

## Musings of A Desperate Dreamer in Exile

# Eche Sharmila, Where Is My Home Place?

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Eche Sharmila, it has been twelve long years of fasting. It needs a lot of selfless dedication to the cause. However, it is time you did some introspection as to why you have not succeeded and will probably never succeed on your own. Is it the emptiness? Or, the incoherence? As many learned members of the society have already pointed out, we need to look at the problem as a whole. It would be futile to concentrate mind and energy—let alone life--to a single aspect of the problem. Terrorism and AFSPA have to be viewed together. There should be no mistake about it. Unfortunately Eche, you do not appear to have ever spared a thought on terror syndicates that many, including myself, feel have incarcerated the state much like the way an untreated cancer does to the human body.

In AIIMS, New Delhi, it is sickening and saddening to see so many patients from Manipur who had to sell or give on mortgage their properties or to borrow money with hefty interest rates to fund the travel expense to Delhi, rental expenses and high daily expenditure while staying in Delhi other than the treatment expense. They do not always come to AIIMS (or Guwahati or Vellore) for ailments that cannot be treated in Manipur. Ninety eight percent of the time they come for treatment of ailments that can be very well taken care of in Manipur where they do not have to bear extra expenses, where they do not have to stay put in alien environments, where they do not have to take the hassles of running errands in the strange environments, where they do not most probably have to sell their ancestral properties or run into debts and where they can stay at their own homes or in rare cases at least near their homes. That is if Manipur has enough number of good doctors. I am sure there is no dearth of good Manipuri doctors. But, why do the doctors worth their grain have to settle outside Manipur? You can answer this question if you know the answer to this question: Why is it that whosoever can afford is settling outside Manipur? I know the answer to the two questions. Everyone knows, perhaps except you, Eche Sharmila. I know many good doctors who prefer to work outside Manipur rather than serving their own people back in Manipur. There are many other professionals who have chosen to settle down in other parts of India. What is suffering because of this? The state's economy! Who are suffering because of this? The common people! Who are dying? The common people!

Every now and then, we have cases of Manipuri students being raped, harassed, duped and trafficked or killed. Do you think these students would be exposed to such routine discrimination and crimes if there were functioning Schools, Colleges and Professional Institutions in Manipur? Do you have an idea of the

emotional turmoil these students and their parents go through, and of the financial burden borne by the parents for their education away from home and in almost hostile environments? Do you know that sending the children away from Manipur is a matter of compulsion in the prevailing state of Reign of Terror in Manipur? What is suffering because of this? The state's economy! Who are suffering because of this? The common people! Who are dying? The common people!

Every day, I wish I had a place I could call my home place, where I could unwind into the soothing arms of the sweet leisurely surrender, where I could cease being a visible minority member, where there was no fear for sudden death looming large twenty four seven, where I have no fear for my dear ones falling prey to bullets or bombs, where I could loiter around any time of the day or night. Manipur however is not a place I can call my home place. Or Eche Sharmila, do you think Manipur is my HOME place?

Born in a far flung village of the nation's most remote state, I remember my childhood when I used to admire the so-called Revolutionaries at heart. The admiration however died a slow death as I went on to gradually learn the hard facts about them and after I personally witnessed many of their "services" to the people. I am entitled to an opinion as a free citizen of the world, and in my opinion I do not find anything worth a pint of praise about these people. Look at the kind of people recruited into these terrorist organizations, and it is no secret majority are ill-educated local thugs or brats or skinheads or very rarely a few rogue literates whose only purpose is to make money through extortion, whatever their propaganda may be.

I spent my growing years working hard day and night in constructive pursuits like study and games. The would-be terrorist recruits of my age were busy attending festivities here and there, chasing and teasing girls, bullying people and of course sitting idle and planning most evil activities. I strived to be among the best in my class and in various competitive examinations. I had a dream: to be a doctor. I wanted to serve my state's people. I wanted to ensure access to healthcare for my far flung village in Manipur. But, they had to be the all-powerful terrorists who insist on being revered with the terminologies like "the Revolutionaries". They were busy running terror networks. I had to spend years far away from home going through the pain of discrimination, loneliness and helplessness in almost-alien environments, struggling, constantly fighting with the contemporaries throughout the nation in cut-throat competitive examinations, surviving, striving and succeeding against many odds and having my name counted among the best in the country. I am still toiling hard. My heart still aches and bleeds for Manipur.

