

Manipur
The Search for Solutions
Pradip Phanjoubam♦

The problem of insurgency or peace has never been, and can never be perceived in black and white, as many have made it out to be. It is definitely not as simple as US President George Bush's defining line between friends and foes, in his nation's war on terrorism, or, in his words, that "you are either with us or against us..."¹ This, presumably, is the kind of mindset that has thrown up theories like the 'Clash of Civilizations'² and made them widely acceptable. The statement is particularly interesting in the context of the trap that the militaristic approach to counter-insurgency falls into. While, in an armed insurgency situation, it would be naïve not to expect an armed retaliation from the state, this retaliation must necessarily be accompanied by a longer political vision of peace that takes care of *issues*, rather than mere

♦ Pradip Phanjoubam is editor of the Manipur-based *Imphal Free Press*. He has written extensively on the problems of the Northeast, especially on issues relating to Manipur and Nagaland. This paper is based on the author's presentation at a seminar on "Manipur: Untying the Bind, Analysing Conflict & Development in the Frontier State," organised on March 28-29, 2003, at Imphal, Manipur, by the Institute for Conflict Management.

¹ President George W. Bush quoted during a joint news conference with French President Jacques Chirac in Washington on November 6, 2001.

² Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

insurgent firepower. The problem often is one of an acute limitation of vision that fails to accommodate the fact that things are not so simple as to be answered within a binary paradigm that conceives of only two exclusive options – true or a false. Contrary to such a reductionist worldview, in any human problem – including a situation of insurgency – between the black and the white; between the friend and the foe; between those who are “with us” and those who are “against us”; there is a whole spectrum of colours and nuances of support, sympathy, indifference and opposition, with many of these sentiments and beliefs literally overlapping. The fact is, not all of the many who are not ‘with us,’ are necessarily ‘against us’; and equally, many who are ‘with us’ may not be working in our best interest, even if unintentionally. Incompetence, insensitivity, corruption and political myopia on the part of those in charge of the establishment and in command of its resources, are at the root of many of our ills.

Hence, there is a need to identify the nuances, or at least acknowledge the existence of the spectrum of colours and shades, between the two poles of “with us” and “against us” in looking for a resolution to conflicts. Conflict resolution cannot be merely about eliminating all opposition or reducing the choices in negotiating the problem to two mutually exclusive sets of rights and wrongs. Rather, it must consist of labouring to bring everybody to accept reality and then to project a future with this understanding as the foundation.

More specifically, insurgency in India’s Northeast has been very much a product, if not an outgrowth of the historical, economic and political circumstances of society in the region. It is the manifestation of unarticulated furies within this society and, indeed, Frantz Fanon’s description of such insurrections as the “mailed fist” of a people with a sense of impotence at articulating the anger within, is apt. There is hence, even at points when the brutalities of insurgency have alienated it considerably from ordinary men and women, and even when it has become evident that insurgency is headed towards a dead end, always an unseen, even if distant, umbilical cord that preserves a fraternal feeling among those who have chosen the path of rebellion and the people at large. Even those who now believe that the causes of

insurgency have lost their relevance on account of numerous shifts in the paradigms that define and give value to these causes, would recommend a political solution in which the prodigals are guaranteed a legitimate place in society, rather than the dominant extermination theory. This seemingly soft vision of insurgency does not, however, mean that society has cut its other umbilical cords, particularly the one with the establishment. For instance, no matter how much the actions of the security forces may be resented, there are traffic jams in the State capital of Imphal whenever there is a call for recruitment by any unit of the security forces, with young men scrambling for a chance to take part. It should be evident from this and many other similar examples that nothing, indeed, is in black and white.

Understanding Insurgency

An essay, “Insurgency and the Disintegration of Civil Society” by Samir Kumar Das, is interesting in understanding the nature of insurgency in the northeast.³ Das seeks to represent the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) as a political critique of Assam’s historical experience, and indeed as also an articulation of an intense discourse within the Assamese civil society. His arguments throw light on the problem through both their strengths and their weaknesses. Das goes to the extent of saying that the ULFA’s relevance as well as integrity depends on its ability to continue to *be* this critique. At the crux of this critique is the familiar identity question. ULFA, (and because it represents a vital part of the soul of the discourse within the Assamese society) the Assamese civil society, perceive their history and identity as fundamentally different from that of India. He cites the near parallel between the degeneration of the ULFA and that of the discourse within the Assamese civil society almost as if to say each is mutually the cause of the other. There is no denying that this is a powerful argument and if its strengths provide insights, its weaknesses obviously unintended, in my opinion, also show ways to negotiate this vexed problem.

