

# Editorial

Friday, December 7, 2018

## A lasting legacy

The world over, people from all walks of life mourned the death of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, often referred to as Mandiba by his close and trusted friends and associates in reference to the clan to which he belong. He is known as the first black president who successfully, albeit with extreme difficulty, made the transition from an all-white apartheid government to a truly democratic one.

The person is gone, but the vision he showed the world by living it will become clearer with each passing day. Almost every one of us have read his story, or at least heard about the man and how he became what he is, but very few of us have actually thought about the impossible hardships and oppressions he had to endure to become the man the world revered. Therein lay the tragedy.

It would be our own loss if we could not learn and grow from the example Mandela set for the whole world to know. It would seem far-fetched for a few who would argue the relevance of drawing a comparison with our present society- yet that argument only strengthen the need for comparison, as we would be saving ourselves from the deepest living nightmare similar to what the man had to endure. It would be fooling ourselves if anybody in our society thinks that ours is better and more developed.

Flattery is addictive and so is self promotion, yet it would be only when somebody else tells us we are good at anything, then we should accept it as true. His words ring true because he had experienced the worst and the best, and made the most of his disappointments and angst to make the world a better place.

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." Doesn't that mean something to every one of us in our present day society living in fear and insecurity as it is? Or what about "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others"- doesn't that strike us as unusual, an anomaly to the way we have been forced to lead our lives in the society where the mighty, with a gun in hand spouting ideologies, or a handful of armed protectors ready to do their master's bidding, have always had their way, be it with our hard earned properties or even another's life.

"A good leader can engage in a debate frankly and thoroughly, knowing that at the end he and the other side must be closer, and thus emerge stronger. You don't have that idea when you are arrogant, superficial, and uninformed"- just the description for the person everybody in the State has been looking for, but a task which is proving easier said than done. Where might is right, words seemed to have lost it's beauty and usefulness, and yet it would augur well for everyone to remember that power- real power, does not flow from the barrel of a gun- it flows from the human mind which made the guns, and the knowledge that made everyone capable of wielding one.

Mandela had lived an example for us to improve upon. It is up to us to grow or rot in self-denial. We need to break out of our comfort zone and put in efforts to keep pace with the rapidly changing times. Holding on to archaic beliefs and irrelevant methods for fear of change will prove to be our own worst undoing. Nobody can afford to live the life of an ascetic, nor should we aspire to be.

# Rebels of the Valley: Romance of insurgency in Manipur in 1970s and 1980s

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Manipur, like many countries and nations of Southeast Asia have found continuous engagement in insurgencies or resistance movements since the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The erstwhile kingdom of Manipur was under the so called indirect system of colonial rule where actual power and authority remained under British colonial masters while the native ruler was simply a pawn yet it was made to believe in the eyes of the people that real authority lies with the latter. The real story of how Manipur became a part of democratic India which had a long history of resistance against colonialism has been told time and again need no further retelling. Yet, to somebody, Manipur's marriage to India was not a sacred ritual solemnized with sanctity and therein lies the crux of the problem viz, romance of insurgency, the story which unfolded with vigour and vitality in the 70s and 80s of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century etched still afresh in the minds of the people accompanied by agony and anger.

This paper attempts to narrate the lived experiences of ours growing up in those troubled times with a limited reflection of how it was depicted in a novel from the pen of a dramatic persona who himself was a high ranking government official. The title of the novel is 'Rebels of the valley' written by BL Vohra<sup>1</sup> who was an IPS officer serving in the state as Home Secretary during 1980s.

In order to make the narrative situated within the changing socio political life of Manipur particularly after her eventful integration with the Indian union in 1949 a chronological account of post 1949 Manipur is outlined here under. The chronicle ends with the famous-infamous Heirangoithong incident of 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1984.

**Major chronological account of post 1950 Manipur History**

1950 - Armed movement of Manipur Communist Party (MCP); Irabot in Burma; inauguration of Advisory Council

1951 - Students agitation; Manipur Conspiracy Case

1952 - Manipur a Part C State; CPI taking part in Parliamentary election

1953 - Scarcity of rice; famine like situation; formal transfer of Kabaw valley to Burma (March); ban imposed on **Mother Manipur**; Advisory Council taking part in administration; Manipur Nationalist Union's ultimatum for restoration of statehood

1954 - Movement for Responsible Government by Praja Socialist Party (PSP)

1956 - Manipur Hill Village Authority Act; Manipur Naga Council

1957 - Manipur as Union Territory with a Territorial Council

1958 - Enactment of AFSPA; heated debate in Indian Parliament; L. Achaw Singh

1950 - MLR&R Act, 1960

1960 - Meitei State Committees Armed Struggle (1960-1963); Assembly Demand Co-ordination Committee & its agitation activities; Police action against agitators

