

State of Democracy in South Asia

DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY AND PEOPLES' FUTURES

Imphal, Manipur

Dates: 26th and 27th February 2004

Venue: At Imphal Hotel, Imphal Manipur

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps, in the contemporary world, democracy is one of the two most arresting ideas - the other being the idea of science - that seems to constitute a world-view in itself. Each of these two words carries a spectrum of meanings, ideals, values and principles that shapes our attitudes and institutions besides informing our theories and praxis of our lived, imagined as well as aspired world. Thus, one would often hear *democratic* spirit and principles being called upon not only in matters of statecraft but also in our personal dealings.

Democracy is increasingly considered a means and an end in itself. It has come to be the main framework within which society and polity get organized in their inter-relationships. As a means, it is considered by the main political actors to be the main vehicle for bringing about changes in society. As an end, it is considered as a set of values that defines relations between society and individuals and among individuals mediated through institutions of the polity, economy and society.

It is no longer a culture bound and culture free world-view. Far from being treated as an alien western ethos, it has come to be a universal longing and a preferred way to look at things and organize life. Indeed, it has become the presiding ideological deity of the *polis* in South Asia and as it is elsewhere. As a political reality, the main political actors in these countries now accept the basic tenets of democracy.

However, the experience of democracy is not similar in all the countries of South Asia. This understanding aside, there has not been a systematic assessment of democracy in this region. For instance, although the human development reports of recent years have started paying more attention to democracy, it remains peripheral to the debate. To fill up this gap, the Delhi-based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) has initiated a research program in collaboration with some South Asian scholars on the assessment of democracy in South Asia.

While the CSDS is the lead institution in the process, the scholars from other South Asian countries contribute as national level coordinators in their individual capacity. This, however, does not mean that institutions in other countries are not involved in this process. In fact, the scholars who contribute to this process are drawn from various institutions working in the area of democracy, human rights, political science, etc. in their respective countries.

This South Asia level assessment process includes four broad methodological components: sample surveys, dialogues, qualitative assessment and case studies. It aims to assess

democracy in the South Asian region in terms of assessing four major components of democracy: the promise, design, functioning, outcomes and future of democracy. Additionally, one specific component has been added in situations like that in Nepal: the agenda for restructuring. Dialogues are organized at three main levels: regional at South Asia, national in each country and local within the countries. So far, the dialogues have been organized in Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan.

The local dialogue (i.e., within each country) is envisaged as an important methodological component. The assessment is not concerned only with 'truth' about democracy in South Asia but also about initiating a wider debate about democracy. Organizing dialogues as a part of the assessment process, therefore, is an important part of the process. The assessment would not end in producing a report. In fact, the production of report will create further society wide debates on the state of democracy in South Asia.

In pursuance of this agenda, *The Dialogue on Democracy and People's Futures* was held in Imphal, the capital city of Manipur (India), from the 26th to the 27th of February 2004. In a special way, the *Dialogue* in Imphal has a significant contribution to the understanding of the democratic experiences of India. Given that India is not only the largest democracy in the world but also a multi-cultural society that spreads across a vast area. The experience of democracy in its periphery needs be read in conjunction with those of the 'mainstream'. In this sense, the *Dialogue* in Imphal contributes an understanding of the experience of democracy in the remote, both in the spatial and psychological sense of the term, part of India, which is popularly referred to as the North East. The region with its varied features - various groups of people with different historical, topographical, and cultural moorings - the experiences of the people in the region revealed the manifestations of the democratic institutions, attitudes and ideals, in both their modern and non-modern forms and contents. It also revealed the conflict and the expression of conflict between the 'mainstream' and the region as well as within the region, and how the democratic ideals, institutions and practices manifest themselves in such conflict situations.

An Important feature of the *Dialogue* in Imphal was the decision to hold the *Dialogue* in the region itself. Meetings and conferences on North East India are usually held in places away from the region (like New Delhi) and are often deliberated upon by people from other parts of the country who are regarded as 'experts' on the region. In contrast to this general tendency, the *Dialogue* in Imphal - one of the oldest capital cities in the country, sought to bring people from different walks of life from North East India - academicians/scholars, activists, politicians, etc - to reflect on the experiences of the region. Thus, the *Dialogue* also provided

a platform for the concerned citizens of the region to share their first hand experiences, build trust and initiate a dialogue among them on the contemporary situation and capture the images/ideas of the political futures of the region. Given the economic underdevelopment and the conflict situation that have come to characterize the region, this is an important move in terms of producing a democratic praxis.

Dialogue participants

Participants in the *Dialogue* in Imphal were drawn from the seven states, which are conventionally referred to as the 'seven sisters', in North East India. A Representative from Sikkim, a new member of the family, was also invited but he was unable to make it to the *Dialogue*. While some participants were politicians who were involved directly in formal multi-party politics through their affiliation with various political parties, some others were those involved in what is generally referred to as 'social work' through their involvement in NGOs, grassroots organizations and social movements. Some participants were also drawn from the university departments, non-university research institutions, and the field of journalism. The choice of participants was deliberate. The purpose being to get viewpoints from a cross-section in the region. Along with these participants from the region, there were eight participants from Delhi: four faculty members of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), one journalist from Delhi, another Delhi based journalist/activist, a Delhi based environment activist, and a Delhi based social worker (the last three were people from the North East but based in Delhi).

Many prominent politicians and academicians from the region were invited, though some of them initially committed, they could not make it to the *Dialogue*. These included among others: Mr. S.C Jamir (former Chief Minister of Nagaland), Mr. S. Marak, (President of MPCC, Meghalaya), Mr. Paul Lyngdoh (Minister, Govt. of Meghalaya), Mrs. Omem Deori (former MP from Arunachal Pradesh), Ms. Monalisa Chankijia (senior journalist from Nagaland), Mr. Sorbanand Sonowal (Ex-student leader and present MLA from Assam), and Prof. Ksh. Bimola Devi (Manipur University). One of the major reasons for the absence of the politician-participants was the sudden announcement for the Lok Sabha elections.

Methodology of the dialogue

The *Dialogue* did not follow the formal seminar format with paper presentations followed by question and answer sessions. It was more of a brain storming exercise among the

participants. The exercise was divided into two sessions - morning and afternoon - each day. The first session on the *Promise of Democracy* was chaired by **Prof. D. L. Sheth (CSDS)**, the second session on the *Designs and Institution* was chaired by **Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur)**, the third session on the *Workings and Outcomes* was chaired by **Ms. Monica Banerjee (Social Worker, Delhi)**, and the last session on *The Futures of Democracy* was chaired by **Prof. Suresh Sharma (CSDS)**.

While the chairperson of each session acted as the moderator, and monitored the discussions, attempts were also made to ensure that the discussions were free and everyone was allowed to speak. Each session started with open-ended questions related to the theme of that session.

Before the participants came to the *Dialogue*, they were given a framework constituted of four themes with concomitant questions that could be discussed. This was done to ensure some form of direction, so that the participants could engage in a focused presentation and exchange of ideas and debate on the experience of democracy in North East India.

These themes and questions were as follows:

1. ***The Promise of Democracy***: Under this theme, the following questions were included: What has been the promise of democracy in North East India? How different social and ethnic groups, women, the labour movement and other stakeholders relate themselves to the promise of democracy? What are the main sources that contribute to shaping the meaning of Democracy in North East India? What constitutes a common ground for democracy in a context of competing expectations? What are the main themes of contestations? What has been democracy's promise of transformation and emancipation?

2. ***Institutions and Design of Democracy***: This theme focuses on institutional designs and processes that accompanied democracy. Its components are socio-economic structures, institutional arrangements, citizenship and rights, elections, parties and representation, and democratisation. The discussion could focus on a critical review of the institutions and processes of democracy as evolved in North East India in its colonial and post-colonial phases. One important aspect that is of interest to us is the working as well as the transaction between the various traditional or non-modern institutions and the new or modern institutions in the light of federal and unitary aspects of the Indian polity.

3. ***Working and Outcomes***: Under this theme, the following questions were included: What has been the overall outcome of the democratic experience in North East India? What has been the role, functioning and impact of the political parties—both in their local and all India character—in shaping the democratic institutions and practices in North East India? To what extent has discrimination based on religion, caste, ethnicity, sex, class etc been remedied or reduced? How far has there been equitable access to and redistribution of public resources? To what extent do democratic institutions (for example, the legislature and other elected assemblies) represent diverse social, ethnic and gender composition of society? What is the level of public confidence in the democratic institutions and processes including the rule of law and the judiciary? Has political participation itself been democratised? How has democracy negotiated with ethnic social and political violence, and the crisis of governance?

4. ***Democracy's Future***: Given a backdrop of contestation, conflicts, expectations and disappointments in the region, the following questions were included for discussion on the future promise of democracy in North East India. For example: Does democracy have anything new to offer in North East India, which is trying to emerge out of the present impasse? Should democracy reform itself if it were to be meaningful to North East India's transition from the present impasse? Should there be some re-envisioning of the promise, institutions as well as practices of democracy?

These were neither an exhaustive set of questions about democracy in North East India nor were they designed to restrict the participants' critical inputs. These questions only sought to frame the discussion. The participants were requested to reflect on those and similar questions and share their views with the rest of the participants. The participants were encouraged to be brief and well focused in their interventions.

All the discussions during the *Dialogue* were recorded to register and disseminate concerned thinking and plurality of thoughts.

THE DIALOGUE

Session I

The Promise of Democracy

Chair: Prof. D.L.Sheth

First Half

The session opened with a brief introduction to the dialogue in Imphal by Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam. It was followed by an over all introduction to the project, of which the present dialogue formed a crucial component, by Prof. Peter deSouza. After that, the Chairperson suggested to have a brief self-introduction of the participants and invited the participants to express their views on the Promise of Democracy. After the self-introduction by the participants, **Prof. D.L. Sheth (Academics/faculty CSDS)** presided over the session the floor was opened for the discussion on the promise of democracy.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): expressed the view that promise of democracy to him meant the ideals of democracy, what democracy stood for... freedom...the right to life...the right to liberty...the right to the pursuit of happiness. And in terms of the North East, according to him, democracy started with town committees in Guwahati, Shillong, Imphal etc. However, the British Parliamentary style came only in the post independent period.

Prof. Kamei was of the opinion that the people in the region, including himself, admired the Indian constitution, the freedoms and the fundamental rights enshrined in the Indian constitution. He said, “The constitution has given lots of promises and it leads to an explosion of expectations among the people that are not delivered”. He noted that there is too much concern about state security...and less of human security and there are lots of human right violations in the region. He also pointed out, “There is a lack of confidence in the electoral process, a lack of confidence in the constitutional process among the people in the region”. However, he expressed the hope that despite the inadequacies, Indian democracy is taking a deep root and it will be able to correct itself, to reform itself to meet the aspirations of the

people of North East. He further stated, “If we are free and our rights are protected by the Constitution...democracy will succeed”.

Referring to the tribal communities, he pointed out that there were traditional institutions which carry modern democratic features, like that of the ‘Khasi states’ in Meghalaya, which he described as monarchical in nature but their social life is democratic, and Kebangs in Arunachal Pradesh. He also pointed out that some of the tribal groups like the Angamis were very democratic while the Konyaks, the Kukis and Mizos were not “...their chiefs are very autocratic”. Generally, he says that democratic roots were not that strong among the tribal societies. But with the introduction of the VIth Schedule, democratic rule has come to stay.

Lastly, Prof. Kamei commented on the idea of the North East by pointing out that in 1813, the British East India Company created a post called ‘Agent to the Governor General for North Eastern Frontier’, he termed the idea of North East as a colonial concept, which the Government of India took over after independence. He stated that unlike the idea of the North West, the idea of the North East carried connotations like periphery, a distance, and a lack of understanding, and it (the concept) had not been helpful in bringing about the process of nation building to a complete end. He, therefore, asked for an alternative conception of the region.

After Prof. Kamie wound up his observations, the Chairperson of the session put forward for discussion some ideas.

Prof. D.L. Sheth (Academics/faculty CSDS): The first pertained to the promise of democracy, which he said, “Can be seen in two ways. One promise that is envisaged in the Indian Constitution and the other is the promise that is there in the very idea, philosophy and history of democracy everywhere”. He also further raised the question on the concept of North East by asking, “What is it? And what it has become and what it can become?” By taking note of the idea that democracy can be seen as an indigenous” concept/practice in the North East, Prof. Sheth concluded his remark by raising the question, “What difference it makes whether it (democracy) is indigenous or adopted or integrated to a larger political (and) cultural system?”

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/faculty CSDS): pointed out, “While discussing the promise of democracy, one should not be confined to the electoral or the art of governance only. One should specifically look at the promise of democracy with reference to the Indian

Constitution and also the ones embedded in the very idea of democracy, especially what kind of individual, what kind of social relationship it (democracy) entails”. Otherwise he pointed out that Ms. Jarjum Ite’s (one of the participants) remarks on gender dimension during her self -introduction that the so-called democratic tribal society was not very democratic would not be captured.

Dr Akoijam also specifically mentioned the need to discuss the contradictory promises between the Constitution (such as envisaged in Article 32 of the Constitution) and the legislation like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which was specifically enacted for the North East in 1958. Further, by noting the democratic experience of 1948 when Manipur became the first in the entire South Asian societies to elect a Legislative Assembly through universal adult franchise, and how that promise of democracy was snapped in 1949, he specifically asked, “What could have been the repercussion of that experience?”

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): then briefly commented on the historical background of the 1948 Assembly in Manipur and pointed out certain democratic (elections based on universal adult franchise and the rights of citizens enshrined in that Constitution) and undemocratic features (such as that the Council of Ministers that was headed by a nominated person — Maharaj Kumar Priya Barta, the younger brother of the Maharaja, and that the ministers had internal autonomy and they functioned in the name of the Maharaja rather than the people) of the Manipur Constitution Act 1948. He also pointed out that the Town Committee of 1915 in Imphal, unlike those in Assam, were appointed.

Ms Minimon Laloo (Writer/Social Worker, Meghalaya): Commenting on the experience of Meghalaya, pointed out that though traditionally there were tribal councils, seven groupings, and that there was the VIth Schedule in place, the contemporary Meghalaya was not very democratic in the sense that there were insurgencies. Voluntary organizations were trying, according to her, to look at these developments and solve the problem.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Intervened by specifically requesting Ms. Minimon Laloo to say something on the working of the ‘democracy in work’ in a tribal area with the VIth Schedule. Prof. Gangumei pointed out that this provision was specifically incorporated in the constitution with the lobbying done by Rev. Nicholes Roy for the Khasi states.

