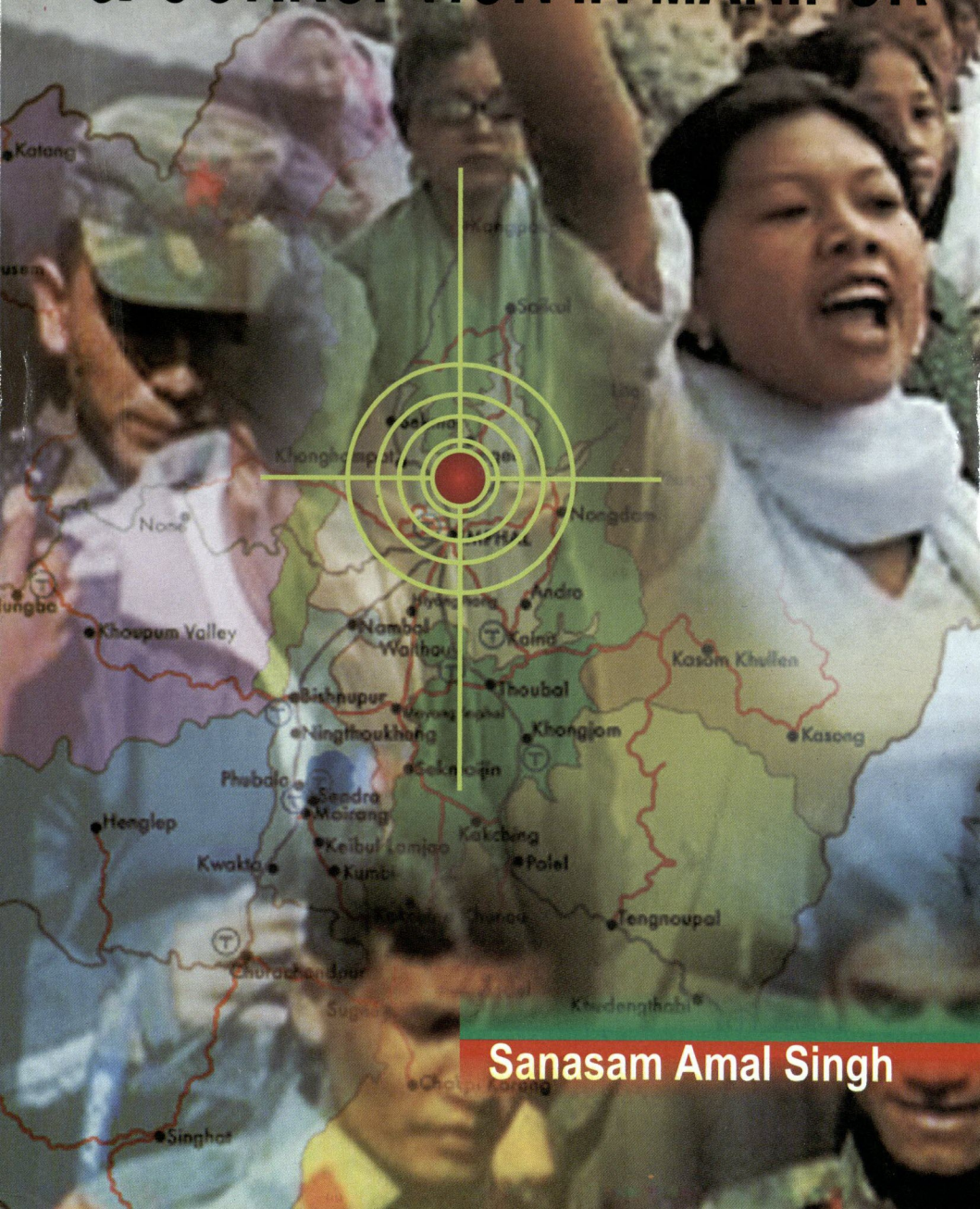


POWER POLITICS & CORRUPTION IN MANIPUR



Sanasam Amal Singh

POWER POLITICS

& CORRUPTION IN MANIPUR

Corruption inevitably has an impact on the economy and the society . In recent years, social scientists have become increasingly intrested in the study of the political dimension of economic growth and development. Part of this intrest can be found in the belief that traditional constructs have not been policy - relevant, especially since they usually fail to emphasize the importance of law and institutions to economic growth.

The corruption within the bureaucracy in Manipur present the principal burden to the society today. The poor will suffer from a corrupt legal system that offers them little protection - exposing them to arbitrary judgments that may cause them to lose their land, homes, or livelihood. This book looks into all these power, politics and corruption issues.

About The Author



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POWER POLITICS AND CORRUPTION IN MANIPUR

Sanasam Amal Singh

M.A., Ph.D.



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In Manipur

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Chapter One

Death Of Politics And Destiny

To make a mention about the genesis of the Manipuri nationalism, it cannot avert from the Social Consolidation Policy of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33-154 AD) who introduced national formation through as a social mingling processes. During his reign, the seven clans (known as YEKs) had been socially integrated.

This nation formation process was taken up by way of cultural exchange, social amalgamation among the different clans as a state norm that had completed more or less one thousand years in advanced than a few ancient European nations. According to customary laws and social conventions, no one was allowed to marry to another of the same clan (which is termed as YEK THOKNABA) and this rule has been in force as yet.

Such classic rule as the social consolidation process among different clans has been molding its people ripe with nationalism with a view to standardizing the national characters which are, still pulling together as a national code to bring about unity among multi-ethnic identities. This is the nation building process which is carried on as yet to make more integrated among the ethnic groups, to keep the State in tact.

Seven Years' Devastation (1819-26)

Another root to swell up Manipuri nationalism is the seven years devastation occurred during the reign of Marjit who sought power at any costs and by all means. The activities of the Burmese occupants in Manipur were not only merely oppressive and killing people, but an attempt to extirpate the entire Manipuri race. But they found it impossible even to subdue the rising up people and so they retreated after only 7 years occupation of the state.

Among the kings and the princes that fled abroad leaving people to their own destiny or, served Burmese invaders during the devastation period, there was still a few leading personalities or, princes who stood for the hapless people by not fleeing from the land but hiding among the panic stricken people of the country.

Here the unique role of Herachandra the brave son of Manipur will be worth mentioning. Herachandra with many other youths of hill and plain began to gathering up the scattered and displaced people and took a turn to venture at the risk of their lives by pouncing upon the Burmese army with tactics of guerilla warfare. This news of resistance movement under the leadership of Herachandra organizing militia of about 400 to 800 in number, spread far and wide, and the scattered people even from Cachar came to join him. This bucked up the operation of guerilla warfare until the Burmese morale was disheartened.

His efforts materialized the people's hope to sweep the enemies away to recovered the suspended sovereign status of Manipur and done it with people's support consolidating the nationalism spirits. Important to note here is that whether the Manipuri history during the devastation period had it with the mass to write or, after the devastation with the monarch to dictate as it was and whether the fugleman like Herachandra was averted from the usual course of Manipuri history even after the devastation or, streamlined to ever produce such national heroes are today's turning points in thoughts.

It was really a landmark of Manipuri history when the Manipuri nationalism was deeply attached to the people with the Herculean task of Herachandra who did ever hold out of olive branch for the throne. Had it been like other Meitei princess who lost reason in betting throne and who looked out for petty gain, it would have created an atmosphere for most of them to be at daggers drawn with each other. As luck favored the people, such demeanor was not appeared that time. It did never draw a line of division among the people out of their true nationalism since the appearance of leader like Herachandra.