1962 - Army operation in hill areas

1963 - Upgradation of Nagaland as a state; Territorial Assembly status for Manipur

1964 - Movement For Greater Nagaland And Greater Mizoram; UNLF; Nagaland Assembly's 1<sup>st</sup> Resolution For Naga Integration

1965 - Scarcity of rice; Student agitation & police firing; foundation of AMSU

1967 - Manipur Cultural integration Conference; voice of Naga Integration

1968 - Establishment of Pan Manipuri Youth League (PANMYL) at Gauhati University

1969 - Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM); commencement of publication of 'Lamyamba' by

Pan Manipuri Youth League (PANMYL)

1970 - Intensification of statehood movement; Nagaland Assembly's 2<sup>nd</sup> Resolution for Naga Integration 1971 - District Councils Act

1972 - Inauguration of statehood; Manipur Peoples' Party under Alimuddin coming to power; release of Matamgi Manipur

1973 - Sahitya Academy Award to Pacha Meitei

1974 - Army atrocities in the hill areas; gross human rights violation; rate of Rose; wide media coverage in Lamyamba and others

1975 - Revivalist movement; India under state of Emergency

1977 - Formation of PREPAK, PLA

1978 - PLA in armed action; imposition of AFSPA; militant revivalism; burning of Hindu scriptures; Meitei National Front; Manipur Language Bill; Issue of Meitei Mayek

1979 - Murder of RGM cadres; PREPAK intensifies its actions; Anti-Foreigners Movement

1980 - Intensification of Anti-Foreigner's Movement; Boycott of examinations; establishment of Manipur University; imposition of AFSPA throughout Manipur; formation of KCP; Military action and operation against valley base armed groups; AMSU observes 'Eclipse Day'

1981 - Arrest of Bisheshwar and killing of his associates in military operations; PREPAK, PLA declared outlawed

1982 - Kodompokpi; operation against PLA

1984 - March 14, Heirangoithong massacre etc.

[Note: The chronological table is drawn with the help of various sources. They are: *Manipur Puwari Kumthaisuba Chahicha* by N. Sanajaoba; '*Kumbaba (1978-1985)*' by Th. Phalendra Singh, Imphal 1988; *Lamyamba*, a journal of Pan Manipuri Youth League; and various Vernacular Manipuri Newspapers].

The pages of 'Lamyamba' under its firebrand editor NK. Sanajaoba were replete with series of write-ups against the exposes wrong doings of both the government and armed forces. The sensational report of the rape of Miss Rose, a Tangkhul girl by BSF personals and her agonies revealed in her suicide note shocked the sensibilities of the common men. Later on this shocking incident was recreated in Mangisana's play 'Chanu Rose'.

PANMYL's publications like 'Manipur To-day' and 'What is wrong in Manipur' critically examine the problems and predicaments of Manipuri people. The idea of Manipur as a historically and culturally rich land had been germinated by the writing of Nandalal Sharma in 'Meitrabak' and Meitram Bira's celebrated play 'Bir Tikendrajit'. Pacha Meitei, Shree Biren and a host of young writers of the time started examining the then socio-political life of Manipur. Jodha C. Sanasam<sup>2</sup> was the earliest Manipuri writer to deal with the heroism of Meitei youths who took up arms for the cause of what they believe in, i.e., self determination of Manipur. It may be interesting to note that the arm activities of valley based underground organizations that rocked the state since 1978 with greater vigil and zeal as evidenced in the autobiography of a middle ranking police officer who was actively involved in intelligence and operational activities. In this autobiographical account the author chronicled the activities of the arm rebels indulged in violent actions.<sup>3</sup>

As also mentioned above 'Rebels of the valley' is a novel written by BL Vohra who was an IPS officer serving in the state as Home Secretary during 1980s and had a firsthand knowledge regarding the activities of the arm rebels, their

modus operandi and ideology. He was also instrumental not only in framing policy but also in implementing with a fair amount of success in containing their violent actions. The story of the novel starts with the jail break of Imphal Central Jail by some daring rebel leaders and cadres by making a tunnel inside the jail building and coming out through the bank of Nambul River. The jail break was masterminded by O. Surchandra Singh, one of the insurgents lodged in the jail. He is the protagonist of the novel who has been disillusioned with the society around him and the body politic. He adopted Marxism as his credo. He was also greatly influenced by his father Gourkishore Singh who was very proud of the rich historical and cultural legacy of the land. Gourkishore's thinking was also deeply influenced by Hijam Irabot, the legendary hero of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Manipur. Thus Surchandra's ideas and actions were a byproduct of Marxist ideas of revolution and Manipuri nationalism through which he was spearheading a war of liberation for his motherland with the ultimate objective of reestablishing Manipur's independence. Yet for strategic purposes he gradually moves towards Maoism in order to get arms and equipment from China to carry out his stated objectives.

