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UNRAVELLING MANIPUR'S CRISIS: IS LAND THE ROOT CAUSE?



“Martyrdom of Cosmic Rhythm”

The vibrant threads of ethnic, religious, cultural, and geographical diversity, intricately woven together create the cosmic dance of existence. Within this cosmic expanse, emergence of a localized burst of violence sacrifices the harmonious pulse of the universe—the martyrdom of Cosmic Rhythm.



SCH. ALBIN P. SJ

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Editor's Desk

Manipur, one of the North-eastern states of India, is home to over 34 lakhs inhabitants. It is a land inhabited by Meitheis and the 33 recognized tribes that either belong to the Naga or the Kuki. Manipur is known for its picturesque landscape, its unique culture, and art like traditional dance, folklore, music, etc. Geographically, it is composed of a unique valley surrounded by the rarest gorgeous mountains, ornated with diverse flora, and inhabited by diverse fauna. The diversity of cultures that have coexisted for centuries adds to the beauty and richness of the land. Manipur is also considered the powerhouse of sports in India on account of the numerous athletes that it has produced. All these befit the meaning of Manipur as “a land of jewels.”

However, this is not the image that people have of Manipur today. “Land of jewels turned into land of blood.” This line from the poem ‘Diadem of the Land’ by Grace Mura depicts the image of Manipur now, resulting from the ongoing violence, so much so that even those with no knowledge previously now speak of Manipur. In one of my conversations with one of my friends from Manipur, he said, “I wish people knew us because of our unique identity enriched with good human values, not this”. He denounced, “What is happening now is unacceptable. It betrays the very hallmark of what our people stand for: hospitality, love, and peace”. Sadly, it happened, and the gravity of the violence and atrocities between the Meitheis and the Kukis is unimaginable.

“One who had the jewel wants the gold; the others denied of giving it; Started with denial and protest; Continued with deaths and destruction; Left the city with burnt and ashes.”

These lines from the poem by Grace Mura elucidate how Manipur turned into such a state. In the eyes of many, the long decades of contestation over land appeared to be the major source of conflict, fuelling the deep-seated resentment between these two communities. This is exacerbated by the state’s recommendation to grant Schedule Tribe Status to the Meitheis, the largest and better-off community. The implication of this, if actualized, is that the Meitheis can easily acquire land in the hills inhabited by the tribals, adding more benefit to them. This is what the tribals opposed, leading to the protestation that culminated in a dreadful bloodshed between these two communities.

This conflict led to widespread arson, brutal killings, leaving hundreds to die, the destruction of homes, and systematic vandalism of churches. Tens of thousands of people have been displaced, thousands are left injured, many are rendered homeless, and some have lost one or two of their kin. The violence against women and children is horrifying. Some women are rape and paraded naked. A woman and her child were burned alive. Till today, the innocent blood has not ceased flowing. The sense of humanity is lost, and human life is devalued and treated with impudence. The land is seriously traumatised and utterly divided, and there is a trust deficit built up among the people. It has been more than five months now since the violence broke out between these two communities. Nevertheless, there seems to be no sign of its end.



How long will this violence go on? Why has the government failed to stop it? These are the questions that everyone is asking those in authority. Looking at how the situation unfolded, one can reason out why the crisis has not been put under control. The complacent attitude of the government to address the crisis, the unprecedented looting of thousands of weapons from the government armouries, and the involvement of individuals and militant groups in instigating and perpetrating attacks are clear pointers to a pre-meditated plan intended for personal benefits and the dominant interests of a particular group. In fact, the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) that visited Manipur in July termed it state-sponsored violence, with the government continuing its provocative actions. This points to the fact why the crisis is far from ending.

‘We want in our society, torn apart by division and conflict, that peace break out.’ These words from ‘The Cry for Peace’ in one of Pope Francis’ addresses resonate with the desperate longing of the people of Manipur, particularly the innocent, the destitute, the children, and women, who, amidst the continued bloodshed, cry for peace, respect, and dignity. Unfortunately, their cry failed to provoke the conscience of those in power and position to promptly act and put this horrendous violence to an end. Therefore, it is a call for everyone with a human conscience to have a collective responsibility and act collectively to cease the violence and give them back their rights and dignity to live in peace and harmony. This is the need of the hour.

J. Martin Ramirez says, “Peace is possible through dialogue.” This is the path that we need to walk in our struggle to bring back peace in Manipur. This is a clarion call to all social, political and religious leaders, and to every responsible citizen. The church, in particular, can play a vital role in this area by bringing in and enabling the two communities to engage in dialogue. This requires certain measures that can foster dialogue grounded in non-violence and mutual understanding. Dialogue provides a platform for listening and mutual exchange. This is crucial for addressing their concerns and engendering mutual understanding between the two groups. This paves the way to fostering trust among them. This is paramount because trust is an essential element in building peace in society. Therefore, it is imperative that we collectively strive towards fostering trust among the people in order to create a conducive environment for the restoration of peace and harmony. In conclusion, a plausible solution to resolve this crisis is feasible only when peace is restored in the land.



SCH. DANIELSON C. SYIEMLIEH SJ
EDITOR, DNC TIMES

“Cry My Beloved People”

(A reality inside Manipur today)

I am at Moirang in Bishnupur District of Manipur. It is a Meithei area. As the crow flies to my west, it is just 3 kilometres to the Kuki-inhabited land on the hill slopes. A little to the north is Koirangtha, the Kom tribal village of Mrs. Mary Kom, the renowned boxer of India. The guns were silenced for a time after the Supreme Court verdict. But now in the first week of September, as I write this, we could hear the guns blazing again, bombs blasting and shouts of people both in the valley and on the hill slopes. It is more than four months long, and Manipur is burning, bleeding. The Manipur Assembly was called to discuss the State matters on the 29th of August 2023. It was adjourned sine die within four hours with no business transacted. There were no issues placed on the table other than the customary ones, while the whole State of Manipur is burning. The opposition called it the “murder of democracy” and the intelligentsia named it as ‘mockery of the Assembly’.

Manipur is a land of many tribes and ethnic groups. There are sub-tribes among the Nagas and Kukis and strong caste divisions among the Meitheis. It has cradled many religions. The three major ethnic groups are Meitheis who embraced Hinduism brought in by Vaishnava priests with the help of the King from Chittagong (now in Bangladesh) and Christianity came among the Nagas and

Kukis with the British administration.

The migration patterns of the people of Manipur are not historically recorded. The three groups migrated over the centuries, occupied the vacant land and cultivated and stayed on. Based on the cultural artefacts, social customs and norms, certain conclusions have been arrived at. Meitheis claim a two-millennium presence in the Valley. Nagas ascertain at least a thousand years. Being nomadic people Kukis who live on the other side of the present boundary of India-Myanmar must have been the inhabitants of this land too as they came in and settled in the vacant uninhabited land. They moved in all parts of the Northeast over the centuries. Hence, we find small Kuki habitation everywhere. Present boundaries were drawn by the British after they divided India. Later the Government of India carved out Union Territories and States in Northeast India, mostly on ethnic basis, to satisfy the desire of the people. But the boundary issues carried on. Even today all the seven States of the Northeast have boundary conflict with their respective neighbouring States. Taking Manipur as the epicentre, the people of Manipur had for all purposes geographically settled; Nagas in the Northern part, Kukis in the Southern and the central valley is inhabited by the Meitheis.

Inter-ethnic wars over boundary issues were a continuous phenomenon. Early in the 1990s Kukis and Nagas fought each other. Beginning of this century we had disputes between Nagas and Meitheis and again between Nagas and Kukis. But there was a truce and they lived peacefully and intermingled with each other, especially in the capital town of Imphal. But



what happened in recent past is beyond our imagination. The ethnic fallout has divided the people so deeply that the Meitheis and Kukis would not like to live together any more. All of them have moved to safer places, that is within their own territory. It is sad that all the Kuki houses in Imphal and all the Meithei houses in Churachandpur are razed to the ground. Statistics can give us numbers but the pain and destruction of life and property cannot be assessed. It is a human tragedy. The same people a century ago fought along with the British in the Indo-Myanmar war to defend the country, but today it is falling apart because of the petty interest and egotistic agenda of a powerful few.

The need of the hour is restoring peace and unity in the State of Manipur. The State Assembly which met just for a day on 28th August 2023 had an opportunity at least to give a call to all sections of the people to shun arms and come to the table to discuss matters of dispute. Political opportunism scuttled the very purpose. Besides, the ten Kuki MLAs boycotted the Assembly session. Very unfortunate. Yet nothing is impossible. The Blacks and the Whites in South Africa who hated each other for decades could come to the table of negotiation, forgive each other and build a nation. It was the opportunity to begin the process of peace but having no leadership, a dearth of ideas, and being slaves of the ideology, it became a farce. They were frightened and rudderless to sail through the crisis. Reconciliation is a way forward to give back to the people their rights and dignity of living in peace and harmony. Or was it a strategy to annihilate a community with the combined brute force of the majority in tandem with the State and Central Government? Only time will expose the truth!

There are strong feelings, and divided opinions



on land and identity issues. Besides, at this stage of the conflict, the Kukis do not want to be under the same administration, that is governed by the majority Meitheis, and want a separate administrative unit in whatever form. The hegemony on the resources, the control of business routes and the threat of narcotic-producing plants like poppy are part of the many strands that make the issue more problematic. Without much discussion and thought the Government promulgated the land laws to protect the interest of the tribal population of Nagas and Kukis. Yet none of these are beyond human solution. If the desire is genuine and the good of the people is of paramount importance, then a solution can be found. With the Supreme Court's directives, the Central Government has called the parties to come to the negotiation table; it would take some time to demarcate the land identify boundaries and sort out the governance issues. It will be a thorny issue as the land spreads intertwining the fields. The boundaries in the Kangkokpi area are a tricky issue as the Nagas are involved too. Nagas had opposed creating the Kangkokpi District. But the Manipur Government forced it to discard Naga sentiments to please the Kukis then.

