

## Reflection On Independence Day: Manipur Crisis In Its Appropriate Context – Part - 2

**By Manish Barma & Ayushmaan Kalita**

Manish Barma is a Doctoral candidate at the Centre for European Studies, School of International Studies, JNU.

Ayushmaan Kalita holds a master’s degree in political science from the University of Delhi.

### Security concerns

In multiple research conducted till date the influx of small arms and light weapons and linkages with narco trade and human trafficking in this fragile state has been noticed. The inability to resolve these issues has led to several ethnic groups among themselves. At one point, Manipur saw the existence of 60 armed groups as per a statement from the then Governor of the state VK Duggal in February 2014. A reporter of The Statesman from Manipur, Yambem Laba, highlights: “The fastest growing industry in Manipur is insurgency. There are established liberation groups carrying on the struggle for more than three decades now” (Laba, 1995). As per the latest data available, before the eruption of fresh violence in Manipur in May this year, the overall security situation in the North-eastern states had improved substantially between 2014 and 2022 as compared to 2005-2013, with an 86 percent reduction in insurgency incidents (2005-13: 1,472, 2014-22: 201). A decline of civilian deaths within the same percentage range (83%) had been noticed as per the same data (2005-13: 629; 2014-22: 102). Security forces personnel deaths, meanwhile, came down by over 65 percent (2005-13: 209, 2014-22: 72).

Currently, giving in to popular demand, the AFSPA has been withdrawn from 19 police station areas in seven Manipur districts.

| Year  | Incidents of insurgency | Civilians | Security Forces Personnel |
|-------|-------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| 2005  | 203                     | 140       | 51                        |
| 2006  | 195                     | 74        | 38                        |
| 2007  | 257                     | 130       | 58                        |
| 2008  | 309                     | 113       | 10                        |
| 2009  | 276                     | 76        | 19                        |
| 2010  | 90                      | 29        | 6                         |
| 2011  | 42                      | 23        | 9                         |
| 2012  | 67                      | 23        | 12                        |
| 2013  | 33                      | 21        | 6                         |
| Total | 1,472                   | 629       | 209                       |

Table 2: Overall fatalities during the UPA years

| Year  | Incidents of insurgency | Civilians | Security Forces Personnel |
|-------|-------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| 2014  | 36                      | 22        | 10                        |
| 2015  | 52                      | 18        | 24                        |
| 2016  | 25                      | 14        | 13                        |
| 2017  | 37                      | 23        | 9                         |
| 2018  | 21                      | 7         | 7                         |
| 2019  | 7                       | 4         | 0                         |
| 2020  | 4                       | 1         | 3                         |
| 2021  | 12                      | 8         | 5                         |
| 2022  | 7                       | 5         | 1                         |
| Total | 201                     | 102       | 72                        |

Table 3: Overall fatalities under the current NDA government

### Act East Policy and Regional Setting

India's Northeast is the "cultural and physical link" between India and the region of East Asia and Southeast Asia (Thomas, 2017). This assertion by Joshua Thomas, an eminent social scientist who is a regular observer of matters pertaining to Northeast India, summarizes the symbolic visualization of Act East policy vis-à-vis the larger framework of India's external affairs policy and the special position which the region holds in this setting. The following couple of factors show how the Northeast India is fundamental to the larger success of the Act East policy:

- The border region is relatively less developed, remote and isolated and where most of its inhabitants are remarkably diverse in terms of both ethnic and religious composition, both inter as well as intra-region.
- Northeast India has been disadvantaged ever since the partition of India happened. Infrastructures of communication that existed from the village to the regional levels suffered obstruction which led to the remoteness of the region.