Throughout the period for four years in service among the scattered people and maneuvering guerilla warfare till the day of his last breath, Herachandra kept on resistance against the invaders with a vengeance for the sake of his motherland. What with the rare opportunity he got to run on with Sana Yumjaotaba during that rough passage and, what with a forceful light of nationalism emitted upon their union, which led them to the service of the people, was all the stories to tell up to the elbows in history of nationalism.

On the other hand, Gambhir Singh's timely organization pulling up the brothers together with consensus and looking out for strategic diplomacy with the British was the excellent token of nationalism, which boosted up the morale of the Manipuris. Besides the credit of hill people from Tamenglong Kabui Khul, Kharam Khungjai etc. came to grief through thick and thin of the incident remains to be the speaking volume of Manipuri nationalism. Another historic event worth mentioning is the Anglo-Manipuri war (1891).

The people wit pains taking heart at the colonial occupation began to rise up with one voice. Despite having differences in opinions among the people was about the over dethroning of the King Surchandra, the mass discontent above the British for unjust actions, patched up all the divisions among the people and kept on consolidating Manipuri nationalism. Manipur though defeated in the battle gained exalted magnificence and increased the taste of nationalism day by day.

History showed renaissance of modern Manipuri nationalism when Naoria Phulo (1888-1941), Hijam Irabot (1896-1951), Hijam Angahal (a poet) together with the Kuki Rebellion and the Jadonang's resistance movement stood against the colonial rule with a view to reviving indigenous culture, religion, language, economy etc of the land. The leaders accomplished remarkable changes in politics and social systems too. One of the most remarkable events in Manipur history was the women's movement known as 'Nupi Lan'.

On many occasions where men could not do so, were only the womenfolk who performed social, economic, political activities. It becomes pride to be with such miraculous trend of Manipuri nationalism which women kept pace with since time immemorial. Not only did the women struggle for political, economic truisms which is successfully known as Nupi Lan but also they carried on social activities and still continuing on to patch up the differences among groups of social activities in Manipur. Today's Manipuri women's Meira Paibi movement acting as defenders against all colonial mal practices enhancing nationalism spirits among Manipuris.

The most significant chapter is the post merger scenario which shows both the contradiction and the degree of excellence of Manipuri nationalism. The Indian rule could not act honorably for years in response with the Merger agreement and drew a blank for years past to the aspiration of the people of Manipur, instead, treated as inferior status with deceitful action.

The people losing heart have to hope against hope. Discontented with the neo-colonial rule, resistance movement and national liberation movement have been on. Many social organizations come up to motivate Manipuri national character among the people specially the youths. All the rough passages met through this Indian voyage make nowadays fertile ground to a degree of giving birth to Manipuri nationalism.

But the people of Manipur can never forget Kiyampok Lamjao (Kabo valley) which was ceded to Burma by India just within 5 years after merger. To day too the territorial

integrity has been threatened time and again. Manipuri people believe in the theory that whenever Manipur remains within the Indian ambit, its territorial integrity will never be secure. This sensitive issue will be their button to press at any time for gaining an advantage secretly. The most important factor of national feeling is this geographic unity.

It is this unity which exhibits to promote pride of possession of this common abode, which is worshipped as motherland Manipur. Without a sense of pride for this coveted homeland it becomes difficult to develop real national feelings. People, who live together on this common land for a considerably long period, can devise new ways of living, working and developing common aim, ideal and aspiration. If territorial integrity is maintained then national interest increases among the people, which helps in bringing up the growth of nationalism.

Linguistic Nationalism

The dialects of the different ethnic groups of Manipur are the rare sources of Manipuri nationalism having common relative affinity among distinct identities, which bind them together into one ribbon-wreath and it begets finally Manipuri as lingua franca. So, Manipuri language is playing a vital role in binding Manipuri people together and creating consciousness among the people of their common heritage. This common language enables people to project common ideal, sentiment and feeling. It could really set up the common standards of morality, justice and manners among the people and could conserve historical values. Its aim for generating a common national psychology should be encouraged from all quarters.

Social Conglomeration

As blended tight, oneness of thought the common race being the unifying force, binds the hearts of the people owing to having common ancestry and, it helps greatly in promoting and sustaining the national spirit, as it is regarded as the first priority in ancestral viewpoint. Though this process had been

started for amalgamation of different social groups since N.L. Pakhangba as social consolidation process, it could well complete national building process and still carrying on inspite of having interruption by alien religions. As religion has been the mainspring of national survival, it seems people sidelining the alien religious impacts and striving of preserving indigenous religions and respect different beliefs and practices of the land with a view to completing the Amalgamation process.

Cultural Nationalism

Regarding nationalism through cultural diversity, we have really common cultural traits signifying unity of ideas and ideals among ethnic groups. As its examples, we have common customs, traditions, common manners, folklore and common tastes in art and literature in various aspects and common cultural heritage. Our national pride of common heritage had been tarnished during the reign of Pamheiba for a while but today still we are on the way clean up the remnants of cultural imperialism. Now there is mass participation on definite but original cultural functions of the nation. So really how we share equally in every walk of social cohesiveness through cultural bindings is perceived as the only way of all.

Economic Nationalism

Since economy plays a vital role in the national process, Manipur as in the status of sub-nation by now becomes consumer society being drained out the state's wealth at large scale outside. Having seen the degradation of our national characters, many of us become intolerant in the psychological pressure of imperialist economy which makes us think that our state or, this fool's paradise may be extinct if India does not stand by us. Interestingly, many organizations now are active in rejuvenating small-scale industries, corporation, industrial sectors and even dictating the alien dress codes.

Many NGOs and leading personalities are on the verge of emphasizing on cultural renaissance like MERA HOU

CHONGBA, EPANTHABA, marriage functions etc. in which local productions are used only to promote economic nationalism. Our ancestors knew well that common economic interest is the most potent factor contributing to the promotion of nationalism. Looking after our common economic interest will be more meaningful only after attaining a social code of consuming Indigenous products and it is really set in operation. We have a lot to revive traditional economic usage and exploring on modernization in full view of the LPG so as to develop local/indigenous products, which shall greatly help in binding the people together in the web of Manipuri Nationalism.

Neo-Colonial Rule Upshot

The post annexation/merger period of Manipur is a history of mass discontent against the hard luck state rule, which is also spelled as the neo-colonial rule. This handed down right from the British rule to the Indian rule as colonial legacy, rolled back as India's basic policy to torture and eliminate North East state people specially Manipur by divide and rule, ethnic cleansing, militarization campaign, economic exploitation, unemployment etc. causing to rubbing off the footmarks of generations to come.

The people of Manipur become more and more disgruntled against the despotic rule for having imposed multifarious black laws which are used as devices of state terrorism such as torture, gang rape, killing innocents at random etc.. This becomes out and out counter productive and yearns to pick up inherited thread of self-determination in many issues and starts orchestrating renaissance of Manipuri nationalism.

Today, the more the people suffer out of the repressive rule, the more loudly yell the people for the renaissance of the Manipuri nationalism which is amplifying to a degree of holding the trump card. In Manipur, the dominant Meitei people strongly disagree with what they see as Naga irredentism. There was some unrest when Muivah announced his visit. Sloppy handling by the Congress government in the state, compounded by delayed action by the Union Home Ministry, ended up causing a first-class crisis.

In early May 2010, protesting Naga students were challenged by the police. This only intensified the disruption of traffic on the highways leading to Manipur. Thus, the biggest hospitals are practically out of medicines. LPG (cooking gas) cylinders are being sold for Rs.1,200, four times what the rest of India pays. Mainstream India - a loaded expression that generally means the politico-intellectual establishment in New Delhi - has decided to take notice. Television channels have started running talk shows on Manipur.

