



IDC School of Design
अभिकल्प विद्यालय
IIT Bombay

A P2 REPORT ON

The Invisible People of Manipur

STORIES OF THE ZO DESCENDANTS



BY

Joy Zenhinsang

GUIDED BY

Arun Mascarenhas
Raja Mohanty

Declaration

I declare that this written document represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea, data, fact or source in my submission.

I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.



Joy Zenhinsang

22M2274

M.Des Communication Design

IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay,

November 2023

APPROVAL SHEET

This project report titled "The Invisible People of Manipur: Stories of the Zo Descendants" by Joy Zenhinsang, Roll no : 22M2274 is approved for partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Master of Design Degree in Communication Design, IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay.

Project Guide:

External Examiner:

Joy Zenhinsang

Internal Examiner:

D. Balasubramanian

Chairperson:

Date: 29.11.23

Digital Signature

Prof. Arun Mascarenhas (IDC
School of Design) (10001833)

12-Jun-24 09:09:57 PM

Digital Signature

Raja Mohanty (i03059)

13-Jun-24 12:58:37 AM

Digital Signature

Shilpa Ranade Ranade (i01079)

13-Jun-24 12:35:31 AM

Joy Zenhinsang

22M2274

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Professors Raja and Arun for their unwavering support and guidance throughout this project, from its inception. Their expertise and encouragement were instrumental. I would also like to thank Aditi Chitre for her insightful feedback during the stage juries, which significantly improved the project.

My sincere gratitude extends to everyone who made this project possible. Most importantly, I am deeply moved by the courage of the people of Manipur who are suffering, and by the individuals who came forward to share their stories.

**Dedicated to those in Manipur who
have been oppressed for far too long.
May your voices be heard and your
stories lead to a brighter future.**

Abstract

“The Invisible People of Manipur: Stories of the Zo Descendants” explores the experiences of the Zo tribal community following ethnic clashes in Manipur. Through in-depth interviews with five individuals directly impacted, the book sheds light on the human cost of conflict, highlighting themes of identity, displacement, and resilience.

The report details the book’s creation process, emphasizing the use of sensitive in-person interviews to capture the interviewees’ experiences. It acknowledges the challenges associated with this methodology, including dealing with trauma and limited access to comprehensive information.

The book’s structure is outlined, showcasing its exploration of diverse perspectives and its aim to raise awareness about the plight of the Zo community.

Introduction

On May 3rd, 2024, violence erupted in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur. Longstanding tensions between the Meitei people, who live in the valley area, and the Zo tribes from the surrounding hills exploded. This clash shattered the peace and caused widespread chaos.

What started as a fight in the town of Churachandpur quickly spread across the state. The human cost was devastating. Over 180 people were killed, and hundreds more were injured. Even worse, over 60,000 people, mostly Zos, were forced to flee their homes. They lost their belongings and became refugees in their own land.

The violence wasn't just about arguments. Homes,

churches, and cars were all destroyed, showing the deep anger between the communities. The situation became even more dangerous when weapons were stolen from government buildings. There were also disturbing reports of violence against women, making this conflict even more horrific.

The government tried to stop the fighting by shutting down the internet and giving security forces permission to shoot anyone causing trouble. However, the violence continued. Sadly, the fighting has created a divided state. Now, the Meitei people live mainly in the valley, while the Zos live mostly in the hills. Security forces patrol a zone in between to keep the communities apart. Even the police force, which is mostly Meitei, has been divided. This makes it harder for people to trust each other and feel safe.

The world hasn't paid much attention to this crisis. When the European Parliament asked the Indian government to step in and help, India refused, saying it's their own internal problem.

"The Invisible People of Manipur," will focus on the human cost of this conflict. We'll hear the stories of the Zo people who have been forced to leave their homes and feel forgotten. We'll explore how the violence has broken families apart and left people feeling like they don't belong anywhere. This report will look at the reasons behind the fighting, like disagreements about identity and the feeling of being left out. By sharing these stories, we hope to raise awareness about what's happening in Manipur and call for peace so everyone can feel safe again.

181
deaths

310
injuries

60,000+
displaced

Purpose of the Project

I chose to study ethnic clashes in Manipur for a few important reasons. First and foremost is the deep human impact these clashes have on people, causing a lot of pain and trauma. I want to explore both the visible losses, like the lives lost and people forced to leave their homes, and the less obvious emotional struggles faced by the communities.

Another key reason is understanding the social and emotional aftermath of these clashes. I'm interested in how it affects people's sense of home and security, uncovering the emotional challenges they face. I want to shed light on the uncertainty and insecurity felt by those directly affected.

However, the most crucial reason for me is personal. I come from Manipur, belonging to the Zo tribe, and I identify as Paite. Even though I live away from my homeland (I've lived in mainland India all my life), my roots and cultural identity mean a lot to me. The hardships faced by my relatives and friends, who have been hurt and left homeless, have made it important for me to focus on something that connects to my hometown, my homeland, and my identity, especially during these challenging times. This topic isn't just about academics; it's my way of understanding, documenting, and supporting the community that shapes who I am.