³ Samir Kumar Das, “Assam: Insurgency and the Disintegration of Civil Society”, *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*, Delhi, vol. 13, pp. 95-116.

Das looks at the ULFA as an intellectual construct, or at least as a phenomenon in which its intellectual architecture has primacy over its physical manifestation. Because of this, in my opinion, the theory is still heavily tilted towards intellectual romanticism, as the author's writings on the same issue in Bengali, on his own admission, were supposed to be. This characterization is akin to Hulk, the loveable comic strip monster, who is basically a materialization of excessive intellectual energy. Das' interpretation of the phenomenon of insurgency in the Northeast is not altogether new in Manipur, although it has never been argued out at such length. Here too, insurgency has been honestly intellectualized (as opposed to trivially propagandised) as an 'enterprise', at its inception, that rose out of the rubble of history. Insurgency in this interpretation represents the strong will of the people among whom it sprang up, determined to 're-people' and salvage lost dignity from a barren spiritual and moral landscape left behind by the devastations of unfavourable but powerful historical forces.

Although the symmetry of Das' theory is strongly manifest in the continued sympathy insurgency enjoys, sometimes unreserved and sometimes grudging, amongst a good section of the people, like many such intellectual constructs, it is exposed to the danger of being weakened by its tendency to forget the contextual background against which alone it can exist and have relevance. Adding to this vulnerability is the fact that the background in this case is not a constant, but in constant flux. As for instance, the very argument that the Assamese identity and history is different, presumes the rigidity of two entities – the Assamese identity itself and more importantly the bigger Indian identity. What if one or the other, or both, shift? Even if a shift in the Assamese identity, to align with the larger Indian identity, is seen to amount to a consequence of cultural imperialism in an 'internal colonialism' situation, and hence objectionable, the question remains, what if the bigger identity itself softens and transforms, and becomes more malleable and accommodative? More pointedly, hasn't such a shift taken place in the Indian identity over the past few decades, all during the lifespan of the ULFA and the other Northeastern insurgencies, thus far? The answer to this question must also take into consideration what is generally perceived to

be a deepening of representative democracy during the same period. It cannot ignore for instance, the inevitable reality of coalition politics in India today, in which even a Government led by a Hindu nationalist party, despite its intent, is unable to force a ban on cow slaughter. It would be fruitful from this standpoint of a search for a solution, and not merely an intellectual exercise in despair, however profound, to explore and discover if there are no alternative 'sites' for this same discourse.

If on the other hand, there have been no shifts in the perception or understanding of the larger Indian identity, and there still exist many incompatible features between this identity and those of the societies where insurgencies have festered, then can the possibility of making this shift happen not provide hope for a solution? Should there not be a reassessment of the historical circumstances as well as of identity, by both the larger as well as the smaller identities, not so much out of any sense of political correctness, but out of the need to fine-tune these understandings to present realities? After all, nothing has remained what it was yesterday, and nothing will, in the future, presumably remain what it is today.

Das also rejects any cause and effect theory of the ULFA insurgency, arguing in the process that the ULFA is itself its cause and reason,⁴ a concept difficult to visualize, but one which gives it some kind of omnipotence and, more frustratingly, defies any answer by way of a solution to the problem. From this viewpoint, the widely held perception of insurgency as a response to other factors, such as poverty, underdevelopment, unemployment, etc., and the attribution of these conditions to externally imposed factors, is reduced to irrelevance and simplistic 'linear narratives'. But by the very obduracy with which the indestructibility and purity of the intellectual construct of the ULFA as a political critique is defended, Das' theory itself appears to exhibit this same quality of linearity. Insurgency is all that Das says it is, *and more*. It is true the critique perpetuates itself, but it also rests, and in fact has to rest on many other stilts and props, all of which are actionable, not necessarily militarily.

⁴ Ibid.

Media under Pressure

In such a scenario, the job before the media has never been easy. At one end, it has to come to terms with the immediate law and order fallouts, which include covert and sometimes overt intimidation from various insurgent groups to forgo the right to edit or criticize. On the other, despite these infringements, the need still remains to tread carefully so as not to end up being blind to the finer undercurrents and dynamics of society, which drive insurgency. There is also the other danger of the state coming down on the media if it is seen to have overstepped the limits of the law in walking this fine balance.