Prof. D.L. Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Tried to recapture what Ms Laloo puts forward. According to Prof. Sheth, what Ms. Laloo said was that there have been traditional forms of democracies, though they may not called it so, within different tribal groups/societies, and that these were sought to be recovered under the Constitutional provisions/method. He also suggested that Ms. Laloo was suggesting that there was democracy from within, sort of an indigenous democracy that was being practiced, and democracy from outside, which was homogenizing and changed people in (a) different way...one that integrates and homogenizes different people in a manner which “they (the tribal?) may not want”. He further noted, “The old form of democracy is tribal and collective while the new form is constitutional and individualistic. Thus, there is a conflict between not only two democracies but also between two people, one who is non-tribal or who have passed the tribal stage preferring a democracy which is constitutional, liberal and individualistic”. He concluded his intervention by pointing out what he termed as three sources of promise of democracy, namely, “constitution, the idea and philosophy of democracy, and recovery or rediscovery of indigenous democracy”.

Mr. Manas Choudhury (Journalist, Meghalaya): Continued the discussion on Meghalaya. According to him, “The Chieftains in the erstwhile Khasi states before the British annexed them had a tradition of having elected chieftains. But with the arrival of the British, there has been a fundamental change. Though they did not interfere too much with the traditional bodies, sort of a Sword of Damocles was hanging over the heads of these chiefs. These influences diluted the traditional authority of the chiefs. The British exerted power over the chiefs by asking them to behave by learning social and other behaviour acceptable to the British. With the arrival of man with Bible in hand from Bengal it became the standard or yardstick to measure acceptable behaviour. Thus, western style/lifestyle was encouraged and they gave these chiefs titles like Rai Bahadur”.

Mr. Choudhury also pointed out that over the traditional tribal bodies, the VIth Schedule was introduced after independence, and after 1972 the constitutional state was also introduced. Thus, according to him, “There is confusion among these three authority structures”, which he describes as “authority upon authority”. By reminding the introductory remark of the chairperson on the idea of promise as something that was never realized or fulfilled, he further pointed out that the chairperson’s remark on promise was true for most people in the North East. He expressed the view that fairness, equality and protection of citizens and property and their rights and life...and that there will be a government of the people for the

people by the people was still wanting in the region. He lamented the fact that for the majority of the people, democracy remained “casting their votes”, and that too like most Indian voters (guided by a) herd mentality. He also lamented that the leaders “care for their self-interests” and that they “seldom care for the people”; thus, the leaders, the elected representatives in the region, who were good at floor-crossing and creating political instability, had been a big letdown for the people. According to Mr Choudhury, “In the North East we are in different stages of democratisation or (in a) crude term, Indianization”. He feels, “Democracy has not delivered and if things are running, it is because of peoples resilience and also perhaps a little bit of helplessness that keep the things going”.

Ms. Valley Rose (Woman Activist/Politician, Manipur): Started with the remark, “There is a conflict between the so-called democracy of India and the indigenous democracy, that is our customary laws and practices, especially for the tribal”. She pointed out three kinds of conflict in the region. First, between the Indian democracy and tradition, Second, between gender and the traditional structure, Third, between the minority and majority. She cited the controversy in Manipur regarding the demand for the implementation of the VIth Schedule in the state as an example of the third kind of conflict. She also raised the issue of armed conflict in the region saying that these movements are also based on their democratic rights.

Ms. Jarjum Ite (Woman Activist, Arunachal Pradesh): Opened her remark with a response to Ms. Valley Rose’s comments on the controversy regarding the VIth Schedule. Referring to the resistance or apprehensions from the valley of Manipur regarding the demand for the implementation of the VIth Schedule in the hills of the state, she cited her own experience pertaining to a recent bill passed by the Arunachal Pradesh State Assembly which sought to introduce the VIth Schedule’s provisions in the four districts of Arunachal Pradesh—Tirap and Chenglang in the East, and Twang and West Kameng. She narrated a conversation with fellow Arunachalis on this issue, and how in some quarters, the development was seen with some apprehensions. She specifically cited the fact that Papumpara District—where the capital Itanagar is located—would be accessible to all but these four districts would not be accessible (say in terms of owning land) to other citizens of the state outside these districts. She further wondered who was going to deliver what the VIth Schedule promised; given the fact the leaders (who are running the state) could not be trusted she expressed her scepticism as to whether the promises of the VIth Schedule would ever be delivered.

Mr. Gautam Das (Political worker/Journalist, Tripura): Shared the experience of the VIth Schedule in Tripura, especially he pointed out the lack of funds as the main reasons why the Autonomous District Council (ADC which comprises of 19 tribes) in Tripura could not deliver its promises. Thus, he expressed the view that better funding and financial autonomy of these bodies would ensure the proper functioning of the ADC. He also pointed out that the democratisation process had not reached the grassroots as the village level bodies were still not elected but nominated.

Mr David M. Thangliana (Journalist, Mizoram): Asked for each state in the North East, though often clubbed together, to be discussed separately on its own terms. Then referring to Mizoram, he pointed out, “There is a local government system of village councils. And though these bodies are elected, they do not have powers as most powers are with the ministers (of the state). Therefore, the promise of democracy has not been fulfilled in Mizoram”. He suggested that Panchyat Raj should be introduced or the village councils should be empowered. He also regreted the fact that Municipal councils were not introduced in the towns in Mizoram.

Dr. Nani Bath (Political Scientist, Arunachal Pradesh): Opened his comments on democracy with the view that democracy, apart from giving equality, justice, rights and freedom of choice, also meant transparency and accountability. He also expressed the view, “We also have to understand what is not democracy”. Suggesting that people wrongly assumed democracy to mean that they had a right to do whatever they wanted, he pointed, Democracy is also about respecting (the) sentiments, emotions and rights of other peoples and our neighbours, our neighbouring states and our neighbouring tribes. The ills of democracy includes the lack of patience”. He reminded the delegates of a remark by a political scientist from the region who said that the ills of democracy in the region was that people tend to go for extremism. In this context, Dr Bath remarked, “People want to do everything in a short period of time, people want things not in hundreds or thousands but in lakhs and crores”. He also cited the dictate of the Naga Students Federation that only the Nagas should write Naga history. Dr Bath felt that such an approach smacked of extremism and that it infringes on the academic accountability of the people, and was therefore undemocratic.

Dr. Bath also pointed out, “Unlike other states, Arunachal Pradesh has not gone through the stages of democracy of feudalism, colonialism and democracy”. In this regard, he said that the colonial British followed a policy of non-interference, which has also been followed by the Government of India. He informed the delegates that Panchayati Raj was introduced in the state in 1969 and that the Lok Sabha election was held for the first time in 1977 followed by the electoral system being introduced in the state in 1978. Further Dr. Bath pointed out the fact that in Arunachal Pradesh, there is no separation of Judiciary from the executives, and he called for the separation of the two for a proper democratic functioning in the state. He also lamented the lack of freedom for Press in the state. He concluded his remarks with a call to grant more freedom to the press and to raise the political consciousness of the people.

Mr. Pradeep Phanjoubam (Journalist, Manipur): Opened his comments on democracy by noting that people seem to have taken democracy to mean a free for all situations. He said that democracy does not mean one can get whatever one demands and that one should not infringe on the interests and rights of other people. He further clarified his position by saying, “We do not exist in a vacuum, and therefore democracy should be seen as a platform where we can negotiate these different and at times conflicting demands/interests”. Referring to the book by Fareed Zakaira (*Future of Freedom*), he says, “We should be building liberal institutions and liberal outlook. Liberalism should be there before we have democracy. Otherwise, democracy could be dangerous, and it can divide people and politics of vote banks can work against efforts to promote social harmony”. He cited the case in the Balkan and drew the attention to what Fareed Zakair’s commented on the how democracy could build a wall among people, and how similar situations can come to states like Manipur if “we do not keep larger interests and commonality among people”. Terming the existing civil societies/groups as mere interests groups, he expressed the need to evolve real civil societies, and maintained that instead of pulling in different directions by different and competing interests, certain uniformity or larger interests needs to be evolved through negotiation.

Ms. Jarjum Ite (Woman Activist, Arunachal Pradesh): Commented on the lack of space for women in the so-called democratic institutions in the Arunachal Pradesh. And then noting that earlier people had confidence in the wisdom of the elders who used to look after the affairs of the people, she commented on the character of the modern leaders. According to her, “With the introduction of electoral politics” which she terms as “alien to the traditional societies—not only the siblings, families, villages and communities are divided, but they

(modern political leaders) have also substituted the traditional leadership. However, on the one hand, these leaders who are supposed to be educated are as ignorant as the people they lead, and on the other they become rulers with the typical colonial tendencies”. Further, while raising a fundamental question on who is the ‘government’ and who is the ‘governed’, she also added, “These leaders do not have any political ideology and their priority is not governance or to deliver the promises of democracy”. In fact, according to her, “These leaders are not leaders but successful politicians, who indulge in corruption, lies and false promises and whose success is measured in terms of how long they have been in the chair or power”. And consequently, she concluded, “Democracy has become some sort of an animal in the Jurassic Park!”

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist, Assam): Commented on the fact of the Judiciary not being separated from the executive, and thereby, he felt that political democracy had not been introduced in the region. He was of the opinion “In the name of restoring customary systems, in many parts of the region the Judiciary has not been separated from the executive. Besides, the VIth Schedule or autonomous councils or Panchayati Raj do not have powers and thus they ask for more and more power like the status of separate states”. “This shows”, according to him, “that any such system is fruitless in this area for political democracy has not been introduced in the region”.

Mr. Kezhokhoto Savi (Lawyer/Consumer Activist, Nagaland): Reminded the delegates, “While talking about democracy, we have to remember that it is not all about freedom and rights. Referring to the Indian Constitution and the dictum if one wants one’s right to be right, one has to do one’s duty. Duty is an important part of thinking about democracy”. Like some other earlier participants, he also expressed the view that while exercising one’s right, one has to respect and not infringe on other’s rights.

Prof. Peter R. deSouza (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Pointed out the fact that in the discussion, “Lots of expectations have been loaded on the concept of democracy. Therefore, we can use certain parameters as lens to look at things while discussing on democracy”. In this regard, he pointed out three components of democracy, namely, (a) popular control (of government), (b) political equality (that one is not more or not less than the other), and (c) protection against tyranny (from the state or majority—be it in terms of gender or ethnicity. Following an interjection by the chairperson Prof. Sheth, Prof. deSouza also mentioned

protection against tyranny includes not only majority but also ‘minority’ like armed groups). These were the three philosophical or higher conceptions, and deriving from the these components, Prof. deSouza pointed out what he called ‘mediating principles’ namely, participation, representation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness etc. According to him, “These principles become valuable precisely because we have the first three components”. He suggested, “During the discussion, we can use these ideas as lenses to look at our complex experiences of democracy”.

Prof. Suresh Sharma (Academic/faculty CSDS): Interjected briefly by saying, “Protection against tyranny is essentially an operative sub-set of the idea of freedom”. To which Prof. deSouza responded by saying, “That’s the debate”.

Thereafter, the chairperson announces the break for tea.

Second Half

In the second half of the first session on the Promise of Democracy the Chairperson Prof. D.L Sheth summarised the first half of the session and stated some of the issues that needed to be discussed.

Prof. D.L Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Saying that the first half has substantialized some of the issues on the promise on democracy, he pointed out five salient issues or questions. First, he raised the question on whether the promise of democracy has been miscarried in the North East or India or South Asia in general, or it has been unfulfilled or partially fulfilled or are they promises to be fulfilled with different kinds of institutions and politics, aspirations that people bring to bear upon them. He noted that during the first half, there was a general feeling that that democracy has been miscarried, that it has created conflicts and divided people in the region.

He also noted that, during the first half, the concept or theory of democracy had also been explicated. “Is democracy is alien in the region? What it ought to be? Whose promise is it? Is it the promise of (Indian) constitution or the democratic age or modern age? Is democracy an idea which is irresistible, an idea and practice that cannot be left?” According to him these were the issues that have been raised and needed to be discussed.

Second, he noted the relation between democracy and violence. He asked, “Can democracy survive which violence? What people do if the democratic demands, valid demands that may make the difference in life and death, freedom and non-freedom are not met? Is violence justifiable? Or is violence anti-thesis to democracy? Can democracy survive, prosper where the means to achieve democratic ends are not used as non-violence means?”

Third, he pointed out the issue of the VIth Schedule of the constitution. According to him, “Democracy came to this part of the country, and many parts of India in the form of the VIth Schedule”. Asking what is the philosophy of VI Schedule, he said, “Its philosophy is the democratic stance of recognizing and conceding to differences, to indigeneity. Of populations, to cultures so that democracy is not seen as a culture free, universal and predominating one cultural ideal”. The VIth Schedule was recognition of plurality but he said that it had mixed consequences. “On the one hand, in the name of autonomy it produces oligarchy of the tribal elites, a sort of indigenous dominance of governance”. He noted the fact that many participants have expressed that, VIth Schedule gives “Autonomy to some and restricts other’s freedom, that it arrests the processes of intermixing, change and transformation. It freezes the future rather than opening up the interactive, dialogic, inter-cultural processes and creates pigeon houses of identities and ethnic tensions and that it may be counter-productive. On the other, there is also a feeling that this is the real way of re-fertilizing cultural and political processes in a manner that democracy makes sense to the people”.

Fourth, the chairperson noted that there has also been a question on the concept of the North East. “Is it an artificial category or can it become a political-cultural identity, has been raised”. Lastly, he pointed out to the issue of liberalism and democracy. He noted that question had been raised on whether liberalism has to precede the development of democracy? “If so”, he asked, “People with no western liberalism are debarred from democracy? And what happens to those traditional notions of co-living, respecting each other. Is there another way of looking at democracy?”

Mr. Gautam Das (Political worker/Journalist, Tripura): Tried to draw the attention of the participants to what has been happening in the last 2/3 years. According to him, “The Iraq War is also fought in the name of democracy”, and he also talked about the attack on the minority in Gujarat. According to him, “With globalisation, the government is abdicating its responsibility in matters of social security and education etc”. Regarding the North East, he felt that the violence in the region was caused by the long neglect of the region by the Central

authorities. He cited the example of the difficulties faced by the people of Tripura in terms of a road link with the rest of the country and the budget cuts imposed by the Central authority on the North Eastern Council (from Rs. 1000 crores to Rs. 500 crores). Thus, he suggested that promises are not being kept regarding the region. And the needs of the people need to be given special consideration and taken care of so that democratic institutions can be strengthened.

Mr. Manas Choudhury (Journalist, Meghalaya): Put the VIth Schedule in perspective by tracing its origin and rationale. He noted, “The VIth Schedule was not given as a blanket arrangement for the entire North East. Arunachal had a different arrangement and Nagaland did not accept the Indian Constitution then so there is no question of that”. He reminded that places like Manipur and Tripura had their separate arrangements. “It was initially more specific to the Khasi states. The British never annexed Khasi hills, and at the time of independence, the British gave them the freedom to join the Indian Union or stay under the British as a protectorate. Out of seven Chiefs of the erstwhile Khasi states, six decided to join the Indian Union. Rev. J.J. Nicholson, a member of the Constituent Assembly, fought for these states and as a result the VIth Schedule was incorporated in the constitution. With state (Assam) reorganization (in 1972), it was extended to Mizoram”.