There are many other factors that have contributed to this imbroglio. The limited land available, especially to the growing population of Meitheis, economic resources, and dwindling job opportunities have become major issues. The claim that the Kuki community are 'outsiders' may have to be verified. All of us in the Northeast



“CRY my people”

are outsiders. Besides, poppy cultivation which gives huge profit to the ‘big wigs’ is a simmering problem. The farmers get very little and the middlemen make a huge profit. Should we believe the circulated stories that the men at the helm and their coterie are involved in the drug business? The kingpins caught in the trade over the years are released at the behest of the men who hold the power. At this juncture, the underground militant people of both the groups have a free hand to demand and impose their will on the people as the civilian government is just a mute observer of the situation. The state police just watch as the Meithei women control the roads and the movement of the vehicles, the women don’t want army convoys to move around in Manipur. The local government seems to be supporting them. Even the imposed curfew is a farce as the vehicles move at will.

“Cry my people,” says one placard at a peace rally. One cannot imagine that we human beings can be so cruel as to de-humanise ourselves. One has to feel with the mothers whose husbands and sons are brutally murdered, whose daughters are raped in the open and paraded, whose houses are burnt and hundreds are rendered refugees by both communities. Stories of inhuman acts have been circulated all around us and the lies are also perpetuated hoping they will become truth by repeating them.

In this situation, we find ourselves cornered. Yet we cannot go on murdering our sons, raping our daughters and looting and burning

the property. Reconciliation is the only way forward. We must stop hate-mongering, and false information and reach out first to the victims and rehabilitate them.

Will our leaders work towards this solution? They will have tremendous support from the public. As I write this column, unconfirmed rumours are that some agreement has been arrived at between the warring parties in Delhi. We need to tread on thin ice on these slippery slopes. As Alan Paton wrote, “Cry, my beloved Country,” our hearts also cry in anguish. Will there be peace ever return in our land? It is anybody’s guess. Being a Jesuit and a Social Scientist and strongly rooted among the people of Manipur (Kuki-Meithei-Naga), and having been stationed at ‘Ground Zero’ at Moirang, I share the ‘Cry my beloved People’ and express my solidarity with the innocent victims of my state of Manipur.



FR HECTOR D’SOUZA SJ

From My Hiding Place

(A poem based on real experience)

“The day is long, and it’s dusk now.
The night has just begun.
I am unsure what the night will bring.
It’s gonna be a long night again.
Not even a candle is to be lit,
To avoid any suspicion,
The ground is so cold,
And I am afraid even to move.
Let the experience of darkness and horror this night be my dream.
Because I know that this too shall pass,
And peace prevails again.
Of which I am unsure of its durability.
I feel the prayers of my brothers and sisters.
And I am very much consoled.
I pray for you too in the silence of my frightening heartbeat.
Yes, the day is long, and the night too.
But this too shall pass.
Let peace prevail again in our beautiful land.
But! I am afraid and ashamed even to call Manipur ‘our beautiful land’.
Because even the son of the soil is unsafe in his beloved land.
Where will this lead to?
God alone knows; He has a better plan.
Of which I have been a witness since my childhood days.
Wherever He leads me, I will go.
For I am safest and most secure with Him”.



STEPHEN MAWILALLAWM NAULAK SJ

MANIPUR

and the Need for 'Good Politics'

The unprecedented violence and unrest in Manipur which began on May 3 is still on. The Meitei community is predominantly Hindu (Vaishnavite) and forms 53 % of the Population. The Kuki tribes form 16 % and the Nagas form around 24 % of the population, both being predominantly Christian. The Meitei also consists of a small percentage of Sanamahis (their original faith before embracing Hinduism), Christians and a much smaller population is Muslim (Pangals). The tribes generally live in the hills. The Imphal Valley's Meitei are a dominant group with better education, employment and heavy representation in the state Assembly. The Chief Minister is a Meitei.

The ferocious attacks on the Kukis were well planned and executed with clinical precision. Land and Ethnicity are, and have been, major issue for decades. However, these fault-lines have been exploited by the new players – the Sangh Parivar (RSS, VHP, BJP) to drive home their agenda. From a bare presence in the Northeast (NE), now it is a force to reckon with. They are either directly in government or are allies of local outfits. So, they control the Northeast (NE) despite the local parties and leadership. The region depends very much on the Centre for funds and historically whoever rules at the Centre also eventually rules the NE!

The expanding Meitei population wanting to occupy lands in the hills have been agitating for a long time for the ST status. Finally, the HC passed an order asking the state government to take up the issue with the Centre. Both the Kuki and the Nagas were infuriated and had an all-tribal massive rally on May 3, after

which violence started. There are casualties on both sides but the Kukis have suffered disproportionately. The Arambai Thengol and the Meiti Leepun are two armed outfits, which unleashed the violence. The chief of Meitei Leepun has gone on record to say that their goal is to wipe out the Kukis. Our Jesuits of Moirang were brutally assaulted while they were returning from a house blessing. Although one of our scholastics collapsed after a blow to his face, there were no other casualties. They are now back to their work determined to serve the people of Manipur.

What is in full display is a state-sponsored diabolical communal politics of the 'double engine sarkar'. There is a BJP government in Manipur and so the Parivar's agenda of majoritarianism, which is seen as genocidal in nature, is being implemented. The majority Meitei are targeting the Christians Kukis. The Church's work and influence are impressive which the RSS resents. It wants to get rid of the Christians. It is shocking that hundreds of Catholic and protestant churches have been burnt, looted and desecrated with impunity. Christians do not fit into the Parivar's scheme of things, which is 'One Nation, One Culture'. So, this violence and mayhem are not simply a fight between two tribes asserting identity and claiming land but there is the Parivar's ideology with its hegemonic designs at play.

The Churches of the Christian Meitei were also burnt, not by the Kukis as alleged but by the Arambai Thengol, who are Meitei. That is

because the Hindu-Sanamahi Meitei wants the Christians among them to 'come home' (ghar vapsi). The PM's silence was deafening but when he spoke, it was dreadful politics in the form of 'whataboutery'. The problem with the masses is that their understanding of politics is poor. The intelligentsia is silent due of fear and others are complicit. The CM has failed miserably. Kukis and civil society are asking for the dismissal of the government under Art 356. But the Centre will not act against its own CM. The ordinary Meitei and the Kukis, and all the other communities who are suffering the consequences of this 'engineered violence and mayhem' are crying for peace. There is a fear in the minds of Christians of the NE and other states such as Kerala, Goa and others that the 'Manipur Model' of ethnic cleansing will be repeated in their states. Why did we reach such a situation? We need to introspect. It is because of our ignorance of politics that we failed to understand the power of the vote and the importance of the ballot box. Quite a few of us do not vote and if we do, we do not do enough homework.

In this situation, we Jesuits should be agents of justice, peace and reconciliation. This process is rendered more difficult because the state government and other vested interests do not want peace because they benefit from hatred, divisiveness, violence and polarization. They are eyeing a bigger win in 2024. That is why this is evil and dangerous Machiavellian politics.

But we can counter this by engaging in 'good politics' as the Pope's Encyclical Fratelli Tutti asks us to. That politics serves the common good which is Democracy, the Rule of Law and the Constitution of India. The Constitution enshrines the values of secularism, socialism and fraternity and offers special protection to

weaker sections. We need to participate fully in the electoral process where the possibilities of creating democratic spaces and promoting democratic and secular candidates are immense. The Church with the Archbishop Peter Machado has led from the front. The other congregations, priests and nuns have joined in. The indefatigable Fr Xavier Bosco SJ, former Provincial of the Andhra Province, has shown us ways in which we can engage in good politics, without directly getting into the electoral fray. His approach has been hailed as strategic and his work as courageous and prophetic. Jesuits of Karnataka also joined in and played a role but much more is expected from them given their resources.

Installing democratic and secular governments is part of our Mission today. Look what has happened after the electoral victory of secular forces! The new government is fighting communal forces, is supportive of minorities and cares about the poor. They have a long way to go. There is hope.



FR TONY DIAS SJ

Associate Director, LCHR, Jangriti, Guwahati

Cling on!

(A personal lived-experience of the crisis)

*Amid Hopelessness, I look up to the Lord
In the horror of the unforgiving Darkness,
I cling to the Lord,
For in him,
I draw courage and resilience
For unto the evil
will I never be subservient
For the likeness of God
transcends abhorrence*

April 2023 was my second visit to the picturesque landscape of Manipur after almost a decade. The rolling hills, the serene Loktak Lake and the warmth of the people are the experiences that have sunk deep within me. It was beautiful to reminisce about those experiences again.

However, the 3rd of May will forever be etched in my heart for various reasons; the experiences have transformed me in my approach towards faith and resilience. When I recall that incident, I started realizing the profound wisdom that many great people have shared; Jesus Christ, Blaise Pascal, and Victor Frankl just to name a few. It was on this particular day as we returned from house blessing, assisting the fathers in Majuron parish that a sudden outbreak of violence erupted. We were a group of seven Jesuits and a female teacher, returning in a Bolero vehicle to St. Xavier's School, the Jesuits' residence and school. As we were journeying, an unforeseen and unsettling encounter awaited us. A violent mob surrounded us, swiftly smashing our vehicle, forcefully pulling us out and using abusive words. They then turned our vehicle into a blazing pyre. What followed was a relentless onslaught of

beatings, kicks, and even stones. Only three among us managed to escape the brutal treatment, thanks to the prompt intervention of the locals who recognized us and protected us. Although, I became an unwilling witness to the violence and chaos because I hardly expected such rage would happen, I can now look back and be thankful.