Examples of the misfortunes of media personnel and media organizations on this count abound. It is indeed a tightrope walk for journalists operating in regions of insurgency. The fact that, in the past few years, at least five journalists have lost their lives and many more suffered harassment from either side in the conflict, should give an idea of the occupational hazard in this extraordinary situation.

Having defined broadly the environment in which the media functions and also the basic outlook with which most media organizations meet the challenge, it is necessary to underline the immediate and grave dangers that confront those in the profession. The following paragraphs provide illustrations of how life threatening certain developments, which in Das' theory may only be symptoms of a deeper malaise, can be. As the critique deserts itself, ULFA (the insurgent) does not make itself felt any longer through the power of discourse. It is forced to clutch on to various non-discursive forms of power. The political critique *per se* has not lost its validity. It has only outlived one of its most powerful agents. Where does this leave the media, which by its very nature, has to tackle and report the problem – whether symptom or disease.

On October 13, 2002, Yambem Meghajit Singh, correspondent of *Vision North East*, was shot dead by unidentified assailants.⁵ Unfortunately, the next day being a

⁵ Singh, who was the vice president of the Manipur Electronic Media Journalists' Union, was killed after reportedly being tortured. He had reportedly criticised insurgent groups and local politicians on his programme

holiday on account of Durga Puja (a Hindu religious festival), the news did not receive the attention it deserved when it did finally appear on October 16 in the local dailies. Today, it is known that the assassination was related to a personal vendetta, and had nothing to do with his journalistic work – but this is hardly a consolation for journalists. The fact also is that the police case in the murder was more or less ‘closed’ even before it was ‘opened’, as has become customary in any death resulting from gun violence in Manipur. Insurgency has become a good cover for police lethargy and incompetence. The case was eventually resolved solely as a result of the dogged pursuit of justice by the family of the murdered journalist, who kept appealing to all who could help: both the State Government as well as the ‘parallel governments’ (insurgents). It does not speak well for the establishment that facts of the case were brought out, not by the Government’s investigative agencies, but by others.

Earlier, on October 8, 2002, two other journalists, Iboyaima Laithangbam, correspondent of *The Hindu*, and Yumnam Arun, correspondent of *Eastern Panorama* were abducted by an insurgent group, the United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF), near Saibon Sinam village, a few kilometres away from Pallel in the Chandel district. They were released unharmed on October 10, 2002, and the only reason given for their abduction was that the media had been giving scant coverage to the concerned group, the UKLF.⁶ There were also the cases of the murder of Lalrohu Hmar, editor of a Hmar newspaper *Shan*, in Churachandpur by a faction of the Hmar People’s Convention (HPC)⁷ on October 10, 1999, and the murder of the *Manipur News* editor, Thounaojam

and had also said that he was going to investigate corruption in Manipur. See *Annual Report (2002) of the Reporters without Borders*, www.rsf.org/artkilled_2002.php?id_article=4148.

⁶ UKLF ‘commander’, Mingthang was later quoted by Laithangbam as saying that the abduction was to protest the ‘poor coverage’ of the UKLF activities. The local newspapers which were not publishing its handouts “properly” might be banned and further, any journalist “captured” in future would face the music, said the ‘commander’. See “Militants release journalists”, *The Hindu*, Chennai, October 11, 2002. Also see “Kidnapping, a thriving business in Manipur”, *Hindu*, April 10, 2003.

⁷ See www.cpj.org/attacks99/asia99/India.html.

Brajamani, by unidentified assailants.⁸ These are some of the many obvious cases of atrocities on the media in Manipur. The trend is that insurgent groups expect newspaper editors to treat every one of their press releases and actions as being extremely newsworthy, and to be printed with little or no editing. Non-compliance has resulted in summons, the threat of physical harm and even diktats warning of the closure of newspapers. Towards the end of 2000, on the call of the All Manipur Working Journalists Union (AMWJU), newspapers in the State even resorted to shutting down their offices for almost a fortnight to protest the unbearable censorship pressure from insurgent groups.