The Home Ministry had said and sent paramilitary forces to clear the blockade. That aside, there have been the traditional arguments: Would a crisis of this type have been allowed to fester for 68 days if it had involved Mumbai rather than Manipur? Are people of the Northeast second-class citizens? These questions are not new, and they are going to be asked again and again. After all the Meitei-Naga crisis of Manipur is not the last such in the Northeast. Even so, there is a certain smugness to India's template response, time after time.

Advocates of a hard line want the Northeast to be under semi-permanent military rule. They uphold the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958. The AFSPA, as it is called, allows armed forces to shoot and kill on mere suspicion of militancy or wrongdoing. On the other side are 'liberals' who want the AFSPA to be repealed, who want the Union government to sit down and talk to the Nagas, the Manipuris and the many disaffected ethnic communities.

Both sides want to 'protect the natives'. The first wants to save them from - take your pick - insurgency, Chinese invaders and Bangladeshi intruders. The second wants to keep them frozen in time, almost as if in an anthropological museum. For politicians, the Northeast is the source of massive corruption. The Union government pours in funds but channels it to key political elites, and the money inevitably flows back to private war chests in New Delhi.

For the Indian ruling class, the Northeast has become a racket, not a problem to be resolved, much less a region to be celebrated. The Naga talks are a case in point. The NSCN has

been engaged in negotiations with a series of interlocutors - usually a retired civil servant in search of a sinecure. The gentleman meets the NSCN leadership in Bangkok or elsewhere, tots up frequent flyer points, persuades them to come back to India for further talks, but in the end gets nowhere.

The interlocutor has no mandate to offer a political deal. He cannot tell the NSCN that Nagalim will be agreed to and Naga-speaking regions outside Nagaland will be brought into the state's boundaries. He cannot refuse this either. He has no authority either way, as this is a political call. As such, all that the interlocutor does is stall for time, and plan his next foreign visit for 'a peace talks'. In the interim, the Home Ministry shrugs its shoulders and whispers to those who will listen: 'What do we do? If we give in to the Nagas, Manipur will be in flames. The Northeast is so volatile. What do we do, what do we do?'

The Northeast is a political minefield, as many parts of India are; it is also culturally and sociologically extremely complex. Yet, does this mean it is forever fated to be at a cul de sac? Frankly, this may well be the case. There are enough vested interests that find the cul de sac very profitable. A Maruti Esteem in Assam was Rs.40,000 more expensive, than one in West Bengal.

"The distance between Siliguri and Guwahati is 500 km," said an acquaintance. "At the rate of Rs. 8 a km, the local Maruti manager, it would take the company Rs.4,000 to bring the car here. Why the Rs.40,000 premium?" The Maruti executive smiled, and retorted: "Strategic pricing." He meant: inadequate competition.

This is true across the Northeast. Branded milk in Shillong is more expensive than branded milk in, say, Chennai. Such examples abound. The region is the last bastion of India's shortage economy. The route out of its troubles must necessarily be economic as well. If it works, all the other fault-lines - the political mess and the ethnic divisions - will fade away that much faster.

First, there are the easy policy decisions. The Northeast has no business having the same time zone as the rest of India. It is to the east of Bhutan and yet 30 minutes behind Bhutan time. Recognition of this irrefutable logic will result in huge daylight and resource savings in the Northeast.

Second, the security-obsessed have got to stop seeing the Northeast as nothing more than the setting for war game fantasy. The Northeast has among India's worst roads and highways. Traditionally, India has built poor to no roads on its borders, fearing that to build good roads will help invading armies march in. Such bizarre thinking, and the long wait for a second Chinese attack after 1962, has had India denying its own citizens halfway decent roads.

Contrast this with Xinjiang and Tibet, two regions the Chinese have brutalised - doing much worse than India has done in the Northeast or Kashmir - but where Beijing has built world-class infrastructure, complete with fabulous highways. If there is a public perception battle here, India is not winning it. Third, the Bangladeshi immigration/infiltration/demographic invasion phenomenon has to be rescued from religious nutcases.

Millions of Bangladeshis live in the Northeast, particularly Assam, which they use as a base to move into the rest of India. Some of these people are Islamists and criminals (Bangladeshi terror and burglar gangs have been busted as far away as New Delhi). But the vast majority are ordinary folk in search of jobs and economic opportunity. In Guwahati, construction comes to a standstill in the month of Ramzan.

This is not a dire statement - it is a fact of life. The Bangladeshi worker is there because he is filling an economic need. If he disappears, it will be that much more difficult to build those houses and malls and roads in Assam and the Northeast. Migrant labour follows a hierarchy. The Oriya or Bihari worker is moving westwards, towards Gujarat and Maharashtra. As such, in the Northeast - at the other end of the food chain - it is the Bangladeshi worker who fills the gap.

Does this mean illegal immigration should be condoned? Not at all. It only implies that India needs to get over the rhetoric of 'deport all Bangladeshis' and give up that idea as simply not feasible. Rather, a guest worker system should be encouraged and incentivised, granting its practitioners legal status but not citizenship.

Fourth, in an age when, from the European Union to ASEAN, trade and other barriers are being dismantled, the Northeast has been deprived of a compelling advantage: scale. In terms of ethnicity and identity, this is one of the world's most complicated zones. That is a reason for its division into eight states. Within most of the states, there are separate jurisdictions for hill, ethnic-minority or tribal councils. All of this is representative of heterogeneity, but is also the product of a mindset in New Delhi that promotes the Northeast solely as a security concern and has sought to keep the locals politically divided.

What is the consequence of this? The Northeast has 25 members in the Lok Sabha, but when was the last time it produced a leader with real clout in India's capital? Probably Dinesh Goswami, law minister in VP Singh's government in 1989. More recently, PA Sangma tried to become a spokesperson for all eight states, but was only partly successful. Rajasthan has 25 MPs, Gujarat 26 and Karnataka 28. These states, through their parliamentarians, wield influence in Delhi. Hopelessly divided, the Northeast contingent in Parliament is a voice in the wilderness.

In economic terms, the jigsaw-puzzle region cannot maximise its potential. Due to its terrain and geography the Northeast, for the most part, is not going to become a manufacturing hub with huge factories making, say, automobile components. Nevertheless, it is a services sector natural and a global tourism story waiting to explode. It is telling that, from malls in New Delhi to BPOs in Bangalore to spas in Kochi, the English-language abilities and 'soft skills' of young boys and girls from the Northeast make them key to India's services economy. Equally, it is a shame that this

talent has little space back home. Neither will tourists come unless ensured good airports and roads, seamless, hassle-free connectivity between states, and freedom from security protocols.

Is this practicable? Yes, but only if the Northeast gets a new regional compact. It needs a States Reorganisation Commission of its own, which attempts to reconcile competing territorial sentiment and, whether it succeeds or not, negotiates a free trade agreement between the component states. Let the Northeast remain eight states and multiple sub-state councils - but let it become a single economic entity, with the same local tax laws, free transfer of goods and services, and unfettered movement of human and financial capital.

In other words, let the Northeast realise even a fraction of its economic destiny. When it starts doing so, the incentive to block a highway, spend a lifetime in identity politics, and oscillate between distrusting New Delhi and becoming a recipient of its hand-me-downs will also start to lose ground. With enlightened political thinking, this can be done. Will it be anytime soon? Unfortunately, we all know the answer.

The brutal murder of the migrant workers speaks about the destiny of Manipur more than many would care to know. It is not a specific episode but something that marks the nature of our trajectory as a collective political being. It is high time for us to do some crucial soul searching. Who could possibly be the enemy of the poor labourers who struggle for life on a daily basis? Would a people who are already fighting for their own right to life and dignity, to be recognized as a self-respecting and respected member of the civilized global community of peoples, be the enemy of such labourers?