Mr. Choudhury talked of two promises that were not fulfilled by the Indian democratic system. “First, while the British ruled these states, they told that laws enacted by Indian Parliament would only be enforced with the consent of the people. When the Indian constitution came, it was abrogated, with article 371 saying that laws enacted by Indian Parliament are automatically applicable in these places. There is resentment on this account”. Second, he pointed out, “There was a promise of direct funding which was not fulfilled as the funding is done through the state government. This creates a problem as the same set of political people running the state and councils, and moreover the state government often choke the councils by not releasing the funds in time”.

Finally Mr. Choudhury commented on the fact that the democratic decentralization (both in economic and political sense) in the form of the institution of Panchayati Raj has not been implemented in these areas. And citing the lack of interests (of the urban population) towards the District Councils (he specifically used the involvement of people in voting for the council as an indicator), and the fact that these areas were now states, say in Meghalaya, 55 seats are reserved for the tribals, he questioned the rationale for the continuation of the VIth Schedule, which he felt has become “superfluous”.

Prof. D. L. Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Intervened by asking whether the VIth Schedule had become superfluous or it was needed by some. Although he agreed with the fact that Meghalaya for instance had become a tribal state, he said that there was a need to preserve the VIth Schedule entitlements, communal and individual base. However, he conceded that there is a clash of interests between the democratic state and the VIth Schedule Autonomies.

Mr. David M. Thangliana (Journalist, Mizoram): Intervened to say that, according to him, what Mr. Manas Choudhury said was that although the VIth Schedule is good, it had not been implemented.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Also intervened saying that Mr. Manas Choudhury has raised a fundamental issue by suggesting that the rationale for the VIth Schedule does not exist in the contemporary times but why is it still in place.

To this **Mr. Choudhury (Journalist, Meghalaya):** Responded by saying, “Exactly”

Prof. D.L. Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Remarked, “But you want to have best of both the worlds And how to democratically deal with it?”

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Joined the discussion on the VIth Schedule by stating, “It is one of the best documents in the world for the administration of tribal- marginalized tribal, areas. It is the best document for protecting the religious, cultural, and social identity, practices of the tribal communities. It provides a protective autonomy for the tribes. Its virtue is that it protects the customary laws and most importantly their land. However, in a recent order by Guwahati High Court, which the Supreme Court confirmed later following the Roman laws on land, the suggestion that each district council shall have separate land laws has been turned down by noting that land belongs to the state and therefore there should be a common land law”. This, according to Prof. Kamei, has taken away the basic power of the VIth Schedule.

Delving into various models of the VIth Schedule, as it is practiced in the region, he further commented that the District Councils do not have the control over resources, especially in the case of Meghalaya. In this regard, he pointed out that the 73rd Amendment (*Panchayati Raj*)

is better off. He pointed out that the District Council as well as the Governor was not beyond the control of the State Cabinet.

Prof. Lokendro Arambam (Cultural Activist, Manipur): Raised the issue on the perception of the North East and its implication for the kind of polity one can visualize. According to him, “There is a perception of the region from an ethnic frame which does not give a true picture of the region”. Citing that Dr. Ambedkar had once described the people of North East as the ‘Red Indians’ (as in America) of India, he expressed concerns on whether the founding fathers of the Indian democratic state understood the people in the region, their mode of life, traditional systems and practices. He cites a conflict of perception and reality of the region by pointing out that many people in the region do not like the term tribal, which is there in the Vth and VIth Schedules of the Constitution, to be used for them and that they would prefer the term ‘ethnos’ or “ethnic” groups. He asked whether the last fifty years of Indian democratic system have allowed the people of the region to follow the path of natural development in terms of their possible unities, affinities, and traditional mode of life, practices and systems to be a part of the nation-state that one visualizes. Referring to **Prof. Kamei’s** remark that the idea of the North East is colonial, he felt that a critical introspection on the perception of the region is required in order to visualize the future.

Prof. Suresh Sharma (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Pointed out the underlying philosophical propositions behind the VIth Schedule and said, “It is based on a very different proposition as compared to the American Constitution. The kind of autonomy granted for the Red Indians under the American Constitution is done within an impermeable enclosure which is outside the constitutional spaces, there is no sharing with the common constitutional space”. He further pointed out that this is done more brutally in the case of the Australian constitution, which until the 1970s did not grant the aborigines the right to vote. “Even the exercise of individual rights is done in a peculiar fashion, for instance, the state arrogated to itself the right to bring up the children born to an aborigine who married a white settler, the parents have to relinquish their right over their children in such cases. Compared to this, the VIth schedule creates mediation between the individual and the universal artefact, the state, without foreclosing the access to and sharing of the common constitutional space”. However, referring to an earlier comment by **Ms. Jarjum**, he pointed out, “It does bring out conflict that what belongs to everyone belongs to everyone but certain things are marked for some

specific collectivity, not individual, at the same time the individual's choice is not foreclosed”.

He concluded his intervention here with a remark on the idea of North East. Stating that the idea of the North East has a colonial origin, however, it does not exhaust the possibilities of the idea. He elaborated this point with a comparison with the various possibilities that the English language can do in the world today in spite of its brutal imperialistic origin. Therefore, he concluded that the idea of North East does play a powerful mediation between distinct civilizations.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/faculty CSDS): Intervenes by pointing out the cultural conception of the North East region and the constitutional mechanism that came out of that conception. He said, “The North East is conceptualised as a frontier where culture is yet to be reified or consolidated, where a sort of syncretic culture can come up to define its identity. Culturally it is a region with an ongoing process, so to speak unfinished as compared to the finished, consolidated region called the mainstream or the centre. This consolidated centre is defined in Indic civilizational terms and the frontier is seen as a region where the elements of the center are felt and intermingled with unknown or external elements. Historically, the ideas of the North East Frontier or Eastern Frontiers of Bengal convey such conceptions and the free India follows the same conception. Thus the constitutional mechanisms adopted by Free India are based on the idea of managing this unknown region with people who cannot be exactly defined or located in the known categories of the centre. The VIth Schedule is one such expression of managing the tribes and is very specific to the North East”.

Consequently, he further noted, “The people in the region imbibed the yet to be formulated identities as well as the modern ideas and political structures, and perceived themselves as people with something lacking in them. Their demands for statehood, autonomy etc are driven by these ideas”. Finally, he noted that the people in the region internalised the external categories to look at themselves, and one example is that of the notion of minority. “The minority in the national context is 18 percent whereas in Manipur it is 40 plus, and many people talk about minority and majority, even in the context of the demand for the VIth Schedule using the same externally derived category”.

Prof. D.L Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Raised the question, pointing to an earlier comment by **Mr Manas**, as to whether the VIth Schedule had ‘outlived its purpose?’ According to him, “New issues and dilemmas have come up now. It has created a sort of self-

contained enclosures, not like the American one, where a new form of oligarchy has come to rule. Secondly, many of the concepts that we used have left far behind the present reality. The idea of frontier is one such idea. Today, every cultural identities exist at the frontier, facing equally threatening and equally challenging issues in the age of globalisation. Regarding the VIth Schedule, in terms of its first principle (that is, in terms of communities that have kept their identities intact), it is not specific to the North East. However, similar dilemmas have been created elsewhere. Although in the area of tribal land rights, Vth or VIth Schedule has done wonders in the past, but new oligarchy has also developed. For instance going by the date available for the last ten years, the lands of the poor tribal have been appropriated by the rich tribal. These few (10 percent) dominate the autonomy and the remaining 90 percent subjugated lots have become the champions of autonomy. These are open issues that call for discussion”.

Prof. Gangumei Kamie (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Intervenes by pointing out, referring to Prof. Lokendro’s remark on the fulfilment of individuality of a person in a democracy, that this is a force at work in the contemporary time. More so, he contended, “When the autonomy is destroyed, capitalism has come, tribal lands have been privatised etc”. Referring to Dr. Bimol’s remark on ‘Eastern Frontier’, he said, that there are groups of scholars whom he calls ‘scholars of Aryabhata’, who look at the region as a periphery, a distant, or with a lower level of civilization. “This is dangerous for the country”, he contends. He further noted that by creating the Ministry of Development of North East, it reminds of the British’s Secretary of India office. “In a way, the Govt. of India seems to follow the British forward policy towards the region”. Finally, he concluded by noting, “The Indian mind-set should guide us rather than the colonial mind-set when we look at the region”.

Mr. Pradeep Phanjoubam (Journalist, Manipur): Referring to the question of creating a ‘counter-culture’, he asked, “Whether there is any alternative to liberalism?” He also raised the issue of tribal and non-tribal, saying, “The issue is different in Manipur as compared to, for example, the tribal and non-tribal in Andhra Pradesh. There is a question of small fish and big fish”. He cited the example of a small tribe Khoibu which wanted to be recognized as a separate tribe but the Maring refused. He also noted that there was a need to think of levelling up and looking for commonality rather than erecting walls around. “Otherwise, the divisive tendencies will continue and we would not be able to solve problem”. Saying that he was not suggesting to “open-up now, which if we do could get us drown, but we should start thinking

in terms of opening up. Noting that the name North East is keeping us together, it is okay for it indicates a commonality of problems in the region”.

Mr. Tarunkumar Thounaujam (Journalist/activist, Delhi): Intervened by saying, “Even if there are darker shades there is no alternative to the North East. We cannot go back to monarchy or feudal order. We are caught in sort of a no man’s land, we are not able to imbibe the core value of democracy that the individual has to take responsibility for his welfare for his freedom. There are parallel institutions and democratic institutions remain as superficial structures. This may not be confined to the North East”. Referring to an article in The Times (Go East Young Man?), he said, “The forms of organizing or refashioning societies are different fundamentally between the East and the West. While in the West, there has been a process of atomisation, family has been trumpeted as a virtue which stands as a ring of comfort, as a protection against atomisation”. He said that how far this will decide the limits of atomisation was still a question. “However, if there is not alternative to democracy, then we have to hone, define and build up the mediations which can avoid the extremes of democracy, of which corruption is a manifest problem of democracy in the region”.

Mr Manas Choudhury (Journalist, Meghalaya): Drawing the attention to the grass-root democracy, he noted that in Meghalaya there are “Panchyat” type local bodies called *Durbars*. These are governed by traditional customary laws. Citing an example, he said, “Even when one wants to get a license from the government to open a fair-price shop, he has to take permission from the *Durbar*, which is a one man show. There is a conflict between the between traditional customary laws and modernity. Traditional bodies do not have a time frame to conduct election, it is a one man show, there is no documentation, no accountability, elections are not codified and something very unthinkable, women are not allowed to participate in the election”.

Mr. Pradeep Phanjoubam (Journalist, Manipur): Briefly intervened, referring to a comment by a fellow participant, to say that democracy is a western concept, “...but there was no harm in borrowing from them, and that we do not have to reinvent the wheel all over again”.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Said that he was observing whether anybody would raise the issue which is pertinent for the region, he pointed out the issue of

democratic promise and certain contradictory practices in the region. By reminding the gathering that the democratic ideal is the individual's freedom, but certain Acts enacted by the parliament like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act goes against this. He specifically mentioned three aspects of the promises embedded in the Indian constitution and the contradictory aspects enshrined in the said act. First, to protect the individual against arbitrary detention, the constitutional provision stipulates that an arrested person should be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours. However, under this act, the person has to be produced within reasonable time. Posing the question, "Who decides that reasonableness?" he contended that lots of 'disappearing cases' have been reported in the region. Second, under the criminal jurisprudence a person is supposed to be held innocent until and unless a court of law pronounces him guilty of the alleged act. "However, under this act, a person can be, not only arrested but shot to death, if the armed forces official 'suspects' that the person is 'going to commit' a crime. He reminded how the promise of the constitution was followed in the case of Mr Advani (Deputy PM) who was not recently charge-sheeted (in the Babri-Masjid case) because the charges were based on 'suspicion'. Third, he pointed out that even if the act is abused by an official, one can not seek Judicial remedy under the article 32, which Mr. Ambedkar had described as the 'heart and soul' of the constitution. To seek such a judicial remedy one has to get clearance from the Central Government under this act. This, he further noted, "Goes against the division between the Judiciary and legislature and also denies the federal character by making the state government redundant". Saying that this act was enacted just seven years after the democratic and republican ideals became a reality in 1950. He said that such an act was a blot in the Indian democratic character, and that there is hardly any compunction among the liberal citizens of the country, he emphasized the need to discuss these issues when talking about promises of democracy in the region.

Prof. Gangumie Kamei (Historian/Politician): Briefly intervened by saying, "There are promises to be kept, and promises to be kept!"

Session II

Institutions and Design of Democracy

Chair: Prof. Gangumei Kamei

First Half

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician): the chairman of the session noting that certain issues relating to the Institutions and designs of democracy had already come up during the last session invited Prof. Peter R. deSouza to set the agenda for this session.

Prof. Peter. R. deSouza (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Pointed out that one aspect of the project on democracy was to look for possible common threads. Noting that there have been overlaps in the discussions on the promise, design, institutions, working etc, he said that the project on democracy in India as well as in South Asia involved a continuous search for new institutional forms that democracy entails. “How the existing institutions have been working and also search for new institutions. In this regard, in the earlier session, we have already discussed the potential of the 73rd Amendment and the local bodies”. He drew the attention of the participants to the a discussions on political parties, movements, the NGO sectors, civil societies and traditional institutions which are part of the design matrix—the apparatus of delivering the democratic ideals etc.

Mr. Gautam Das (Journalist/Political Worker, Tripura): Talked about his state, he reminded the participants that there was a 60 members State Legislative Assembly of which 20 seats are reserved for the tribal, and that there is District Council with 19 tribes....

Prof. Gangumei Kamie: the Chairman, intervened to remind the speaker to share the general context and then go to the specifics.

Mr. Gautam Das (Journalist/Political Worker, Tripura): Stated that the Autonomous Districts Council (ADC) has been working well in his state. However, he said that the ADC was demanding more administrative and financial power. “In terms of democratizing the local bodies, there are bodies at various levels: Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Jila Parishad and District Planning Board. Through these bodies, people were involved in terms

of planning process of what should be done in their areas and who should get the benefit. Among the 19 tribes, there are chieftainships. However, attempts have been made to codify the customary laws to strengthen the democratic institution”. In this respect, he said, “The customary laws of the Reang tribe, the second largest tribe in Tripura, have been codified”.

Mr. Harish Khare (Journalist, Delhi): “Why is the communist party active in one state but not in the other state? Who comes to political party etc should be discussed”.