A Historical Look at Manipur and the Zo People

Manipur, a state nestled in the verdant embrace of northeast India, boasts a rich tapestry of history, culture, and ethnicities. However, this tapestry is also marred by threads of conflict, particularly when it comes to the relationship between the Meiteis, the valley inhabitants, and the Zo people residing in the surrounding hills. Understanding the historical context is crucial to grasping the complexities of the recent ethnic clashes that ripped through the state.

EARLY ENCOUNTERS AND SHIFTING DYNAMICS

The pre-colonial history of Manipur remains shrouded in some mystery. Legends speak of the arrival of the Meiteis around the 1st century AD, establishing a kingdom that flourished for centuries. Meanwhile, the Zo people, consisting of various sub-tribes like the Kukis, Mizos, and Hmars, are believed to have migrated

from Southeast Asia over a longer period. While interactions between the two groups likely existed, the nature of these early encounters remains unclear.

COLONIALISM AND THE SEEDS OF DISCORD

The arrival of the British Raj in the 19th century marked a turning point. The British, seeking to consolidate their control over the region, entered into a complex relationship with the Meitei king. This alliance inadvertently sowed the seeds of discord. The Meiteis, favored by the British administration, enjoyed a privileged position, while the Zo people were largely viewed with suspicion and distrust. This policy of divide-and-rule exacerbated existing tensions, fostering a sense of marginalization among the Zo communities.

POST-INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLES

India's independence in 1947 brought about a new set of challenges. The Zo people, yearning for greater autonomy, voiced their aspirations for a separate state, leading to the formation of insurgent groups like the Mizo National Front (MNF). While the MNF eventually secured statehood for Mizoram in 1987, similar aspirations within Manipur remained unfulfilled. The sense of alienation among the Zo communities within Manipur persisted.

INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND ESCALATING TENSIONS

The decades since independence have witnessed sporadic outbreaks of violence between the Meiteis and Zo communities. Clashes have often erupted over land disputes, political representation, and competition for resources. The rise of ethnic nationalism within

both communities has further added fuel to the fire. Media portrayals and political rhetoric have often played a role in amplifying existing prejudices, creating a climate of hostility and mistrust.

THE 2024 CLASHES AND THEIR AFTERMATH

The recent ethnic clashes of May 2024 were the culmination of these long-simmering tensions. A seemingly innocuous incident sparked a violent conflagration that left over 180 people dead and displaced over 60,000, primarily from the Zo-Kuki community. The government's response, including internet shutdowns and shoot-on-sight orders, further heightened anxieties. The aftermath saw a devastating human cost, with shattered lives, fractured communities, and a deepening sense of division between the Meiteis and the Zo people.

While the recent clashes were a brutal eruption of violence, the underlying causes run deeper. The Zo people continue to grapple with issues of identity, displacement, and a lack of political representation within Manipur. The feeling of being marginalized within their own state fuels resentment and fuels the cycle of violence. Additionally, issues of land ownership and resource distribution contribute to the tensions.

But who are the Zo people?



The Zo people are a unique ethnic group living in the northeastern Indian states like Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. They're also found in nearby countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar, forming a significant part of various hill tribes in India. Under the umbrella term "Zo," there are various tribes, including Paite, Chin, Kuki, Thadou, Hmar, Mizo, Gangle, and many more. "Zo" is the overarching term for these diverse tribes mainly residing in Manipur and its neighboring regions. I belong to the Paite tribe, and this is where my story becomes part of the larger picture of the Zo people.

The Zo people have been called by different names like "Kuki," "Chin," "Lushai," "Zomi," and "Mizo," but they have not been able to agree on a single identity that everyone can agree upon. This lack of consensus has made it difficult for them to establish a unified sense of who they are as a group. This means that because the Zo people cannot agree on a common identity label, it becomes challenging for them to develop a shared understanding of their collective identity as a group. The absence of a unified sense of identity can lead to internal divisions and difficulties in representing themselves as a cohesive community.

Despite their importance, the Zo people might not be as widely recognized as some other groups for a few reasons:

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The boundaries of states in India have changed over time due to historical and political reasons. This has led to the division of some ethnic groups among different states, making it challenging for them to gain recognition:

2. LIMITED REPRESENTATION

In mainstream media and education, the representation of different ethnic groups can vary. Some groups may receive less attention, resulting

in limited awareness among people outside the region.

3. GENERALIZATION AND SIMPLIFICATION

People from other parts of India or the world might not be familiar with the specific ethnic diversity within Manipur and other northeastern states. This can lead to the use of general terms like “Manipuri” for all people from the region, which isn’t entirely accurate:

4. GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION

Certain ethnic groups in the northeastern states live in relatively remote and isolated areas, contributing to their lesser-known status.

The Individuals

I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have connected with five individuals who experienced the profound upheaval of displacement. Engaging in conversations with them not only strengthened my resolve for the project but also affirmed that their stories were vital and deserving of a platform. Some of these narratives had already found their way into newspapers, and a few individuals had shared their experiences with various media outlets. I called up some people I knew who could help me connect with those who had been displaced. I had the privilege of conversing with the following individuals.