These developments have been painful for conscientious journalists, who believe that the primary worth and legitimacy of their profession lies in its guarantee of the freedom of thought and expression. The pain is not only physical, but also spiritual, for what is being demanded is a surrender of the very independence that this profession values most. It also means a depletion of the moral authority to criticise and bring to account institutional violations of fundamental rights, which has been the media's duty and privilege. If somebody were to ask if the media in Manipur today was free, an honest answer would be 'no'. The media in Manipur is more in the nature of a tightrope walk, having to balance between the demands and pressures of many parallel 'governments' besides the constitutionally elected one headed by Chief Minister, Okram Ibobi. It is also to be noted that, not all these parallel governments are run by insurgent groups. The frequency of *bandhs* (shutdown), blockades of highways, "public curfews", imposed by any and every sundry organization bears evidence to the political pressures under which the system operates. Each such organisation, incidentally, can cause journalists physical harm or force newspapers to shut down.

⁸ Brajamani Singh was killed on August 20, 2000, by two unidentified assailants in the Sagolband area of the State capital, Imphal. Prior to his death, he had received a number of anonymous death threats. In an editorial published the day before the murder, Singh had urged the people who had made the threats to either stop or identify themselves. See "India: Editor murdered in Manipur", www.cpj.org/protests/00ltrs/India21august00pl.html.

An Orwellian Nightmare and the Search for Peace

While the media is not a holy cow, the difficulties it is facing today are only its legitimate share of the burden that has fallen on society, and what Manipuri society confronts today is nothing less than an Orwellian nightmare of totalitarian politics. Many of the terms and phrases George Orwell coined in his *1984* like “Thought Police”, “Double Speak” “Hate Session”, “Big Brother”, are uncannily apt in describing the present social circumstances in Manipur. Freedom of thought and expression and other valued individual liberties that distinguish civilization from the lack of it are being replaced by tough diktats from numerous ‘parallel governments’ in operation in the State, even as the legitimate one slumbers on in slothful and corrupt complacency.

The need of the hour is peace. Of course, what should constitute this peace is a matter that must be thoroughly discussed between all those who have a stake in it. This is what we think the central message is. However, Manipuri society, at this moment in history, seems to be suffering from a multiple split personality, with each part deliriously and myopically obsessed with only its own private agenda, never realising that each of these agendas will be in vain if the larger theme that concerns the whole State is not taken cognisance of. All these private concerns have to converge somewhere otherwise our common or mutual destiny cannot be anything but anarchy. The shutdowns, blockades, strikes, threats, the mindless bloodshed, the bans, the boycotts, the ministry troubles, the reshuffles... all these point to this one conclusion: the engines which should ideally be contributing their mites to take the State forward are all pulling in different directions, taking it nowhere.

When will all this end? When can the ordinary citizen’s primary worry be restricted to providing his or her children a good education and a future and not when or where the next trouble spot will be? When will the Government’s primary concern become the general health of society and not the hypertension resulting out of the perpetual vigil on internal dissension? These are questions asked a thousand times before and have now become hollow because nobody seems really

interested in the answers, not even those who continually ask them. Perhaps it is a matter of being intimidated by the immensity of the problems staring at us. Despite the yearning for peace, nothing seems to be falling into place and all the numerous private agendas remain unsublimated and unreconciled. Manipur is already in the midst of a deep crisis. The administration's writ has faded gradually and there is neither law nor order. Anybody and everybody hold the State to ransom any and every time they want. A melange of violent insurgent groups continues to further their insidious agenda without any hindrance. The highways are infested with brigands and are unsafe. Above all, the disturbing thought that haunts the State is that it no longer has a vision of the future to inspire its present.

Moral Authority Needed

One of the first conditions for good governance to return is for politicians to begin treating politics seriously and to accord it the respect and reverence it deserves. Only when they make an effort to do this, will the people they lead also follow. This will be one giant step towards ensuring political stability, a condition Manipur has been starved of for much too long. The onus of restoring the dignity and moral authority of politics rests solely on the shoulders of the elected leaders. The continued deficit of legitimacy in politics as a people's process has done great harm to the moral authority of the state.