Shouldn't we ask this question, irrespective of the fact that the idea of terrorism as an act of targeting "non-combatants" has been there for a long time before the same discourse has come to inform a politics of de-legitimization in the post 9/11 global order? Indeed, what political legitimacy could the enemy of these labourers — people who have

already been hounded out of their own homestead by destitution and castist discrimination – achieve by murdering them in cold blood?

Even if one were to go by an intriguing suggestion that the influx of these labourers to Manipur is a part of a sinister design to subvert the economy and demographic character of the state, who are the victims here anyway? Shouldn't we ask this question irrespective of whether there would be retaliation against the Manipuris outside the state or not? In any case, isn't it critical for one to know what has made such an influx possible in the first place? For instance, do we need to ask as to how many "sons of the soil" would do the labour that these migrant labourers do for "us"? Unlike them, don't our own "local" labourers (e.g., rickshaw pullers) cover their faces to protect their "dignity (of labour)"?

What is the nature of our economy anyway? Isn't it a donor-driven economy that primarily sustains itself on "grants" from "others"? Incidentally, don't some people term such an economy "colonial" or "neo-colonial" that subverts our collective being? But how do we try to resist, if at all there is such a resistance to, this economy? By partaking in it or getting seduced by its culture of "easy money" – its underhand dealings, percentage cuts and institutionalized corruption – and the corresponding practices of ideological, intellectual and moral bankruptcy, and the capacity and willingness to kill each other for one's shares of the spoil?

Are these questions relevant to those for whom murder with impunity and dead bodies being dumped, displayed or discovered here and there have become part of the "normal" daily life? The answer should be a categorical "yes" precisely because the brutal murder of the migrant workers is nothing but a symptom that signals the deepening of a "life threatening" disease that afflicts Manipur. And that disease is violence in its unbridled form that has come to entirely usurp politics in Manipur today.

Politics has been divested of its cardinal search for a life that can be articulated and practiced in terms of "justice" and

“rights” etc. Even politics as power has been simultaneously trivialized and vulgarized in terms of solely practicing tangible violence. Thus, affected by this disease, the body politics of Manipur is marked by ideological and intellectual bankruptcy and weakening of institutions.

Symptoms of the deadly affliction have manifested time and again for a long time now. But each time, people seem to have responded only to the symptoms, and that too episodically. As a result, most have failed to recognize, leave alone addressing and grappling with, the underlying ailment that afflicts the body politics of the state.

For long time, Manipur is a state, where the lawful agencies of the state could kill people with impunity and principle of criminal jurisprudence could be thrown to the dustbin (such as exemplified by the enforcement of the notorious Acts like the AFSPA, and conducts of the executive arms of the state).

Does anyone care to remember that ours is a state where custodial murder of a woman – and a public display of her dead body – has been defended and justified? And that ours is a state where police could shoot down a citizen for a traffic altercation that he had with them in broad-daylight? Indeed, in Manipur, for a long time, the legitimacy of the state has been sought, not in terms of “governance”, but primarily in terms of its capacity or potential to commit, or threat to commit, violence that goes beyond the institutional restraints of a politico-legal order.

In the light of such an orientation, “Do’s and Don’ts” issued by the Supreme Court while delivering its controversial judgment of upholding the “constitutionality” of the AFSPA obviously stand in reality as hollow directives. Indeed, with the deepening of the hold of the murderous violence, *kaapthatlura* and *loishallura* (should you be shot or finished off) seem to have become the vocabularies of discourse on “political issues” and *haattok-uu* and *loishillu* (kill him/her or them and finished him/her or them off) seem to have become the only “political directives”.

Rescuing Politics

To think of it, fifty years before the Supreme Court of India issued such a morally nice sounding directives, the Chinese People's Liberation Army had also issued what it called "three main rules of discipline" and "eight points for attention" to its revolutionary fighters. Its rules of discipline included nice sounding directives such as "obey orders in all your actions", "don't take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses" and "turn in everything captured".

And the call for attention included directives such as "speak politely", "pay fairly for what you buy", "return everything you borrow", and "pay for anything you damage", "don't hit or swear at people", "don't damage crops", "don't take liberties with women and don't ill-treat captives. Obviously these directives underscored the fact that every tactical move or act implicates a politics which cannot be anything but articulated and practiced within the moral and ethical domain of human existence.

Indeed, the legitimacy of modern state, and any political movement, critically hinges on its capacity to claim and project such a politics that has its foundation in the moral and ethical domain. That every state, and also political movements, always seeks its legitimacy in the name of the "people" and their well-being is precisely because of this nature of politics. That is also why it is said that "governance", far more than "sovereignty", vitalizes and legitimizes the modern state.

This being the case, parties involved in a "political" conflict must show that it is morally and ethically superior to its adversaries. Without such a claim, if any one of them seeks to rely on its capacity to exercise violence in its unbridled form, it would not only alienate the people but also delegitimize its projects. One ought to remember that the USA invasion of Iraq has been carried out in the name of protecting "democracy" and saving ordinary Iraqis from their Dictator! This is a moral claim that seeks justification for its brutal force.

If the USA were not to claim and project such a moral and ethical high ground, leave alone any support from the rest of

the world, its soldiers would not fight and its citizens would also reject the war univocally. We say that the confrontation between the state and the "non-state" in Manipur is a political phenomenon, and that it must be resolved politically. But we must recognize that this claim entails recognizing the fact that violence in its unbridled form cannot be allowed to usurp politics. But as it stands today in Manipur, politics is dying in the hands of a culture of unbridled violence perpetuated from all sources and sides.

And those who speak about and for the people of Manipur shall not allow this death of politics. Indeed, people's loyalty will be ultimately with those who seeks to reinstate politics by rescuing it from the unbridled violence that critically threatens the very existence of politics in Manipur, and thereby the political being of Manipur itself. In Manipur (India) the brutal murder of Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) Dr. Thingnam Kishan and his associates, driver Aribam Rajen and mandal Yumnam Token, on 17 February 2009 by the cadres of National Socialist Council of Nagalim - Isaac Muivah faction (NSCN-IM) had sparked off widespread protest paralysing normal functioning of administration for several days.

Unequivocal protest slogans demanding punishment of the murderers were raised by civil societies, underground parties, overground political parties and trade unions cutting across community and organisational boundaries. The Government of Manipur, besides its attempt to appease the families of the victims with the compensation game had mechanised brutal tactics to suppress protest, e.g., imposing of curfew, baton charge, firing of rubber bullets, blasting of mock bombs and so on. The present chapter explores the character of the murder and questions the fundamental issue lying ahead of politics in Manipur.

According to the statement of NSCN-IM there was 'collusion that has nothing to do with socio-political interest other than laundering public money... (and) when studied from the angle of criminal detective, the mastermind of the whole thing points towards Pankaj, conniving with the ruffians within NSCN and outside NSCN'.

The statement sounds like escapism. How would a militant party say that the party's Lt. Colonel, Town Commander and Sergeant Major were not accountable to the party? Does it mean to say that there is institutional breakdown in the disciplinary order or gangsterism within the party?

On the other hand, even if the primary motivation of murdering was extortion of public funds for personal interest; the character of the well-planned killing, selection of victims and spot of abandonment of the dead bodies were bent on communalism, i.e., three Meeteis and three Tangkhuls were abducted by Tangkhul criminals and the three Meeteis were murdered brutally and abandoned near a Kuki village.

Was not it aimed at inciting suspicion of Meeteis vis-à-vis the Kukis in case the involvement of Tangkhul criminals were not being exposed? Does not the exposure generate intercommunity tension between the Meeteis and the Tangkhuls on the one hand and between the people of Senapati and the Tangkhuls on the other hand?