Initiated under former Prime Minister late Narasimha Rao in 1991, India's Look East Policy- the predecessor to the Act East Policy- was launched to address the issue of backwardness of India's North-eastern region in tune with the overall foreign policy objective to deepen engagement with nations in Southeast and East Asia. Subsequently, the Look East Policy was upgraded and renamed as the Act East Policy in 2014 by the Narendra Modi government. This upgraded and revamped policy initiative encompasses within its purview a bigger stretch in terms of geography (going all the way up to the nations in the Pacific Islands) and a fresh focus on the hitherto neglected Northeast which borders Myanmar, an ASEAN member. It can hence be deduced as a logical corollary that the existing issues of the northeast, like the current crisis in Manipur, be accorded priority and located in a proper and larger context, separating it from infantile and pretentious discourses, farcical shows of sympathy to settle political scores and largely, narratives, which under the guise of correct sounding platitudes, are eventually inimical to the communities and the centuries old faiths and customs of the people. Putting it across in a broader context, Sahni (2019) states that ensuring effective links of communication within the region and further towards Southeast Asia is an absolute necessity. The fact that the Southeast Asian Nations Association is the fifth largest trading partner of India only underscores the vitality of these links of communication. Enhanced economic cooperation is also a natural extension of the centuries old cultural ties shared between the particular regions and India and Southeast Asia as a whole.

And unlike previous regimes in New Delhi, the Modi government is walking the talk in so far as bringing about a positive and visible development in the overall profile of the region is concerned. Beginning from orderly and enhanced connectivity to a rapid increase in the pace of infrastructural development, the Northeast has seen unparalleled progress in the past few years. To talk about examples, projects like the four laning of Imphal to Moreh section of NH-39 (image below), inauguration of a 'Water Transmission system of Thoubal Multi-purpose project' in Manipur, to the inauguration of the first All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in the region at Guwahati in Assam, are among the numerous other projects that are either seeing or nearing.

completion, in a timely manner (Dasgupta, 2023). All of this is in line with the long-term policy goals of the current Union government that seeks to not just accelerate economic development but also mitigate and reduce inter-regional disparity between different regions of the country.

The vast resources and potential of the region remains underused primarily due to lack of security arising out of militant activities. The current quagmire in Manipur is a result of the festering mistrust between the state's two largest communities- Meiteis and Kukis. The schismatic demands by Kuki militant groups threaten the very accord of the neighboring states as well as of Manipur. This has eventually led today to a spirited and protectionist campaign in Manipur steered by the Meiteis for their fundamental rights as well as the territorial integrity of not just Manipur but India in the long term. A common denominator in most of such movements is the use to violence to assert authority, seize political control and at times even reap unjust financial returns from the critical resources of the region. Talking about resources and geography in the larger context of geo-politics, Singh (2021) states that most of these insurgent movements have had direct and indirect support from foreign powers that in collusion with their associates in India, seek to stem its growth and developmental potential by perpetually keeping it occupied with managing internal insurgencies. In a world witnessing altering geo-political and geo-strategic equations, accelerated by a global pandemic and armed conflicts and tensions in various regions, a brief reading of the US-China power play would serve us well.

### **Big Power Machinations: A New Cold War?**

The Act East Policy also emerged as a vital foreign affairs motif of India, due to an altered global scenario at the cessation of the Cold War in the 1990s. The rise of regional associations around the world and an increasingly assertive China and its ever-expanding presence in the Southeast Asian region were and are the other causal factors that has been shaping responses by New Delhi of late. A new phase of renewed hostilities or a 'Fresh Cold War' seems to have been kindled between the two major powers in the world today- USA and China- being played out in different geographical locations of the world. Talking about geography, the largely porous border between Myanmar and India has allowed insurgent to run camps based in Myanmar. Despite Myanmar's government's own actions against these groups (seen in figure below), these groups continue to find safe havens there (MHA, 2022). Myanmar's long-running political instability and logistical compulsions could well allow powers like China and USA to exploit the situation to their respective interest. Interestingly, despite their stated world views and outward appearance of hostility, a mutual interest of theirs could well be the derailment of India's economic progress and resumption of communication and cultural links with the countries of Southeast Asia, with Myanmar as the transit. Both China and America's involvement in the region should alert New Delhi, if one goes by the characteristic machinations of both the states. In this plausible set-up, the role and imminent inevitability of a country like Japan needs to be stated here. Japan happens to be the prime investor for India in the Northeast. Japan's increasing cooperation and growing proximity with India has led to caustic reactions from the Chinese state. As a country that has world-class technological expertise, Japan, of late, has been visibly shedding its earlier policy of 'pacifism' and is gearing for a more proactive and independent role in the Indo-Pacific and the East Asian region. This portends well for the region as both India and Japan, in the coming six to seven years shall,