Prof. Lokendro Arambam (Cultural Activist, Manipur): “With the defeat of Manipur in the 1891, the state came under the colonial British Indian Empire. This new dispensation created a new social order by transforming and abolishing traditional practices as well as by destroying of the traditional nobility. Through the new social order, they sought to create a middle class that is loyal to them. The new educated class also started seeking what constitutes a self-governance or rule, thus the apprenticeship of self-rule was a product of British colonial education in Manipur. After the British, since 1949 to 1972, a new apprenticeship was also carried out on what constitutes the modernity project of India. Although the Indian constitution was beautifully conceived by the founding fathers, its practices and institutions are intertwined with the forces of the market. With the integration of the state’s economy with the larger economy, the earlier forms of relations and practices were devastated”. He further said that under the successive Indian state (that came after the British), an economic dominant structure was created with a control from the centre and the native market became a captive market. This economic structure influenced the functioning of the various institutions. He concluded with the charge that democracy is a front and a form but underneath, there is corruption and manipulation.

Mr. Kezhokhoto Savi (Lawyer/Consumer Activist, Nagaland): Started his remarks with a recent controversy regarding the formation of a Municipality in Nagaland. “Under the Constitution article 371A, certain issues, the parliament cannot make and impose laws on the state. Some objected to the idea of Municipality saying that it is against article 371A”. He said that he did not subscribe to this idea as Nagaland could decide what kind of municipality they wanted to have; it was a form of local self-government. He also mentioned about the lack of transparency and accountability in the democratic functioning in the state. “In terms of institutions, there are Village Councils and Village Development Boards. The Village Development Boards are headed by a secretary appointed by the government”.

Prof. D.L Sheth (Academic/faculty CSDS): Raised, “Whether the design and institutions do they enable, facilitate processing the expectation and promises of democracy or there is a mismatch? The institution and procedures are by themselves constitutes democracy. The kind of representative or liberal democracy as a singular unidirectional form of democracy, with identifiable checklist, as election etc may not represent the values, principles of democracy. Liberal representative democracy often leaves out or distorts the values, principles, freedom, egalitarian participation in decision-making etc. Therefore, there is a lot of scope for improvising at the level of design and institution to make democracy more democratic. There is a need for radical rethinking on these issues, and efforts have to be made to bring together the issues of representation and participation so that democracy becomes meaningful and the shortcomings can be taken care of. There is also a need for liberal democracy to be in tune with or closer to the traditional forms. The concentration of power should be at the level of the people and then delegated upward. There is a tendency to marginalize the local participation and macro aspects of liberal democracy to dominate”. Saying that the dispute at Ayodhya would have been solved long time back had the local participation been able to decide, he said, “There is a need for democratising democracy and more local participation. Democracy needs to be taken back to the people”.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Noted that the Indian constitution, “Not only carries the thoughts but it also provides various institutions and designs to carry out the activities”. He specifically then asked how these institutions and designs were in reality in the North East should be discussed.

Prof. Peter R. deSouza (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Noted that so far two positions had come up: “One argued forcefully by Prof. Lokendro, that ‘democracy is a front’ and the other by Prof. D.L. Sheth who argues that there is a need to “democratise democracy”. However, in terms of discussing the institutions and designs, we can look at three clusters. First, the protective provisions of the Constitution, does it operate differently here in the North East as raised by Bimol? Second, how do the federal designs work in the North East or is it again a sham? Third, saying that in a way, the crossover, the size of the cabinet etc are quite like in Goa, and therefore, we need to discuss the party system in the North East”.

He also raised two specific issues. He said, “Unlike other areas where the working of the Panchayati Raj has led to the creation of local elite, corruption at the local level, proxy etc.,

here people seem to be looking at the Panchayati Raj as a silver bullet to solve all the problems here”. He cited a comparison between a traditional local body in Sikkim known as Jumma, which for example deals with the issue of corruption effectively. In this system, if a person is found to be corrupt, there is a social ex-communication with the person. People even do not keep in touch even at the time of death in the family. “Is it because of the homogenous culture, as the study suggested? The experience of Jumma is different from those of the Panchayati Raj in Sikkim itself. We should discuss more on the local bodies, traditional and others in the North East. Finally, the place of civil society organizations needs to be discussed. He cited the case of Sri Lanka, saying that because of the conflict in that part, there is a whole range of civil society groups, mothers for peace etc. What is the scene here, and what is the nature of the civil society in North East?”

Dr Nani Bath (Political Scientist, Arunachal Pradesh): Opened his remarks by saying that he did not agree with Mr. Manas’s position that the original purpose and rationale for the VIth Schedule, ‘no longer operate; therefore, it should be done away with’. He said, “There is a difference between the Panchayati Raj, which was introduced to encourage peoples’ participation in the developmental activities and democratic decentralization, and the VIth Schedule, which was incorporated in the Constitution to protect the social practices and cultural ethos of the tribal people, particularly the minority tribal people, in the North East. This Schedule may not be needed in Meghalaya today but it is definitely needed to protect some tribes in Tripura like the Chakmas and Karbis in Assam. However, in Arunachal Pradesh, the introduction of the VIth Schedule in Arunachal Pradesh is due to political compulsion, it is not required in Arunachal Pradesh”. He cited the Inner Line Regulation Act, (1873) and Assam Frontier Administration Justice Act (1945), which sanctioned and protected the traditional social and cultural practices and institutions. The Inner Line regulation gave control over their land. Thus, he said that the VIth Schedule was not required in the state.

He said, “The party system in Arunachal Pradesh is different from other parts of the country”. Citing the recent power shift in the state he said, “All the politicians and people join the BJP; it is not guided by ideology but whoever is in power, people go by that”. Differing with another participant from Arunachal Pradesh (Ms. Jarjum), he said, “Democratic institutions are not alien to the people of the state”. He cited the example of Mompas in the western part of the state who he said, “Have traditional democratic institutions; they have elections etc.

Chieftains run for century but there is an element of democratic spirit in the sense that able men were selected for the job”.

“There were four tier local bodies from 1969 Gram Panchayat (at the village level), Anchal Samiti (the intermediate level), Jila Parishad (at the District level), and Agency Council (at the territorial level), now we have only three level since 1992. Electoral participation is high in Arunachal Pradesh”.

Prof. Lokendro Arambam (Cultural Activist, Manipur): Citing his experience of working with young Arunachalis who expressed their fear of losing (for instance, their languages etc) due to the recent rapid modernization and urbanization, he raised the question on whether the recent development has been on the positive side or negative side.

Dr. Nani Bath (Political Scientist, Arunachal Pradesh): “There are 10 notified towns in the state but there is no municipality in the state. Arunachal was better off while it was under the central authority but once the statehood is given, everything went up side down. Hardly 5 to 10 percent of the population are getting the benefit of the development, and mega projects; these few are getting richer at the expense of the destruction of our community, our environment and our culture.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Remarked, “Dr Bath is the first academician in the North East who says that statehood is not good!”

Prof. D.L Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Interjected by saying, “It’s not a statement of principle but technical”.

Second Half

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Invited Ms. Jarjum Ite to continue the discussion on Arunachal Pradesh.

Ms. Jarjum Ite (Woman Activist, Arunachal Pradesh): Opened her remarks by saying that democracy was about justice and fairness. In this regard, she narrated certain aspects of the gender dimension in the institutional arrangements in Arunachal Pradesh. She said, “There

are institutions that deal with civil and criminal cases (e.g., the Adis, the Galos, and the Apathanis etc), and there are 'Gao-Buras' or Village Heads and Political Interpreters. Gao-buras are appointed by the government. In addition, these political interpreters have Sadar Councils. There are few women in these institutions, however the Gao-burris cannot open their mouths. They are there to make tea whenever a VIP pays a visit to their areas etc". She cited an example of a case involving a husband discarding his wife, and the Council passed a stricture saying that the husband could give the wife a sum of Rs20000/- and to look after the daughter he could also give some money from time to time. "Such gender bias and imbalance are there", she said.

In the Panchayati system in the state, elections were held on party basis. She also noted that there were 3000 plus women amongst the 8000 Panchayat members. Citing a case of a husband coming to the Capital with his wife's office seal, she noted that women participation is marked by proxy. "There is still resistance to women's participation in these processes. However, though there are lots to improve upon the system, even if it is statistics, the number of women in these bodies still marks a change", she says.

Noting that devolution of power is not happening, "Though theoretical a concept; democracy is very noble the ground reality is different", she concluded.

Mr. David M. Thangliana (Journalist, Mizoram): Put the development of various institutions in Mizoram in a chronological order. "Mizoram, then known as Lushai Hills was annexed by the British in 1874. Traditionally, each village had a chief call Lal, and after the British left India, these chiefs decided to join the Indian Union. The whole of Mizoram was under one District Council called Lushia Hills Autonomous District Council. When Union territory status was granted in 1972, for the first time there was a government formed by the people and the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council was abolished. There are three autonomous councils in the southern part of the state, namely, The Chakma Autonomous District Council, The Mara Autonomous District Council, The Poi Autonomous District Council".

"Besides the ADCs, there are village councils as well. Capital Aizwal consists of 79 villages and each has a Village Council".

Referring to the political party, Mr David said, "In the mid 1960s, there was a famine, and an NGO was formed to tackle the problem. This NGO became the Mizo national Front, which wagged a war against the Indian State starting in 1966. There was a peace agreement between the Mizo National Front (MNF) and Government of India GOI and as a part of that

agreement, in 1986 Mr. Lathanhawla the Congress Chief Minister, gave up the CM office and Mr. Landenga, the MNF leader took over without an election. In 1987 Feb 20th election MNF won and ruled for two and half years”.

Dr. Vanlalchhawna (Economist, Mizoram): Supplemented what Mr. David has just said. “The British had labelled the then Mizoram, along with the present day Nagaland as excluded areas and Inner Line Permit was required to enter these regions”.

“Mizoram has a legislative Assembly of 40 MLAs. The state has 8 districts, three ADCs and about 800 villages. Except the 3 ADCs, other areas of the state are not under the Vith Schedule”. Commenting on the functioning of the District Councils, he said, “There is a lack of administrative and financial power, and therefore these councils cannot deliver the goods. Land is owned by the state. Besides these, there are some Development Councils like Hmar Development Council which takes care of their development”. Overall, he felt that the Vith Schedule was not serving its purpose presently in his state.

Turning to political party, he noted, “There are two major political parties in Mizoram, the Indian National Congress and the Mizo national Front. These parties do not have internal democracy; they do not have regular elections to elect their functionaries. Besides, there is no proper auditing of the fund/finance of these parties”.

Finally he said, “There are civil society groups/NGOs like the Young Mizo Association, which discourages ethnic based party, clan based candidates etc. This body seeks and encourages transparency in the political culture of the state”.

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist, Assam): Opened with the remark that Assam had a complex design and that the Vith Schedule had failed to deliver the promise. He said, “Karbi and Dimasa have Autonomous Councils under this act but they are demanding more. Bodos also had a similar arrangement but recently it has turned into Bodo Territorial Council; it is too early what they will get out of this arrangement”. He said that he would prefer the term indigenous ethnic groups rather than tribe because the number of tribes has been increasing; while some had already been recognized, some were demanding to be declared as tribes. There were also conflicts among people; “One demanding to be classified as a tribe, others object fearing a threat to their autonomy benefits etc”.

He also raised the issue of the problem of not codifying the customary laws and thereby confounding the division between the Judiciary and legislature. Finally, he also raised the

issue of the media saying that anybody who wrote on the ills of democracy could face problems in the region.

Ms. Monica Banerjee (Social Worker, Delhi): Raised a crucial issue as to why in spite of the visibility of women in the socio-economic life in this region, “Why is that very few women are there in the political field?” Saying that unlike the rest of the country where there is gender discrimination, which can account for the political absence of women, “Why is it in this region that a similar absence is there?”

Ms. Valley Rose (Woman Activist/Politician, Manipur): Started by saying that Ms Monica’s observation about Manipur was true. She noted, “In our Manipuri society whether it is the ordinary or the tribal or whatsoever a woman has a better capacity for building and taking care of the home or the economy of the state. In the city areas, it may be better for the women a little bit because men have been sensitised but in the hills, it is a very difficult”. Citing her experience in electoral politics, she said that during the campaign she meets many women who cry and talk about their preferences for women candidates but during the casting of votes, their sons and husbands, would do it, through proxy. Referring to the political parties, she said that not only do these parties destroy democracy but also families. Turning to the Naga traditional societies, she said, “In spite of the big-hearted claims like we do not discriminate against women, they would not allow women to be a part of the village councils. It is not that they cannot accept women leaders; they may say ‘madam madam’ to Sonia Gandhi or to lady officers, but they will ask their women not to open their mouths. This is a double standard”.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Asked about the possibility of some sort of a sub-federation of the North East within the Indian federation?

Dr. A Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Asked whether the protection against tyranny and the constitutional protection follow different parameters in the region. Citing the Armed Forces Special Powers’ Act, he said that the question of federal polity needed to be discussed.

Prof. D.L Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Said that each state in the North East has different arrangements and histories, and the North East Council has not been successful.

However, he said that a sort of a federation of North East or a North East Parliament, based on democratic processes and local involvement and with constitutional effect would not be a bad idea.

Prof. Suresh Sharma (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Said that the need to have a formation or a forum was very compelling. He said, “I am not thinking of an elected forum. Though how it is possible is not clear, but given that these states come out of a shared situation, a need to consider things together for beyond the word the North East is a compelling idea. For the development, governance and aesthetics that gives a sense of sustenance, and for formulating things together, I think it’s time for such a forum”.

Prof. Lokendro Arambam (Cultural Activist, Manipur): Noted the difference in the economic wealth and activities between the western coast of India (Bombay) and the central and eastern part (Bihar). “This accumulation of wealth and economic activity can be blamed on the work ethics of the people but this is indicative of the economic changes and transformation that has destroyed the traditional economic ethos of the people in the region. A new politico-economic and socio-cultural ethos instilled by a new system needs to be discussed before we engage with the idea of federation etc”.

Mr. Pradeep Phanjoubam (Journalist, Manipur): “The North East Council failed because it has a militaristic intent; it’s not purely for development”. He further noted that most of the Governors of the states in the region are either retired Army generals or intelligence officials; “They are the ones who run this body. Every governor in the region is supposed to file the report on the law and order situation of his or her respective states before the developmental funds are allotted”.

Prof. Suresh Sharma (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Interjected to clarify that he did not mean to say that the states did not exist earlier but to invoke historically (the region) as a single point explanation comes close to a myth.

Mr. Harish Khare (Journalist, Delhi): Said that had the question been asked to him in Delhi, it would have been politically correct to say, “Yes it’s a wonderful idea”. However he said that having listened to all that had been discussed, “It (forum or federation for North East) is a profoundly mistaken idea. It is like substituting an imperfect instrument by another

imperfect instrument. Developing the kind of social skill to operationalize the democratic institutions is yet to be understood”. He further said, “It is about not only the North East but also the general decline in the democratic index; therefore, the idea is a non starter”.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Expressed that the whole issue of governors as military was important in understanding the designs and institutions in the region. He said, “The institutional arrangement involves an identity assumption (e.g., Indian state is based on India as a one nation). For instance, the conception of the Indian state is based on the divergent formation of state where the units are not autonomous entities (this is in contrast to the state formation in the USA). Even the demand for the VIth Schedule also assumes an identity behind that; it involves an identity politics. These identity assumptions need to be understood in order to understand the designs and institutions”.