Logically, the crime was communal and it had socio-political ramifications. Who gains from it? Communalism strengthens communal organisations, weakens the bond of community co-existence and serves the material interest of class rulers who extract the surplus value of peasants and workers within communities in the name of community assertion.

There could be other reasons as well. Dr. Kishan was a progressive intellectual cum activist influenced by Marxism.

Born on 26 February 1972 in Imphal in Manipur, he had completed his B.A. and M.A. in English with first class first position from Jamia Milia Islamia University in Delhi. He had cleared the National Eligibility Test for teaching in 1998. He had taught in Shyamlal College, University of Delhi from 1996 to 1999; D.M. College of Arts, Manipur University from 2005 to 2007; Churachandpur College, Manipur University in 2005; and was appointed as Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Manipur University in 2007.

He was a founder member and editor of the journal *Alternative Perspective* that was aimed at exploring material perspectives of Manipur within South East-Asian economic paradigm. Apart from several published works in journals and editions his notable volumes include among others; *Rethinking Colonialism, World View*, New Delhi, 2006 and 'Ordeals and Upheavals; A Critique of Hindu Proselytisation in Manipur' in *Proselytisation in India, The Process of Hinduisation in Tribal Societies*, Dharmendra Kumar & Yemuna Sunny (Ed.), Akar Books, New Delhi, 2009.

As a student activist he had worked with the Northeast Committee on Human Rights and the Manipur Students' Association Delhi in 1990s. Kishan was among the Meeteis who in his capacity as a student had devoted to campaigning and organising cultural fest *Wakchingee Nong* to promote unity and peace among the Nagas and Kukis who were in communal conflict. Before he became editor of the journal *Alternative Perspectives* in mid 2000s he was working with the All Manipur United Clubs Organisation. He was a man who was born and brought up in the cities but was willing to work for the development of backward rural areas.

He was less concerned about community boundaries and territorial hangovers than for the welfare of the marginalised and underprivileged sections of population. He had lived with a progressive ideology and while serving with the Manipur Civil Services (2007 batch) he had stood for structural reform, at least in his capacity within his administrative jurisdiction, to carry on with equitable distribution of rights and incentives. He was, therefore, an enemy to corrupt bureaucrats and mercenaries who had converted India's administrative institutions into a den of private profiteering and corruption.

The Indian state had also foreseen in the person of Kishan a potential revolutionary against Indian capitalism. He was, therefore, kidnapped and assassinated in a high level 'structural conspiracy' executed by an alliance of counterrevolutionary mercenaries including the corrupt DC who had laid a trap for Kishan in the format of a meeting scheduled for 13 February 2009. Both the associates of Kishan, driver Aribam Rajen and

Yumnam Tokens were being murdered simply because they were with Kishan and to cover up true character of the plot.

The enemy of the people had executed the murdering with communal colouring so that it incite communal tension and divert attention from both the cause and the culprits. Why should the people of Manipur protest the murder? For an immediate punishment of the murderers! There is no disagreement on this issue. Who should be the legitimate authority to carry out criminal investigation and to award punishment?

Disagreement becomes apparent on this issue. Why? In a situation where parallel administrations are being run by various fronts contesting one another, the Indian state being a party working in tactical collusion with one or other parties, and where party cadres are involved in crime, in an attempt to defend party 'dignity and interest', jurisdictional legitimacy of a party over the criminals is being arbitrarily imposed and it become mixed up with political questions. The trial of the murderers of Kishan has become a political issue and controversial when the NSCN-IM refused to hand over the murderers to the state government.

If the murderers belong to Manipur why should they not be tried under Indian CrPC in Manipur? This straightforward question though sounds simple directly raises an intricate issue concerning the 'Naga formation' process in which NSCN-IM had claimed for leadership since 1988. Such a question, though indirectly related to the case of murder, impersonalises the crime from the immediate murderers and the target of protest is shifted towards the NSCN-IM. When charges are being framed against the Government of Manipur for not bringing the murderers from the custody of NSCN-IM into their custody; the inability to do so on the part of the government can be interpreted from geo-territorial perspective.

The basic question is; if the ceasefire agreement between Government of India and NSCN-IM was not extended into Manipur why was the NSCN-IM found to be operating in Manipur, and able to abduct six officials of the government

in broad day light, move them from village to village with arms freely despite of the heavy deployment of Indian security forces in strategic areas, refuse to hand over the criminals to the government and so on and so forth. The government's inability to book the criminals into its custody and award punishment was interpreted as either a prelude to or pretext of or example of surrendering Manipur's territorial integrity to NSCN-IM.

'Brand the NSCN-IM a terrorist organisation'! These are some of the charges and statements raised from the anti-NSCN-IM flank. But then are we to continuously imperil ourselves through indulging in the most primitive form of browbeating with frenzied responses against one another? What would be the profit of the NSCN-IM in harbouring morally degenerated criminals and letting loose a reign of terror under their dictates? What should be the commensurable response of the protagonists of territorial integrity of Manipur if someone would raise objection to the historicity and politics of integrity?

Is it the right moment to invoke sentiments by raising emotive questions on either the geographical limit of the ceasefire or the territorial integrity of Manipur when collective pressure had been heavily mounting upon the criminals and the party they are responsible to? Abusive response and counter response would never end if we are to deliberately keep on surviving the fruitless course of altercation, if not bargaining. Bargaining and campaigning along communal and party lines can be carried out inexhaustibly till dooms day.

These are useless if it does not serve the material requirements of co-existence and progress. Such a routine affair of hoodwinking and browbeating delays consensus and could let the convicts buy time in delaying punishment. In the course of the delaying, intensive issues already in queue would become more sensitive. The murderers would be pushed into the background or out of focus as it was in the case of James Kuki who had masterminded the kidnapping of baby Elizabeth on 4 November 2003 for ransom and later on killed her.

The collective voice for identification of the murderers and awarding of punishment may not be emotively conceived and focused on from a legal perspective alone. There are intricate issues around us that exist in a state of crisscrossing and its venom becomes apparent to distract public attention from a particular course of intercommunity consensus and collective effort. The legal aspect functions within a political economy that has a bearing on social relations.

We may avenge the murder through imposing heavy corporal punishment, but the causes of such communally twisted criminal expression cannot be ruled out in a society where growing class contradiction is being addressed through communal colouring. When we condemn divide and rule by external factors as responsible for intercommunity conflict, are we suppose to neglect the dynamics of internal contradiction along communal line promoted by class rulers within our respective communities? Are we ideologically too impoverished and myopic that we fail to realise communalism as an instrument of exploitation to perpetuate class order?

Today imperialism in the disguise of Look East Policy looms over us. Should we choose to accept backwardness as our manifest destiny and remain far behind the advanced countries, only to become imperialist sponsored gangsters and compradors looting our resources? Are our underground organisations really fighting for the emancipation of the people? Why is that the NSCN-IM would charge the DC of Ukhru for notoriety, corruption, greed and disgraceful only recently if it had known it for a long time?

Will it say that it simply enjoys watching the Indian officers convert the administration machinery into a den of corruption? Can we really materialise social equality from the imperial spoils that are not under our control? What steps had the NSCN-IM planned to root out the nexus between corrupt Indian bureaucrats and the ruffians within NSCN-IM that had not only misappropriated funds meant for the poor Naga citizens but also had created class contradiction within the cadres?