Their compelling stories have become the heart of my project, and it is through their voices that I aim to convey the impactful and authentic narratives that often remain unheard.



Mercy is a PhD scholar from Manipur University. She is almost on the verge of completing her dissertation on war and diplomacy. She is currently living with her friend in Delhi. She was one of the many people who stayed in a refuge camp in Manipur. I met Mercy in a restaurant in Delhi and we had a wonderful conversation about her perspectives, her experiences, her life, and her future aspirations. We talked for a duration of almost 3 hours together.



Muanthang is also a PhD scholar from Manipur University. Due to the prevailing situation in Manipur, he has relocated to Delhi and has enrolled in the PhD Botany programme in Delhi University. Muanthang and me met over chai in a small tapri located in Ber Sarai. We had really nice conversation which lasted about 35 minutes during which I enquired about his life in the aftermath of the events.



Mr. Vungzagin Valte, the MLA from Manipur, faced a mob attack on May 4, 2023, and was brought to Delhi for treatment. I interviewed his wife and son together. With his father still recovering, the son has taken on household and financial responsibilities. Even back in Imphal, he used to assist his father in political matters. Meanwhile, the wife is caring for her husband and providing emotional support. They are planning to return home once his health improves.



Mrs. Ching, a woman in her 60s, faced a heartbreaking situation when she lost her husband. What made it even sadder was that she couldn't give him a proper burial right after his passing. Due to the ongoing conflict, they had to wait. I learned about her story while I was having a conversation with Mrs. Maan. She expressed a deep longing to return home. Meeting her was unexpected, but it shed light on the challenges people like Ching face during difficult times.



Maan, a woman in her 40s, used to run a pharmacy on the MU campus. Now, she's starting over by opening a small grocery shop in the bylanes of Mahavir Enclave in Delhi. I visited her shop and had a pleasant 30- minute conversation with her. We talked about her journey and how she is eagerly working on rebuilding her life in Delhi. It was inspiring to see her positive outlook and determination for a fresh start.

I changed some names for privacy, and since I couldn't take photos without permission, I did my best to draw some of individuals based on how I imagined they looked. Keep in mind that my drawings might not be an exact representation of their real appearance.

Execution

WRITING

My starting point was the transcripts meticulously created from the interviews. These transcripts held the raw emotions and experiences of the individuals. However, I wanted to go beyond just relaying information. I strived to translate their words into a narrative that felt personal and immediate, as if the reader were listening directly to them.

To achieve this, I didn't just rely on the transcripts. I revisited the audio recordings of the interviews, immersing myself in the interviewees' tone, inflections, and pauses. This active listening allowed me to capture the essence of their stories, not just the facts.

The writing process then became one of iterative refinement. I drafted their stories in their first-person perspective, constantly going back and forth between the transcript, the audio recording, and my own writing. I rewrote and revised, ensuring the narrative flowed naturally and accurately reflected their experiences.

The next page gives a glimpse of the transcript of one of the individuals, Mercy.

The 3rd of May started off very normal, the usual university life which a lot of us are familiar with; you hang out with your friends, you go to the library. However, towards the evening, things did not feel so right. Prior to the 3rd of May, there was this peace rally conducted in Lamka so some of the students who belonged to the Zo-Kuki community went home for the rally and the rest who stayed back, in solidarity of what was going on just sat together and had our usual *chai pe charcha* thing going on.

I went out of the gate to buy groceries with my friends. We had already heard from home that things were escalating and it might not be very good to loiter around. The atmosphere was very different from what it usually was. Shops that usually close around 8 or 9 pm, were closing down at 5 pm. What you could see was that there wasn't the usual crowd. There were a collection of men on the sidewalks and pavements all busy on their phones, there were vehicles with groups of men running around. There was this human instinct which told me that things weren't normal were settling in. As soon as I got back to my hostel room, I started packing my bags with my laptop, my documents and a few essentials of if things might escalate or if things might go really wrong, some snacks/ration for me to survive for a day or two. And then I just waited.

My hostel was such that it was in the boundary of the neighbourhood and then just after the fencing, there was a residential colony. There was a lot of commotion going on and the electrical posts were ringing on. It was very disturbing because we weren't familiar with the language so we didn't know what was going on. My friends from our community came to my room and said "We don't know what's going on but it seems like *they're* gathering." The panic just inflated. We just knew that there was already an outbreak of violence happening somewhere and that it could potentially reach us as well. I could see there was a certain level of panic settling on the other community residing in the hostel as well. Not knowing what is really going but then violence being in the mix, it was enough to make us panic and worried, regardless of which community we belonged to.