Prof. Peter. R. deSouza (Academic/Faculty CSDS): “It is a good idea but what is a good idea? The time has come for a new imagination, and that new imagination is the creation of a new idea. A common Europe has emerged after the War; children of those parents who went to war and killed each other are today working on this idea of a common Europe. Therefore, the idea of a common North East is a new idea and that new idea has to populate this idea called North East because the geographical unit, the idea of a region is important”.

Mr Manas Choudhury (Journalist, Meghalaya): Made a clarification regarding a comment by Dr. Bath that he (i.e., Mr Manas) asked for ‘doing away with the VIth Schedule’. He clarified that he was not asking for doing away with the Schedule per se but where it is not required, like Meghalaya, it should be done away with. “However, where it is required like in Mizoram, it should be there”. Regarding the issue of a North East Forum, he said, “It is not all about future but also past and that the region has to be conceived with a view of the neighbouring South East Asia in mind”.

Regarding Meghalaya he said, “It came into being without having shed a drop of blood but after we got statehood, there is a grip of parochialism and violence and bloodshed. Economic chocking, marginalization of the non-tribes, and inter-tribal tensions (Garos demanding a state for themselves etc) have become part of Meghalaya today”. He says, “Therefore, we need to be a little patient and discuss the things rather than giving solutions etc”.

Mr. Tarunkumar Thounaujam (Journalist/Activist, Manipur): Said that he agreed with the idea that the time has come for a need to have a new imagination. However, as Mr Khare said, ‘the social skills need to be developed’. He pointed out that for sometime in the region one group has been pitted against the other, and doing shadow boxing, “It is time for us to come out of that. Political economy and political geography should be addressed, while we are imagining a new idea and empowering people. Otherwise, there will be more conflict”. He gave the examples: “What will happen to Manipur if we do not consider the political geography and political economy while seriously thinking of implementing the Vth Schedule in the state; “Reserving 14 thousand sq. kilometres out of the 22 sq. kilometres, it make no sense in terms of political economy and political geography of the state”, he said. “This issue of political economy and political geography should be addressed along with the issue of empowering the people”.

Session (III)

Workings and Outcomes of Democracy

Chair: Ms. Monica Banerjee

Ms. Monica Banerjee, the Chair requested the participants to engage in a dialogue rather than a seminar and invited Mr. Manas Choudhury to initiate the discussion.

Mr Manas Choudhury (Journalist, Meghalaya): Opened the discussion with the remark, “People who were nobody suddenly became somebody with the advent of democracy and statehood in Meghalaya. He felt, “We were not ready for the change”. He further noted, “These people follow the principle of make hay while the Sun shines, and thus, all these leaders have managed to cement their position and destroyed the fabric of democracy”. He cited the example of selecting a Chief Minister with the throw of a coin, and the sharing of power on a 50-50 percent basis: each coalition party ruling for two and a half years each (first time in the history of free India). He also cited the example that people are not able to live together by noting that in a state of three major tribes, there is a PWD (Public Works Department) Minister for Khasis and another PWD Minister for the Garos!

“There has been organized violence against the minority, an ethnic cleansing; when the state was formed the non-tribals were about 20 percent, today it is less than 13 percent. It’s not

even non-tribal and tribal but among tribal themselves, for instance Khasis themselves are divided based on clans”.

“Besides, there is no political allegiance and defections are rampant in the state. Politicians are the main law-breakers. There are conflicts between the legislature and the Judiciary, and cases where speakers are being summoned by the court are all there for us to see. The first time local self government was formed in the region was in 1905 when the Shillong Municipality was constituted. 1967 was the last time when elections were held for this body”.

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist from Assam): “There is nothing wrong if a particular group wants to preserve its identity and regarding the non-indigenous people and indigenous people, the problem between the two are part of the system and we have to look at the system itself”.

Mr. Harish Khare (Journalist, Delhi): Asked, “What is the system Mr Bordoloi is talking about?” He further asked as to whether he is blaming Delhi or Guwahati for it?

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist, Assam): Replied, “No, I am not blaming Guwahati or Delhi, I am saying it’s the system”.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Interjected saying “‘System’ is not an abstract term, either one looks at the ideational assumptions or its operatives; one needs to state these rather than being retrained by political correctness”.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Traced the historical factors behind the relation between the indigenous and non-indigenous people. He pointed out that since the time of the first Anglo-Burmese war, Assam was annexed by the British, and along with that, immigrants have come to the compradors of the colonial forces. He said, “They continue to control the social system, political processes and economy; even the medium of teaching was Bengali. Thus, there is a mistrust or resentment against the immigrants. The expression of Assamese nationalism is associated with an assertion of the Assamese language and part of their resentment against the immigrants can be understood from such historical legacies”.

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist, Assam): “The people in the North East are frustrated because they don’t get their rights as citizens of India”. He further said, “People are trying to reclaim their rights based on their ethnic identities; There is nothing wrong with this”.

Mr Harish Khare (Journalist, Delhi): Asked, “What is the content of reclaiming those rights?”

Prof. Suresh Sharma (academic/Faculty CSDS): Interjected by asking, “How can small ethnic communities reclaim those rights?”

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Intervened by citing the example of a small tribe he stumbled upon in 1969, the Tarao of Leisouching in Manipur. When he found out this tribe, there were only 19 houses with a population of 365. Today, 35 years down the year, they are 900 and are recognized as a scheduled tribe. “Such constitutional recognition provides protection to these small tribes; it is a way of securing and safeguarding their identity and rights against other tribes as well”.

Mr Harish Khare (Journalist, Delhi): Asked about the relation between the small and larger tribes.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Pointed out that larger tribes sometimes try to swallow these small tribes but the resistance to such attempts give the first step to retaining their identity and rights. He said, “Moreover, the cultural and linguistic recognition allows them to sustain their identity. It is the recognition of the community rights that has been recognized through a constitutional mechanism”.

Mr. Pradeep Phanjoubam (Journalist, Manipur): Talking about the relation between the Bengali and Assamese said, “There is also a history of linguistic nationalism v/s religious nationalism. Bengalis always look at Assamese as a sort of a second fiddle to them. When partition happened, Sylhet district was a Bengali dominated areas but the Assamese did not want them to be a part of Assam”. He also further pointed out, citing the case of Bosnia, “Democracy without liberalism will be dangerous. People who are responsible for genocide

crimes can come because the majority supported them in elections”. Thus, citing the case of Meghalaya he said, “The will of the people is not a good thing without a liberal basis”.

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist, Assam): Drew the attention to the composition of the population in Assam. He said, “60 lakhs of workers in the tea plantation, plus another 80 lakhs outsiders from different parts of the country as well as neighbouring places, 60 percent of the state population are thus outsiders”. Thus, he noted, “This population pattern is what the crisis of identity is all about in concrete terms”.

Mr. David M Thangliana (Journalist, Mizoram): Noted the case of the Brus who demand an Autonomous Council, he said that the people of Mizoram oppose the demand. He also noted, “The sudden jump in the populations of the tribes such as the Chakmas is seen as a threat by the people”.

Mr. Gautam Das (Journalist/Political Worker, Tripura): Asked, “Why Mizoram is refusing to grant autonomy to the Brus?”

Mr. David M Thangliana (Journalist, Mizoram): Replied saying, “They are provided with all the facilities at the village level except District Autonomy”.

Mr. Gautam Das (Journalist/Political Worker, Tripura): Noted the fact, “Brus are known as Reangs and are to be found in the border between Mizoram and Tripura, and that they are being pushed into Tripura”.

Ms. Monica Banerjee (Social Worker, Delhi): Expressed the need to take care of their (Brus) education.

Mr. David M Thangliana (Journalist, Mizoram): “They (Brus) are a nomadic tribe and their education level is very low. It adds to the existing problem”.

Dr. Vanlalchhawna (Economist, Mizoram): “Those Brus who are fixed in Mizoram are not discriminated. They have the same rights and facilities as any other Mizos”.

Prof. D.L Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Wondered whether all these inconvenient facts happen because of democracy or because they already were there but have been aggravated by democracy. He then talked about two moments of democracy. First, he termed as the initial moment, which was the moment of arrival of democracy, a democratisation point, whereby subaltern oppressed majority who had been under the rule of minority, captured power. The second moment was the resettlement of democracy, where democratisation starts by extension of equality to others including the minority. Such moments can be degenerated into a majoritarianism, which can in turn lead to expulsion, subordination, sub-humanization of the minority, who are seen as threatening.

He further noted that part of the problem, seen in insurgency could be a manifestation of such a process. Finally, he emphasized on the fact that democracy should not be only in terms of numbers but in terms of norms, checks and balances etc.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Spoke about the demographic patterns in the region. He said that categories of people in the plains would be few, more organized, and homogeneous. However, in the hills, disparate and numerous groups of people would be there. He then asked, “What would be the nature of the arrival of democracy in such a situation?” He also raised the issue of how the centres (like Imphal, Guwahati) in this region were destroyed and a common centre was shifted to Delhi. Thus, the capacity for the region to negotiate and deal with the various disparate groups has been seriously undermined. “Now, we look at Delhi, and negotiations are done in the terms set by the centre, which exists outside the region. Similarly, a client-patron structure—economic and political—is in place between the centre and the states in the North East. This structure determines the working of the political system in the region. Because there is no stake involved, as the benevolent centre is there to give, this structure is also at the root of corruption here”. Citing the fact that state reorganization in the region is done on ethnic basis, not on linguistic grounds as done in other parts of the country, he questioned the ‘ethnicization’ of the region, which still continues in making various demands of autonomy etc. “In order to understand the working of democracy, we need to asks questions like why North Eastern Council (NEC) is under Home Ministry, not under Finance Ministry, and why Acts like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act are there”. He said, “These are facts fundamental to democracy and raising these issues has nothing to do with one being anti-India or pro-India as it tends to be in this part of the country”.

Mr. Tarunkumar Thounaujam (Journalist/Activist, Manipur): Said that although he agreed with what Bimol Akoijam had said, he reminded, “If we don’t look at the economics of the process, it will be an oversight”. He further stated that although politicians have dismantled the democratic processes, “People do not demand accountability. People deserve their own leaders”. He said, “For the proper functioning of democracy, we need to have enterprising leaders and people who can seek accountability from their leaders. However, our problem cannot be solved by democracy alone; we need an enterprise and a vision for otherwise, we will head for bloodshed with one group pitted against another”.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Again raised two specific questions: “First, has democracy been encouraged here in the region during the last 50 years? Second, what are the consequences of the militaristic and client-patron structures for the region?” Regarding the leadership, citing a statement by some political leaders during the 18th June 2001 crisis, ‘Who said that if this time they (referring to the central leaders) do not listen to us (Leaders from Manipur), we (Manipur leaders) will tell them (Central leaders) to run the administration of the state’, he wondered whether they are people’s representatives or rulers ruling the people for and on behalf of the central leaders. “Under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, if these local leaders want to be responsible to their electorates by filing a case against any abuse by the security forces, can they do it? He asked. “They cannot, as they need the clearance from the central leaders under this Act”. He asked, “What is the nature of this local leadership in the working of democracy in the region?”

Prof. D.L. Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): “Democracy is a form that needs to be substantialized. In the North East democracy has not been substantialized partly because it is a border area and hence, the centre wants to have a certain form of control over it. Secondly it suits the local elites of the region. The Patron-client relation allows the elite a lifestyle and security; a sort of being a client of a patron is better than being a patron and face problems to deal with”. He cited the example of the massive employment program in the region, which he opined could only be there because of the patron. “Because the elites have a stake in this structure, the older structure refuses to be dissolved under democracy”.

Dr A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Interjected by saying that the arrival of democracy in the region did not free the oppressed parts of the older system. “In fact, it is appropriated by the older structure”. Saying, “Similarly, in states like Bihar modern

democracy did not free the non-modern oppressive structure, however people do not read similar meanings into it. In the case of the region, it tends to be accounted for by reasoning the primitive/tribal character. Whereas in the case of places like Bihar, when democratic functioning collapses, such judgments are absent”.

Prof. D.L. Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): “In Bihar it is the second point of arrival but in the north east, it is the first point of arrival”.

Dr A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Interjected by saying, “In the North East democracy has not arrived. Instead, it is the militarism that has arrived in the grab of democracy in the region”.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician): Objected to the statement that ‘We are not ready for democracy’ and its derivative ‘North East is ungovernable’ (statements Prof. Gangumei Kamei thought Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam said). Thus, he said as a counter point, “We are ready and that North East is governable, and democracy has been in the region for fifty years”.

Dr A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Sought to clarify that he did not say the above and that ‘Are we ready for democracy’ was not his statement but it was someone else’s; and that he was trying to communicate something else related to that statement.

Prof. Peter R. deSouza (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Brought out certain salient issues, which had arisen in the discussion. He said, “The question is of the relation between democracy and constitutionalism”. He identified certain specific issues in this regard. First, the regimes of rights, and in this regard he felt that there has been a series of violations in the region. The second was regarding the separation of powers, the federal structure and the checks and balances to be carried out. Third, the institutional working, party system etc. Here he wondered whether the ethnic based voting behaviour, political party system and the instability can be counter-posed with the case of Tripura where a National Party like Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPM was an active one. Fourth, he wondered whether the fragments of identity also go hand in hand with larger coalition making identity politics. In this regard, he asked whether there was anything wrong with the electoral system? “Should we go for proportional representation?” Fifth he said that there was a need to explore the

democratic profile and its relation with the kind of politics that emerges. Sixth, he asked whether there was a vested interest involved in insurgency? Seventh, there was also a need to investigate the political leadership, especially the role of the leaders in building and operating the democratic system. Eighth, he wondered whether the emergence of an elite was necessary for operating the democratic system”.

Prof. D.L. Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): “There are institutions and politics. Democratic politics is supposed to function within the parameters and norms but this has not happened”. He asked whether we could think of some safe guard against such aspects, to devise some institutional mechanisms to deal with it. Saying that democratisation has produced two effects namely, majoritarianism and persecution of minorities, such a devise would be necessary to counter these effects.

Prof. Gangumei Kamie (Historian/Politician, Manipur): “Democracy did not arrive here but it was imposed, except perhaps in Assam. (Prof. D.L. Sheth jokingly interjected “Imposed because people were not ready? Laughter follows). The constitutional democracy came here in phases”. He also said, “There is a tendency to blame the elite, which is wrong”. Saying that it is good that elite rule, “They should rule”, he concluded.