Why were the civil societies in Ukhrul that were supposed to be the champion for the cause of the Ukhrul people remaining in silence when the notorious DC was looting the people? On the different flank; how would the United National Liberation Front, Manipur Naga Revolutionary Front, Revolutionary People's Front and other civil societies deal with the basic social and economic grievances of the impoverished sections of Manipur from the paradigm of territorial integrity? Would it be possible for our underground parties to create or carve out territory to build nation on the mortal remains of communal conflict?

What revolutionary vision had been drafted for the people of Manipur by our revolutionary parties and progressive fronts so that *unity for a change* would be appealing to lakhs of potential revolutionaries who were living below the poverty line? The people of Manipur, when fighting for the cause of Kishan, Rajen and Yumnam, or for any issue need to restrain from sectarianism and initiate a durable collective effort to achieve development and the emancipation of Manipur from any form of suppression and exploitation.

The problem of insurgency or peace has never been, and can never be perceived in black and white, as many have made it out to be. It is definitely not as simple as US President George Bush's defining line between friends and foes, in his nation's war on terrorism, or, in his words, that "you are either with us or against us..." This, presumably, is the kind of mindset that has thrown up theories like the 'Clash of Civilizations' and made them widely acceptable. The statement is particularly interesting in the context of the trap that the militaristic approach to counter-insurgency falls into.

While, in an armed insurgency situation, it would be naïve not to expect an armed retaliation from the state, this retaliation must necessarily be accompanied by a longer political vision of peace that takes care of *issues*, rather than mere insurgent firepower. The problem often is one of an acute limitation of vision that fails to accommodate the fact that things are not so simple as to be answered within a binary

paradigm that conceives of only two exclusive options – true or a false.

Contrary to such a reductionist worldview, in any human problem – including a situation of insurgency – between the black and the white; between the friend and the foe; between those who are “with us” and those who are “against us”; there is a whole spectrum of colours and nuances of support, sympathy, indifference and opposition, with many of these sentiments and beliefs literally overlapping. The fact is, not all of the many who are not ‘with us,’ are necessarily ‘against us’; and equally, many who are ‘with us’ may not be working in our best interest, even if unintentionally.

Incompetence, insensitivity, corruption and political myopia on the part of those in charge of the establishment and in command of its resources, are at the root of many of our ills. Hence, there is a need to identify the nuances, or at least acknowledge the existence of the spectrum of colours and shades, between the two poles of “with us” and “against us” in looking for a resolution to conflicts. Conflict resolution cannot be merely about eliminating all opposition or reducing the choices in negotiating the problem to two mutually exclusive sets of rights and wrongs.

Rather, it must consist of labouring to bring everybody to accept reality and then to project a future with this understanding as the foundation. More specifically, insurgency in India’s Northeast has been very much a product, if not an outgrowth of the historical, economic and political circumstances of society in the region. It is the manifestation of unarticulated furies within this society and, indeed, Frantz Fanon’s description of such insurrections as the “mailed fist” of a people with a sense of impotence at articulating the anger within, is apt.

There is hence, even at points when the brutalities of insurgency have alienated it considerably from ordinary men and women, and even when it has become evident that insurgency is headed towards a dead end, always an unseen, even if distant, umbilical cord that preserves a fraternal feeling

among those who have chosen the path of rebellion and the people at large. Even those who now believe that the causes of insurgency have lost their relevance on account of numerous shifts in the paradigms that define and give value to these causes, would recommend a political solution in which the prodigals are guaranteed a legitimate place in society, rather than the dominant extermination theory.

This seemingly soft vision of insurgency does not, however, mean that society has cut its other umbilical cords, particularly the one with the establishment. For instance, no matter how much the actions of the security forces may be resented, there are traffic jams in the State capital of Imphal whenever there is a call for recruitment by any unit of the security forces, with young men scrambling for a chance to take part. It should be evident from this and many other similar examples that nothing, indeed, is in black and white.

Understanding Insurgency

An essay, "Insurgency and the Disintegration of Civil Society" by Samir Kumar Das, is interesting in understanding the nature of insurgency in the northeast. Das seeks to represent the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) as a political critique of Assam's historical experience, and indeed as also an articulation of an intense discourse within the Assamese civil society. His arguments throw light on the problem through both their strengths and their weaknesses. Das goes to the extent of saying that the ULFA's relevance as well as integrity depends on its ability to continue to *be* this critique.

At the crux of this critique is the familiar identity question. ULFA, (and because it represents a vital part of the soul of the discourse within the Assamese society) the Assamese civil society, perceive their history and identity as fundamentally different from that of India. He cites the near parallel between the degeneration of the ULFA and that of the discourse within the Assamese civil society almost as if to say each is mutually the cause of the other. There is no denying that this is a powerful argument and if its strengths provide insights, its

weaknesses obviously unintended, in my opinion, also show ways to negotiate this vexed problem.

Das looks at the ULFA as an intellectual construct, or at least as a phenomenon in which its intellectual architecture has primacy over its physical manifestation. Because of this, in my opinion, the theory is still heavily tilted towards intellectual romanticism, as the author's writings on the same issue in Bengali, on his own admission, were supposed to be. This characterization is akin to Hulk, the loveable comic strip monster, who is basically a materialization of excessive intellectual energy. Das' interpretation of the phenomenon of insurgency in the Northeast is not altogether new in Manipur, although it has never been argued out at such length.

Here too, insurgency has been honestly intellectualized (as opposed to trivially propagandised) as an 'enterprise', at its inception, that rose out of the rubble of history. Insurgency in this interpretation represents the strong will of the people among whom it sprang up, determined to 're-people' and salvage lost dignity from a barren spiritual and moral landscape left behind by the devastations of unfavourable but powerful historical forces.

Although the symmetry of Das' theory is strongly manifest in the continued sympathy insurgency enjoys, sometimes unreserved and sometimes grudging, amongst a good section of the people, like many such intellectual constructs, it is exposed to the danger of being weakened by its tendency to forget the contextual background against which alone it can exist and have relevance.

Adding to this vulnerability is the fact that the background in this case is not a constant, but in constant flux. As for instance, the very argument that the Assamese identity and history is different, presumes the rigidity of two entities - the Assamese identity itself and more importantly the bigger Indian identity. What if one or the other, or both, shift? Even if a shift in the Assamese identity, to align with the larger Indian identity, is seen to amount to a consequence of cultural imperialism in an 'internal colonialism' situation, and hence

objectionable, the question remains, what if the bigger identity itself softens and transforms, and becomes more malleable and accommodative?

More pointedly, hasn't such a shift taken place in the Indian identity over the past few decades, all during the lifespan of the ULFA and the other Northeastern insurgencies, thus far? The answer to this question must also take into consideration what is generally perceived to be a deepening of representative democracy during the same period. It cannot ignore for instance, the inevitable reality of coalition politics in India today, in which even a Government led by a Hindu nationalist party, despite its intent, is unable to force a ban on cow slaughter.

It would be fruitful from this standpoint of a search for a solution, and not merely an intellectual exercise in despair, however profound, to explore and discover if there are no alternative 'sites' for this same discourse. If on the other hand, there have been no shifts in the perception or understanding of the larger Indian identity, and there still exist many incompatible features between this identity and those of the societies where insurgencies have festered, then can the possibility of making this shift happen not provide hope for a solution?

Should there not be a reassessment of the historical circumstances as well as of identity, by both the larger as well as the smaller identities, not so much out of any sense of political correctness, but out of the need to fine-tune these understandings to present realities? After all, nothing has remained what it was yesterday, and nothing will, in the future, presumably remain what it is today. Das also rejects any cause and effect theory of the ULFA insurgency, arguing in the process that the ULFA is itself its cause and reason, a concept difficult to visualize, but one which gives it some kind of omnipotence and, more frustratingly, defies any answer by way of a solution to the problem.