WOMEN'S BODIES AS BATTLEFIELD

At that time, we still had access to the Internet so we got to know what was going on. The boys hostel was attacked. Then they came to the girls hostel. They dispersed in groups, some went to the boys hostel and some to the girls hostel. Never in our wildest dreams, knowing the kind of conservative and conventional community that we are, did we think they would enter the girls hostel. Both genders don't mingle so much platonically as open as other communities. So understanding that a mob of men with sticks, stones and batons coming to a hostel preoccupied by women just instinctively sets off a fear psychosis in us. It gives us a lot to think about. We have read in history books, historical movies on war or even long standing testimonies from actual women that whenever war or conflicts happen women are usually used as a battlefield. Imaginations run high. We were scared for our safety but at the same time we were also hoping that the Zo-Kuki women from different hostels were also safe and sound and not being violated. If the men took a hold of me I could choose to jump off the balcony. Indian Independence is also shrouded by the dark histories of *Johar*. Now looking back I do recall how I would have actually ended up doing that instead of land in the hands of my "enemies", I'd rather jump off the balcony and die than fall into their hands. I thought to myself even if I'm killed, I wouldn't mind it. But not violated. The sounds were deafening.

Our hostel was attacked around 7.30.

✚ One of our friends, who was *Bengali*, hid me and another friend from the *Simte* community in her room with my duffel bag and backpack. My friend suggested we switch off the lights and we were cooped up in her hostel room, the three of us. During this time, I was staying in constant contact with my family over the phone, it was either messages or it was phone calls. My friend and I put God in our prayer. We lied to our family saying that everything was alright and they were not to worry. There was no point in telling the truth to our family, we didn't want them to worry about it, for their own peace of mind or maybe our peace of mind. In the background, windows were being shattered, men were shouting and things were not consoling at all. We kind of manipulated our parents into thinking we were okay because, whenever the sounds were distant that is when we called them up and when the noises came closer, we cut the calls and told them that we will call them later.

The thing about being a woman or an adult is that, even if you are in a dire situation, we just want our loved ones to not worry about us and don't want your them to go through the mental torture of wondering what happened to me. 17.28

CHILLY POWDER & KNIVES

My friends and I were literally shaking. When our floors turn came, the friend who hid us told us that the balcony might be safer because the washroom is inside the room so it might be more dangerous. We hid in the balcony and we heard that they were checking for IDs to identify who belonged to which community. They tussled with the girls who were hiding inside the washroom. My friend and I were hurdled in the small balcony holding each other. Our friend is physically big so the clothes that she was drying was fortunate enough for us as it could hide us and prevent people from seeing us. From the balcony, we could see the people from the neighbouring colony was just observing what was happening in the hostel and they were gathered as if to see a light and sound show. We actually had chilly powder with us, our last line of defence for us. We have these selected supplements with us when you're a student living in a hostel. We took the chilly powder with us and our friend who hid us, she gave us her kitchen knife. **You don't know what's going on outside, just hold it.** It kind of caught us off guard because our train of thought was to be defensive and not offensive, so the chilly powder was the thing for us. 20:10

We could hear footsteps approaching and the door of the room we were hiding in was struck open. We had blocked the door of her room with her study table, which had utensils and a container of rice on it so that it would be heavy and it would hold them off for sometime. But they did not even knock on the door, they just kicked it open and the utensils, and books went flying in the room. Our friend (let's call her Priyali), she was very fluent in Meitei and she talked to them. The assailants asked her why she had locked her door this way and she had a little conversation with them. Most of the time she didn't talk much, which she told us later. God was definitely on our side that day, most of the rooms were thoroughly checked but they didn't even bother checking our room. They just peeped through the door and then left. There was this particular man in the group who said "let's enter, let's enter" but the guy who was in the front heading the group just peeped through, switched on the light of the room and then let his friends off of our room. We were in the balcony beneath the sill, holding each other, Mary is crying. We were both praying. Chilli powder ready in both of our hand. Thankfully, they didn't come back to our room to check again. This happened around 9-9.30 pm.

They left our hostel around 11-12 o'clock.

One of Mercy's friends communicated with those in the Assam Rifles Camp and she and Mary were rescued around 3.30 am in the morning. 27.32

And you know, the funny thing is we were reassured that nothing would happen to the university in the beginning. And when the university gates were breached, we were told that nothing would happen to us because we were girls and women hostel would be safe. But as it is, those were a empty assurance and when we were attacked, no backup, no security, nothing from the state forces was there, even the university forces was not there. And when we went off, we told the security we're going, the Assam Rifles have come, so we're going. And they were like, okay, okay. We went, and the funny thing is I cannot emphasize this enough. The hostel gate was tied together with a shoelace. It must be one of the security forces' shoelace. You know those combat boots of that armies wear? It was those. I was like, just look at this. I untied it and it just went flying open. And then the Assam Rifles were with their gypsy. And we climbed on it and we reached the... How many of them were there? I believe there are more than 20 of us there. I don't know the exact number. When you escape, like... Three of us. There's a whole lot of things with that number as well. You know, our mentality was that we are still safe, that it will pass this night, *it will not penetrate this much because of the number of people that went to the at least from our hostel, that went to the camp. There were so many of us, but that night, at least with the rescue that we gave, only three of us went. We were told that we would be safe there. We were told that they would be safe there.*

