

भारत के सभी देशवासियों को स्वतंत्रता दिवस के उपलक्ष्य में
फिन्स की ओर से बहुत बहुत हार्दिक शुभकामनाएँ।

जयहिंद

भारत माता की जय



Reflection On Independence Day: Manipur Crisis In Its Appropriate Context – Part - 1

By Manish Barma & Ayushmaan Kalita

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Introduction

Manipur has not exactly been a pleasing place to read or hear about for the past three months. Communal clashes between the Meitei and Kuki communities, who have always had a strained relationship historically, have broken a dangerous threshold today as both, along with their respective armed militias and volunteer groups, have apparently launched several assaults on one another leading to nearly 200 deaths as we write. In what has come to be a lingering and symbolic imagery in this entire saga of conflict in Manipur,

a disturbing video of two Kuki women who were paraded naked and one of them raped and killed, has caused a great deal of shock and distress in the entire country. The legitimate outburst and anger over such incidents aside, it needs to be stressed upon here that this entire region has witnessed several such violent occurrences in the past with each side and community, narrating their own side of the story that needs to be heard as well, lest it gets forgotten in the face of a lopsided and selective coverage by many powerful elements in the media ecosystem along with other important actors who more often than not, use such unfortunate incidents as a smokescreen to further their own inimical agendas that have consequences in so far as inter-community and inter-religious coexistence in a sensitive place like Manipur and other parts of India is concerned.

Additionally, the ramifications that the Indian State has to face as a result of such a crisis especially in the domains of internal security and external geo-politics is something that warrants urgent attention today. Apart from the academic prerogatives that call for serious focus and attention on the current issue, there is another reason why sincerely engaging and studying the myriad layers of this issue is imperative. That reason is the apparent display of cosmetic and pretentious concern by a particular lot towards the crisis in Manipur. Motivated purely by their own fanatical biases against the current Indian government, they probably presume that their own ideological and hollow views on serious issues like national security, illegal immigration, need of surveillance by the state, demographic changes induced by immigration and proselytization among others, that they generally hold, would be forgotten by the common public at large. Hence, this work is a sincere intervention to put things back into memory and perspective. An appraisal of the historical unfolding of the current issue, its broader dynamics that plays out in the form of multiple communities and religious denominations that inhabit the region as well the spatial context and effect of the above mentioned factors in relation to the larger geo-political and geo-strategic developments in the form of India's Act-East policy and a intensifying competition between the United States of America and China, form the crux of this work and places the ongoing issue in an intelligible perspective.

Important political and associated developments in the state since Independence

When Manipur became a full-fledged state in 1972, the first elections were held. Elections were held for 60 members in the state Assembly, with 20 seats in the tribal hill areas and 40 in the valley. The Congress, which has always been the largest party winning elections, dominated Manipur's government until 2017. Even in 2017, the Congress held a larger majority of seats than the BJP, which later formed a coalition to unseat the Congress following the then-chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh's three consecutive terms in office. A Kuki-Naga conflict that lasted from April to December 1993 while Raj Kumar Dorendra Singh of the Congress was the CM of Manipur claimed over 750 lives and destroyed 350 villages. A resolution for Presidential rule was moved in the Rajya Sabha in February 1994. PV Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister, and Shankar Rao Chavan, the then Home Minister, stayed out of the discussion. P.M. Sayeed, MoS, Home replied in the Upper House. According to the MHA, the then PM did not participate in any discussions about the violence in Manipur during those nine months. Rajesh Pilot, the Minister of State for Home Affairs, spoke in Parliament when the violence peaked in August 1993.

One of the most contentious was Congress's Okram Ibobi Singh's uninterrupted 15-year term as CM from 2002 to 2017; there were numerous bandhs, agitations, instances of bloody violence, blockades, and protests like Irom Chanu Sharmila's hunger strike from November 2000 to 2016 calling for the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, that applied to the seven Northeastern states and granted security personnel special powers to detain, arrest, or even shoot suspected insurgents. According to news reports, 1,728 cases of fake encounters were documented during Ibobi Singh's 15-year rule, and the Supreme Court requested an investigation. Manipur's reputation for blockades rose during his administration as well, particularly between 2010 and 2017.

In a year, blockades lasted anywhere between 30 days to 139 days. The blockades resulted in a major humanitarian crisis as the cost of petrol and LPG skyrocketed to Rs 240 and Rs 1,900 per liter, respectively. One of Manipur's worst blockades, which lasted for 123 days, occurred in 2011. At the time, the opposition and members of civil society heavily criticized the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi for remaining silent while Manipur was engulfed in flames.