From this viewpoint, the widely held perception of insurgency as a response to other factors, such as poverty,

underdevelopment, unemployment, etc., and the attribution of these conditions to externally imposed factors, is reduced to irrelevance and simplistic 'linear narratives'. But by the very obduracy with which the indestructibility and purity of the intellectual construct of the ULFA as a political critique is defended, Das' theory itself appears to exhibit this same quality of linearity. Insurgency is all that Das says it is, *and more*. It is true the critique perpetuates itself, but it also rests, and in fact has to rest on many other stilts and props, all of which are actionable, not necessarily militarily.

In such a scenario, the job before the media has never been easy. At one end, it has to come to terms with the immediate law and order fallouts, which include covert and sometimes overt intimidation from various insurgent groups to forgo the right to edit or criticize. On the other, despite these infringements, the need still remains to tread carefully so as not to end up being blind to the finer undercurrents and dynamics of society, which drive insurgency. There is also the other danger of the state coming down on the media if it is seen to have overstepped the limits of the law in walking this fine balance.

Examples of the misfortunes of media personnel and media organizations on this count abound. It is indeed a tightrope walk for journalists operating in regions of insurgency. The fact that, in the past few years, at least five journalists have lost their lives and many more suffered harassment from either side in the conflict, should give an idea of the occupational hazard in this extraordinary situation. Having defined broadly the environment in which the media functions and also the basic outlook with which most media organizations meet the challenge, it is necessary to underline the immediate and grave dangers that confront those in the profession. The following paragraphs provide illustrations of how life threatening certain developments, which in Das' theory may only be symptoms of a deeper malaise, can be.

As the critique deserts itself, ULFA (the insurgent) does not make itself felt any longer through the power of discourse. It is forced to clutch on to various non-discursive forms of

power. The political critique *per se* has not lost its validity. It has only outlived one of its most powerful agents. Where does this leave the media, which by its very nature, has to tackle and report the problem - whether symptom or disease.

On October 13, 2002, Yambem Meghajit Singh, correspondent of *Vision North East*, was short dead by unidentified assailants. Unfortunately, the next day being a holiday on account of Durga Puja (a Hindu religious festival), the news did not receive the attention it deserved when it did finally appear on October 16 in the local dailies. Today, it is known that the assassination was related to a personal vendetta, and had nothing to do with his journalistic work - but this is hardly a consolation for journalists.

The fact also is that the police case in the murder was more or less 'closed' even before it was 'opened', as has become customary in any death resulting from gun violence in Manipur. Insurgency has become a good cover for police lethargy and incompetence. The case was eventually resolved solely as a result of the dogged pursuit of justice by the family of the murdered journalist, who kept appealing to all who could help: both the State Government as well as the 'parallel governments' (insurgents).

It does not speak well for the establishment that facts of the case were brought out, not by the Government's investigative agencies, but by others. Earlier, on October 8, 2002, two other journalists, Iboyaima Laithangbam, correspondent of *The Hindu*, and Yumnam Arun, correspondent of *Eastern Panorama* were abducted by an insurgent group, the United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF), near Saibon Sinam village, a few kilometres away from Pallel in the Chandel district. They were released unharmed on October 10, 2002, and the only reason given for their abduction was that the media had been giving scant coverage to the concerned group, the UKLF.

There were also the cases of the murder of Lalrohu Hmar, editor of a Hmar newspaper *Shan*, in Churachandpur by a faction of the Hmar People's Convention (HPC) on October

10, 1999, and the murder of the *Manipur News* editor, Thounaojam Brajamani, by unidentified assailants. These are some of the many obvious cases of atrocities on the media in Manipur. The trend is that insurgent groups expect newspaper editors to treat every one of their press releases and actions as being extremely newsworthy, and to be printed with little or no editing.

Non-compliance has resulted in summons, the threat of physical harm and even diktats warning of the closure of newspapers. Towards the end of 2000, on the call of the All Manipur Working Journalists Union (AMWJU), newspapers in the State even resorted to shutting down their offices for almost a fortnight to protest the unbearable censorship pressure from insurgent groups.

These developments have been painful for conscientious journalists, who believe that the primary worth and legitimacy of their profession lies in its guarantee of the freedom of thought and expression.

The pain is not only physical, but also spiritual, for what is being demanded is a surrender of the very independence that this profession values most. It also means a depletion of the moral authority to criticise and bring to account institutional violations of fundamental rights, which has been the media's duty and privilege. If somebody were to ask if the media in Manipur today was free, an honest answer would be 'no'.

The media in Manipur is more in the nature of a tightrope walk, having to balance between the demands and pressures of many parallel 'governments' besides the constitutionally elected one headed by Chief Minister, Okram Ibobi. It is also to be noted that, not all these parallel governments are run by insurgent groups. The frequency of *bandhs* (shutdown), blockades of highways, "public curfews", imposed by any and every sundry organization bears evidence to the political pressures under which the system operates. Each such organisation, incidentally, can cause journalists physical harm or force newspapers to shut down.

The Search For Peace

While the media is not a holy cow, the difficulties it is facing today are only its legitimate share of the burden that has fallen on society, and what Manipuri society confronts today is nothing less than an Orwellian nightmare of totalitarian politics. Many of the terms and phrases George Orwell coined in his 1984 like "Thought Police", "Double Speak" "Hate Session", "Big Brother", are uncannily apt in describing the present social circumstances in Manipur. Freedom of thought and expression and other valued individual liberties that distinguish civilization from the lack of it are being replaced by tough diktats from numerous 'parallel governments' in operation in the State, even as the legitimate one slumbers on in slothful and corrupt complacency.

The need of the hour is peace. Of course, what should constitute this peace is a matter that must be thoroughly discussed between all those who have a stake in it. This is what we think the central message is. However, Manipuri society, at this moment in history, seems to be suffering from a multiple split personality, with each part deliriously and myopically obsessed with only its own private agenda, never realising that each of these agendas will be in vain if the larger theme that concerns the whole State is not taken cognisance of.

All these private concerns have to converge somewhere otherwise our common or mutual destiny cannot be anything but anarchy. The shutdowns, blockades, strikes, threats, the mindless bloodshed, the bans, the boycotts, the ministry troubles, the reshuffles... all these point to this one conclusion: the engines which should ideally be contributing their mites to take the State forward are all pulling in different directions, taking it nowhere. When will all this end? When can the ordinary citizen's primary worry be restricted to providing his or her children a good education and a future and not when or where the next trouble spot will be?

When will the Government's primary concern become the general health of society and not the hypertension resulting out of the perpetual vigil on internal dissension? These are

questions asked a thousand times before and have now become hollow because nobody seems really interested in the answers, not even those who continually ask them. Perhaps it is a matter of being intimidated by the immensity of the problems staring at us. Despite the yearning for peace, nothing seems to be falling into place and all the numerous private agendas remain unsublimated and unreconciled.

Manipur is already in the midst of a deep crisis. The administration's writ has faded gradually and there is neither law nor order. Anybody and everybody hold the State to ransom any and every time they want. A melange of violent insurgent groups continues to further their insidious agenda without any hindrance. The highways are infested with brigands and are unsafe. Above all, the disturbing thought that haunts the State is that it no longer has a vision of the future to inspire its present.

Moral Authority Needed

One of the first conditions for good governance to return is for politicians to begin treating politics seriously and to accord it the respect and reverence it deserves. Only when they make an effort to do this, will the people they lead also follow. This will be one giant step towards ensuring political stability, a condition Manipur has been starved of for much too long. The onus of restoring the dignity and moral authority of politics rests solely on the shoulders of the elected leaders. The continued deficit of legitimacy in politics as a people's process has done great harm to the moral authority of the state.