I was there in the relief camp for around 7 days. The things that I saw over there, I experienced myself. You get to know the most darkest of human's mind, as well as the most humble that a human being can get. Because imagine, not darkest, I think the most petty that a human being can get, and then the most humble as well. And then as soon as this supply is over they will have another supply but they will not share that supply. So long as they are warm and full, it doesn't matter. And in times even if we can share a piece of food to someone, because we are all in the

another supply but they will not share that supply. So long as they are warm and full, it doesn't matter. And in Ijanga, even if we can share a piece of bread to someone, because we are all in the same breathing garment, it's okay. I actually handed a professor with water bottle with the supply that my friend gave me. I realized that not everyone is like that. And it hurt. It hurt a lot. I saw lots of different colors of human beings, from how humble we can get to how petty we can get. It's sad. It's sad. Because there are times when we are good and there are times when people are good. And when we are good, we are in the same situation, they will have the humanity to say, like, help us out as well. There were associate professors and professors, officers in high positions as well. Them and civilians in the community, having meagre ration standing in line to have rice and dal. Limited supply of food as well as no water to drink. No proper sanitation supplies. Everyone was the same position. Everyone was stripped down to the basics. In the past, limited air-vehicle, everyone was in the same place. Communists, community, we don't need to know.

Everyone was stripped down to their basics

+ For me, I was blessed enough that a friend of mine from the Naga community was married to a Meitei community and the family helped me. I will help you, I will help you, any way I can, she was ready to risk everything and she was confident enough because she was she had been married for almost 20 years now she was confident enough that she would be able to navigate I was like for your safety it might not be very safe for you as well she said no I'll be able to get through just tell me what you need. She told me Everyone was clubbed in groups for survival. And then we have our university friends. We have a group of friends who help us survive. They help us survive because we have a room for them. The duffel bag that I had packed, in a rush I didn't take it. I only took my documents, laptop. We were sleeping on the on the ground, there were no mattresses. Even though it was summer, the nights and morning were so cold. She actually brought a whole bunch of rations with her. She even brought blankets and blankets. And brought me snacks in plastic. I asked her why she brought them and how I will give them back to you... She said, no, it's okay. You just do whatever you see fit with it. You can get away from there. You can give it to other people. I'm glad people like that exist.

So, I mean, how has it changed for you? I mean, obviously, lots of things have changed for you now, but in the end, What's the one thing you wish you had to...

09:58

Like, you really wish didn't change. You can't say, okay, all of these things have happened, but...

10:06

You know, some things like, North Malawi, you know, like, these are the things that come along with what's happening in Manipur, but what's the one thing that you wish actually went back to normal?

10:29

+ I wish the university was not affected. Honestly, I'm not saying it selfishly. In the sense, I'm looking at it in a very holistic and a very generic view. Because it's a central university, first of all. And it's not just one community university. And we take pride in having a central university in our state. We are very small and very background in it economically as well when we compare ourselves with the other northeastern states. So having a central university over there is quite prestigious for us. And the university authorities should have been able to guarantee the safety of their faculties and their students. Even if it was affected, even if it was attacked, we should have been held together like cattle and transported in clothes and zipped up trucks. Nobody deserved that. Institution of education allowing their faculties, teaching and non-teaching and their students to go through this in their presence is a shame. It should not have interrupted education. The conflict or the ethnic clashing should not have affected education. What are the small things that you would miss about staying in that university?

12:02

In a sense, like you do miss, do you guys miss tea or something? Yeah, I miss that a lot. I miss dinners, I suppose. I mean, what's the one thing that, those small important things in life that you would miss about? It would be my friends and my life in general. But in particular, I miss my evening workouts.

12:25

You used to work out? Yeah, I do. Like, personally, I used to run, kind of like, you know, you eat as much as you want and you sweat it out. You don't have to go on a diet and be picky with what you eat. You eat what you want, however you want, but you spread them out and stay fit. So that was my sense of principle that I live by, so I'm supporting now. And besides that, I'm spending time with my friends. I still have. I still get texts and phone calls sometimes from my friends in

ILLUSTRATING

The illustrations in “The Invisible People of Manipur” were carefully chosen to complement the powerful narratives within. They weren’t meant to be a literal portrayal of events, but rather an artistic interpretation that amplifies the stories and emotions shared by the interviewees.

The book features editorial drawings that act as visual companions to the text. These illustrations don’t depict specific scenes from the conflict, but rather evoke the emotions and experiences recounted by the individuals. They might portray a sense of loss, displacement, or resilience, depending on the context of the story.

To further add depth and context, the book incorporates illustrations resembling newspaper clippings. These visuals serve a dual purpose. They present factual information about events. Yet, some of which didn’t even make it to the newspapers!

The color palette chosen for the illustrations is deliberate. By avoiding vibrant colors, the focus remains on the stories themselves. The muted tones create a somber atmosphere, reflecting the sadness and hardship endured by the people of Manipur. This visual choice complements the text and reinforces the emotional impact of the book.