Inter-Ethnic Composition & Religious Dynamics

The population of Manipur has evolved through several waves of immigration from groups originating from both the East and West of the region. While much of the early history of the state is shrouded in mystery, anthropological assumptions by social scientists place the origin of the state's diverse population to be primarily of the Tibeto-Burman stock. Meiteis are the most numerous of all the ethnic groups in the state and largely inhabit the fertile Imphal valley that sits at the center of the state. Meiteis were originally a set of four different tribes — Khuman, Luwang, Moirang and Meitei. The latter of these tribes was able to exert its influence onto the three other tribes absorbing them to form the modern Meitei ethnicity (Tarapot, 2003). Kukis in the state refers to the Chin tribes that inhabit the Southern Hills and the Kangpokpi region in the Northern Hills. They are relatively much later migrants to the state compared to the Nagas and the Meiteis.

Prior to India's partition in 1947, the Manipur king had promulgated two laws for ensuring the smooth administration of the Imphal Valley and the hill districts. One was the Manipur State Constitution Act for the people of the valley and the other was the Manipur State Hill (Administration) Regulation for hill residents. This was where and how the difference in the administrative setup of both these regions of the state began, and it continued to be operational even after Manipur joined the Union of India in 1972. When Manipur was a Union Territory prior to this, the government body for the hill areas was known as the Standing Committee. But, with the promulgation of the two aforementioned laws, those living in the plains could no longer buy land in the hill areas. After Manipur was granted statehood, the Standing Committee of the hills was renamed the Hill Areas Committee (HAC), entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding the interests of the hill residents of the state. The root of the problem lies in the fact that the current administrative system provides administrative autonomy to the elected Hill Areas Committee. So, the hill residents (Kukis and Nagas) of Manipur have freedom with respect to land and resources, unlike the Meiteis who are the actual indigenous Manipuris, who can only purchase land in the valley regions.

Although the Hindus comprise 42-45% of the total population of Manipur, they reside in a very small area of the state, i.e., hardly 10%. They are largely confined to the Valley area. The Pangals or Manipuri Muslims comprise around 10% of the state's total population. However, the population of Muslims is gradually on the rise in Manipur because of the infiltration of Bangladeshi immigrants from neighboring Assam, Meghalaya, and Mizoram. After Independence, the rise in the numbers and share of Christians was quite steady; but, even in 1951, the share of Christians there at 11.8 percent was the lowest among the Hill States of the Northeast. After 1951, the share of Christians in Manipur has grown consistently and fairly rapidly. Although in 2011, their share of 41.3 percent remained far below their share in Meghalaya, Mizoram or Nagaland, the hill districts of Manipur, which have mainly tribal populations, are almost fully Christian now. Of 11.8 lakh Christians counted in Manipur in 2011, 11.2 lakh are in the Hill Districts and only 59 thousand are in the Valley. On the other hand, of the same 11.8 lakh Hindus in Manipur, 11.0 lakh are in the Valley and only around 77 thousand in the Hill Districts. Christians form a staggering 91.6 percent of the population of the Hill Districts. Thus, contrary to the impression of limited Christian growth in Manipur created by the aggregate numbers for the State, the Christianisation of the Hill Districts is nearly as complete as in Mizoram and Nagaland. Also, the Christianisation of the Scheduled Tribes in Manipur is so complete that among their total population of 11.7 lakh, only 30 thousand are counted as non-Christian.

Year	Population	Christians	% of Christians
1941	5,12,069	25,727	5.02
1951	5,77,635	68,394	11.84
1961	7,80,037	1,52,043	19.49
1971	10,72,753	2,79,243	26.03
1981	14,20,953	4,21,702	29.68
1991	18,37,149	6,26,669	34.11
2001	22,93,896	8,57,285	37.37
2011	28,55,794	11,79,043	41.29

To be continued in next issue

Qin Gang: Fall Of The President's Man

By Shivani Pandey

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It was on 30th December 2022 when Qin Gang, a 57-year-old seasoned diplomat, former Ambassador of China to the United States, and a close confidant of Chinese President Xi Jinping, was appointed as the Foreign Minister of China. He replaced Wang Yi who served in the position from 2013-2022. However, the disappearance of the Minister from 25th June 2023, canceling key meetings including that with EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell, sparked speculations over the internal turmoil within the tight-lipped Chinese Communist Party. Affirming these speculations, on 25th July 2023, Qin Gang was replaced by his predecessor Wang Yi as the top diplomat of the country. Thus, the youngest Foreign Minister of China also became the shortest-serving Foreign Minister of China

Who is the “Warrior Gang”?