As Viktor Frankl put it, 'When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.' We were helpless; we could not change the situation and the mob. His philosophy of finding meaning amid adversity gave me the courage and spiritual strength to feel deeply for the people who experienced the worst inhuman atrocities in their lives. At that moment of life and death, we managed to remain calm. We made sure that we were not scattered. The bond of companionship and brotherhood was indeed a reality. We forgot about ourselves and our background differences but our minds and hearts were for the safety of others. That moment of total helplessness and hopelessness made me reflect on the impermanence of life and how to live life purposefully.



That night was a nightmare for all of us, some of us found refuge in the police station with the help of the locals and students and some at our teachers' place. We were deeply moved by the incredible bravery of two of our class XII students. In the middle of the night, they walked from the police station to our campus to bring medicine for the elderly old father, a victim who was not well and had not taken his regular evening medicine. Nevertheless, in the morning, we managed to reach our residence. However, the fear and uncertainty did not leave us. Our prior concern was to ensure the safe evacuation and protection of all the people from the school campus. That week was undeniably fraught with tension, especially in finding help and means from various avenues.

The Jesuit Community in Moirang and I cannot forget the quiet Mass on the 5th of May, the emotion was deep. The priest who celebrated the Eucharist could not hold back his tears and all of us were deeply connected with all the victims; women, children and innocent people. We were reminded about Jesus' unwavering love and commitment despite the pain and suffering he went through. The book of Isaiah took flesh during the Mass we had. It reminded us, 'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.' (Isaiah 41:10). We struggled to find the right words to comfort our people and calm their fears with the situation that is present in front of us.

On 8th May, we managed to contact the Indian army for help and they assured our safe evacuation. That came as hopeful news for all of us. Everyone felt relieved, not just us, but the children and workers whose safety was

our top priority. If the army hadn't arrived to rescue and escort us, we couldn't fathom the situation we would be in. We were evacuated to Nagaland and reached around 7 p.m. in one of our communities that same day. Once we landed there, we knew we were safe.

We may not know how long this ordeal will last, but we will have the mental fortitude and spiritual energy to persevere. Our sole hope is that the Lord who called us will illuminate our path and guide us through this difficult situation.

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal echoed this sentiment with his famous words: "The heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing." Even when confronted with the inexplicable, my heart responded to the call, to love and seek higher meanings amid the chaos. Pascal's insights spoke into the depths of my emotions as I struggled with fear and uncertainty.



SCH MARCONI WAHLANG SJ

Rays of Hope

In shadows cast by night's embrace,
Amidst the trials that we face,
Emerges from the darkest scope,
A guiding gleam, the rays of hope.

But in a land with strife concealed,
Where justice's cry is left unheard,
Where minorities in shadows cope,
Injustices cast a shadow's scope.

Through stormy seas and tempest's roar,
A light emerges from the shore,
Illuminating paths unknown,
The rays of hope, a beacon shown.

Yet in Manipur's tortured land,
Where suffering grips with ruthless hand,
Where minorities face strife alone,
Those rays of hope seem faintly thrown.

When doubts besiege and fears increase,
These rays of hope will never cease,
A glimmer in the darkest hour.
Their steadfast glow empowers.

But on this troubled, hallowed ground,
Discrimination's chains are bound,
The light of hope feels far and dour,
Injustice' clouds loom like a tower.

Within the hearts of those who yearn,
The rays of hope, forever burn,
Igniting spirits, bright and clear,
Dispelling doubts and drawing near.

But in the midst of pain and tears,
When prejudice feeds on people's fears,
The flames of hope grow weak, I fear,
Their brilliance dulled, their essence sear.

They dance upon life's canvas grand,
Brush strokes of gold in vast demand,
A masterpiece they help unfold,
Each stroke, a story yet untold.

Yet shadows cast on this land's face,
Mar hope's depiction, love's embrace,
The canvas stained, its brilliance sold,
Injustice' mark, a tale untold.

But weary hearts that bear the weight,
Of discrimination's cruel dictate,
Find solace in hope's faintest view,
A whisper in a world askew.

In midst of strife and battles fought,
These rays of hope cannot be bought,
They're gifts bestowed to all who seek
To mend the broken, heal the weak

Yet battles fought with justice's plea
Are harder still for you and me.
The gifts of hope, injustice, reek,
For those oppressed, their future bleak.

But as we stand in unity.
Against the chains of bigotry,
Let's strive to mend injustice's scope.
And kindle brighter rays of hope.

When darkness creeps, remember well
The light that in your heart does dwell,
For in the toughest climb and scope.
You'll find the strength in rays of hope

And as we strive for justice true.
Embrace diversity, renew.
The guiding light of hope will cope.
In shadows' grasp, bring love and hope



SCH. MERWIN MATHIAS SJ

Violence in Manipur and the Way Forward

Since violence broke out in Manipur, there have been several news reports and articles about the shocking and painful disorder in the State. When a horrifying video clip of two women being paraded naked in public, went viral, several independent news channels reported it in length. Violence on a large scale began on May 3, 2023; since then, losses of life and property have continued, and there seems no end to it. There are enough reports and video interviews in the public domain to explain the reasons behind the unfolding of violence. It's wise, therefore, for now, to look at certain aspects of violence in a critical manner and identify courses of action that seem appropriate and imperative to put an end to further loss of lives.

Projection of fatigue of violence

It has been more than four months since violence flared up in the State. No violence can continue for such a long period of time without a lukewarm response from those in power. The Prime Minister of the country visibly expressed very little concern publicly. The Home Minister visited the State, but his promises for relief to the victims, medical support, and other assurances seemed to defy expectations. Two parliamentarians from

the Northeast, desirous of expressing their concern in the parliament were disallowed. An FIR is filed against the Editors Guild, the fact-finding team that visited the State. The mainstream media have gone back to broadcasting their usual TRP-generating content. The politicians are gearing up for the next momentous election.

What does the above scenario tell us? It gives the impression that the State and the Centre have projected a fatigue of violence. This is the notion of letting the mayhem continue and come to a halt on its own once exhausted. So, there is a visible sign of complacency, non-acceptance of large-scale destruction and loss of life, and uncertainty about the security of life in the State. The most alarming factor is the fact that arms and ammunition are being looted from police stations in large numbers. Wouldn't the police know who looted the arms? Have the police carried out raids to recover those looted arms? When thousands of arms are with civilians, the attainment of normalcy is a myth. When people are made to defend themselves with sophisticated arms, a return of order in the State is a fallacy.

Way forward

In this scenario of utterly painful chaos,



NGOs, the Church, and certain individuals have done a commendable job of providing shelter, protecting victims, and distributing relief materials and other basic needs to the displaced. These angels on earth give us hope for peace to break the chain of violence. Apart from the role of civil society, the State and Centre could adopt the following course of actions, enumerated as priorities, as steps toward normalcy:



First, the State Government needs to accept the fact that it has miserably failed to maintain law and order, leading to the loss of lives in the State. Until and unless failures are accepted, no sincere course of action can take place. Therefore, at the failure of the constitutional machinery of the State, under Article 356 of the Constitution of India, the State be suspended and the administration brought under the Centre. This should ensure a certain degree of accountability for administrative measures in the State. Second, all arms and ammunition, thousands in number as reported, floating around civilians must be recovered. Peace will never be obtained in an environment where the muzzles of the guns are pointing at one another. Third, the government must ensure that the international borders are shielded to foil any kind of entry of arms or even civilians who are a potential threat to peace and harmony. Fourth, the Center must sincerely gear up a speedy process of dialogue, engaging various neutral organizations and persons of credibility who are acquainted with the ground realities. Judging any of the suffering

communities in the process of dialogue will be a futile exercise of mind. Fifth, there should be a constructive means of social justice for the communities living in the hills and valleys. A demand for a separate administrative region for a particular ethnic group is not a solution for peace; rather, this will open up a Pandora's box of larger issues. Finally, the Centre cannot be any more complacent but must proactively support the victims with relief materials, and medical needs and instill a sense of security among the people. Rebuilding the houses and compensation for the loss of life and property must follow consecutively.

Conclusion

Ultimately, we must not look at the issue of Manipur as an issue of a particular geographical area alone. It is an issue of humanity, and it must concern us all. A killing of an innocent in one community cannot be justified by another killing of an innocent in another community. Normalcy should mean that people feel safe to live a dignified life and able to dream for their future in a secure environment. Even an intermittent sound of gunshots would mean the absence of a safe, livable environment. The lives lost cannot be brought back; even when normalcy comes in the coming days, the traumatic, painful memories will not fade away easily. Yet the cycle of violence must end, even to the extent of forgiving those who have wronged us inconsolably.