in all likelihood, start providing the Southeast and East Asian region with a much-needed hedge against the disquieting machinations of powers like the USA and China.



Figure: Myanmar government asking its nationals in Manipur to not interfere in any matters of the Indian state.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Unity Government

## Conclusion

The prevailing doctrine of the methodology of operations by the security forces aside, there is a need to relook at the concept of security in the wake of immense changes we witness today around us. And part of that change should be accorded serious consideration to the realities of ‘demography’ in specific places of India today and devise strategies accordingly. The scourge of religious conversions must not be overlooked in the face of loud, dishonest and funded campaigns around non-existent tropes like ‘majoritarian fascism’ whereas ground realities show the opposite. As regards the state of Manipur, the carrying-out and implementation of a National Register of Citizens should be given urgent priority as at the root of the present conflict lies the unabated influx of illegal immigrants from Myanmar, specially from the last few years. Kuki immigrants from there have been settling down on uninhabited tracts of lands--mostly forests--in the hills and cultivating poppy as well as other crops there. A state used to a long history of violence; Manipur will surely hobble back to normalcy again. It, however, needs to be rescued from specious narratives and theatrics by those who have been primarily responsible for keeping it and rest of the Northeast underdeveloped and literally wiping it and its history from the popular conscience of the nation, something that is seeing a welcome reversal today.

---

## Why Protecting India’s Forests Should Be A Part Of National Security

By Ravi Chellam

Author is CEO, Metastring Foundation and Coordinator, Biodiversity Collaborative

*With only 21 per cent of India’s land area having forest cover and even more worryingly, only 12.37 per cent intact natural forest, we have a long way to go to meet our target of 33 per cent forest cover.*

At least from the early 1970s, there has been a growing realisation of both the environmental damage that humans are collectively causing and the impact this is having on our lives. For example, extensive wildfires, prolonged and intense heat waves, extreme rainfall events, powerful and more frequent cyclones, rampant loss of biodiversity and the unravelling of ecosystems have all, and in many cases synergistically, impacted the lives of billions of people. Premature deaths, increasing incidence of diseases, destruction of built infrastructure, declining soil fertility, and decreasing quality of air and water are a short list of the impacts we are suffering. Globally, the response has included dozens of multilateral environmental agreements committing to the time-bound reversal of these trends. Many countries, especially India, have put in place strong policies and laws to protect the environment and restore it.

It is in this context that I am deeply concerned about the government's Forest Conservation Amendment Bill, 2023, which was passed in the Lok Sabha earlier this week. With only 21 per cent of India's land area having forest cover and even more worryingly, only 12.37 per cent intact natural forest, we have a long way to go to meet our target of 33 per cent forest cover. Additionally, the most biodiversity-rich part of the country, the northeastern states, show a net decline of 3,199 sq km of forest cover from 2009-2019 and much of the marginal increase in forest cover is in the form of commercial plantations and urban parks. These cannot replace the ecological functions performed by intact natural ecosystems.

The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 along with the Supreme Court's 1996 order in T N Godavarman vs Union of India have provided a strong basis for the protection of natural ecosystems. What is required is better and more effective implementation. Why try to fix something that is not broken? Especially when this legal framework has served us well.

My broad concerns are: Reclassification of forest areas; exemptions for projects near border areas and for security purposes; exemptions for zoos, safari parks and ecotourism activities, and disempowering local communities.