Born in 1966 in the city of Tianjin, Qin studied Bachelor of Laws with a major in international politics at the prestigious University of International Relations in Beijing and entered the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1992. Over the years, he held key diplomatic appointments around Europe and the United States. He served as the spokesman of the Foreign Ministry twice between 2006-14 and 2014-18. He has also been serving as State Councillor of China since March 2023.

Qin stood out as a “Wolf-warrior Diplomat” aggressively defending Chinese assertive foreign policy. Over the years, he worked closely with President Xi in organizing his visits overseas. As a sharp-tongued spokesman, he was soon nicknamed “Zhan Gang” or “Warrior Gang”. He was instrumental in the propagation of the Chinese Dream and ambitions abroad, acting in line with President Xi’s instructions by projecting the apparent decline of America and its allies.

The meteoric rise of Qin and his ascendancy to the Ministry is often credited to his closeness to the President who appointed him in the office over his more experienced peers.

Disappearance and Removal

After the meeting with his counterparts from Russia, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka, Qin had not been seen in public since June 25, 2023. Key meetings such as with EU Foreign Policy Chief, US Treasury Secretary, and US Climate Envoy, were either canceled or missed by Minister Qin with ill-health being cited as the reason for sudden absence.

On 25th July 2023, in a session convened by the country's top legislature, it announced the removal of Qin Gang as the Foreign Minister, having been replaced by his predecessor Wang Yi. While he stands removed as the Minister, there has been no announcement yet on his status as the State Councillor.

Speculations over reasons for Qin's removal:

Following Qin's ouster, during a daily briefing in Beijing, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Mao Ning declined to provide any information and reasons behind the sudden turn of events and responded that the matter is being subjected to "malicious hype".

When Qin was absent at the diplomatic meeting in Indonesia between Foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China, the Foreign Ministry cited ill-health and his "physical condition" as the reason. However, observers and experts have speculated both personal and political reasons behind the move. Social media conspiracies have only added fuel to the fire.

One of the reasons mused for the removal of Qin, as buzzed on social media, were rumours of his extramarital affair with a female television presenter, who notably has also suddenly disappeared. Additionally, considering the rapid rise of Qin and his closeness to Xi, coupled with him being the youngest Foreign Minister of China, the likelihood of envy and prejudice among his party colleagues cannot be discounted. As such, the competitors within the CCP might have used this moral indiscretion to pressurize the deposition of the diplomat from office.

[Read complete article on website finsindia.org](https://www.finsindia.org)

The Wagner Group

By Dr. Santhosh Mathew

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The Wagner Group (Russian: Группы Вагнера, tr. Gruppya Vagnera), officially known as PMC Wagner ('Wagner Private Military Company'), is a Russian paramilitary organization that has been involved in various conflicts around the world in support of Russian interests. It is seen as a private army of Yevgeny Prigozhin, a businessman formerly with close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin. It operates in coordination with the Russian Ministry of Defense and receives equipment and training from it.

Formation of Wagner Group

The Wagner Group was first identified in 2014, when it was backing pro-Russian separatist forces in eastern Ukraine during the Crimean crisis and the war in Donbas. It was founded by Dmitry Utkin, a former lieutenant colonel of the Russian special forces who used the nom de guerre "Wagner" after the German composer Richard Wagner. Utkin was allegedly hired by Prigozhin, who is also known as "Putin's chef" for his catering business that serves the Kremlin. Prigozhin has been accused of financing and orchestrating various covert operations and disinformation campaigns

for the Russian government, such as the Internet Research Agency that interfered in the 2016 US presidential election.

Objectives of Wagner Group

The Wagner Group's main objective is to advance Russia's strategic interests and influence in regions where it has geopolitical or economic stakes, such as Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Venezuela and Mali. It also provides security and military training services to governments and entities that are friendly or aligned with Russia, such as South Sudan, Central African Republic and Mozambique. The Wagner Group's activities are often deniable and covert, allowing Russia to avoid direct responsibility and international scrutiny for its involvement in foreign conflicts. The Wagner Group also benefits from lucrative contracts and access to natural resources in exchange for its services.