Second half

Prof. Lokendro Arambam (Cultural Activist, Manipur): Stating from a cultural angle, he said, “India as a unified civilizational and cultural character is based on the institutions that have been put into practice. The political parties have been playing their roles that unify the country. But we have not looked into the nature of the regional parties, what do they represent, for the identities? There are reasons to believe that they are in tune with the national parties in terms of their behaviour, perceptions etc”. However, he felt that national parties look at the regional parties as representatives to carry out their visions. “The assertions of the identities and armed movements are the fallout of the failure of the national and regional parties to perceive the reality of the regional aspirations”.

He said that the workings of the bureaucracy, which he called the instruments of the working of the Indian State, “Are another area we need to discuss while looking at the functioning of

democracy”. He raised questions on the manner in which election funding was done and its influence in the actual working of democracy. “Governance is not about welfare, but it has turned into a trade proposition. These are parts of the political culture which critically influence the working of democracy; it is not only the sons of the soil that play an important role here”.

Ms. Jarjum Ite (Woman Activist, Arunachal Pradesh): In saying that she could understand the plight of the Chakma refugees, she talked about the need to settle these issues. However, she also mentioned that the growth of the Chakma populations in Arunachal Pradesh, which she termed was very un-natural; even one of the Chakma leaders whom she had met did not have an exact figure of the Chakma refugees in the state. She also noted that the recent declaration of disturbed areas in two districts of Arunachal Pradesh has impacted women, elders as well as youths. She said, “Ironically, the problem in the eastern parts (the areas where the disturbed areas have been declared) is a problem caused not by the people of the state but from across the state”. She further said that in spite of the demands from various organizations, “The state still does not have a Human Rights Commission”. Referring to the issues of human rights among others, she feels that beyond the dialogue, the democratic process needs larger movements.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Supplemented the above point by noting that after independence, in the rest of the country there has been a process of democratisation while in the North East there has been an increasing militarization. He said, “There is a need to reverse the militarization process and democratise the North East”.

Mr. Manas Choudhury (Journalist, Meghalaya): Interjected by saying, “Militarization is partly because the state’s police and the civil administration etc cannot stand on their own, and that they can not protect themselves”.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Replied by noting that Meghalaya’s experience was a little different. He said, “Militarization began much earlier, before Manipur got her statehood”. Citing the case of Naga Hills in the 1950s, Manipur and Mizoram in the 1960s, Tripura in the 1970s, Assam in 1980s, he said, “There has been a gradual development of this militarization”. He cited the example of how a non-violent movement for statehood in Manipur was not given attention while Nagaland was granted statehood nine years ahead of

Manipur as a response to the violent struggle of the Nagas. He also noted that the central authority has a tendency to look at the people of the region as subjects residing in a strategic space rather than as citizens of a democratic polity.

Ms. Monica Banerjee (Social Worker, Delhi): Intervened saying “We also need to discuss not only the violence but the soft part concerning women, like why is it that women are asked to wear the traditional attires and take the responsibility of preserving the tradition; such things are never asked for the men to follow. These dictates are not democratic”.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Interjected by noting that these were also forms of violence, “Though we tend to see only the guns and physical violence as violence due to a patriarchal world-view”.

Mr. Kezhokhoto Savi (Lawyer/Consumer Activist, Nagaland): Shared some brief aspects of Nagaland. He started by saying that the Naga National Council (NNC) was the first Naga body that demanded independence, and though statehood was given, it was accepted as a temporary arrangement, and many still say that they would not compromise on independence. Citing tendencies to vote for a candidate belonging to one’s own tribe, he further noted, “There is a sort of tribalism or loyalty to one’s own tribe that influences the working of democracy in Nagaland”. He also talked about the bogus organizations and corrupt politicians who were to be blamed for many of the problems in the state and said that there was a lack of accountability. Referring to Mr Tarunkumar’s remark, he said that people do not demand accountability. He finally remarked on the role of media saying that they have been playing a major role in the Naga society in the present.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Briefly interjected, referring to Mr. Manas’s, Mr. Tarunkumar’s, and Prof. Lokendro’s remarks about politicians destroying the fabric of democracy. He said, “Politicians do need democratic institutions, thus they do not have a stake in maintaining the institutions. So there is no question of they deliberately trying to destroy the democratic institutions”. He concluded by saying, “Perhaps some of their actions might have led to some damages”.

Mr Tarunkumar Thounaujam (Journalist/Activist, Manipur): Commenting on the issue of the media, he said, “It is a question of influence on or by politics. Some people come into

this profession and exploit their profession to serve their self-interests. However, media along with the opposition can play a crucial role in demanding accountability from the government”.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Interjected briefly to say, “The opposition exploits the media, and in case of Manipur, they do create a lot of problems for the government”.

Mr. Harish Khare (Journalist, Delhi): Said that the above question was of finance. “The financial strength or background of the media is important to decide its independence. In India, due this financial angle, the media is controlled by the state. Very few people can sustain themselves against such control”. Regarding the media in the North East, he asked, “If Ford Foundation committed 10 million for the media here will there be enough skill and people with integrity to run the media in the North East?”.

Mr. Manas Choudhury (Journalist, Meghalaya): “There has been a mushrooming of newspapers and journals in the North East in the last two decades, it has grown from more than being a cottage industry. One of the reasons for its growth is the relative better coverage of the regional news”. Citing the examples of how a ban imposed on his paper by some youth organization was revoked due to opposition from the public, he emphasized the personal integrity and credibility of the media professional.

Mr Pradeep Phanjoubam (Journalist, Manipur): He said, “The media is relatively free in Manipur. However, there are certain constraints like the dictates of the under-ground organizations”. Citing the example of black tenders, he also said, “There are unscrupulous elements in this profession as well and said that whatever is written in paper is noticed by the politicians. The financial constraints are also part of the problem in the region”. He spoke of the government in Manipur giving advertisements in rotation to the various newspapers. (Mr Harish Khare asked Mr. Pradeep whether he would publish any such materials from the army. He replied, “Yes”). He cited once the Government issued a list of dos and don'ts, which was removed later.

Mr. Manas Choudhury (Journalist, Delhi): Referring to Mr. Khare's hypothetical proposal, he interjected to say, “We can run a good paper”.

Mr Pradeep *Phanjoubam* (Journalist, Manipur): Regarding militarization, he said, “It is inevitable; it’s a fact of life here”.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Interjected to say, “Militarization has become a vicious circle, and that we need think about reversing the process”.

Session (IV)

Democracy’s Futures

Chair: Prof. Suresh Sharma

Some issues on media from the earlier session continued in to the IVth session.

Mr. Harish *Khare* (Journalist, Delhi): “Running the media is not as simple as the saying ‘The pen is mightier than the sword’. The media is not an ethnic enterprise or even a nationalistic enterprise. One cannot be partisan, if you become good at one, you can be bad on the other”. These are some of the thoughts, he said that were required for revitalizing the media in the region.

Prof. Lokendro *Arambam* (Cultural Activist, Manipur): Asked whether the media could play the role of a moral agent of social and democratic changes. He specifically spoke about the manner in which the national media covers and presents the event happenings in the region, which bear a critical link with the democratic aspects of life in the North East for example the human rights issues.

Mr. Manas *Choudhury* (Journalist, Meghalaya): Commented on rookie reporters saying, “It is the financial condition which constrains them from paying the reporters well. Hence, we cannot attract good people for the job”. He also said, “There are instances of positive media intervention in the affairs of the state”.

This discussion on the media continued briefly with short one-line exchanges among the journalist participants; comments were on the relation between the national media and its

coverage, distribution of papers, and how local newspapers were threatened by the double edition of the national media etc.

Dr Nani Bath (Political Scientist, Arunachal Pradesh): Regretted the absence of political ideology among the politicians and political parties in Arunachal Pradesh. He also further noted that the regional political parties do not have a future in the state because it can be manipulated by the power at the centre due to the state's dependence on the centre for resources. He also noted the active role played by students in the political processes of the state. Coming to the question of refugees, he said, "While the genuine concerns of the refugees have to be taken care of, we should also take care of the indigenous people of the state". He also insisted that in the name of protecting the identity and cultural rights of the tribes, "There is no separation between the Judiciary and the executive; this upsets the democratic process in the state". Regarding the militarization of the state, he said, "It is more to do with the external factors, including the problem in the eastern part of the state where Naga insurgency has affected the peace in the region".

Prof. Peter R. deSouza (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Drew the attention of the participants to the question of identity politics in the state and its consequences and what can be done about it in terms of democratic politics and practices. He raised questions of rights violations, and refugees as major concerns of the region. "Effects on the democratic institutions and their functioning in the light of the problems of the region such as lack of resources and opportunity, the emergence of elites in the region needs to be discussed", he added. He further suggested two specific steps that can be taken up: "One, there is a need to improve the existing institutions and also create new institutions; two, there is a need to improve the practices, improvement in how the negotiations can be done". He concludes his remark with the question, "Why is civil society too heavily based on ethnic identity and its interests?"

Prof. D.L. Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): In referring to the question of liberal democracy and the need to look at the global level as well. Referring to Fukuyama's 'End of history', he asked, "Is liberal democracy superior to other forms of democracy or democracies? As one nation, one state becomes the norm, we also need to ask whose sovereignty we are talking about?" He said the future of democracy is plurality of governance, and it needs to adapt to the local situations and multiple cultures. "Direct participation of people is the main issue in democracy".

Prof. Suresh Sharma (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Referring to Prof. D.L Sheth's invocation of Fukuyama's idea while talking about the prospect of the idea of democracy, he sought to set one possible way of looking at the future of democracy. He said, "Fukuyama is in the Hegelian lineage, which has a tradition of speculating the forms of organization and coherence or instruments or vehicle to move humanity to a higher stage of doing, living, and thinking. Fukuyama audaciously argues that liberal democracy represents a form that theoretically cannot be super-ceded. It is a form that exhausts the possibility of historical movement, though it does not put an end to conflict necessarily or to happenings. However, it puts an end to the search of forms of organization and legitimation".

Prof. Sharma further noted, "The idea that liberal democracy is anchored in the idea of nation-state as one absolute centre of power. Accordingly, other points of sovereignties can only be accepted by a diffusion of sovereignty. In this negotiation, the question comes up as to what kinds of expertise are required or should there be; should it be NGO etc. It requires a bringing together expertise and forms of accountability beyond ethnicity and even nation. However, seeking accountability cannot be done in a vacuum, a territorial demarcation would be needed". Saying this he invited the participants to express their views in this final session of the dialogue.

Mr. Harish Khare (Journalist, Delhi): Said that a broad theme had emerged during the last two days. "That is, the introduction of the formal democracy of the variety Indian Constitution favours has produced a thousand conflicts. Every conflict has its grievances, resentments, victims, and a conflict on the meaning of the conflict, history and blame mongering game of who is responsible etc; however, can we think of democracy as a means of reconciliation?" he asked. He further said that instead of the insider vs. outsider, colonial power vs. victims etc, looking at the future of democracy should also mean reconciliation, especially for this region (The North East).

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Saying that the European idea of one nation one state was not relevant in the Indian context as India is a plural society, he put forward the idea that democratic institutions have to be designed according to the nature of Indian society. Emphasizing the need to look at the principle of representation, he insists that representation based on population in the *Lok Sabha* was okay but the representation in the *Rajya Sabha* should be based, not on the number of legislatures but on states. Citing various

Supreme Court judgments and pronouncements reaffirming the federal character as a basic feature of the Constitution, and the states as units but not appendages of the centre, he said that every state should have equal representation in the *Rajya Sabha*.

He further said, The Planning Commission is not a constitutional body; therefore, it should be combined with the Finance Commission. This will strengthen the federal character and streamline the resource distribution”. He also, again by citing the Supreme Court judgment (Bombay Vs. Union of India, 1994) that states are not mere appendages of the centre, more autonomy should be given to the states.

He concluded by saying, “By the multiplicity of ethnic communities in the region cannot be swept to the Bay of Bengal, we should look at the non-territorial federalism to meet the linguistic and ethnic aspirations”. He drew the attention of the participants to what has been tried out in Assam.

Prof. D.L. Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Interjected by saying, “It will totally communalise the situation”.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Replied “No it will not”. Then he went on to elaborate on the issue. He said that these (The case of Assam) are councils for the tribes who are not living in a compact area, and funds are allotted for them to look after their own affairs. He cited tribes who have these councils: Missing, Tiwa, Rabha, Hmar, Nagas in Cachar (Assam). Finally, he said that Panchayati Raj should be strengthened and non-VIth Schedule areas in the North East should be brought under the 73rd Amendment.

Mr. Pradeep Phanjoubam (Journalist, Manipur): Interjected to ask, “Whether we can think of the provision to appoint two Anglo-Indians to the Lok Sabha as an example of non-territorial representation, and if so, something like that can be thought of here in the North East”.

Prof. Suresh Sharma (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Interjected saying, “It is a nomination to a body which is territorially conceived. It is very different from what Prof. Gangumei is suggesting. He further pointed out that a person representing a territory represents everyone living in that territory. Therefore, what Prof. Gangumei is suggesting has a very different implication in terms of the theory and practice of representation”.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Said that he had forgotten to add one more issue, and requested the participants and the research team of the project whether one can really explore the possibility of a sub federation of the North East people within the Indian federation. He said, “The units (states) may remain as it is but if we can have this kind of sub-federation it would be worth exploring”. He said, “The North East Council has failed because among others, it is a bureaucratic organization and a Department of the Home Ministry, not a part of the Planning Commission or regional Planning Board, therefore, exploring such a sub-federation would be worthwhile”.

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist, Assam): Referring to Prof. Gangumei’s observation on the non-territorial federation, he said, “It is called non-territorial autonomy or sometimes as satellite autonomy. It is given to an ethnic group who is not confined to a particular area. It started in 1993. These Autonomous Councils are allotted some funds and they distribute the benefit to all the members of that ethnic group wherever they reside. However, some protested against this non-territorial while some demand territorial autonomy”. He said that Bodos had territorial Autonomy now.

Mr. David. M. Thangliana (Journalist, Mizoram): Asked, “Where is the territorial head quarters?”

Prof. D.L Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Asked, “What do these non-territorial councils do? Where from they get their funds?”

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist, Assam): “The Bodo Territorial Autonomous Council is located at Kokrajhar, while the Non-territorial Autonomous Councils have their headquarters wherever a majority of them reside. These bodies get their funds from the Tribal Development Departments and state government. They primarily look after their cultural and customary affairs”. (To a question from Prof. Sheth, he said that they do not run schools etc. and Prof. Sheth remarked, “Then these are sops”)

Mr. Bordoloi then made his observations on the futures of democracy in the region. He said, “We can explore the possibility of a separate Parliament with a separate constitution under the Indian constitution”. He said that the provisions of the Indian constitution fail to address the interests, needs and aspiration of the people in the region. The people of the region should be allowed to frame their own constitution. He further said, “If full autonomy (including

“rights over resources”) is not given to this parliament (say except for currency, foreign affairs and defence), it will fail”.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Jokingly interjected, “The Parliament there (Delhi) should frame the constitution!”