Let me explain these briefly. By stating that the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) will only apply to areas recorded as "forest" in government records, as on or after October 25, 1980, I fear that the amendment will invalidate the SC's 1996 judgment in T N Godavarman. The Court has interpreted the meaning of forest as its dictionary definition, expanding the purview of the FCA over all forests and not restricting it to only officially declared tracts. If these areas are declassified, it will result in thousands of sq. km of forests losing legal protection. The scale of the potential disaster is humungous, as 1,97,159 sq. km of our forests lie outside Recorded Forest Areas, implying that 27.62 per cent of our total forest cover of 7,13,789 sq. km is at risk of losing legal protection.

It is proposed to remove the necessity of forest clearances for security-related infrastructure within 100 km of international borders. These areas are home to some of the most ecologically important ecosystems, including the forests of the Northeast, the high-altitude deserts of Ladakh and Spiti, the alpine forests and grasslands of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, and the open scrub and desert ecosystems in the west. While recognising the need for military security, it is equally if not more important to recognise that ecological security is a critical part of national security and central to the well-being of our citizens. Hence, the need for fast-tracking should not result in the complete elimination of the need for environmental appraisal and taking informed and balanced decisions.

Our natural ecosystems play a crucial role in buffering against increasingly unpredictable weather patterns caused by climate change. The loss of natural ecosystems will result in greater human displacement and heightened internal security risks.

A zoo or a safari park is not a forest. Natural ecosystems are complex functional units and once destroyed, it is very difficult to restore them. Science is still trying to understand how these function. Zoos and safari parks are built by humans with the objectives of ex-situ conservation,

education and recreation. It is absolutely inappropriate to clear and by implication destroy natural ecosystems to build them. Instead, we should aim to establish science-based and world-class conservation centres away from forested sites. While eco-tourism can be an important ancillary activity to generate employment, it is not correct to exempt it from clearances as it indicates that tourism will take priority over nature. In many cases, ecotourism projects have resulted in large-scale construction, which has negatively impacted natural ecosystems.

A provision allowing the central government to exempt clearance for “any other purposes”, could have disastrous consequences, as this could open the door to a whole host of activities on forest land that will no longer require clearances.

[Read complete article on website indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)

---

## Hospitality, Not Hostility

**By Masood Lohar**

The Author is an expert on climate change and development, and founder of the Clifton Urban Forest.

THE exodus of Pakistan’s brain capital paints a worrying picture of its future landscape. If this trend continues, the nation could be left with a dearth of skilled professionals, leading to a population dominated by drug addicts, criminals, semi-educated clerks and prayer leaders.

According to official data, a staggering 400,000 plus Pakistanis, with a quarter of them highly trained professionals, departed from the country within just the first half of the current year.

This trend mirrors previous years, with over 700,000 leaving in 2022, more than 600,000 in 2019, and 500,000 during the pandemic-impacted years of 2020-2021. Among those departing are engineers, doctors, and IT professionals. This obviously needs immediate attention.

The rationale for this brain drain is multifaceted. It’s challenging to attract investment due to Pakistan’s debt-ridden economy, with external debt reaching \$131 billion in 2023-24.

The country faces challenges such as terrorism, climate emergencies, and natural disasters. Moreover, Pakistan also has appointed itself as the ‘fortress of Islam’ — the last standing warrior of the faith. The concerning question is, what if things fall apart because of basic socioeconomic reasons?

With a median age of 23, approximately 63 per cent of the population falls within the age group of 15 to 30 years. This comes at a time when Europe’s population is aging, with a median age of 44, while the US has a median age of 39.

This young population is a significant asset that should be leveraged effectively. Alongside human capital, sectors such as tourism have been overlooked, despite Pakistan’s abundant potential.