Functions of Wagner Group

The Wagner Group functions as a hybrid force that combines conventional and unconventional warfare tactics. It employs tens of thousands of fighters, mostly veterans of Russia's elite regiments and special forces, but also recruits from prisons, ethnic minorities and foreign countries. It is equipped with modern weapons and vehicles supplied by the Russian Ministry of Defense, such as tanks, artillery, drones and air Defense systems. It also uses mercenaries, proxies and local militias to augment its ranks and operations. The Wagner Group operates under the command and control of Prigozhin and his associates, who coordinate with the Russian Ministry of Defense and other state agencies. It also receives intelligence, logistical and air support from the Russian military and private contractors. The Wagner Group has a hierarchical structure with several commanders and subunits that are assigned to different regions and missions. Some of its known leaders are Konstantin Pikalov, Andrei Troshev and Mikhail Mizintsev;

Historical Events of Wagner Group

The Wagner Group has been involved in several historical events that have shaped the course of regional and global politics. Some of these events are:

- The Crimean crisis and the war in Donbas (2014-present): The Wagner Group supported the pro-Russian separatist forces that seized Crimea from Ukraine and declared independence as the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic. It also fought against the Ukrainian army in several battles, such as the Il-76 shootdown, the Battle of Debaltseve and the Battle of Popasna.
- The Syrian civil war (2015-present): The Wagner Group intervened in Syria on behalf of the Syrian government led by Bashar al-Assad against various rebel groups and terrorist organizations. It participated in several offensives and campaigns, such as the Latakia offensive, the Palmyra offensive, the Central Syria campaign, the Deir ez-Zor offensive, the Rif Dimashq offensive and the Operation Dawn of Idlib. It also helped secure strategic assets and locations, such as oil fields, military bases and ports.
- The Second Libyan Civil War (2019-present): The Wagner Group sided with the Libyan National Army led by Khalifa Haftar against the internationally recognized Government of National Accord and its allies. It deployed hundreds of fighters, drones and air Defense systems to support Haftar's offensive to capture Tripoli, the capital of Libya. It also fought for control of key oil facilities and infrastructure in the country.
- The Sudanese Revolution (2019): The Wagner Group provided security and military training to the Sudanese government led by Omar al-Bashir, who faced mass protests and a coup d'état by his own army. It also helped suppress the demonstrations and protect al-Bashir's allies and assets.
- The Venezuelan presidential crisis (2019-present): The Wagner Group deployed dozens of operatives to Venezuela to protect the embattled president Nicolás Maduro, who faced a challenge

from the opposition leader Juan Guaidó, who declared himself as the interim president with the support of the US and several other countries. It also helped Maduro's loyalists to counter potential threats and coup attempts.

- The Insurgency in Cabo Delgado (2020-present): The Wagner Group assisted the Mozambican government in fighting against an Islamist insurgency in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, where a massive natural gas project is being developed. It provided training, equipment and air support to the Mozambican army and police, but also faced resistance and attacks from the insurgents.
- The Mali War (2020-present): The Wagner Group signed a contract with the transitional government of Mali, which came to power after a military coup in 2020, to provide security and military training services. It deployed hundreds of fighters and instructors to Mali, where they are expected to train and mentor the Malian army and counter-terrorism forces in their fight against jihadist groups and separatist rebels.

Contemporary News of Wagner Group

The Wagner Group has recently been in the news for several reasons, such as:

- The Wagner Group rebellion (2023): The Wagner Group's leader Yevgeny Prigozhin announced a rebellion against the Russian government and threatened to march on Moscow to force out Russia's defense minister Sergei Shoigu, whom he accused of corruption and incompetence. He claimed that he had the support of thousands of Wagner troops in Ukraine, who were dissatisfied with their treatment and pay by the Russian military. However, after a swift intervention by President Putin, who promised to punish those who had "betrayed" Russia, Prigozhin agreed to a deal that would see him move to Belarus with his loyal troops. Those who wished to could sign contracts to join the regular Russian armed forces. It remains unclear whether Prigozhin will remain in charge of any mercenaries and - if so - where they will be based.
- The Moura Massacre (2023): The Wagner Group was accused of committing a massacre in the town of Moura in Mali, where it allegedly killed dozens of civilians, including women and children, who were suspected of collaborating with the jihadists. The incident sparked outrage and condemnation from human rights groups, the UN and several countries, who called for an investigation and accountability. The Malian government denied any involvement or knowledge of the massacre, while the Wagner Group claimed that it was a false flag operation by its enemies.
- The designation as a terrorist group (2023): Several countries have designated the Wagner Group as a terrorist group for its involvement in various atrocities and violations of international law. These countries include Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine and the US. They have imposed sanctions and restrictions on the Wagner Group's members, assets and activities, and have called for other countries to follow suit. They have also warned that any cooperation or support for the Wagner Group would be considered as complicity in terrorism. The Wagner Group is a Russian paramilitary organization that has played a significant role in several conflicts around the world in support of Russia's interests. It is seen as a private army of Yevgeny Prigozhin, a businessman formerly with close ties to Putin. It operates in coordination with the Russian Ministry of Defense and receives equipment and training from it. It functions as a hybrid force that combines conventional and unconventional warfare tactics. It employs tens of thousands of fighters from various backgrounds and sources. It has been involved in several historical events.