Prof. D.L Sheth (Academic/Faculty, Manipur): Answered in the negative and then noted that the issues and kind of history involved in the case of the North East. “There is a need for special democratic adaptations; there have been such adaptations but, he says, they are not enough or half hearted. Special democratic dispensation and arrangements that are legitimated by the people of that area are required for the North East, for Kashmir, and may be later for other areas in the country. Whatever name one gives to such a body, a common forum for the North East is worth exploring”, he concluded.

Mr. Harish Khare (Journalist, Delhi): Asked, “You wont want any resources from New Delhi then?” (Prof. Gangumei Kamei and Prof. D.L Sheth both say that would be needed) He continued, “There is colonialism in reversed here; elites have mastered...?”

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist, Assam): Interjected to say, “We would not need any resources from New Delhi, we have enough resources here”.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Intervened to state four specific aspects that are necessary, according to him, to re-visualize the future. Referring to the suggestion of equal representation for each state in the Rajya Sabha (put forth by Prof. Gangumei Kamei), he said that a similar proposition was placed in front of the Sarkaria Commission by the CPI (M) government of West Bengal, but it was not accepted by the Commission. He believes that the reason for that was related to the assumption that India was one nation and one people, and accordingly the formation of the Indian state follows a divergent theory under which the states are not ascribed the autonomous status as the individual citizens, and they are taken as creations out of the unified entity for administrative purposes. This is unlike the American state formation, which follows the convergent logic, whereby autonomous units come together to form the unified entity. He cited amongst other, the example of Manipur joining the Indian Union and the presence of article 370 for Kashmir as an indicator of the convergent logic. While the creation of Nagaland, Mizoram etc through the will, and

sovereign power of the Parliament and article 3 of the constitution that empowers the Union to create new states or change the boundaries of any existing state through a simple majority as indicators of the divergent logic. He said, “Thus, the first step for re-visualizing the future is to reorient the basic assumption of identity behind the institutional arrangement in India”.

Second, he suggested, “The Sinic civilizational element (as in the North East) is absent in the imagination of the Indian nation-state, which is primarily defined by the Indic civilizational assumptions whereby the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian narratives are forming the national narrative. Given this, right from the post War situation there has been a fear of the idea of the (pan) Mongoloid and communism in the context of the Chinese communists coming to power. This worldview and the fear led to a fear psychosis among the leaders at the Centre, and the militaristic frame became a part of the Indian State policy towards the region. Re-visualizing the future requires a change in this mind-set/approach.

Third, there is a tendency to articulate every other grievance in the region in terms of the 18th and 19th century concepts and ideas like nation-state, sovereignty, and right to self-determination, which led to ethnicization and conflicts in the region”. He suggested that there is a need to critically examine the utility and the rationales of these concepts. He noted, “One couldn’t criticize the nation-state out there and employ the same concept here (North East)”.

Fourth, following from the above aspects, he suggested, “There is a need to critically examine the client-patron relation between the Centre and the states. There is a need to strengthen the existing centres in the regions (the state capitals) instead of weakening them”. He said that instead of the ethnic based autonomies after autonomies (which strengthen the Centre at Delhi) and creating conflicts in the region, “Each state can think of having a second house to their legislative assemblies to accommodate different communities with equal number of representatives (irrespective of the number of the community). This second house can be given powers to deal with specific and various issues relating to the culture, linguistic or developmental issues of the communities)”. By observing that there was a need to demilitarise and de-ethnicize the region, he concluded his intervention.

Prof. Suresh Sharma (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Referring to the observation by Dr. Bimol Akoijam as being a very pointed and important intervention, he made two observations. “First, in the American experience, the states are taken as absolute units, the territory remains unchanged, and so does the ethnic representations remain foreclosed”. He drew the attention to the artefact as conveyed by the map of the USA, and says that in no part of the world where entities have been formed through a complex processes of historical

interaction can one draw a boundary straight as done in the units of USA. (Bimol also drew his attention to Africa for the similarity of the artefacts). Saying that these artefacts are based on a cultural closure, a profound ethnic closure, and constructing homogeneity within that only gives certain concessions to others, “We need to be a little cautious about invoking the American model as a classical example of federation”.

Prof. D.L Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Briefly interjected to say, “We can learn a lot from the American experience too, particularly the process of massive homogenisation cultural or market processes and the possibility of the right to secede (as a fall out?)” (Prof. Suresh Sharma said the USA does not provide the right to secede and Prof. Gangumei Kamei interjected by stating that the first civil war in American history occurred on the issue of secession). He concluded his brief interjection by saying that cultural processes cannot be ignored when talking of identity.

Prof. Suresh Sharma (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Continued his observation. Secondly, referring to an observation by Prof. Peter R. deSouza, he asked, “What does one do with identity formation?” He drew the attention of the participants to the question of arrangement for democratic governance that provides a framework of coherence (whether nation, region or North East as it is today) to deal with this question of identity. “This question is important because, however small it may be, given the kind of history and situation in the region, it is impossible to have the ethnic line and the territorial line converged on the same line”.

Mr. Gautam Das (Journalist/Political Worker, Tripura): Talked about the degeneration of the democratic polity in India. He cites the abuse of article 356 as eroding the federal character. Saying, “We cannot go back to monarchy or the kind of dictatorship as in the emergency”. He called for the strengthening of the democratic institutions. He specifically mentioned the need to grant more autonomy to the states and to review the centre–state relation. Regarding the question of a Second house as suggested by Dr. Bimol Akoijam, he wondered whether it would impose a sort of financial burden on the state. He also expressed the need to reform the electoral processes and to create constitutional mechanisms to ensure accountability. He also stated, “Autonomy and more rights for women, various minorities/tribes etc are other areas that are needed to be taken care of for a better future”.

Mr. Manas Choudhury (Journalist, Meghalaya): Put forward some suggestions. First, he expressed the need to deal with the ethnic problem, the minority syndrome and how to protect them without harming the majority. Here he suggested that the Sikkim model could be thought of. “In Sikkim, the indigenous people are a minority and the Nepalese constitute 80 percent of the population. There are provisions to protect the minority (seats are reserved etc.) and the demographic profile has been frozen, outsiders/immigrants are now not allowed. This could be thought of in other states as well because influx is a real problem in this part of the country. Second, there should be a restriction on the birth rate (because many tribes have been encouraged to increase their population as the vote value of an MLA in UP (Uttar Pradesh) is more than an MLA here because of the population he represents)”. He also said, “Given the fact that people here are not law abiding and politicians often subvert the democratic institutions, the idea of a separate parliament is a little absurd”. He also raised the issue of human rights, and the need to have equal considerations for the majority as well as the minority. He said, “When the human rights of the majority are harmed, there is a hue and cry about it but the same does not happen if it happens to a member of the minority”. Regarding the media, he felt that it has not been playing the role that it should be and he expressed the need to encourage creative mechanisms for recruiting of talented people. He suggested, “Send them outside for training to sharpen their professional skill”. He also noted, “We have politicians but we have not thrown up statesmen and it is time for us to have leaders of that kind”. Saying that for democracy to thrive, “We need to use our hearts”.

Mr. Tarunkumar Thounaujam (Journalist/Activist, Manipur): Expressed the view, “In the last two days, in the discussion we seem to have missed the economic contents of democratic processes”. Further, he also noted that the feelings of deprivation—between the centre and the states and between the smaller communities and the larger communities—have to be addressed to strengthen democracy and for the better functioning of democracy. Therefore, he raised the question, “As to whether the suggested structures that we have here so far can deal with the sense of deprivation prevalent in this region”. Furthermore, he asked, “Can we identify or generate institutions to generate new opportunities for economic regeneration etc or should the state or the civil society take the initiative in this regard?” Saying that he left these as questions for the participants to ponder upon, he concluded his observation.

Ms. Jarjum Ite (Women Activist, Arunachal Pradesh): Expressed the view that the promise of democracy has been partly delivered but mostly not delivered in this region. Therefore, she felt that there are issues that need to be taken care of. Stating that the violence, gender or ethnic, "...is rooted in our aspirations", she asked, "To what extent we can support our causes without harming ourselves?". She also spoke about what Dr. Bimol Akoijam has said about de-ethnicizing of the region and like-minded people to come together to work for it. She also agreed with the prospects of exploring the possibility of a regional body for the North East at the same time she expressed the need to be a little patient while approaching the issue. She also called for the strengthening of the Panchayati Raj in the non-VIth schedule areas and the need for revamping the village councils and also to have a vigilant media and civil society.

Mr. Pradeep Phanjoubam (Journalist, Manipur): Endorsed the idea of a second house in the state legislative Assembly. He also believed that this would take care of the smaller groups like the Kom and the Tarao in Manipur. He cautioned the participants on the minority issue and said that while talking about the Minority Commission, "We have to calibrate the idea of minority within the context of the state". He pointed out that Christians in the state consists of 30 percent, and the total minority figure in the state of Manipur is 43 percent, which could hardly be called a minority. (Dr. A.Bimol Akoijam interjected to say that all India minority figure is 18 percent). Reminding the participants of the Quote, 'If men are good, there is not need to rule', he said that as men are not going to be good all the time, there is a need to develop institutions and cultivate values. Expressing the need to encourage and cultivate the liberal values, he concluded his observation by saying, "We need to institutionalise hearts".

Prof. Lokendro Arambam (Cultural Activist, Manipur): Expressed the view that the concluding session and its suggestions were actually opening up (the) dialogues. Saying, "Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam has thrown open some difficult propositions", he expressed the wish that it could have been in the first session so that "We could have disused them during the dialogue". He further said, "Identity can not be wished away; it has been used by the elites to gain or share power and resources".

Noting that the experience of conflict in the North East was different from the experience of say conflict in Bihar, the democratic experience of the North East people were different in terms of the economic, cultural, political etc. dimensions. Further, he said that statecraft and

the rationalization of the authority dimensions are also different in relation to the North East. He was of the opinion that a Kautalian kind of statecraft, of how state should behave and build the legitimacy of the state in regions inhabited by loyalists, enemies etc has been a part of the Indian State. In this regard, he said, “Mrs Gandhi (ex PM) pitted one ethnic community against another and this ethnic conflict has been a part of the realities of the democratic experience of the region”. Noting that to study the futures of democracy in India, “We need to take the context of insurgency, and the processes of de-colonization etc, and these issues have been left out during the dialogue and a further dialogue would be required after this”.

Dr. Nani Bath (Political Scientist, Arunachal Pradesh): Expressed a serious doubt on the idea of a North East Parliament. He suggested that grass-root democratic practices should be strengthened and more devolution of power should be carried out. Citing the administrative constraints and interest of other tribal residing in Arunachal Pradesh, he did not support the idea of integration of Naga areas with Nagaland. Instead, he suggested that non-territorial arrangements should be taken up to look after people residing in different areas. Regarding the Chakma refugees, he said, “Politicians enrolled them for their own electoral advantage; therefore, the freezing of influx is not enough, there should a restriction of the resettlement areas as well”.

Dr. Kezhokhoto Savi (Lawyer/Consumer Activist, Nagaland): Expressed regrets regarding the absence of those participants from Nagaland who were supposed to be there for the dialogue.

Dr, Vanlalchhawna (Economist, Mizoram): Expressed the view that a number of conflicts had come up and therefore new ideas and new institutions needed to be evolved while strengthening parallel traditional democratic institutions. He also called for strengthening liberal democratic ideas and institutions and noted that the North East has to be looked upon as an economic unit; he said, “Although we have rich natural resources but technological and entrepreneurial resources are limited. Therefore, we need to cultivate and strengthen these aspects”.

Mr. David M. Thangliana (Journalist, Mizoram): Said that the idea of a common forum or a parliament for North East was a good idea. He felt that it could take better care of the economic aspects of the region. He felt that in-spite of the general idea that money has been

pumped into the region, there is a general bias against the region. Thus, he agreed with Mr. Tarunkumar's suggestion that the feeling of deprivation and neglect of the people has to be taken care of for better democratic functioning.

Mr. Harish Khare (Journalist, Delhi): Said that he would like to put a mischievous and imaginative proposition. Saying this, he asked, "If somehow the region is free from the Indian union, save for defence, communication, currency etc and, the Prime Minister of India in a great act of statesmanship (Prof. Suresh Sharma jokingly interjects, "Or forgetfulness!"), signed an agreement with the European Union that for the next 50 years, all your (North East's) economic requirement would be met and that the North East would not become a part of any hostile country, will the North East be a better place to live in?"

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Interjected by saying, "Mr Khare that is what Muivah, leader of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muviah) (NSCN-IM) suggested. It is the same concept he (Muivah) tells the Government of India, that Nagas would have a parliament called the Tatar Hoho, and the border will be guarded by the Indian Army as well as the Naga Army".

Dr. Dhanabir Laishram (Human Right Activist, Manipur): Replying to Mr Khare, interjected to say that there is a medicine for treating cancer patients called the Texum, which is made from a tree called *texus beccatus*. He said, "The tree is available in plenty in the hills of Manipur. Saying that 1.5 ml costs Rs. 1,50,000 and that 5 litres of this medicine can feed the entire North East for 10 years!" Coming back to the North East, he suggested that the whole area should be declared an 'under-developed areas' and the control over the resources should be completely with the people in the region. He also endorsed the idea of the second house and says that the zone of interference should be minimized as far as the relation between the centre and the states.

Prof. Gangumei Kamei (Historian/Politician, Manipur): Asked Dr. Dhanabir Laishram, "Will he support the application of article 371A to Manipur as well? (Why not follow this 371A to Manipur?)"

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist, Assam): Responding to Mr. Khare, said, "The smaller states may not be financially viable but the North East as a whole taken as a unit, is

financially viable”. Citing the budget of Assam in 1999 (Rs.1600, Crores of which Rs 300 Crores are from Tea and another Rs. 500 Crores are from oil, he said, “If we are given the rights over our resources, we can do it”.

Ms. Minimon Laloo (Author/Social worker, Meghalaya): Expressed some concerns on the finances of the smaller states but said that the idea of the second house was a good one.

Prof. Gangumei Kamie (Historian/Politician): Interjects to say that his party (Federal Party of Manipur) has suggested the second house already and that it would hardly cost some Rs. 5,00,000/- per annum, and hence it was not a financial burden.

Mr. Lachit Bordoloi (Human Right Activist, Assam): Interjected to say that (while they were in power) Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) had already moved a similar thing in Assam for a second house to have the representatives from all the communities, small or big. He said, “After the election, two years from now, Assam will have an upper house, first in the North East”.

Prof. D.L. Sheth (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Made his concluding remark by noting that the utopian conception of democracy, the ideal of democracy for present and the future has been, during the dialogue, the democracy of communities, the beneficiaries are the communities. “We seem to be afraid of democracy of citizens, he observes. The intra-community democracy is limited; and although the democracy of community also empowers the individual there is no proposition for citizens or an indication of the transition to a democracy of citizens”.