The country offers rich historical, scenic and religious sites, including pilgrimage spots for Hindus, Sikhs and Sufis. It features globally acclaimed Pakistani cuisine, diverse community-made handicrafts, and vibrant village-based music and dance forms.

By promoting foreigner-friendly and quality tourism, Pakistan has the potential to earn foreign exchange and generate micro-economies across the nation.

Home to two of the world’s 10 highest mountain peaks and a coastline of 1,365 kilometres, Pakistan presents a mesmerising variety of natural wonders, each more captivating than the other.



The country's allure ranges from the snow-clad peaks calling out to adventurers worldwide to enjoy the unique wildlife and spellbinding valleys. The nation also echoes the whispers of ancient civilisations through historical monuments spanning millennia.

Pakistan has not put its natural, cultural and historical assets to good use.

However, despite its cultural richness, historical significance, scenic beauty and heritage, Pakistan lags behind its Asian neighbours. The World Bank's 2021 data shows tourism contributing to 12.6pc, 6.7pc and 4.6pc of GDP in Sri Lanka, Nepal and India respectively; Pakistan's was 2.7pc. Remarkably, smaller Sri Lanka and Nepal have done far better than Pakistan in this sector.

Pakistan has not gone unnoticed in the global travel arena. In 2018, it was ranked as the top adventure travel destination by the British Backpacker Society and hailed as one of the world's friendliest countries with awe-inspiring mountain landscapes. Forbes acknowledged Pakistan as one of the "coolest places" to visit in 2019.

The World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report recognised Pakistan's remarkable world heritage sites, placing it in the top 25pc globally. In 2020, Condé Nast Traveller honoured Pakistan as the 'Best Holiday Destination' and acknowledged its potential as an adventure destination.

Compared with other countries, if Egypt can earn \$10.75bn in 2022 from tourism, and Thailand can earn \$16bn from its extensive coastline, Pakistan too can capitalise on its historical sites like Mohenjodaro and the picturesque beaches of Sindh and Balochistan. Global beach tourism alone reached \$145bn in 2022, highlighting the underutilised coastline of Pakistan.

Pakistani archaeological sites, such as Hindu temples, Sikh sites, ancient Buddhist sites and Sufi shrines, have untapped potential to attract tourists from neighbouring countries and the global diaspora. Additionally, prehistoric rock carving sites and rugged forts like Ranikot Fort, which is known as a 'mini-China wall', also offer unique experiences.

This potential does not need the additional crutch of government funding. The ever hospitable and entrepreneurial nature of our nation will take care of showing the world the beautiful side of this most misunderstood and distrusted country.

Pakistan, strangely, falls in the category of hard-to-get visa countries. Opening doors to all types of tourism at least sounds better and less worrying than leasing out airports, seaports and other key national assets.

The writer is an expert on climate change and development, and founder of the Clifton Urban Forest, Karachi.

**Courtesy Dawn Newspaper (Pakistan)**

---

## **India And Its Significance In The Maritime Sector**

**By Dr.Santhosh Mathew**

The writer is Associate Professor at Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies & Social Sciences, Pondicherry Central University.

India's coastline is 7,517 kilometres long, and nine of those kilometres are coastal states with several ports that annually handle about 1,400 million tonnes of cargo. Due to its peninsular location, India has historically had maritime ties that have influenced trade, religion, and culture; these early ties, however, have since deteriorated. The emphasis of India's international outreach has shifted nearly exclusively to the continent, particularly after independence. The liberalisation changes of the 1990s can be seen as a turning point in India's priorities since they gave port development more priority and elevated the country's marine position on the national agenda.

Since 2014, when national policies were put in place to promote the development of the marine industry, a greater emphasis has been placed on expanding maritime capacity and outreach.