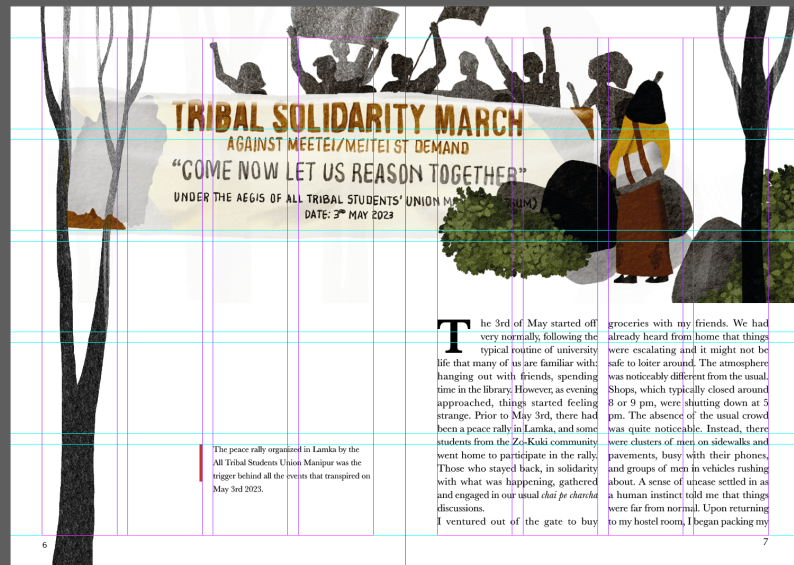


DESIGNING THE BOOK

The book utilizes a straightforward 4-column grid system. This grid structure might seem simple, but it offers a surprising degree of flexibility. It allows for a balanced arrangement of text, images, and white space across each page. The grid ensures a consistent and visually appealing flow throughout the book, while also allowing for variations in the layout to maintain reader interest.

By using the grid system, I was able to effectively identify and utilize negative space within the layout. Negative space, or empty areas on the page, is often overlooked, but it plays a crucial role in design. Strategic use of negative space can enhance readability, guide the reader's eye, and create a sense

of balance. In “The Invisible People of Manipur,” negative space is used to separate text blocks and illustrations, creating a clear hierarchy and preventing a cluttered feel.



The book is designed for an **A5 size format**, which is both portable and comfortable to hold. This size allows for a good amount of content on each page while remaining easy to carry around. Additionally, a gutter margin of **4 mm** and a larger outer margin of **12 mm** provide ample space for binding and ensure the text remains readable throughout.

The Final Output



During this time, we still had access to the internet, and we learned what was happening. The boys' hostel was attacked, and then they came to the girls' hostel. They dispersed in groups, with some heading to the boys' hostel and others to the girls' hostel. In our wilder dreams, considering the conservative and conventional nature of the majority community, we never thought they would enter the girls' hostel. Both genders never mingled as openly as in we would in our community. The sight of a mob of men armed with sticks, stones, and batons heading to a hostel occupied by women instinctively triggered fear in us. It made us contemplate the idea of women often becoming the battleground during times of war or conflict."

was, and supported by the testimonies of actual women. Our imaginations ran wild. We were frightened for our safety, but we also hoped that the other women from different hostels were safe and unharmed, free from violation. The threat was real, and the

In August, there was a leaked video of 2 women being paraded naked in a village in Manipur by a mob of men, as a result of the ongoing conflict. The video ends as the men take these two women to the field. We don't know what happens in these two women.

The leaked video was circulated online and received widespread international coverage. The incident took place in May 2023, but it was only discovered/leaked in August 2023.

"It made us contemplate the idea of women often becoming the battleground during times of war or conflict..."

uncertainty weighed heavily on our hearts. My thoughts took a desperate turn, contemplating whether, if faced with imminent capture, I would dare to jump from a balcony. Indian history, marked by its share of dark stories, contained the concept of *jaha*. Looking back, I can't help but remember the possibility of choosing a balcony leap over falling into the hands of those who sought to harm us. I pondered the idea that perhaps, even if I were to meet my end, death would be preferable

to the unpenalizable violation I feared. I thought to myself, even if I were to die, I wouldn't mind, but I dreaded the thought of being violated.

One of Mary's friends managed to contact the individuals at the Assam Rifles Camp, and it was through their intervention that Mary and Mary were rescued around 3:30 am in the morning.





10



From 10 pm to 4:30 am, I stayed locked in my room, scared and clueless about what was going to happen. At around 4:30 am, the Assam Rifles showed up and saved me. We were moved to the 1st Manipur Rifles battalion, the first group to go. The road to my home in Lamka was blocked. From May 4th to 6th, I was stuck in a camp with lots of people, thousands I presume, all wanting to go home. Food was scarce, and there were women and children in the camp. As a guy, I felt like I needed to help, so sometimes I skipped meals, especially so the children could eat. It's funny, the stress made me forget about my hunger, however, needless to say, I had too much on my mind. The internet was off, and we were clueless to what was going on. Then, on June 6th, we heard that if you had a flight ticket, the army would escort you to the airport. Because I'm from the Zo community, I couldn't move around

"As a guy, I felt like I needed to help, so sometimes I skipped meals, especially so the children could eat."



19

"The tragedy of war is that it uses man's best to do man's worst."

-Henry Ford



CHAPTER 3
The Vide Family's Narrative

HP MLA Vanggrah Vah's story is one of the first few incidents that had gained momentum. I was unable to converse properly with him, however, his wife and his son, Joseph were very kind enough to take the interview in his place. They are currently residing in Delhi due to his treatment.