The most basic building block of any successful government is, first and foremost, a moral authority over the people it leads. This is precisely what has been lacking in Manipur's politics all these years. It has, indeed, been a case of the state losing control over its citizens. The result has been predictable – a free-for-all ensues, and the law becomes an irrelevant commodity. Witness the number of strikes, shutdowns and blockades Manipur has been plagued with. Witness also the fact that most of these strikes and boycotts were against Government decrees. This is an indication of the scant respect the establishment commands. For instance, during the strike for employees salary hike on the pattern of the 5th Pay Commission's recommendations for Central Government employees, an important argument by the employees

against the Government's plea of no funds was that the latter was not setting a consistent example.⁹ The State Legislative Assembly had, not long before, unanimously resolved to hike the salaries of legislators,¹⁰ and could hardly argue against extending the same benefit to the Government's employees. When the Government made moves to downsize its work force, the same counter argument applied. The heads put on the chopping blocks did not include those of the top rung employees during President's Rule, and during the last popular ministry, there had been no move at all to down-size the jumbo ministry.¹¹

The Naga Imbrolio

The National Socialist Council of Nagalim – Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) leaders, Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu, were in Delhi in January 2003 to negotiate a solution to the seemingly intractable Naga conflict, an issue that has a huge bearing on peace in Manipur. There is much speculation that a new dawn of peace is in the horizon ending half a century of conflict in Nagaland. But for this to materialise, either both the parties to the negotiations, or one of them, will have to be move away from their stated positions. The two most important as well as difficult issues to negotiate will be 'sovereignty' and '*Greater Nagaland*'.¹² On the issue of sovereignty, one of the sides will

⁹ Pradip Phanjoubam, "Financial Mismanagement in Manipur", *Dialogue*, Delhi, July - September, 2002, vol. 4 no. 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Wahengham Nipamacha Singh of the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), who led a coalition Government between March 2, 2000, and February 14, 2001, had 34 ministers in the 60 member house. 22 of the 23 MSCP legislators and five of the six legislators of the Federal Party of Manipur with whose support MSCP had formed the Government were given ministerial berths. Three of the four breakaway Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) legislators, two of the three breakaway Manipur People's Party (MPP) legislators, a Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) legislator and a woman independent member who supported the coalition ministry were also inducted. It was the biggest ever ministry in the State. See T K Rajalakshmi and Kalyan Chaudhuri, "New governments, old faces", *Frontline*, Chennai, vol. 17, no. 6, March 18 - 31, 2000.

¹² The purported objective of the NSCN-IM is the establishment of a *Nagalim* ('Greater Nagaland'), consisting of all the Naga-inhabited areas of the neighbouring States of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and some portions of Myanmar, which it considers to be the rightful homeland of the Nagas. Slated to be an independent State, *Nagalim* lies in the Patkai range

have to make a compromise. But, within the current negotiating ensemble, both the Union Government and NSCN-IM have stated that the issue is not negotiable. Swu explicitly stated that the NSCN-IM had not abandoned its demand for 'self-determination', and reiterated the position that 'there is no greater or smaller Nagaland', and that Nagaland is 'the place of their (Nagas) natural habitation and they are asking for nothing more and nothing less.'¹³ This position is irreconcilable with that of the other States of the Northeast that share boundaries with Nagaland, and who reject the redrawing of maps in the region, and any transfer of Naga majority areas to a *Nagalim*.¹⁴ The simple conclusion is that, if either thinks its position is not negotiable, there will be no negotiations. The other major issue to be tackled is the question of an integrated Naga homeland. The Government of India's objection to the demand has been, at best, half-hearted, and its mood so far has been determined by the winds of electoral politics. However, the real objections to the idea will come from those different peoples whose own notions of homeland overlap with that of the Nagas. Within this context, it is necessary to ensure that developments in the Naga peace process do not lead to a further polarisation of communities in the region. Unless this happens, the present peace gambit can result in previously unforeseen wars.

On this latter question, it has long been maintained that only an acknowledgement of the inevitability of a shared homeland can solve the problem. To the notion of homeland, we would like to add the much-related notion of *Lebensraum*, or the natural living space that a people or community need, to feel that its peace and security are not threatened. *Lebensraum* does not necessarily mean the immediate area of settlement, but extends into the spheres with which the people in question feel their well being is vitally linked. Hence, a landlocked people will feel the

between 930 and 970 East longitude and 23.50 and 28.30 North latitude at the trijunction of China, India and Myanmar. The proposed *Nagalim* spreads over approximately 1, 20, 000 sq. km. See www.satp.org/India/nagaland/Nagalim.htm.

¹³ Ajai Sahni, "Nagaland: A Very Long War Ends?", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, vol. 1 no. 26, January 13, 2003, South Asia Terrorism Portal. www.satp.org.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

right of way is vital, (objections have been raised against shutdowns along the Tiddim Road that puts the Churachandpur district in difficulties on this count), just as communities living in the lower reaches of a river basin will feel their right to water is vital. Similarly, a valley will feel the surrounding hills are part of its *lebensraum*.