The most basic building block of any successful government is, first and foremost, a moral authority over the people it leads. This is precisely what has been lacking in Manipur's politics all these years. It has, indeed, been a case of the state losing control over its citizens. The result has been predictable - a free-for-all ensues, and the law becomes an irrelevant commodity. Witness the number of strikes, shutdowns and blockades Manipur has been plagued with. Witness also the fact that most of these strikes and boycotts

were against Government decrees. This is an indication of the scant respect the establishment commands.

For instance, during the strike for employees salary hike on the pattern of the 5th Pay Commission's recommendations for Central Government employees, an important argument by the employees against the Government's plea of no funds was that the latter was not setting a consistent example. The State Legislative Assembly had, not long before, unanimously resolved to hike the salaries of legislators, and could hardly argue against extending the same benefit to the Government's employees.

When the Government made moves to downsize its work force, the same counter argument applied. The heads put on the chopping blocks did not include those of the top rung employees during President's Rule, and during the last popular ministry, there had been no move at all to down-size the jumbo ministry.

The Naga Imbroglia

The National Socialist Council of Nagalim - Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) leaders, Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu, were in Delhi in January 2003 to negotiate a solution to the seemingly intractable Naga conflict, an issue that has a huge bearing on peace in Manipur.

There is much speculation that a new dawn of peace is in the horizon ending half a century of conflict in Nagaland. But for this to materialise, either both the parties to the negotiations, or one of them, will have to be move away from their stated positions. The two most important as well as difficult issues to negotiate will be 'sovereignty' and '*Greater Nagaland*.'

On the issue of sovereignty, one of the sides will have to make a compromise. But, within the current negotiating ensemble, both the Union Government and NSCN-IM have stated that the issue is not negotiable. Swu explicitly stated that the NSCN-IM had not abandoned its demand for 'self-determination', and reiterated the position that 'there is no

greater or smaller Nagaland', and that Nagaland is 'the place of their (Nagas') natural habitation and they are asking for nothing more and nothing less.' This position is irreconcilable with that of the other States of the Northeast that share boundaries with Nagaland, and who reject the redrawing of maps in the region, and any transfer of Naga majority areas to a *Nagalim*.

The simple conclusion is that, if either thinks its position is not negotiable, there will be no negotiations. The other major issue to be tackled is the question of an integrated Naga homeland. The Government of India's objection to the demand has been, at best, half-hearted, and its mood so far has been determined by the winds of electoral politics. However, the real objections to the idea will come from those different peoples whose own notions of homeland overlap with that of the Nagas.

Within this context, it is necessary to ensure that developments in the Naga peace process do not lead to a further polarisation of communities in the region. Unless this happens, the present peace gambit can result in previously unforeseen wars.

On this latter question, it has long been maintained that only an acknowledgement of the inevitability of a shared homeland can solve the problem. To the notion of homeland, we would like to add the much-related notion of *Lebensraum*, or the natural living space that a people or community need, to feel that its peace and security are not threatened.

Lebensraum does not necessarily mean the immediate area of settlement, but extends into the spheres with which the people in question feel their well being is vitally linked.

Hence, a landlocked people will feel the right of way is vital, (objections have been raised against shutdowns along the Tiddim Road that puts the Churachandpur district in difficulties on this count), just as communities living in the lower reaches of a river basin will feel their right to water is vital. Similarly, a valley will feel the surrounding hills are part of its *lebensraum*.

The disarming and disbanding of all insurgent groups is another issue that assumes importance in the light of any proposed negotiated settlement. The ongoing peace process in the northeast, with the NSCN-IM as the principal non-state actor, must also keep this in mind. But, for a stable settlement, it is necessary that everybody must agree to disarm at the same time. The need then is to try and bring in all the militant organisations operating in the region on the same negotiating platform, if peace is to be comprehensive.

Peace is not just a matter of the absence of violence. It is also necessarily about removing the potential for violence – namely the uncontrolled possession of weapons. It would be naïve to believe that anybody can be at ease when it is known that a potential opponent is stockpiling arms, even if the latter swears on whatever he or she believes, that the weapons will not be used. Weapons are meant to be used and pretexts will eventually be found for their use at some point or the other. Unless this understanding is clearly understood and acknowledged, Leon Trotsky's dark prophesy will remain a reality: You may not like to go to war, but war will come to you.

For a lasting solution to any problem, the solution will have to be defined through a two-way discourse. The quest for peace must necessarily be synonymous with a genuine attempt towards creating a just order of things. This necessitates honest introspection and retrospection. We need to widen the vision of the past, present and the future considerably, and see things within a consensual and democratic perspective.

One man's delicacy can very well be another's sacrilege. A middle ground where even these directly opposing points of view can meet has to be created. For violence to end permanently, the residual sense of anger and outrage among all communities, big or small, must first be put to rest. This cannot mean that the onus of settling these conflicts rests solely on the shoulders of only those on one side of these conflicts. All parties to the conflict will have to engage in a process of

give and take. Only such a solution can be honourable for all. Only such a solution can be just and lasting.

One fascinating question posed by philosopher Karl Popper in *All Life is Problem Solving*, opens up interesting new insights in the discussions on the many problems of India's Northeast. It is not a rhetorical question, and Popper himself embarks on a convincing answer in the course of his first essay in the book. If all life is, indeed, about problem solving, what is it that distinguishes the problem-solving mechanism of a rudimentary life form, such as the single cell amoeba and that of, say, Albert Einstein? Filtered down to its very basics, problem solving, as Popper explains, involves, first, the identification of the problem; then the attempts at solving it; and finally arriving at the right answer through a series of eliminations of failed (or false) solutions.

As with all who do not believe in a finite world, Popper, of course, adds that the new solution (or theory) will always pose new problems and the cycle of problem solving will continue endlessly. So, to the original question: How does the amoeba differ from Einstein in solving problems? The basic difference says Popper, is that while the amoeba is unable to distance itself from its problem solving strategy, higher primates, to which category Einstein belongs, can and most often do. The result is that the amoeba is part and parcel of its own problem solving strategy so that, if the strategy fails, it perishes with it.

Einstein, like other evolved primates, is able to externalise his problem solving theories so that, even if his theories perish, he does not. In fact, Popper's definition of progress and scientific enquiry is the constant attempt to falsify existing theories. Consequently, the belief in the infallibility of theories always results in dogmatism. The proposition is interesting because we identify a certain strain of thought in the indigenous people's movement in the Northeast region as well as elsewhere in the country and the world, which, if viewed against Popper's definition of problem solving, exhibits a syndrome similar to the one the amoeba suffers from.

This school of thought, upheld by many home-grown activists and intellectuals, as well as many non-indigenous champions of the Northeast, argues and seeks to authenticate the supposed non-alienability of the indigenous peoples from their subjective world. The argument (undoubtedly powerful and, more often than not, sentimental) is that the identity of the indigenous man is non objectifiable, as it is deeply rooted in his subjective realm of culture, land, mythology, history, etc.

Advocates of this position also discard the Western reductionist, analytical method of approaching problems - a method to which we suppose Popper would adhere - as non-applicable to the indigenous situation, and claiming that the incompatibility exemplifies a clash of cultures. It is, of course, necessary not to oversimplify the problem of identity, but the stubborn refusal to accept a scientific definition of progress and scientific enquiry not only amounts to obscuring reality, but is also dangerous, as the line that divides the subject and the object tends to become confused. The end result can very well be, as in the case of the amoeba that those who set out to solve a problem may themselves become part of the experiment, unaware, so that, in the event that the experiment fails, their own well being is put in jeopardy - or they may even perish.