22

because it was dangerous, except in the camp. My cousin from somewhere else leaked tickets for me to Guwahati. It was hard to get tickets; we just got whatever we could. Some friends booked tickets to different places, whether they knew someone there or not. It was survival, you had a ticket, and you'd be safe to go to the airport. But it still wasn't safe to go back to Lamka, around 70 km away. I was lucky to get one of the first tickets, but it cost a lot, like 16,000 bucks just to go to Guwahati, on Indigo Airlines. It's weird how, in tough times, you'd expect help from airlines or people in charge, but it was the opposite. They took advantage of our misery and made money from our situation. It makes me sad, and I'm still mad about it.

When I got to Guwahati, I didn't know what to expect and how to proceed from there on, but luckily, my cousin in who was working in Chennai got me a ticket to go there. It was all impromptu. I stayed in Chennai for a month without a plan. After that, I thought Delhi might be better for me, more opportunities and more people I knew. I left all my certificates and research work at my hostel in the university. Now I'm starting over. It feels weird to care about my stuff when some people lost their lives and it's sad to think about how certain companies capitalized on the situation to make money. I wonder?

"It feels weird to care about my stuff when some people lost their lives and it's sad to think about how certain companies capitalized on the situation to make money."



In May, amidst the peak of the crisis, airlines took advantage by raising prices nearly tenfold. The usual Rs. 2500 fare from Imphal to Guwahati skyrocketed to Rs. 16000 to Rs. 23000, varying by airline. Indigo priced at Rs. 15000, Air India at Rs. 25000, and Air Asia at Rs. 12000. Opportunity during a humanitarian crisis? Yes, indeed.

20



The ironic thing is, we were initially trained that nothing would happen to the university. Even when the university gates were breached, we were told that as girls in the women's hostel, we would be safe. However, those were empty assurances. When the attack occurred, there was no backup, no security, nothing from the state forces or even the university force. When we left, inferring the security that we were going because the Assam Rifles had arrived, their response was nonchalant. The funny thing is, I cannot emphasize this enough – the hostel gate was tied together with a shoelace, shoes. It likely one from the security forces' combat boots. I untied it, and it just flew open. The

Assam Rifles were waiting for us with their gypsy. We climbed on it and reached the camp. Despite many of us being there, only three of us were rescued that night. We were assured that we would be safe there. I stayed in the relief camp for around seven days. The things I witnessed and experienced were profound. It exposed the darkest and pettiest sides of human nature, as well as the most humble. In a situation where everyone was suffering and supplies were limited, some individuals would not share even when they had additional supplies. As

long as they were warm and full, they showed little concern for others. I once handed a professor a water bottle with the supply my friend gave me, realizing that not everyone was selfish. It hurt a lot to see such stark contrasts in human behaviour. People, regardless of their status, stood in line for meagre rations of rice and dal. In that camp, hierarchy ceased to matter; survival became our only focus. Personally, I was fortunate that a friend from the Naga community, married to a Melite, helped me. She was ready to risk everything. Despite my concerns

for her safety, she reassured me and provided emotional support. We slept on the ground with no mattresses, enduring cold nights and mornings even in the summer. She brought a significant amount of rations, blankets, and snacks in plastic. When I asked how I could repay them, she insisted I see them as I saw fit, even if it meant giving them to others. Encounters with people like her restored my faith in humanity when I had lost all hope.

As of June 11, over 55,000 people had been displaced and were living in 549 camps. Many were one of those people, she stayed in the camp for 7 days before finally it was safe for her to reach her hometown, Lanka.

"The funny thing is, I cannot emphasize this enough – the hostel gate was tied together with a shoelace, shoes. It likely one from the security forces' combat boots. I untied it, and it just flew open. The



THE HINDU

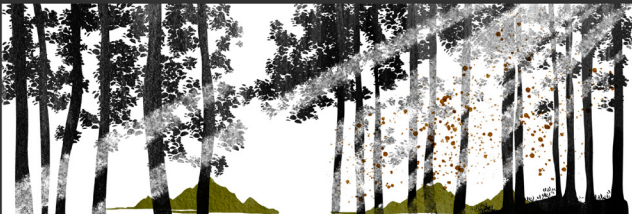
Manipur violence: BJP MLA attacked by mob in Imphal.

23 died in Boko Haram attack in Nigeria.

V ungrate Vale, a 61-year-old BJP legislator representing the Thakshin constituency in Manipur, faced a brutal attack on May 4, becoming one of the initial victims in the ethnic violence that has claimed over 160 lives in the region. Accompanied by his driver after a meeting with the Chief Minister of Manipur, Vale, along with his driver, fell prey to a brutal mob assault. Joseph Vale, his son, discloses the distressing condition of his father's health, emphasising on the lack of support from the party. No visits or

calls were made during his month-long hospitalization in Delhi. The assault had left Mr. Vale with a skull injury and a damaged face, reducing him to a state of a child, requiring assistance in basic activities. Despite the severity of the injuries, Vale's wife remains hopeful, relying on faith that, through God's grace, her husband will recover, and that life must go on. They are currently living in Delhi seeking treatment.