Eche Sharmila, I have now realized a part of my dream, good enough to have been accepted by the nation's top institutes. I need to fulfill the other part of my dream, for my own people. But, I dread the prospect of going back to Manipur. The prospect of being dictated what I should do and what not, what I should think, how I should do and what I should say and what causes I should support. By the very people who had failed in the examinations and had dropped out simply because they did not want to study or because they had more interesting things to do other than study. By the very people who have no idea what sincere toil means and what it takes to sacrifice the lure of innumerable other distractions and to work to one's own success. By the very people who can never gel with educated reasoning or enlightened thinking. By the terrorists who have devastated the state into ruins. By the people who have been holding the state to ransom in the guise of Revolutionaries. They would not give a darn about my

rights (or anybody else's but theirs) as an individual in a democratic country in a civilized world! Even if I do not have the slightest belief in their propaganda, I have to make donations to their brazen "cause" from the money I earn by sweating it out day and night. Or else, I would simply be slaughtered. Or, one of my family members will bear the brunt. The very prospect of my own principles having to be compromised--because some armed thugs want it so-- is outrageously abominable. Why should I, or for that matter the people of Manipur, face this terror of the medieval kind? Why should the common people be denied their basic Human Rights and Constitutional Fundamental Rights with sheer brute force?

Eche Sharmila, you are particularly one of the most apt persons to answer my questions. All through the twelve years, that you have spent protesting against the AFSPA 1958, you have not uttered a single word against the terrorists. You need to answer why you have chosen to ignore the most damning Human Rights violations by the terrorists. Where is the press freedom in Manipur? Are the terrorists respecting Human Rights of the hapless common people? How on earth can you, terrorists and Meira Paibis claim that yours are the voices of Manipuri people when all other voices are silenced with butts, bullets and bombs? On one hand, these Revolutionary Organizations deny the people their most basic rights, and on the other, they are calling for plebiscite for freedom for India! Can you not see the irony, Eche? Eche Sharmila, are you not aware of the fact that terrorism has destroyed the state of Manipur in every sphere: education, economy, infrastructure, transport, social norms and what not? Or, are you also espousing the propaganda that simply reads "we should sacrifice our present and future at the altar of the past"? Or, do you feel that innumerable hushed-up and unreported rapes, extortion, killings, corruption and other heinous crimes by the terrorists are not crimes? Is it not in your knowledge that every Manipuri is paying multi-layered tax to the Terror Syndicates? A bulk dealer recovers the "donation" he had coughed up to the terror syndicates from the whole seller. The whole seller who had to pay a "donation" to the terrorists also recovers the same from the retailer. The retailer who had to buy his own life from the terrorists also recovers the money from the ultimate consumer. So, the consumer who is a common man ends up paying, over and above the actual price of a particular commodity, a share of all the donations paid to the terrorists by the various up-the-chain players. This applies to all supply chains: healthcare, telecommunications or public works or name any. The consumer also has to pay his own donation to the various Revolutionary Organizations if he is earning a decent livelihood: he may be a shop keeper, paanwala, carpenter, government employee, etc. Who are suffering? The common people whose per capita income is one of the lowest!

And, you think the Revolutionaries are doing anything about the rampant corruption? Yes, they are doing: encouraging and getting involved in the practice, although they find it very convenient to bump off anyone in the name of corruption when he or she does not acquiesce to or fit in their scheme of things. They have cuts and shares in everything: job recruitment, PWD contracts, shop allotment and what not. Has anyone complained about the poor quality of work in infrastructure projects? No! Who wants to confront the all powerful and mightily armed? If anyone has ever done, he is either no more on this planet or has promised to keep his mouth shut. Eche Sharmila, are you actually unaware of these facts? Why should a handful of armed terrorists be allowed to run the state like a money minting mill and hijack an entire state's fate? Going by the emotions your fast has fanned up, by simply feigning

ignorance about the catastrophic effects terrorism has had on the state, you have absolved the terror syndicates of their crimes that are a million times more heinous, in nature and magnitude, than the intermittent collateral crimes committed by the dark horses among the security forces under the AFSPA 1958. And, in the process, you have done the gravest disservice to the state: aggravated the situation in favor of the terrorists.