SCH. JULIUS TUDU, SJ
(B.TH., YEAR I, VIDYAJYOTI, DELHI)

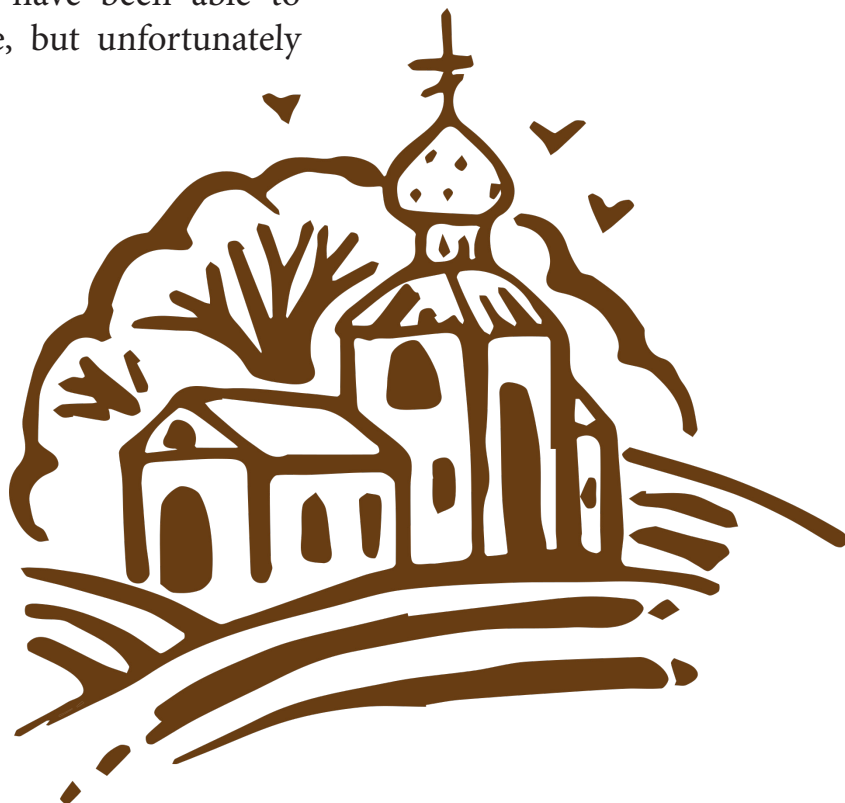
The Church's Mission in Manipur

The adage says, “Calm after the storm.” This might be our common understanding when we think of Manipur. Actually speaking, calmness is not the presence of peace but the state of being completely free from disturbance. Though the violence in Manipur seems to have ceased, the presence of peace is still at stake. The people of Manipur have been robbed, brutally attacked, and left half-dead like a wounded man in the Gospel of Luke. The magnanimous response of the ‘Good Samaritan’ to the wounded man is the mission of the Church at this time to the people of Manipur. Apart from our constant prayers, the mission of the Church in Manipur is essential and much awaited to alleviate the plight of the victims.

I wish to highlight three categories of people who are victims and are in need of immediate attention. First, I think of the children of Manipur, who are still surrounded by fear. Though the schools were reopened after the violence, the attendance rate is still adversely low. Children may not have been able to understand the violence, but unfortunately

they became the victims of it in the course of time. According to the officials, so many schools were damaged and turned into ashes. Over 14,000 school children have been displaced due to ethnic violence and admitted to the nearest schools. Many of them have lost their parents, relatives, and friends. They are terribly traumatized psychologically by the impact of brutal violence. The future of these children is in danger unless these inner wounds of violence are treated properly.

Second, I consider the women of Manipur, who became the worst-affected victims of the violence. The leaked video unveiled the entire pathetic situation of women. Women were allegedly raped, assaulted, harassed, stripped off, paraded naked, and murdered. Michelle Obama contextually says, “The measure of any society is how it treats its women and girls.” What happened to Manipur women explicitly reveals how we treat them in our country. We cannot wash our hands by saying it has happened in one corner of our country.





It is the women who became the victims of different forms of violence, from micro to macro. What would be the mindset of the women victims in Manipur? Will they be able to overcome the tragic nightmare they went through and build up their family?

Third, I think of the youth of Manipur. The violence has severely affected them in various ways. They have been deviated, scattered, misled, demotivated, and brainwashed. Some youths are also culpable for the heinous act that they did to those women in the leaked video. Their career has been jeopardized. Their ethnicity has compelled them to take up guns to protect their land. Their future and dreams have been shattered and their efforts are in vain.

In the midst of all these, the Church must come up with creative and viable mission. This could be building a conducive atmosphere for the children to grow and helping them come out of their trauma; providing women with moral, social, and financial support in rebuilding their family; offering the youth career guidance and motivation; and helping them to resume their studies in order to reconstruct their future and reorient themselves in society. Along with these, the Church must be ready to collaborate with other denominations and other faiths as well to make the mission possible and vibrant. These are the ways through which the Church could help restore peace, harmony, and normalcy to the state of Manipur.



BRO. JUSTIN AROKIA RAJ, SVD
II YEAR THEOLOGY, JD, PUNE.

To Whom Does It Belong?

(A short story)

Ten years ago, I drove along this road, but today I couldn't help but feel a sense of foreboding. The road that was once a majestic entrance to the land of paradise has now become a bumpy path of uncertainty. Driving along the road, those ramshackle buildings and houses stood as silent witnesses, the broken windows and collapsing walls mirroring the shattered lives of those who once called them home. The natural beauty that once adorned the surroundings had dwindled. Burnt-down cars' debris and charred metal littered the road as I drove towards the capital. With each passing mile through the conflict-ridden area, the constant echo of "what if" reverberated in my mind, wearing down my confidence and giving way to worry. The quietness that once brought comfort now felt deafening, intensifying my anxious thoughts. I gripped the steering wheel tighter, trying to calm my racing heart.

Not long after crossing the Churachandpur-Bishnupur border, I heard a burst of my car's wheel. I quickly manoeuvred the car beside the road. As I stood there on the desolated road, my eyes scanned the horizon for any passerby. The road ahead disappears into an abyss of utter darkness, leaving me stranded in the void. Slowly, I removed my phone and called my friends; however, to my dismay, the phone was not reachable to any of them. "What bad omen is guiding me?" I thought to myself and walked towards the white milestone, which was just a few yards ahead of me. I sat there and looked around with the mobile flashlight. Just then, I saw a brown leather handbag beside the road and a diary, pen, and mobile charger scattered around it.

With cautious anticipation, I picked up the diary. I could not help but wonder about the bag and those things abandoned on the side of the milestone. I walked back to my car and gently opened the diary.

Dear Diary,

01/05/2023

I always long for summer vacation. Every year during this season, as a family, we spend time visiting different places in Manipur. My father would always say, 'First travel around your own state and fall in love with it. Be proud of its magnificent natural beauty and different cultures and traditions of the different tribes.' Today, my mom decided that we should visit the Loktak Lake. We left our house by 5 a.m., and my father drove the car. On reaching the highway, I could see my village nestled between the towering green hillocks. The beautiful valleys unveiled a breathtaking scene. Lush emerald green meadows stretched endlessly, painting the landscape with vibrant sheds. The air carried a delicate scent of fresh pine and wild flowers. The sun's rays pierced through the lush canopy of leaves, dispersing their golden hues. The birds chirped, and the melodious voices of cuckoos captured my ear. On reaching the lake, I was mesmerized by its lush greenery, rolling hills, and floating vegetation. The lake appeared to me as though an artist had meticulously painted it, placing the serene water blending seamlessly with the surrounding landscape. I could see the fishermen washing their nets after their morning business. We got into one of the

boats and sailed around the Keibul Lamjao National Park, spending the whole day there.

As twilight fell, we left for our home. The quiet hum of the engine filled the air as my daddy drove the car on the highway. The setting sun emanated a canvas of vibrant oranges and purples. The rhythmic motion of the wheels on the asphalt road provided a soothing sound to accompany the soft, warm breeze that brushed against my face.

03/05/2023

I stayed in my room as I was down with a cough and a headache after the sightseeing. The atmosphere was charged with passion as the crowd gathered for the Tribal Solidarity March. From my window, I saw signs and banners held high. Their voices, rising like a tiding wave, rang through the air, demanding to withdraw the proposal made by the High Court to include the Meitei community on the ST list. The sound of thousands intermingled, creating an indomitable force throughout the village and every house around it.

I wondered what the outcome of this solidarity march would be. I have read in the newspaper that some miscreants have set on fire an Open Gym at PT Sports Complex New Lamka. Moreover, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum had called for a total shutdown in the Hill districts of Manipur just a week ago in protest against the government's land survey and demolition of Churches. I can't just imagine why educated leaders, thinkers, and lawmakers behave in this manner. Can't the government and the local leaders put their heads together, discuss, and settle the issue? With due respect, could they not at least stop destroying the sacredness of the churches and respect the religion of others? Don't we learn in

schools and colleges that India is a democratic country where we respect the freedom and practices of any religion?

The intellectuals with high degrees, Phds, and those securing high positions in society on this account are to lead by example on how freedom should be respected and applied in everyday life situations. On the contrary, don't you think that these so-called intellectuals, allied with those in power, were the ones who mobilized these attacks and resources for their own benefit?

08/05/2023

Not even in my dreams have I experienced such a horrific situation in my life. That day, at nightfall, I saw a mob rushing in from all directions, shouting and yelling, "Go away, you migrants, outcasts, foreigners, etc." and began to terrorize us with their gun shots and subsequently set our houses on fire. Fear consumed me as I heard the angry shouts and jeers of a mob approaching from the darkness. Smoke filled the air, and we frantically searched for an escape route from our blazing houses. We ran into the open field towards the forest. There were more than 30 people chasing after us with sticks and deadly weapons in their hands.

Right now, I am in one of the army Relief Camps. The sweltering temperature made me uneasy and sick. But more than my discomfort, it is the crying and whining of the little innocent children for food and water, which tore my



heart apart. Why have we become enemies of each other? What have we done that has made us bitter enemies? Why do my father's and my mother's family suddenly turn against each other? The sons and daughters of the land are not safe in their own home. I am a stranger in my own homeland, which was supposed to be the cradle of loving memories.

09/05/2023

I don't know whether this was a sign of hope for us. My father said that we would be moving to another place for safety this evening. What about my friends and relatives here? How would they manage in this situation? What can I do? I hope and pray that peace and reconciliation may flourish when these children will laugh, play, and dance once again in this enchanting 'land of jewels.'