"The assault had left Mr. Vale with a skull injury and a damaged face, reducing him to a state of a child, requiring assistance in basic activities."

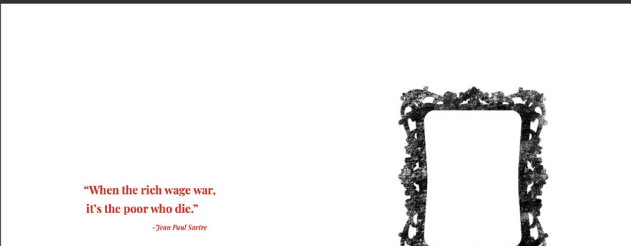


About three weeks ago, I (Joseph) visited our hometown to attend to my father's affairs, wanting to witness the current state of things. Witnessing the resilience of the people, their fight for our homeland, gave me strength and a shift in perspective. Initially focused on our own struggles, seeing the sacrifices and dangers people were enduring for our land grounded me and preserved my sanity. This change in perspective has helped me cope with the trauma more effectively than I did initially. The closure I needed seemed to come from observing people as young as 18 working on the frontline, defending our borders, and being ready to sacrifice for their land. It left a profound impact on me.

After graduating from Delhi University, this wasn't my first time staying in Delhi. Following my graduation, I returned to Manipur, becoming my father's right-hand man in handling his affairs. Many plans my father had envisioned for our people are now at a standstill, and it hurts to witness this stagnation. Living in Imphal, I had friends from another community, but the circumstances have severed those connections. It's challenging in Delhi too, as our lives have revolved mainly around my father. Our family's future depends on our father's well-being. We are committed to dedicating our time to focus on his healing. If he recovers, returning to our hometown, Lanka, would be

ideal because that's where we belong. However, as his treatment is ongoing and he hasn't fully recovered, it seems unlikely for now. The outpouring of love and support from our people has been unexpected and heartwarming. I'm patiently waiting for that. We're still getting used to the Delhi life, it's hard but it's necessary. Life's funny ain't it? We make plans, but it throws curveballs at us. Facing a situation like this was beyond my wildest dreams."

Expressing my gratitude has been challenging for me, not showing my emotions easily, but I am genuinely thankful. It's this support that has kept my father going.



"When the rich wage war, it's the poor who die."

-Jean Paul Sartre

CHAPTER 2
Musang's Narrative

Musa is currently pursuing his PhD in Botany from Delhi University. Prior to this he was in Manipur University, however, due to the ongoing conflict he has enrolled himself in the PhD programme in offered by DU.

Challenges Faced

First, it showed me how important personal stories are. Numbers and statistics can't tell the whole story, but hearing from people who lived through the conflict really helps you understand what happened. It also made me realize the power of empathy. Talking to people who were displaced made me feel for them and want to help.

Figuring out the design was tricky. After my final presentations, Professor GV Sreekumar gave me a great suggestion. He said I should redesign the layout and fonts to visually show the turmoil and difficulty of the situation. It was a fantastic idea, and I'd love to incorporate it in a future version.

I also realized I need to improve on my illustration skills. And of course, managing my time effectively was a challenge, especially when finalizing the book.

Overall, this project was a valuable experience that taught me a lot. I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow.

Learnings

First, it showed me how important personal stories are. Numbers and statistics can't tell the whole story, but hearing from people who lived through the conflict really helps you understand what happened. It also made me realize the power of empathy. Talking to people who were displaced made me feel for them and want to help.

Figuring out the design was tricky. After my final presentations, Professor GV Sreekumar gave me a great suggestion. He said I should redesign the layout and fonts to visually show the turmoil and difficulty of the situation. It was a fantastic idea, and I'd love to incorporate it in a future version.

I also realized I need to improve on my illustration skills. And of course, managing my time effectively was a challenge, especially when finalizing the book.

Overall, this project was a valuable experience that taught me a lot. I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow.

References

1. BOOKS

- i. Sen, Amartya, Identity & Violence, Penguin, 2006
- ii. Vumson, Zo History, Published by the Author, 1987

2. INTERNET RESOURCES

- i. What's Behind the Manipur Violence and Why Stopping It Poses a Test For Modi, Last accessed on 18 August 2023
URL: <https://thewire.in/security/manipur-violence-reasons-failure-and-solution-q-and-a#:~:text=The%20violence%20broke%20out%20in,of%20some%20of%20the%20mobs.>
- ii. 2023 Manipur violence, Last accessed on 11 September 2023

URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Manipur_violence#:~:text=On%203%20May%202023%2C%20ethnic,community%20from%20the%20surrounding%20hills.

- iii. Manipur: Thousands displaced as ethnic clashes grip north-eastern state, Last accessed on 11 August 2023

URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-65522714>

3. PAPERS:

- i. Suan, H. Kham Khan. "Rethinking 'tribe' identities: The politics of recognition among the Zo in north-east India," Contributions to Indian Sociology, 2 (2011), 157–187, 2011.