Terrorism and AFSPA are two facets of the same problem. If one cannot understand this fact, he or she must be judgmentally challenged. I hate AFSPA, and so do you, and so do all Manipuris and all sensible Indians and human beings. However, do you think AFSPA will ever go when there still are terrorists in Manipur on such a large and calamitous scale? If you think so, you are wrong. Absolutely wrong! Look at the matter from the perspective of the security forces among whom there are so Manipuri personnel as well. They are also human beings with all the humanly weaknesses and strengths. Don't you think they need a safety provision against the omnipresent terrorists in the state who are a lurking threat to their life every moment of their stay in the state? Terrorists do not look different or wear uniforms or name plates. How will you otherwise ensure that security personnel are not all the time vulnerable to being made easy game birds of the hunting terrorists? It is not all the time that the security forces have misused the provisions of the AFSPA. Dark horses are there everywhere, but they are always minuscule in number except among the terrorists. The number of times we count of their misuse of the Act will be far lesser if we are courageous enough to accept the truths about many instances and about the identities of the individuals involved. This holds true for the debate about AFSPA not being clamped on Maoist affected areas of Jharkhand, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. There are genuine differences between the Maoist Revolutionaries and Terror Syndicates in Manipur. We all know it. It is just that we need to be brutally honest with ourselves for our own good. Why is it that almost all people have favorable opinion about the President's Rule periods in Manipur? Have you ever pondered over this fact? Because, with little interference from both the terrorists and their symbiotic partners among politicians, things run smooth and fast with no corruption!

The point is this. You and I, and all the people in Manipur should first set the stage for AFSPA to be lifted from the state. We cannot do so by simply fasting or shouting slogans or blocking roads or burning buses and government buildings. We should make our state a peaceful and progressive one free of the people who have been raping the state with the promise of setting so-called Historical wrongs right. Until and unless that happens, the Union Government and the Army have all the sound reasons to be paranoid about the state of affairs in a border state like Manipur.

***“History is nothing but a set of lies agreed upon.”***

**Napoleon Bonaparte**

At this time of civilization when national boundaries are being viewed with diminishing relevance, we cannot sacrifice our present and future at the altar of the history that has always remained and will continue to be contentious. The initiative should come from within us. We should stop begging to the

Central Government for everything and at the same time blaming Mainland India for all our ills. Our ills and problems are of our own making. There should be no confusions.

***“I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.”***

**Thomas Jefferson**

I, like most other sensible peace and life loving people, want to stop whining and instead be alive and strive to progress and carve out a niche and identity for ourselves and for our community. We want to earn honors and respect from other communities in India with legitimate endeavors. We do not want to get stuck to the past. Eche Sharmila, you have the potential to be the game changer if you open your eyes and champion the cause for claiming the people's rights from the iron grips of the terrorists: this is the only way we can get rid of this inhumane AFSPA 1958. Let us get rid of the disease called terrorism. Everything else will fall into place. Eche Sharmila, you need to be very sure about what you want: a solution to the conundrum of problems in Manipur or simply your obstinacy's triumph over good sense and judgment. Eche, I would like to request you to please enlighten me how I can realize the second part of my dream. I need a place I can call my home. I want to be near and serve the people I can call my own. I want to see a progressive and peaceful Manipur. Eche, let's make Manipur terrorism free today. I, yes I, can turn it into Switzerland in 10 years. If I cannot, I can be hanged and hung upside down in full public view.

*NB: Sorry for the words some people may find rather too harsh. While writing this piece of catharsis, I have exercised my rights as a free citizen of the world to freedom of choice, opinion and speech. I run the risk of being asked to write an apology later on. I run the risk of being simply bumped off. But, I needed to do this. Because, I think the state has gone to the pigs. I feel my home place has become stranger than the strangest alien places. I think Manipur has almost reached a point of no return in its path to decadence and hell. Eche Sharmila should be the one championing the fight for my human rights and human rights of all the Manipuris not only against the Army but also against the terrorists. I would like definitely like to have a one to one talk with Eche Sharmila as well. That would be another dream come true for me. For people of any hues who still vouch for sacrificing our present and future at the altar of the past, I have this to say: we have already had enough, please!*