The disarming and disbanding of all insurgent groups is another issue that assumes importance in the light of any proposed negotiated settlement. The ongoing peace process in the northeast, with the NSCN-IM as the principal non-state actor, must also keep this in mind. But, for a stable settlement, it is necessary that everybody must agree to disarm at the same time. The need then is to try and bring in all the militant organisations operating in the region on the same negotiating platform, if peace is to be comprehensive. Peace is not just a matter of the absence of violence. It is also necessarily about removing the potential for violence – namely the uncontrolled possession of weapons. It would be naïve to believe that anybody can be at ease when it is known that a potential opponent is stockpiling arms, even if the latter swears on whatever he or she believes, that the weapons will not be used. Weapons are meant to be used and pretexts will eventually be found for their use at some point or the other. Unless this understanding is clearly understood and acknowledged, Leon Trotsky's dark prophesy will remain a reality: You may not like to go to war, but war will come to you.

Defining Terror and Solving Problems

For a lasting solution to any problem, the solution will have to be defined through a two-way discourse. The quest for peace must necessarily be synonymous with a genuine attempt towards creating a just order of things. This necessitates honest introspection and retrospection. We need to widen the vision of the past, present and the future considerably, and see things within a consensual and democratic perspective. One man's delicacy can very well be another's sacrilege. A middle ground where even these directly opposing points of view can meet has to be created. For violence to end permanently, the residual sense of anger and outrage among all communities, big or small, must first

be put to rest. This cannot mean that the onus of settling these conflicts rests solely on the shoulders of only those on one side of these conflicts. All parties to the conflict will have to engage in a process of give and take. Only such a solution can be honourable for all. Only such a solution can be just and lasting.

One fascinating question posed by philosopher Karl Popper in *All Life is Problem Solving*, opens up interesting new insights in the discussions on the many problems of India's Northeast. It is not a rhetorical question, and Popper himself embarks on a convincing answer in the course of his first essay in the book.¹⁵ If all life is, indeed, about problem solving, what is it that distinguishes the problem-solving mechanism of a rudimentary life form, such as the single cell amoeba and that of, say, Albert Einstein? Filtered down to its very basics, problem solving, as Popper explains, involves, first, the identification of the problem; then the attempts at solving it; and finally arriving at the right answer through a series of eliminations of failed (or false) solutions. As with all who do not believe in a finite world, Popper, of course, adds that the new solution (or theory) will always pose new problems and the cycle of problem solving will continue endlessly. So, to the original question: How does the amoeba differ from Einstein in solving problems? The basic difference says Popper, is that while the amoeba is unable to distance itself from its problem solving strategy, higher primates, to which category Einstein belongs, can and most often do. The result is that the amoeba is part and parcel of its own problem solving strategy so that, if the strategy fails, it perishes with it. Einstein, like other evolved primates, is able to externalise his problem solving theories so that, even if his theories perish, he does not. In fact, Popper's definition of progress and scientific enquiry is the constant attempt to falsify existing theories. Consequently, the belief in the infallibility of theories always results in dogmatism.

The proposition is interesting because we identify a certain strain of thought in the indigenous people's movement in the Northeast region as well as elsewhere in the country and the

¹⁵ Karl Popper, *All Life Is Problem Solving*, New York: Routledge, January 2001.

world, which, if viewed against Popper's definition of problem solving, exhibits a syndrome similar to the one the amoeba suffers from. This school of thought, upheld by many home-grown activists and intellectuals, as well as many non-indigenous champions of the Northeast, argues and seeks to authenticate the supposed non-alienability of the indigenous peoples from their subjective world. The argument (undoubtedly powerful and, more often than not, sentimental) is that the identity of the indigenous man is non objectifiable, as it is deeply rooted in his subjective realm of culture, land, mythology, history, etc. Advocates of this position also discard the Western reductionist, analytical method of approaching problems – a method to which we suppose Popper would adhere – as non-applicable to the indigenous situation, and claiming that the incompatibility exemplifies a clash of cultures. It is, of course, necessary not to oversimplify the problem of identity, but the stubborn refusal to accept a scientific definition of progress and scientific enquiry not only amounts to obscuring reality, but is also dangerous, as the line that divides the subject and the object tends to become confused. The end result can very well be, as in the case of the amoeba that those who set out to solve a problem may themselves become part of the experiment, unaware, so that, in the event that the experiment fails, their own well being is put in jeopardy – or they may even perish.