Yoga, Technology, and Security - Part 2

By Uday Kumar Varma

Author is a former Secretary, Information and Broadcasting, GOI

Beyond Yoga; Technology and Security Seal Ties

Even if the grand show of 21st June at UN Headquarters is so gracelessly underplayed by some in India, the range of agreements and understandings reached during Modi's visit are enormous and unprecedented.

While trade conventionally finds primacy in such visits and the agreement to terminate six outstanding disputes at the World Trade Organization was a big gain, it were areas of advanced technology and defence that made the visit so different and so remarkable.

These areas comprise the forefronts of technology, significant security tie-ups and in their range encompass the stars and the seas.

The effort to make India a hub of semi-conductor manufacturing got a big boost when U.S. memory chip firm Micron Technology announced its intended investment up to \$825 million in a new chip assembly and test plant in Gujarat, its first factory in India. The investment will scale up to \$2.75 billion with Government of India and the state of Gujarat joining hands. U.S. semiconductor toolmaker Applied Materials (AMAT.O) is set to invest \$400 million over four years in a new engineering centre in India.

The other significant area relates to Drones. India is set to procure 31 armed MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones made by General Atomics worth over \$3 billion. These MQ-9Bs will be assembled in India in new facilities to be established by them.

But the really historic agreement has materialised in the area of Fighter Jet manufacturing. General Electric's aerospace unit has signed an agreement with India's state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd to make fighter jet engines for the Indian Air Force. This landmark arrangement includes the potential joint production of GE Aerospace's F414 engines in India to be used to power Tejas fighter jets.

In a long-term perspective, the agreement to work together for the creation of logistic, repair, and maintenance infrastructure for aircraft and vessels in India and the launch of the India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X), a network of universities, start-ups, industry and think tanks, is a huge initiative. To begin with, Boeing will invest \$100 million on infrastructure and programmes to train pilots in India, supporting the country's need for 31,000 new pilots over the next 20 years. Boeing also announced its completion of a C-17 aftermarket support facility for MRO and a new parts logistics center in India.

India's National Quantum Mission will find support from US on Advanced Computing. A Joint Indo-U.S. Quantum Coordination Mechanism to facilitate joint research between the public and private sectors across both countries has been put in place, unleashing endless possibilities. A \$2-million grant programme for joint development of AI and jointly funded research projects on cybersecurity is another hallmark.

Likewise, in the area of space exploration India agreed to join the U.S.-led Artemis Accords on space exploration and to work with NASA on a joint mission to the International Space Station in 2024.

A less publicised but far-reaching outcome was India joining the US led Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), to create reliable supply chains of critical energy minerals like Lithium and Cobalt. India will join 12 other partner countries, plus the European Union. India's Epsilon Carbon Limited will invest \$650 million in a greenfield electric vehicle battery component factory, hiring over 500 employees over the course of five years.

The area of green energy found an unprecedented pitch. For the first time, an Indian company Vikram Solar Ltd is partnering an investment in a U.S. solar energy supply chain, beginning with a factory in Colorado next year. The newly formed company, VSK Energy LLC, will pump in \$ 1.5 Billion to aid the U.S. push to build a clean energy manufacturing sector to compete with China. Another platform aimed at accelerating cooperation in green hydrogen, offshore and onshore wind, and other emerging technologies was also announced.

In non-technology area, an instantly visible understanding was about Visa renewals and facilitating the Indians coming to US. The State Department has announced that a small number of Indians and other foreign workers on H-1B visas will be able to renew those visas in the U.S. without having to travel abroad, part of a pilot program that could be expanded in coming years. New US consulates in Bengaluru and Ahmedabad and an Indian consulate in Seattle were also announced.