As my eyes slid towards the unwritten page of the diary, these streams of questions evoked and hit my head hard. Whose bag is this? Who was she? Where are they going? How was it that this small bag had fallen beside the road? Have they been attacked by a mob or managed to reach the new place safely? I

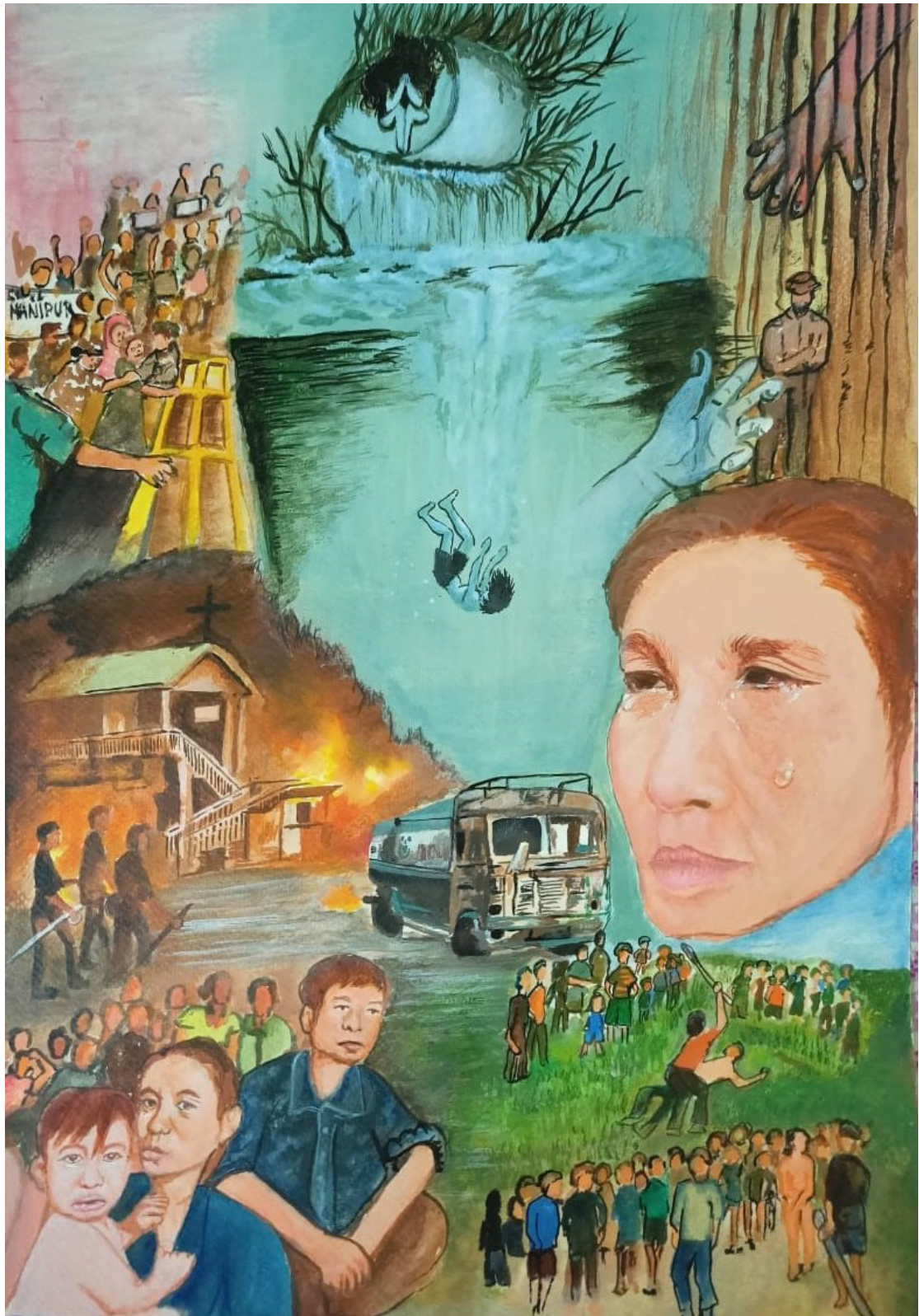
hope they have reached their destination safe and sound.

As I drove out of the city the next morning, I felt exhausted from the sleepless night, yet my heart wished and hoped for the people of the land. Let the echoes of gunshots and explosions be filled again with the laughter of children. Let the ashes of the past be wiped off and a new chapter of life that is vibrant and everlasting be written. Let this land that was torn apart be a shining example of what we can accomplish when hope, peace, love, and mutual dialogue prevail. Long live the Land of Jewels!



SCH. ANTHONY PAVINGAOLOU SJ





SCH. NITESH ROHIT MINJ SJ

Manipur: Upholding the Dignity of Human Rights

Manipur, a northeastern state in India renowned for its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, has recently faced an alarming incident that shook the nation's conscience. The picturesque landscapes and colourful cultures that were its pride are now overshadowed by the chaos, violence, and instability that have gripped the state. Manipur, home to several ethnic groups, including the Meitheis, Nagas, Kukis, and Pangals, has a history of co-existing together. But at times, conflicts arose among them. These conflicts often stem from disputes over territorial claims, cultural differences, and political power struggles. The ethnic violence in Manipur has resulted in tragic consequences, including loss of lives, displacement of communities, destruction of property, and severe psychological trauma. Armed clashes between various ethnic groups and clashes with security forces have become distressingly commonplace. The perpetuation of such violence not only hinders development but also deepens the divide among communities, eroding the social fabric that has held them together for centuries. This conflict led to the destruction of their common home. They have betrayed the love of their so-adorned mother, who has adorned their land with its beauty. The land of jewels, the beauty of North East India, is now stripped off.

Manipur has failed to protect the dignity of its mother and daughter. A shocking video of two women from the Kuki-Zomi community being paraded naked and sexually assaulted in Manipur surfaced on July 19. The incident allegedly occurred a day after ethnic clashes between Kukis and Meitheis broke out in

the state. Multiple reports emerged revealing the deplorable act of women being paraded naked in public, an incident that blatantly violated their dignity and fundamental rights. However, in the aftermath of this horrific event, it is crucial to shed light on the resilience and collective efforts of the people of Manipur in upholding the dignity of human rights.



The act of parading women naked is a gross violation of human dignity, a fundamental principle recognized by International Human Rights Instruments. Dignity is an inherent characteristic of every individual, regardless of their gender, race, or background. To treat someone without dignity is to strip them of



their basic humanity and subject them to extreme humiliation, creating long-lasting traumatic effects.

The incident sparked widespread outrage not only in Manipur but across India and internationally. People from all walks of life, including human rights activists, feminist groups, politicians, and civil society organizations condemned this egregious act. Protests and demonstrations demanding justice and an end to human rights violations reverberated throughout state and beyond.

In the face of such deplorable actions, the people of Manipur demonstrated immense resilience and determination to uphold the dignity of human rights. The incident galvanized the community to collectively fight against human rights abuses and demand justice for the victims. Various grassroots organizations emerged advocating for human rights, women's rights, and the repeal of draconian laws.

This unbecoming episode served as a wakeup call for the Indian government and society as a whole. It shed a spotlight on the urgent need for reforms in security laws and the protection of human rights. Manipur became a symbol of the fight against enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and human rights violations. The incident acted as an impetus for change, leading to renewed discussions

and debates on the role of security forces and the necessity of accountability.

In response to the public outcry, inquiries and investigations were conducted, resulting in the identification of those responsible for the incident. Legal actions were taken against the perpetrators, serving as evidence that the justice system can be a tool for redress and accountability.

While the incident of women being paraded naked in Manipur was a dark chapter in the history of human rights violations, it inadvertently became a catalyst for change, and a symbol of resilience. The episode brought to light the determination of the people of Manipur to fight for justice, human dignity and the protection of basic rights. It serves as a reminder that collective efforts and solidarity are indispensable in upholding the dignity of every human being, regardless of their gender, in order to build a society where human rights are respected and protected.



BRO. GABRIEL KRO MCBS

Reconciliation's Hope: Kuki and Meitei Unity

In Manipur, a land so pretty and fine,
Nature's beauty makes it truly divine.
With colours so bright, it's a lovely sight,
Filling our hearts with pure delight.

Hills rise gently under the blue sky,
Covered in green, they reach up high.
Valleys dance with flowing rivers so grand,
Creating a scene that we can't withstand.

Meadows are lush, with flowers in bloom,
Their sweet fragrance dispels all gloom.
Lakes with lotus flowers look so serene,
Reflecting peace, like in a dream.

The air is filled with joyful melodies,
From traditional dances to folk remedies.
In colourful attire, the rhythms unite,
Celebrating heritage, a pure delight.

But above all, it's the people we find,
With warm hearts and a spirit so kind.
Their smiles shine as bright as the sun,
Welcoming all, embracing everyone.

Oh, Manipur, your beauty is renowned,
In every corner, treasures can be found.
From hills to valleys, rivers to the skies,
A wondrous place that brings endless sighs.

In Manipur's ancient, rugged land,
Kuki and Meitei, hand in hand,
A tale of troubles, strife, and woe,
Let's speak of this, that all may know.

Kukis, proud of their heritage,
Meiteis, too, with tales to presage,
But oft in history, they have clashed,
Over boundaries, rights, their dreams un-
latched.

Land disputes have fuelled their ire,
Flames of conflict rising higher,
Yet in this land of hills and dales,
Let's seek a way where peace prevails.

In unity, let hearts entwine,
For harmony in this land, define,
Kuki and Meitei, side by side,
Together let's bridge the great divide.

Through dialogue, understanding seek,
The path to harmony, not to speak,
Of conflict past, but of the way,
To brighter, peaceful, hopeful day.

In Manipur's story, let it be said,
Kuki and Meitei, no more misled,
Towards a future where they stand,
Together strong, in this blessed land.



SCH. SAURABH PARMAR SJ



UNHEARD CRY OF MANIPUR

In India, violence has sadly been a common issue due to a variety of major sensitive issues. India is a diverse country, and the reasons for violence can vary from region to region. India's religious, cultural, and ethnic issues are significant societal issues. These various issues lead to conflicts, bloodshed, etc. Over many years, sexual assault and violence against women have occurred at a significant rate. India, as a bilingual and multi-ethnic country, occasionally experiences disputes between different ethnic or regional groupings, typically over issues of resource allocation, zoning, or political representation.