In order to establish contact with Chinese authorities he made a long journey from Imphal to Chinese occupied Tibet via Nepal with some of his trusted comrades which were fraught with lot of dangers. There Surchandra and his comrades were given not only political training but also the use of arms. Here the author strongly feels that Chinese authorities had developed a sympathetic attitude towards the activities of the young Manipuri rebels. Brigadier Chou a smart middle-aged Chinese of average height was in charge of looking after the rebels. In his first formal interaction Brigadier Chou warmly addressed the Manipuri rebels - "Dear Comrades from Manipur, you are welcome to China, to the land of Mao-Tse-Tung and leader of revolutionary wars all over the world". As part of the indoctrination towards Maoist Philosophy, theory and practice of revolution they were advised to familiarize with Mao's famous book, 'Strategic problems of China's revolutionary war', by citing a few things from that book: the laws of war-this is a problem that anyone directing a war must study and solve; the laws of revolutionary war-this is a problem that anyone directing a revolutionary war must study and solve; and the laws of China's revolutionary war- this is a problem that anyone directing revolutionary war in China must study and solve.

Within the next few days they were fully exposed of how to become a good revolutionary by way of getting trained in hard Physical Training in the morning, followed by weapons training and indoor classes in the afternoon, with games in the evening. Every day there was a film show late in the evening and then homework, reading and writing had to be done. On Sundays they were taken on visits to commune farms of other places which the Chinese wanted to show to them. They were given stationery, books, etc. They had to write their views in English whether it was a lecture, a tour or a film show. Those among the group who did not know English had to be helped by others. Learning the laws of revolutionary war was not going to be easy. Many of Surchandra's colleagues got disheartened and became homesick. Some said that they had come to see China and had seen enough of it. But they were all in

one boat and the others persuaded them to hang on. The training took one year ultimately, though initially they were told that it would take about six months.

Slowly they were completely being indoctrinated to the communist point of view and the necessity of using the gun to free Manipur from the rest of India. Thus Surchandra and his comrades were made tough and hard to crack revolutionaries. Apart from the Meitei youths the Nagas and the Mizos were also given training by the Chinese authorities. It appears that the author had a strong conviction that China had a great role in triggering rebellious activities in North East India. After receiving the training Surchandra along with his colleagues had a firm conviction that there has been a strong case for revolution in Manipur since Manipur was once an independent country; and economic cause because the State was an under developed one and allegedly had an incompetent administration and a social cause in view of the prevailing corruption and alleged discrimination. Hence they were suffering from identity crisis.

In order to get publicity and create a large scale of discontentment and disillusionment among the people to further expose the incompetents of the established authority Surchandra and his fellow comrades adopted violence and terror tactics. It is done by random terrorism, bombings, arsons, and assassinations, conducted in as spectacular a fashion as possible, by concentrated, coordinated and synchronized waves. The second step of selective terrorism quickly follows the first. The aims are to isolate the counter-insurgent from the masses, to involve the population in the struggle, and to obtain as a minimum its passive complicity. This is done by sporadic killing of low ranking officials such as policemen, mailmen, teachers, etc., who work most closely with the population. Killing high-ranking counter-insurgent officials serves no purpose since they are too far removed from the population for their deaths to serve as examples. These activities forced the security forces to respond in a strong measure and they made success at Khonghampat operation which covers a large area where a hideout of the rebels was busted. In the encounter security forces killed thirteen rebels among whom two important rebel leaders viz Nilah Singh and Devchandra Sharma who both carry a reward of Rupees 20,000 each on their heads. The operation was a grand success on the part of the police and it also saved them from the embarrassment of being at the receiving end from the rebels [B.L. Vohra, 1987: 46-47].

The rebels were on the run for quite some time since they did not have a permanent base of their own. Even then they decided to strike back with a vengeance for their losses at Khonghampat. They decided to respond with three operations in quick succession to make an impact on the authority. The places chosen for the operations were Yurembam Power House to the west of Imphal, the All India Radio Complex in the heart of the town and on the Pallel-Moreh Road leading to Burma (Myanmar). These tasks were assigned to Iboyaima, Kunjeshwor and Achouba, the three well trained cadres of the organisation. They in turn were to be assisted by others from their respective units. The operation at Lamshang was carried out successfully in which three CRPF personnel including DSP Ram Ratan. In fact it was a tremendous loss and caused considerable demoralization in the police circle [Ibid., 91-92]. (To be contd....)

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