, is in fact a highly ambiguous concept (Schade 2002). In the history of political ideas, beginning with Aristotle and ending, at least provisionally, with Jürgen Habermas, the concept has been invested with some very different meanings. Citing Charles Taylor (1991: 52), civil society may be defined as "a web of autonomous associations independent of the state which, bound together in matters of common concern by mere existence or action, could have an effect on public policy." If, on the other hand, we base our definition on Jürgen Habermas (1992: 443), we would find that:

Civil society is made up of more or less spontaneously created associations, organizations and movements which find, take up, condense and amplify the resonance of social problems in private life, and pass it on to the political realm or public sphere. Not without a sound dash of pragmatism, the present article will define civil-society actors as organizations which see themselves as such and meet at least two conditions: they must be independent of the state and they must be active in the realm of politics.

UCM as civil society

The United Committee Manipur, UCM was established on the 30th of July 2001, as an apex organization to spearhead the people’s movement for protection and safeguarding of the territorial boundary of Manipur as one of its sole objective. In order to achieve its objectives UCM had to undergo different facets of activities such as maintenance of communal harmony, ethnic de-polarization, emotional and social integration. Right after the Bangkok agreement between the Govt of India and NSCN (IM), there was a continuous demand for disintegration of Manipur in the name of Greater Nagaland, Southern Nagaland, alternative arrangement and so on. Even today their demands ruffle coe. Since the inception of the agreement within the territorial limits of Nagaland. It was a people's victory. From thereon there is no turning back and UCM still continues to take the spearheading role in protecting and safeguarding the territorial boundary and emotional integrity of Manipur. The latest position that the United Committee Manipur, UCM had reiterated to the Govt of India is that:

i) The Govt of India should respect the political and historical distinctive identity of Manipur and nothing should be done to disrupt this unity.

ii) The people of Manipur would not tolerate any compromise to its territorial boundary in appeasing any organization; the territorial boundary which was there at the time when Manipur joined the Indian Union on the 15th of Oct, 1949 should remain intact.

iii) Anything sort of internal administrative arrangement based on ethnicity will not be accepted under any condition.

iv) While respecting the ethos and aspiration of one group or organization which relates to a particular state, the Govt of India shall not disturb the peace and tranquillity of neighbouring states at all or simply to say any structural transformation of the appeasement policy of pan Nagal cultural body or religious body cannot cross the territorial boundary of other states, it should be confined within the territorial boundary of Nagaland.

Another important objective of UCM is to constantly make vigil of the ethnic differences occurring at different levels in Manipur. In Manipur we have witnessed ethnic clashes in 1992-93 which resulted in the killing of around 1000 peoples and forced evacuation of around 550 villages all over the hill areas. The main reason for such ethnic communal violence was the pursuit of dominance of one ethnic group by another for territory. In fact, according to UCM, it was an orchestrated move by NSCN (IM) to set the table for their vested agenda by issuing a dictate or serving quit notices to many Kuki villages or accept forced conversion to Naga. Naganism was the main reason for so many killing at that time. Many of the smaller tribes which population was less than ten thousand people belonging to the old Kuki were converted into Naga. Now, Moyon, Maring, Tarao, Aimol, Monsang inhabiting around the areas of Chandel district are converted into
Acting on this note UCM with other liked minded organisations have started a state-wide movement to bring awareness and unity so as to strengthen the age old relationship of hill-valley people under the campaign brand called the Peoples movements for the organisations of Manipur. And as continuing part of it UCM also to act as show down to everyone trying to threaten Manipur’s unity and territory boundary. UCM with other organizations of the state jointly organized a Mass Rally entitled “Mass Rally for the Common Future of Manipur” which was unprecedented in the history of Manipur where more than five lakhs people attended on the 6th of February, 2016.

Organisational Structure of UCM
UCM is purely an apex civil society organisation, consisting of various state level civil society organisations’ representatives which operate on changing. Office bearers are appointed from various civil society organisations for a term of three years. The organization structure consists of

I) General Assembly members
II) Executive Committee holding various portfolios.
III) Also have various units at districts and local bodies as UCM units and districts councils

Initiatives taken up by UCM
Apart from territorial integrity of Manipur as mentioned in the objectives, the initiatives taken up by the organisation for the overall stability of the state are as follows:

I. Communal harmony
As Manipur is multi pluralistic society, there is every possibility of differences which may occur between the different groups for different reasons. Land boundary dispute is a common form of ethnic feud which exists largely in the state. Sometimes it aggravated and violence followed. At such time UCM have continuously tried to intervene for an amicable solution. The recent incident of Keithel Mhanei Kuki and Moidangpok village, the issue of land encroachment between Chingkham Kabui village and adjoining Muslim villages of Lilong, the boundary dispute between Tronglaobi and villages of Henglep divisions had been skilfully handled. Administrative anomalies cannot be converted into ethnic temperamental what UCM has been preaching and they are successful in their attempt. So far, in this regard nothing has occurred which can be termed as ethnic violence except some skirmishes. The incident of killing at Pallel at a Lai Haraoba procession was also timely intervened by UCM. Besides there are number of cases where UCM have worked in defusing tensions between various ethnic groups such as the incident of killing of some labourer at Thingshat near Mapao khullen by some underground groups which was transforming into an ethnic tension was rightly intervened by UCM.

II. Boundary
Another important activity of UCM is to preserve the territorial boundary of Manipur at all cost. Many border surveys have been conducted by UCM in this regard. Very recently, a team of UCM have visited the incursion of boundary line by Myanmar at Kwathaa khanou and was brought out into the limelight. Similar cases were brought up by UCM in Ukhrul districts at Wangle, Jessami also. UCM have been demanding for demarcation of boundary lines based on mutual agreement based on traditional boundaries which are identified by the inhabiting peoples on both sides. UCM believes that until and unless this is done, there cannot be border demarcation and border fencing. The main reason for this is that the people are living on either side for so many years and all of a sudden based on satellite drawings and map, an imaginary line has been constructed as border line disqualifying the traditionally accepted boundaries between the peoples causing an atmosphere of uncertainty and animosity among them.

A glaring example is the recent issue of land encroachment at Mao area by the Angami people was strongly reacted by UCM and supported the Mao people for their right stand.

III. Strengthening peoples’ resilience
UCM thus strongly felt the need for strengthening the peoples’ resilience in such a conflict situation in Manipur. As we can see from the above facts that it is very important to meet ever evolving challenges from external and internal. It is a proven fact that the power of the people is the ultimate force against any injustice, foul political games, crime against humanity and anti people government deci-