It is obvious that there is a reason for concern when authorities ignore or encourage violence in Manipur. Leaders are expected to uphold the rule of law, protect the safety and welfare of their citizens, and promote peaceful solutions. It is also essential for citizens to hold their leaders accountable for their actions. Transparency, responsibility, and the rule of law are essential components of a just and healthy society. The widespread violence done in the name of religion, caste, and culture endangers India's social fabric and growth. India can only expect to get over these challenges and progress in the direction of a more egalitarian and peaceful future by working together on initiatives like legal reforms, educational reforms, responsible leadership, economic growth, and community participation.

Manipur is greatly ashamed of and troubled by acts of heinous violence, rape, and murder. Such behaviours are morally repugnant, and they also have serious negative effects on

people and communities, causing trauma on the physical and mental levels, dread, and a loss of social cohesiveness. Law enforcement, community assistance, education, and awareness campaigns are all necessary components of the multidimensional strategy needed to address these problems. To prevent and respond to such crimes, help survivors, and hold offenders accountable through a fair and just legal system, the government must pay attention and act accordingly. The two main communities in Manipur, the majority Meithei and the minority Kuki, are at war with one another for dominance of the region and political power. After their villages were destroyed in an attack in May, two Kukis women were paraded naked by Meithei men in a horrific video. This is very shameful for our nation. This horrific incident has destroyed the human dignity of our nation, not only in India but also at the global level. The inhuman methods of torture, killing, and destruction of the villages have shocked the entire nation and the world.

The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, remained silent about the upheaval in Manipur until the attack video was made. Following his declaration that the tragedy has shamed India, he gave the assurance that no one will be spared, but this remains just a word. The violence continued to worsen, and the villagers were driven from their homes. Churches and temples were destroyed and ransacked, and in several places, vehicles were burned. The nation was perplexed by his artificial speech and assurance; he waited so long to speak out, and after his declaration, nothing positive as such has happened so far. Manipur was burning; the entire nation was crying for help, but our fascist-like government behaved like irrational beings. Manipur has already lost hope in our

government leaders. The cries of our brothers and sisters in Manipur are unheard by our dear humans in India.



What has the church done for our brothers and sisters in Manipur? The Christians have made an appeal to our honourable Prime Minister, saying that “Prime Minister Modiji, you should quit if you cannot protect citizens in Manipur.” The Christians’ echoes still carry on for peace, justice, and harmony in our nation. The majority of the population of India was united and shared pain with each other. When the situation was out of control, the church leaders urged the federal government to step in immediately.

Perceiving the attacks on Christian population and churches in Manipur, it can be stated that the Christians are targeted. The violence in our country is not over. Yesterday, it occurred in Manipur; tomorrow, it will be in our states or communities. Therefore, to be more understanding and effective in fostering peace and reducing ethnic violence in India, the Catholic Church must cooperate with other religious and civil society organizations. In the face of racial and ethnic violence, the

church’s dedication to the values of justice, love, and peace may be an important force for societal harmony. To promote understanding, empathy, and cooperation among various ethnic and religious communities, the church must encourage open and respectful discourse. The Christian communities of today must establish forums, gatherings, and discussions where common people can air their issues and problems. We should adopt policies that would support equal access for all racial and religious groups to resources, jobs, and education. We must make positive use of social media platforms to enforce anti-discrimination rules and regulations and spread the values of safeguarding minorities.

To stop the spread of misinformation and hate speech, we should promote honest and ethical reporting in the media. We must also encourage interfaith dialogue to foster understanding and harmony among different religious communities. Always keep in mind that achieving unity is a long-term endeavour for individuals, communities, leaders, and institutions. However, this is essential, and this process must be approached with patience and commitment to the ideals of equality, diversity, and respect for all.



SCH. NITHIN BILUNG SJ

My God-experience In the midst of War in Manipur

While going through the forest, there comes a time when we find ourselves in a situation where we just walk bravely with our eyes closed tightly, not knowing where we will end up, but with the sure 'Hope' that we will reach a safe road on which we can freely walk and enjoy the beauty around us. This is exactly my sentiment in regard to the unexpected and tragic recent incidents, and it is the faith that I have in God that helps me to move on.

When the trouble began, everyone was scattered because it happened all of a sudden. Many 'Mothers and Fathers' were at work, busy in the kitchen, in the field, etc., and were quite confident like any other day to see their children when they return home. Unfortunately, some of them never saw the faces of their sons and daughters again, except in a coffin that wouldn't be opened again. Day by day, sorrow sank deeper into my heart when I got the news that all the Kuki-Zo in the valley had fled to the army camp, where they were in thousands and had no place even to lie down. Many babies had to suffer because of the heat, rain, and lack of food. They spent whole day and night waiting for a bus that would be able to carry only a few, yet thousands were waiting for one bus in the hope that they would reach a safer place one day.

Some went on a family outing and ended up with one or two shot dead in front of one or two spared. Phone calls came from far and near, asking for help and for prayers, with narration of incidents in fear that they had escaped and their counterpart was being killed in front of them. I can never imagine that human beings could be so cruel. But

now I see that humans are capable of such heinous acts, and I say that they are worse than animals. Such people have killed their real selves, tried to be someone else, and let their conscience die.

The particular phone call I made to a mother who just gave birth to her first son and had to run daily to the mountain to escape in the afternoon and back in the morning left me speechless and took me deeper into sorrow, but I put my trust in the God who is alive and just listened to her sobbing and lamentations.





But her one question “Where is God”? kept me thinking over and over again. The only reply I had was silence, because I believe God is there even in that silence, and I’m pretty sure that this is just one piece of what’s happening in many places with many people.

Evil will have its ruin and meet its end, but God, who is ever alive, will surely see to the victory of truth. All these incidents took me to a deeper sense of God, and in situations like this, we can only rely on God’s intervention because I can’t go there and be physically fighting for them, yet my heart and soul reach out to them in prayer and in deep sorrow and pain. It ultimately took me to surrender into God’s hands, believing that God, who is all powerful sees it all, and will bring everything to an end, bring to light the hidden faults, and prove His faithfulness.

My parents kept calling to inform me of the help that came for those in the camps from the different congregations, especially the FMA Sisters from Imphal and other congregations even from Nagaland. I found my parents weren’t afraid of anything, nor the villagers, unlike before, because they fasted

and prayed much for God’s intervention, and I believe God worked miracles by giving them extra courage to face the reality with great courage, from the smallest to the biggest. The help extended to all categories, be it the small ones for studies, the bigger ones for their higher studies, and the elderly for the basic necessities, all show that God wants to bring the best out of the worst. This gives me the surest hope that God is still with us and that He walks with us. All these make me realize that God will never abandon us, and will take care of us and the evil will meet its own fate. God is ever faithful and loving and knows what is best for his children. Not that this is best for His children, but this is one way God brings the best out of the worst. This is my firm belief and my experience of God in this time of war.



SR. STELLA HAOKIP, FMA

Moral responsibility:

A progressive way out towards peace and unity?

Amidst the magnificent hills where Manipur lies, ancient struggle abides, and communal violence tearing apart and dividing the hearts of the people is a long-standing issue that divides and disturbs the lives of the state's various ethnic communities. Manipur's history is steeped in struggle, with no winner among the communities, and the outcome is the suffering of the innocent yearning for a better tomorrow. The ethnic groups have different points of view, with their grievances ranging from land rights to cultural identity to political autonomy. Despite the differences, we, the people of Manipur, share a common goal of prosperity and heritage preservation in an uncertain future - mainly the Kukis, Nagas, Meiteis, and Muslims. The recent conflict between the Kuki community and the Meitei community is a prime example of the long-standing historical and territorial conflicts that have resulted in violence and displacement of people.

In order to rebuild public confidence in the government and promote an atmosphere of peace and stability, it is crucial to take preventive actions to stop this violence and guarantee justice and equality for all communities. Remember that it takes time, patience, and a collective effort from all parties involved, including the government, community leaders, civil society, and individuals, to resolve deeply rooted problems like this one. A more comprehensive and forward-thinking strategy that addresses both the root reasons and the immediate causes of the conflict can help Manipur become more peaceful and unified. To build a harmonious society, inclusiveness and understanding among all communities are essential. Intercultural interactions, fair representation, and equitable access to resources can help

bridge the gaps and foster social unity. The government should focus on socio-economic development, education, and healthcare facilities to help marginalized people and create a sense of belonging. Communities must understand the importance of maintaining their unique identities while preserving their heritage and the rights of others.

Conflicts should be settled through peaceful negotiations, acceptance of compromise, and understanding. The wounds of the past can only be healed, and a new era of coexistence and harmony can be created. Peace in Manipur can only be achieved through collective efforts. It is the responsibility of everyone to maintain their moral compass and to reject the mob mentality. In this regard, the communities should work together to resolve historical grievances, break stereotypes, and strengthen unity. Regular inter-community dialogue, cultural exchange, and joint development projects can help in this regard.

To sum up, communal violence has cast a dark shadow on the unity and prosperity of the state for a long period of time. In order to ensure peace and harmony in Manipur, it is essential that each individual accept his or her moral responsibilities, reject mob mentality, work towards peace and harmony, and engage in constructive dialogue with the government and the communities. This serves as a remedy to heal the wounds of the past. Inclusivity and understanding can help build a resilient and unified Manipur for future generations.



SCH. RAMHORCHAN MASHANGVA SJ

Turmoil to Tranquillity

In Manipur's take up of emerald green,
A story of strife and sorrow, little-known;
Beneath the purplish-blue sky, carry a tune with one's voice harmony,
Whispers of violence damage the quiet gale.

Oh Manipur, your charm knows no bounds.
Yet discord's echo in your highlands resounds.
Innocence once dance, a lively bloom,
Now shadows cast in sorrow's unfriendly melancholy.

Through bending lowland, waterways gently plod,
A desire for harmony in each soul is laid.
The ages' turmoil, like a commotion's departure,
Has abandoned allure mark, a haunting, endless midnight.