Prof. Suresh Sharma (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Briefly interjected to say, “Democracy of community also means attenuation of citizenship”.

Prof. Peter R. deSouza (Academic/Faculty CSDS): In his concluding remark reaffirmed his feeling, “That dialogue is a superior instrument for learning and education”, he said that he came to the dialogue, “With an ignorance of a complex world (and) leaves with a complex sensibility of the same”. Noting that what had emerged during the last session, “Is the microcosm what the future holds and the suggestions that have been mooted here reduced the ferocity of the problems that we have seen during the earlier sessions”. Further, he said that

these suggestions form the basis for new imagination and that these have fore-grounded the idea of representation and what does it mean for the structures and institutions for the North East within the larger Indian context/frame. Saying that this had been a chastening experience, he came to understand the historical context of the issues here; the absences and the presence have emerged during this dialogue. Stating that Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam had taken this (dialogue) up, not as a part of academic exercise but with a sense of mission, he called the participants as partners of this project. Finally, he called for furthering the dialogue onwards.

Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (Academic/Faculty CSDS): Opened his concluding remark by saying that he had a propensity to speak from the heart and more often than not it created conflict with the demands and the imperatives of formal and politically correct modes of transaction. He also noted that he was happy to know the participants personally and thank them for making this dialogue. He said that the project will not end with the production of the report but will continue in the form of a wider discussion in the society. Quoting a feminist statement that “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bi-cycle”, he said that if the people in the North East can do away with their obsession with outside (non-North East) funding, they can move forward. In this context, he said “If we have the will and the commitment, we can have another dialogue, without funding from the Centre or any other place beyond the North East”.

Prof. Suresh Sharma (Academic/Faculty CSDS): In his concluding remark, described the experience of the dialogue as instructive and stimulating and thanked the participants for the sustained engagement. Saying that if he could use the prerogative of being the Chairman of the session to make the last word, he would like to put a proposition. He said, “The dialogue expresses a primal longing, longing for a home, longing for homeland. It is a part of human consciousness. It expresses a deep tension in working out the sovereignty of the individual in the public realm. However, the quest for identity and home is marked by the absence of cultural aesthetic articulation in the last two days. It is a strange paradox because this cultural aesthetic is supposed to be at the roots of the longing and tension and the quest articulated during the dialogue”. With these comments, the Chair thanked the participants again.

Conclusion

The two-day long *Dialogue on Democracy and Peoples' futures'* in Imphal, had been both a reflection on democracy as much as a manifestation of democracy in practice. It had truly been a moment of revelation, sharing, debating, and evolving people's experiences. Irrespective of their different backgrounds, the participants were united by a 'sustained engagement' with the issues pertaining to their collectivity and individuality too. From dissecting issues to propagating ideas, the exercise was not merely been a cognitive engagement for the participants also allowed their 'hearts' to talk out the minds. In this sense, the *Dialogue* in Imphal had also been, in a deeper sense, a revelation of a basic democratic ethos best captured by a phrase of Prof. Suresh Sharma, who chaired the last session on the *futures of democracy*: "working out the sovereignty of the individual in the public realm".

The discussions have thrown up various issues of which some were discussed in length while some did not get similar attention. Perhaps, the differential concerns also revealed the saliency of the issues in terms of the preoccupations and concerns of the participants. If this dialogue could be considered an expression of differential concerns as a microcosm of what the people in the region felt, part of the rationale to have the *Dialogue* in Imphal would have borne its fruit.

Some of the major themes that had come up during the *Dialogue* could be noted as follows:

Modern democracy and non-modern or traditional forms of democracy: In terms of the democratic experiences of the people in the region, the last 50 years or so have been marked by a confrontation between forms of non-modern institutions and practices and the new constitutional liberal democratic institutions. This confrontation had produced tensions, anxieties and violence as much as new hopes and expectations among the people. On the one hand, the arrival of democracy, i.e., democracy preferred by the Indian Constitution, had been seen as an imposition that uprooted the people from their traditional sensuous and personal

ways of dealing with relationships and organizing the society and their polity. It was seen as producing a corrupted ethos and something that had divided (the) people, destroyed the kinship matrix, and induced conflicts in the society. On the other hand, it was also seen as promising a way to modernization, and a means to take the people to the liberal modern world order.

Un-kept promises: Another salient theme that had come up during the discussion was the issue of un-kept or undelivered promises. Although the liberal democratic promises of the Indian constitution are being admired by many, there was also a feeling that these promises had not been implemented or carried out or that these had been subverted both by the insensitive leaders at the centre and the local elites. In spite of the fundamental rights of individual freedom that had been promised by the constitution, there have been rampant human right violations due to too much concern with the security of the state. In fact, there was a feeling that the last fifty odd years had not been a process of democratisation but had been the militarization of the region. Some saw democracy as only a front. The feeling of deprivation and the lack of control over their resources and under-developments had been expressed as indicators of the un-kept promises. Gender biases and discrimination also came up as a feature of the un-kept promises of democracy; significantly, this issue had been expressed simultaneously as a critique of the so-called egalitarian traditional forms of institutions and practices.

New Elites: The nature and role of the local leadership was another theme that had come up during the discussions. Many blamed these local leaders to be the main culprits of subverting the process of democratisation in the region. These people were seen as selfish, corrupt and lacking the quality of statesmanship. Some also looked at them as compradors of the political masters in Delhi who were responsible for the destruction of the basic fabric of society in the region.

Demographic and ethnic challenges: One major theme had been the nature of the multiplicity of the various communities that constitute the North East people and their conflicting interests. The demand for autonomy and the assertions of identity had been both a democratic expression as well as the source of conflict in the region. Here various institutional mechanisms based on the Indian constitution, particularly the VIth Schedule, non-territorial autonomy and Panchayati Raj were discussed. Some alternatives were also

suggested such as the introduction of a second house in the state legislative assemblies. (Assam was likely to implement this in 2 years time.). The problem of refugees and influx of immigrants also came up during the discussions.

The idea of the North East: One major theme that had been deliberated upon during the *Dialogue* was the idea of the North East and what it could become. Some suggested a change in the nomenclature as the name North East had a ‘colonial baggage’ attached to it. While some insisted that the name was okay as it had given the people in the region a common platform. While some others still expressed that it could become a structure to mediate between the region and the entity beyond, or for that matter, amongst various categories within the region. This mediation it was though could have profound civilisational, cultural, economic and political dimensions. In this context, the idea of a ‘common forum’, a separate ‘parliament’ for the North East was mooted and discussed.

In the discussions on the above themes and issues, a grim picture of the situation in the region seemed to dominate. However, as Prof. Peter R. deSouza noted during the last session, that the various suggestions that were thrown up reduced the ferocity of the problem discussed in the last two days of the *Dialogue*. In a way, these suggestions fore grounded the future possibilities for the people in the region in their tryst with democracy. Along with these positive notes and the possibility of looking at democracy as a way to ‘reconciliation’ among people, one could strive for the transition from the ‘democracy of the communities’ to the ‘democracy of the citizens’. And this inevitably calls for a commitment and action to carry on the *Dialogue* beyond the two memorable days in Imphal!

----- END OF DIALOGUE -----

List of dialogue participants arranged state wise and alphabetically by family name

Sr. No.	Name	Interest/Background	Address	Phone/Fax/ E-mail
ARUNACHAL PRADESH				
1.	<i>Bath Nani (Dr.)</i>	Political Scientist	Arunachal University, Itanagar	0360-2277564 ® 0360-2277342 (O) nanibath@rediffmail.com
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ASSAM				
3.	<i>Bordoloi Lachit (Mr.)</i>	Human Right Activist	Chairman, Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti, Bamuni Maidum, GHY-7811001	0361-2550301 (o) 03672-284647 ® (Nagaon District) massghy@sify.com
MANIPUR				
4.	<i>Arambam Lokendra (Mr.)</i>	Manipuri Scholar, Cultural Activist & Theater Personality	Chairman, United Nations Associations Manipur, Imphal, Sagolband Meino Leirak, Imphal West-795001	0385-2223973 mitrawaheng@yahoo.com
5.	<i>Kamei Gangmumei (Prof.)</i>	Historian/ Politician	Vice President, Federal Party of Manipur. Majorkhul, Imphal West-795001	0385-2222644
6.	<i>Laishram Dhanabir (Dr.)</i>	Social Activist	Advisor, The All Manipur United Clubs' Organization (AMUCO). Kwakeithel Akham Leikai, Imphal 795001	0385-2443851 dblaishram@yahoo.com
7.	<i>Phanjoubam Pradip (Mr.)</i>	Journalist	Editor, The Imphal Free Press, Palace Compound, Imphal 795001.	0385-2441705 (o) 2223233 ® Fax: 2441704
8.	<i>Rose Valley H. Hungyo (Ms.)</i>	Social Activist/Politician	Spring Home, Nagaram D I, Imphal 795001	0385-2320343 hvalleyrose@yahoo.co.in
MEGHALAYA				
9.	<i>Chaudhuri Manas</i>	Journalist	Editor, The Shillong Times Bilbong, Shillong-793004	0364-2227488,2223488 Fax: 2229488 shillongtimes@yahoo.com
10.	<i>Laloo Minimon (Mrs.)</i>	Writer/Social Activist	Joint Secy. All India Tribal Literary Forum Res: Mawkhar Block 7, Shillong 793001 Meghalaya	0364 2546566 9863097146 (mobile) Fax: 0364 2503958/2503964

MIZORAM				
11.	Thangliana David M (Mr.)	Journalist	Editor, The News Link	0389-2312518 newslink@indiatimes.com dthangliana@yahoo.com
12.	Vanlalchhawna	Economist	Hragbana College, Aizawl- 796007, Mizoram	0389-2315809 vchhawna@hotmail.com
NAGALAND				
13.	Savi Kezhokhoto (Mr.)	Advocate/Consumer Right Activist	Chairman, Nagaland Voluntary Consumer Organization C/O Kohima Law College, Raj Bhavan Road, Kohima-797001 (Nagaland)	0370-2224523
TRIPURA				
14.	Das Gautam (Mr.)	Political Worker/Journalist	Editor, Deshar Katha Agartala	0381-2323448 (O), 2324383, 2328467 @, 2314723 @ ddkatha2000@yahoo.co.in
DELHI				
15.	Akoijam A. Bimol (Dr.)	Dialogue Coordinator /Academic	Visiting Associate Fellow, CSDS, 29, Rajpur Road, Delhi 11005	011-23942199 (ext:226) Telefax: 011-23981012 abakoijam@csdsdelhi.org
16.	Banerjee Monica (Ms.)	Social Worker	National Foundation for India, India Habitat Center. New Delhi	011-24641864-65
17.	deSouza Peter (Prof.)	Academic	CSDS, Co-Director, Lokniti: Institute for Comparative Democracy	011-23942199 (ext:336) Telefax: 011-23981012 peter@csdsdelhi.org
18.	Khare Harish (Mr.)	Journalist	The Hindu Flat. No. 5, 32 Alipur Road Delhi-110054	011-23350854 9810045813
19.	Sharma Suresh (Prof.)	Academic	Senior Fellow, CSDS, 29, Rajpur Road, Delhi 11005	29, Rajpur Road, Delhi 110054
20.	Sheth D.L. (Prof.)	Academic	Hon. Senior Fellow, CSDS, 29, Rajpur Road, Delhi 11005	29, Rajpur Road, Delhi 110054.
21.	Tarunkumar Thounaujam (Mr.)	Journalist/Activist	Consultant, Rediffusion DY & R, Delhi, DII/261,	thounaujam59@yahoo.co.uk
22.	Wangkheirakpam Ramananda (Mr.)	Associate Dialogue Coordinator /Environmental Activist	Lokayan, 13 Alipur Road, Delhi 110054 Delhi	Telefax: 011-23969380 Email: wramd@hotmail.com
LOCAL OFFICIALS				
23.	Akoijam Bapin	Office Administrator	Keisamthong	
24.	Aribam Boy	Driver		
25.	Khuanthem Jyoti	Rapporteur	Moirangkhom, Sawaijam Leirak	
26.	Nongmaithem Manichandra	Rapporteur	Kakching	
27.	Okram Sakuntala	Office Administrator	Keisamthong	
28.	Ranita Gurumayum	Rapporteur	Singjamei Chingamathak Imphal	

Appendix

PROGRAMME LIST

25th February (Wednesday) 2004

Arrival of Delegates from outside Manipur

5:30 PM Evening tea at Imphal Hotel
7:45 – 9:00 PM Dinner at Imphal Hotel

26th February (Thursday) 2004

Bed Tea

8:00 AM - 8:30 AM Breakfast
8:30 AM – 9:00 AM Registration
9:00 AM – 9:10 AM Introduction to the Research and its Background by Prof. Peter de'Souza (CSDS)
9:10 AM – 9:15 AM An Introduction to the Dialogue in Imphal by Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam (CSDS)
9:15 AM – 11:15 AM 1st Session, *The Promise of Democracy*
11:15 AM – 11:30 AM Tea Break
11:30 AM – 1:00 PM Continuation of 1st Session
1:00 PM – 2:00 PM Lunch Break
2:00 PM – 3:30 PM 2nd Session, *Institutions and Design of Democracy*
3:30 PM – 3:45 PM Tea Break
3:45 PM – 5:15 PM Continuation of 2nd Session
5:15 PM - 5:30 PM Evening tea
6:00 PM – 7:00 PM Screening of a Documentary Film at Imphal Hotel
7:45 PM – 9:00 PM Dinner at Imphal Hotel

27th February (Friday) 2004

Bed Tea

8:00 AM - 8:30 AM Breakfast
9:00 AM – 11:15 AM 3rd Session, *Working and Outcomes*
11:15 AM – 11:30 AM Tea Break
11:30 AM – 1:00 PM Continuation of 3rd Session
1:00 PM – 2:00 PM Lunch Break
2:00 PM – 3:30 PM 4th Session, *Democracy's Future*
3:30 PM – 3:45 PM Tea Break
3:45 PM – 5:15 PM Continuation of 4th Session
5:15 PM - 5:30 PM Evening tea
6:00 PM – 7:00 PM A Manipuri Street Play at the Open Air Theater (cancelled)
7:45 PM – 9:00 PM Dinner at Imphal Hotel

28th February (Saturday) 2004

Bed Tea

8:00 AM - 8:30 AM

8:30 AM

5:45 PM

Breakfast

Leaves Hotel for Sightseeing

Arrival and Tea at Imphal Hotel

29th February (Sunday) 2004

Bed Tea

8:00 AM - 8:30 AM

11:00 AM

12:00 AM

Breakfast

Light Lunch

Delegates Leaves for Airport

Delegates from Mizoram will leave on Monday as there is no flight on Sunday.