Early in the 1990s, policy directives and naval engagements started to take shape and grow, but it wasn't until the second part of the decade that the discourse about these connections took off. The range and quantity of players participating in the conversation about maritime geopolitics, trade, infrastructure, ecology, and defence have increased recently. The geographical peninsula of India separates the eastern and western sides of the Indian Ocean. This affects the nation's strategic considerations, policy stances, and naval deployment on both sides of the peninsula. The Indian Ocean's peninsular shape distinguishes it from the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, according to prominent historian K.M. Panikkar, who wrote on this in the 1940s. Asia acts as a landmass to cover this ocean expanse. He emphasised the significance of the Indian Ocean for the nation by referring to it as a "landlocked sea" and urged the establishment of the necessary maritime strength to take advantage of the opportunities it presents and exert influence in difficult situations. Panikkar agrees with the Mahanian axiom in his writings. India's marine interests increased dramatically as a result of the reforms that started in the early 1990s and as the country developed as a trading power.

As New Delhi became more involved with its neighbourhood, it became clearer how important it was to rekindle old maritime relations on a political and economic level. India's current maritime imperative is comparable to that of the US at the turn of the 20th century when that country turned to the sea for global markets and to exercise its maritime capabilities. China, too, emerged at the start of the 21st century as the world's workshop and declared its maritime destiny, pledging to build a blue water navy and uphold what it saw as its maritime rights.

To support overall defence and trade growth, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized the importance of the marine industry and the need for a certain level of sea defence. India did not have the necessary economic or industrial resources at the time to fully realise a powerful marine presence. Nehru was unwilling to relate India's regional foreign policy to maritime power. In actuality, the naval budget was cut following the 1962 battle with China, and the navy played a smaller part in the 1965 fight. Acquisitions from the former USSR began to aid in the navy's force expansion in the 1960s. The Navy then went on to play a crucial role in the war of 1971, the INS Vindhyagiri was sent to Seychelles in 1986 to assist in putting down a coup and the navy assisted in the 1988 rescue of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom from Male. When India asserted its role by mediating regional conflicts in the IOR, one can see how sea power and foreign policy objectives are related in this instance. An increased focus on maritime issues in policy over the past ten years has had a considerable impact on diplomatic outreach in the immediate area as well as the larger Indian Ocean region. The conviction and understanding that the nation's geographic advantage must be used to establish maritime links and strengthen security networks are arguably more deeply ingrained today than ever before. As it has developed unique ties with important partners around the IOR, New Delhi has been increasingly conscious of the need to provide public goods in the marine realm. It has helped smaller littoral nations manage their exclusive economic zones during natural catastrophes. The Maritime Vision 2030 is the most recent version of the government's marine development blueprint, together with the SAGAR initiative.

### **What is the significance of National Maritime Day and why such recognition?**

It is important to recognise the reasoning behind the formulation of such a day. Apart from the facts and figures stated above, there is a lot of emphasis going on the Blue Economy. Gunther Pauli's book Blue Economy has taken the world by storm. The book emphasises the potential advantages of connecting and fusing unrelated environmental issues with open-source scientific solutions based on physical processes found in the natural world, to produce solutions that are advantageous for the environment as well as for the economy and larger society.



The book makes the case that by shifting our attention away from the use of scarce materials with high energy costs and towards simpler, cleaner technology, we can change how we manage our industrial processes and address environmental issues. Instead of focusing solely on cost reduction, the book suggests concentrating on the creation of extra value. The book tries to motivate businesspeople to embrace its insights by illuminating how doing so can generate economic benefits through the creation of jobs, less energy use, and increased revenue streams from each stage of the process while also benefiting the local communities involved. In layman's terms, the term refers to Term "blue economy" describes the ethical exploitation of marine resources for transportation, exploration, and economic development while protecting the well-being of marine and coastal ecosystems. The complete system of ocean resources and all man-made economic infrastructure in marine, maritime, and onshore coastal zones that are subject to national legal authority are together referred to as India's blue economy. To increase public understanding of the economy and international trade, the inaugural celebration of the day was organised in 1964. The day is observed to promote the world economy and shows appreciation for the Indian navy.