But hope pursues, a flicker without knowledge.
A spark of wholeness, a healing mark.
Above the struggle, we'll rise, closely associated,
In Manipur's blessed soil, love will stand.

Let's get rid of the violence, embrace the dawn,
In unity and love; let the pain be gone.
Oh Manipur, your strength will prepare the way.
To brighter tomorrows, a more auspicious day.



SCH. THOMAS J PHILIP SJ

Complexities Involved in Manipur Violence

The news about the ongoing violence in Manipur is widespread all over the world. Many national and international newspapers, channels, and magazines, including social media and websites, have reported the heinous and frightening stories in the Manipur conflict. They reported, “It is horrific and violent.” Yet no one is able to quell the issue.

The state called “Land of Jewels,” consisting of 34 communities, stands divided. The spirit of unity in diversity is tossed off. People are afraid of each other. Families are separated because they belong to different ethnic communities. For the sake of religion, people attack each other. Everyone is in fear. Is this a democratic and secular state? Why is the political leadership of the country not able to intervene adequately and restore normalcy? The issue under discussion involves varied complexities.


The conflict began in Churachandpur on May 3, when a ‘Tribal Solidarity March’ was organized after the Manipur High Court’s order to consider giving Scheduled Tribe status to the Meitei community, which is the majority population in Manipur. This turned

into an ethnic clash between the Meiteis and the Kukis. The conflict became violent swiftly. Sophisticated weapons were being used by both communities. How was that possible without any pre-planned method in place? If we agree, history would prove us wrong. For instance, in World War I, the Germans’ initial strategy called ‘the Schlieffen Plan’ anticipated that they would fight war on two fronts concurrently. Thus, the war gradually made progress. The same pattern is seen in Manipur. Therefore, it is probable that this conflict is a well-intended execution of a crime.

Perhaps both parties are being aided in different ways. Many people think of it hypothetically, but logically, it is the truth. Otherwise, it is not possible for a handful of people to fight against a hundred and strike a total balance. 52% of the population are Meiteis, and only 10% of the population are Kukis. 40 MLAs are Meiteis, and only 10 are Kukis in the Manipur Assembly. The three-fourths majority are Meiteis. There is absolutely no parity between the two communities to wage war against each other. One thing is clear: the Meiteis have a particular group called ‘Arambai Tenggol’ headed by the chief minister, which, as per



The Landscape of Manipur: The Hills & Valleys



reliable information, is well trained to handle sophisticated arms. In this case, a question arises as to whether the Meitei, occupying a small portion of the land, had an intention to wipe out the 'tribals' completely from the Imphal valley so as to gain land. If it is there then the Meiteis are facilitated by the ruling government of Manipur. On the other hand, we know nothing about the assistance to the Kukis that is sustaining them. If they have no external assistance, then their resistance is a miraculous story.

From a religious point of view, it is an attack on Christians. Within two days of the eruption of ethnic violence, over 200 churches were burnt down. Before the churches were burnt down, the attackers raided, looted, and vandalized them. This is comparable to what happened in Kandhamal 15 years ago, in 2008. For example, St. Paul's Parish Church and Pastoral Centre, Sangaiprou, were burnt into ashes after being ransacked and looted four times. Therefore, it is evident that the attack on Christians was intentionally well planned.

There are also numerous evidences against ethics and justice in the current scenario of Manipur. They are indeed complicated and complex, with many intricacies the world can't see, interiorize, or understand. Since then, the divergence has remained antagonistic and panic-stricken.

The citizens of Manipur plead for peace, but the leaders are dumbfounded. While ordinary citizens across the country conducted rallies, the leaders and rulers of the country were indifferent to the issue. When the 'No confidence' motion on Manipur was held in the recently concluded parliament sessions, the Prime Minister spoke on Manipur 'too

late and too little'. Nothing was said on how to bring peace and normalcy. Instead, he made a statement that the Manipur situation is bad and 'WE' have to bring peace. Who is this 'WE'? If bringing about peace in Manipur is a social responsibility, then why should he be silent on the issue? It simply shows that he is ready for no action to restore normalcy.

Furthermore, two MPs from Manipur were not given the opportunity to speak, for the Parliament had no time to listen to them. Where is the sense of leadership? Why have the leaders at the centre become so hard-hearted and insensitive? According to the Indian Constitution, Art. 355, it is the duty of the centre to protect the state from three things: external aggression, internal disturbance, and respecting constitutional provisions. But when the state of Manipur is facing all the issues mentioned in the stated article, how can the centre be so silent? Further, the common citizen wonders, why is it so? Has the centre any hand beneath the conflict? Is there any hidden agenda behind the hostile horror story? It is unfortunate to know that while the country is advancing economically and scientifically, the letter and spirit of the constitution are being disregarded.

If the leaders are not able to take a decision upon the crisis of the subjects, it indicates the complexities involved. Whatever the complexities, if the situation has not been subdued until today, it implicates the utter failure of the leaders. Besides, if people are suffering intensely, then the leaders, both of the state and the centre, are accountable and responsible.



SR. AGNES RUNGSUNG, SABS

A shadow of unknown hands

In the shadow of unknown hands, they dwell,
Where whispers of secrets and plans, hidden from spells.
The powers conspire to play their game,
With whispers and deception, they fuel the flame.

A play of disguise, behind the scenes,
As leaders keep their mouth shut
Religion and beliefs used as weapons,
To divide the masses, and tear them apart.

The quiet green hills of theirs, was once rich with flora and fauna,
Now turned into battle fields of horrors, rape and violence.
Days pass like echoes, empty and gray, as they find their way,
Hoping that light shines through the darkest of days,

Brother against brother, neighbour turned foe,
The embers of unity, they cease to glow.
Land, a coveted prize, a source of strife,
Communities entangled in a fight for life is to flow.

The weight of loss, a crushing blow on their lives,
Dreams shattered, as their homes brought low by the flames.
In the shadows of anguish, they wait, for their leaders to speak,
For a ray of hope they wait, as their lives are at stake.

Invisible forces at play, guiding the course of the day
As the struggle for land, causes hearts to break day by day
For in the shadow of unknown hands we still see,
The strength of humanity's spirit breaking free.

Through the struggles, they find their way,
To conquer the shadows, with every step on the way.
For in the midst of loss and pain, they find hope to regain,
As faith in Gods begins to wane, doubt and fear fill every vein,

Yet, amidst this chaos, let our voices blend,
Till the shadows be known, their grip exposed.
Let us break the chains that bind us tight,
Their motives and intent be divulged to light.



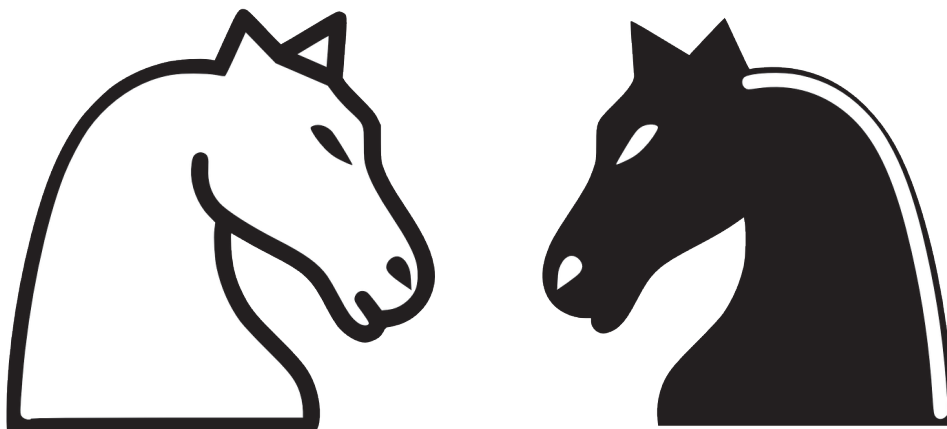
SCH. DILIP XAVIER SJ

Manipur Violence: A Colonial Strategy of 'Divide et Impera'?

On a cold winter season, we decided to visit a few places in Manipur, one of the seven sister states in the North-eastern region known for its natural beauty, culture, and traditions. It was a long journey from Dimapur (in Nagaland) to Manipur, passing through the hilly area, experiencing the cold wind, and admiring the beautiful trees. However, the roads were difficult, leading us into the valleys of Manipur. We passed through the Mao Gate, which serves as a border area between Nagaland and Manipur. As we continued our journey, I noticed the differences in the dress styles of the people. One of our friends narrated a few things about the various communities in Manipur, including their customs, traditions, dress, and lifestyles. He narrated that the main communities in Manipur consist of the Nagas in the hilly areas, the Kuki-Zo near the valley, and the Meitei people living in the valleys of Manipur. We visited a few historically significant places including the Khonjom War Memorial Complex. The war memorial complex took me to the thoughts of war in 1891 when the British Colonial forces attacked Manipur and many Manipuris shed their blood. It has been a land of various historical conflicts involving foreigners; between various tribes; and among ethnic

communities. Now, the present violence in Manipur will also be added to the pages of history. What is the reason behind the conflict? What are the underlying motives of violence? Why do certain historical events with fascist elements reoccur in new forms? This article aims to explore these questions in the context of the violence in Manipur.

The demographic composition of the region provides insight into the people of Manipur. Among the total population of 3.22 million in the state, the Meitei community constitutes 53% and primarily resides in the Imphal Valley. They reside on 10% of the state's land. The Naga and Kuki-Zo communities make up almost 40% of the population. Around 67% of Manipur's landmass is forest area, and most of it is in the hill inhabited by the tribes. The conflict arises from the fact that Meiteis cannot own tribal land, while tribes can own both types of land. Land disputes, resource conflicts, and the fear of losing their cultural identity have been long-standing issues and concerns among all ethnic communities. The longstanding demand for tribal reservation status for the Meitei community has remained unfulfilled for an extended period. The Meitei do not have much land but they dominate the economy and the administration. They are



demanding tribal status in order to get more land, but the tribes oppose it precisely because it is a question of losing their resources and cultural identity.