Historic Visit

The implications and the impact of the announcements made during Modi's visit are monumental and unprecedented. No corner of human enterprise had been left untouched by the partnership between the two nations. From the seas to the stars, this partnership will now be deepened by the defining role of technology.

The Joint Statement was unequivocal. "From expanding bilateral technology partnership with a focus on tech-sharing and co-production to creating first of its kind platforms on financing renewables and closer industry tie-ups on space, the strategic global tie-ups are aimed at keeping India and the US "as the closest partners in the world".

The echo of a definitive incorporation of the key Indian demand of greater technology sharing, while also ensuring co-development, and co-production opportunities was unmistakable. The chosen areas of inter alia AI, Quantum technology, Advanced Computing, and Space underlined the vision and foresightedness of the two leaderships.

In fact, the term 'technology' was mentioned as many as 44 times in the joint statement. It had found just five mentions the last time both nations released a joint statement, back in February 2020.

A Bright Future

Prime Minister Modi has given a new dimension, a new direction, and a new dynamism to Indo-US ties. Its implications may take a while to unfold, but a firm foundation has been laid based on an acceptance that India is an emerging superpower on the world stage. It also conveys a message, loud and clear, that India has arrived, and this century is likely to be known as India's century.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.

India is Proud of:

Dattu Agrawal

Founder of Matoshree Ambubai Residential School, Kalaburgai, Karnataka



After losing his vision at the age of 3, Dattu Agarwal started Matoshree Ambubai Residential School at Kal;aburgai, Karnataka, for blind girls to give free education, shelter, and more to 75 girls living with visual impairments.

"Who, if not myself?" remained an ever-present query that fueled the determination of Dattu Agarwal, now 66 years old. Living with visual impairment, Dattu consistently pondered over the lives of individuals akin to his own.

Presently, he is a guardian and teacher to 75 girls living with visual impairment. Within the precincts of his boarding school nestled in Kalaburagi, Karnataka, these girls are provided with more than just academic instruction — they are also given clothing, shelter, and a chance at life.

Born and raised in Kalaburagi, Dattu suffered a bout of pneumonia at the age of three, which led to his visual impairment.

After completing his schooling, Dattu went on to study political sciences in Gulbarga University. “In 1985, I started to teach in the same university. I taught political science for more than 35 years,” he says.

While Dattu progressed in his life, he never felt that his impaired vision was like a disability to him. For others, he notes, this was not the case. “Comments like ‘What will he do now?’ and ‘He is disabled and will be a burden’ were quite common. Such comments take a toll on your mental health too. I wanted to create an environment where there is no such prejudice,” he says.

He started saving and brainstorming ideas to help people with visual impairments.

“In 1990, I laid the foundation of a trust by the name Hyderabad Karnataka Disabled Society. Under this, I also founded a residential school for visually impaired girls. The girls belong to underprivileged sections of society.” Says Dattu

He the school Matoshree Ambubai Residential School for Blind Girls after his mother. “It was my mother who was my backbone and biggest supporter. Whenever voices from the society became too much, she would rescue me and remind me that I can do anything if I wanted to,” he recalls.

Dattu provides free education, clothing, food and shelter to 75 girls with visual impairment; Picture credit: Dattu Agarwal

When Dattu started the school, he had only four girls with him. “I went to villages in Kalaburagi district to talk to parents and tell them about the school. The parents did not want to send their girls to blind school because they feared for their safety,” he says.

The girls at Dattu’s school are from six districts — Kalaburagi, Bidar, Yadgir, Raichur, Koppal and Bellary.

“Initially, we intervened and went to villages to find girls with visual impairments who needed help, but within a few months, the scenario changed. People would hear about us and approach us directly,” he informs.

“Apart from following the regular syllabus, we also train them in sports and music. This gives them more options and passions to follow when they move out of the school,” he adds.

Among them is Idhma, who wants to be a lawyer. “My parents found out about Dattu sir’s school when we were at an eye camp in Hyderabad. I moved to the school and joined Class 7. Initially I missed my home, but everyone here helped me settle in. I want to study harder and become independent so that I can help my parents out financially,” she says.

Besides following the Karnataka Board syllabus, the girls are also trained in music and sports; Picture credit: Dattu Agarwal

Reflecting on his journey, Dattu says, “I believe that the turn of events when I was a child and everything that followed in my life was fate. My life would have been very different if I had not lost my vision back then.”

Dattu Agrawal has proved anyone with sensitivity can do excellent work for society.

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