### **G20 Presidency and Blue Economy**

The fact that the Blue Economy (BE) has a different meaning for the global south than it does for the global north reinforces the necessity of the BE for India's G20 presidency. This distinction is frequently not well understood. India's assumption of the G20 presidency from Indonesia is important because it places India in the middle of the trio of countries from the global south that will preside over the G20: Indonesia, India, and Brazil. So, it is incumbent on the Indian presidency to emphasise the BE's importance from the standpoint of the global south. India's G20 Presidency presents a rare chance to priorities the BE for growth, the green economy, and social fairness. This is especially true for the vulnerable ocean-dependent people in the global south. Without the development of particular guidelines or principles, national blue economies, or sustainable ocean economies, are likely to priorities achieving economic growth at the expense of social equality and environmental sustainability. With its active participation in international and regional conversations on the Blue Economy, and maritime, and marine cooperation, India's interest in the sector has been growing. Thus, while the oceans absorb about a third of the carbon dioxide released each year, the presence of iron aids in the growth of phytoplankton's, an essential part of carbon storage. Also, despite the upkeep costs and scaling problems, wave energy has the potential to be a green energy source.

**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:  
Maguni Kuanr  
whose perseverance helps survive a dying art form.**



Twenty plays and 300 puppet characters engraved on pieces of wood, which are brought to life on stages in front of live audiences over past 70 years – a no mean feat.

But it requires to be passionate, dedicated, hardworking and willing to fail over and over again, just like 85-year-old Maguni Charan Kuanr of Odisha's Keonjhar district, to help a dying art survive on the onslaught of modernity. When Mr. Kuanr's name figured in this year's list of Padma Shri awardees, it did not surprise those who know him, his perseverance and body of works.

Sitting at his home in district headquarter town of Keonjhar, the artist said he was happy that his art form got recognition on national stage in shape of Padma Shri award for him and till the death he would make all efforts to keep the rod puppetry alive.

Though India tasted freedom from British rule, around early 1950s the caste hegemony had not subsided. The rod puppetry being practiced by Mr. Kuanr was an art-form that was usually performed by fishing community in Keonjhar district. Mr. Kuanr instantly fell in love with the puppetry.

It was not easy for the artist, who belonged to Khyatriya, a higher caste, to get into puppetry which was considered job of Dalits. The resistance from the caste and family failed to come in way of Mr. Kuanr's love for the art.

Puppetry is one of most ancient forms of visual art. There are four types of puppetries such as string, glove, shadow and rod practiced in the country. According to Shyamhari Chakra, an art columnist, Odisha is the only state to have all these four styles and rod-puppetry locally known as Kathi-Kandhei Nacha is found only in Keonjhar.

Mr. Chakra said puppets fixed on a wooden rod are generally the tallest and heaviest in rod puppetry. A puppeteer does the movement of puppets sitting below the platform unlike string puppets operated from top. But Mr. Kuanr mastered the art with his versatility. He took the art form to such a professional height that was unheard of during that era.

The artist came up with his troupe and named it Shri Viswakarma Kalakunja. His shows based generally on Ramayana and Mahabharata were in so much high demand that people were eagerly awaiting for his troupe's arrival. Truckloads of articles, puppet boxes and artists were moving in different parts of Odisha as well as Bihar, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal. As time elapsed, so did his life of his art form.

Recipient of the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Award and Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja Samman, highest honour for performing arts in India and State respectively, Mr. Kuanr wanted the government to facilitate more shows for rod puppetry and help make younger generation aware about such art form practiced earlier by earlier generations.

People like Maguni Charan Lunar are the passionate saviour of rich Indian art and culture.

---

Write to us at:

**[bulletin@finsindia.org](mailto:bulletin@finsindia.org)**

**OFFICE :4, Belle View, Lakhamsi Nappu  
Road, Dadar (East), MUMBAI – 400014  
Phone 022 24127274**

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

**Shri. Milind Bondale  
Col Ravindra Tripathi**