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Glimpses of a Forsaken State and its People

Manisha Subba

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Mata Sundri College, University of Delhi

Book Review

Bhonsle, A. (2016). *Mother, Where's My Country? Looking for Light in the Darkness of Manipur*. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger. (Rs. 499/- , pp. 250)

In the book, the author attempts to present the history of conflict, the various episodes of brutalities that people have long endured and the everyday struggles of the people of the state. Coming from a background of journalism, the author has done extensive research which has shaped the book with nearly nine years of fieldwork. She has conducted over two hundred interviews and studied documents and court testimonies to verify the accounts that have been recorded. She has tried to give account of all the stakeholders; the civilians, the army, the state bodies or the insurgent groups. While giving account of the civilians, the author has tried to give space to the many ethnic groups residing in the state. While reading the book, we get to know about the historical narrative of the state along with an unbiased description of the tensions that exists amongst the ethnic groups. This is a commendable portrayal that is usually missing in books of other authors on similar topics, where focus has been on the history or tensions of their own state or focus on the history and problems of their own ethnic group/ community only.

The book has 15 sections with an introduction and an epilogue. The sections do not form an uninterrupted flow. Each section focuses on different issues such as incidents of rape, the Malom massacre¹, Irom Sharmila, her family, her fleeing to Delhi, history of the state, experiences of the insurgents at their camps, Manorama incident² and the protest by a

group of women at Kangla Fort³, and many more. The descriptions of the rape accounts and the court proceedings are heart wrenching. It vividly brings alive the images to anyone reading the book and makes one feel for the men, women and children in the state. There are descriptions given of people who have been caught up in the conflict and have been killed in encounters, facing extortion threats from the insurgent groups or checking in the name of security by the armed forces. The extreme experiences of the people and the mistreatment they face reflect the complete denial of human rights. The physical and mental trauma experienced by the people cannot be measured, one can only try and empathise with them.

The author brings to the forefront the hardships faced by the people and the everyday struggle for basic goods due to the numerous economic blockades in the state. The blocking of the National Highways could be called by any of the ethnic communities or the insurgent groups for voicing issues or for showing resistance to various decisions taken up by the state. This results in the complete absence of movement of vehicles. Goods could get stranded on the roads for months which results in the unavailability of many basic products such as medicines, cooking gas, petrol, kitchen products, among others (p. 169). The functioning of the banking system may get hampered due to the non-availability of cash. The whole country was in