After the 2022 election, the BJP-led coalition government was supportive of the Meitei community about the contentious issue of land, but it lacked proper measures and cooperation from all communities in Manipur. On 27th March, the acting Chief Justice M.V. Muralidharan of the Manipur High Court passed an order and directed the government to consider the inclusion of the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribe status. Later, the Supreme Court said that the order by the Manipur High Court was factually not correct and was against the principles of the Constitution bench. Once the Manipur High Court order was made public on April 19th, it led to protests across the state by the Kuki-zo and Naga Tribes. On May 3rd, there was a joint demonstration against this tribal status of the Meitei by the Naga and the Kuki-Zo communities, meanwhile, the Meitei armed groups attacked the Kuki community. The question is, why did they attack focusing only on Kuki Communities? That is where the division comes in. The government began to employ a gradual 'Divide et Impera' strategy, reminiscent of colonial 'divide and rule' policies. The issues quickly escalated, resulting in violence, killings, house burnings, and unrest across the state involving both Kukis and Meiteis. Meitei communities pointed fingers at Kukis as the instigators of violence through newspapers and social media, while Kukis blamed Meiteis for attacks. It was a sad thing to see Meitei and Kuki friends divided between themselves in colleges and classrooms in various parts of India. Close friendships ended up in tensions, worries and conflicts. As Bhagat Oinan pointed out in his article in Economic and Political Weekly, Manipur served as a laboratory for experimentation

for a well-planned and funded effort using human bodies to incite violence for political gain. According to the ruling party's political strategies, the support of 53% of Meiteis is sufficient to maintain long-term political dominance in the state.

As Shashi Tharoor states, "during colonial rule, Indians were conscripted into the British military during World War I for their interests. They utilized Indian bodies for their gain, pitting us against each other in the Indian freedom struggle. During the freedom struggle, they essentially forced us to fight amongst ourselves for their victory." Similarly, the state authorities of Manipur used the bodies of the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities for their political triumph. At times, the thoughtlessness of the state government was very evident during episodes of violence. In our country, any outbreak of violence can typically be brought under control within 24 hours through official means of control, but this was not executed by the state government. Hannah Arendt in her book "Eichman in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil," speaks about the trial of the Nazi officer Eichman, who was responsible for the deportation and extermination of Jews. During his trial in Jerusalem, he repeatedly tells the court that "he was just following the orders". Based on the event, Arendt wrote about the concepts of thoughtlessness and evil. Eichman lost his critical thinking and moral responsibility due to certain ideologies. The state government in Manipur and Chief Minister Biren Singh happened to be in a similar situation of thoughtlessness and evil by just following the orders from the high command of the BJP. He surrendered his thoughtfulness and moral

responsibility to fascist ideologies, leaving his people to fight each other.

The state government has the responsibility to restore peace without further violations of law and order in the state. However, the situation appears as if the state government is becoming a part of an overall game being played within the state. Simultaneously, the state government is attempting to create a certain drama by announcing the resignation of CM Biren Singh and publicly reading the resignation letter. During this event, an elderly lady stepped forward and tore the letter into pieces. All these instances indicate that Manipur is entangled in a larger game, fueled by the state government's actions. Although the situation is extremely critical, there are rays of hope for peace

and reconciliation in the state. As Walter Fernandes mentioned in his article titled "A Land in Trouble," many of their leaders, thinkers, and writers are speaking out against it. Women's groups have played a crucial role by protesting against violence and stopping men from attacks by forming human chains. People are supporting each other by providing material resources to the relief camps. At the same time, it is also a crucial time to identify the real perpetrators of violence and refute their fascist ideologies, which are being used to ignite violence in various parts of India.



SCH. FRANGLE B.R. SJ



The Unseen Struggles of Manipur

In the northeastern corner of India lies Manipur, a land steeped in history, culture, and a silent ocean of pain. Behind its picturesque landscapes and vibrant traditions, the people of Manipur have silently borne the weight of their struggles, shedding tears that often go unnoticed by the world.

The pain of Manipur runs deep, woven into the very fabric of its history. For decades, the state has grappled with conflicts that have left scars on its people's hearts. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has cast a shadow over Manipur, giving security forces sweeping powers that have led to allegations of human rights violations. The tears shed for the lives lost and the voices unheard echo through the valleys, a reminder of the ongoing battle for justice.

Ethnic tensions have further added to the pain of Manipur. Deep-seated rivalries and conflicts over land and identity have disrupted lives and torn communities apart. These struggles have often gone unnoticed by the world at large, leaving the Manipuri people to bear their pain and tears in solitude.

Cultural erosion is yet another source of anguish for Manipur. The younger generation grapples with the pressure of modernization and globalization, which threaten to wash away the traditions that have been the essence of their identity for generations. The tears of the elders, who fear the fading of their culture, mix with the aspirations of the youth, creating a poignant symphony of longing.

Economically marginalized, Manipur faces challenges that lead to the shedding of

tears of frustration and despair. Limited opportunities and inadequate infrastructure hinder progress, leaving many to grapple with poverty. The tears shed for unfulfilled dreams and unrealized potential form a silent river of sorrow.

Yet, despite the pain and tears, the spirit of Manipur remains unbroken. The vibrant dance forms, the resilient communities, and the unwavering determination to preserve their heritage reflect a resilience that is truly remarkable. Activists and individuals are working tirelessly to turn their tears into catalysts for change, advocating for justice, unity, and progress.

The world may not always hear the cries of Manipur, but their pain and tears, particularly those inflicted by the current unabated violence, are an indelible part of their story. As we bear witness to their struggles, let us remember that every tear shed is a testament to their strength and a plea for a better tomorrow. The pain and tears of Manipur must not be forgotten; they must be acknowledged, understood, and transformed into a future where suffering is replaced by hope, and tears are wiped away by triumph.

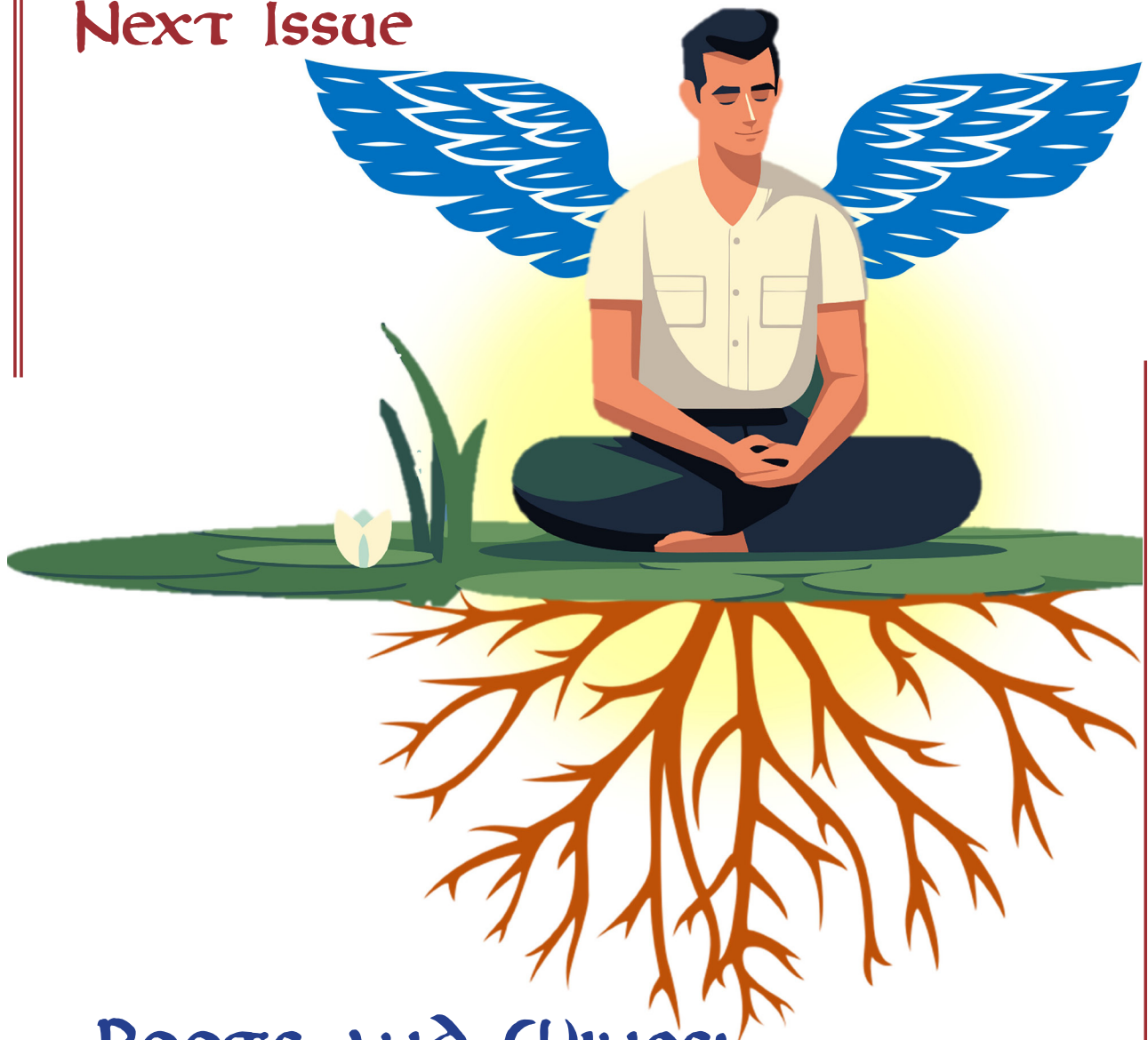


SCH. ALOK TOPPO SJ

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ROOTS AND WINGS:
AN IGNATIAN QUINTESSENCE