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Technologies of the Self and the DNA of a New Manipuri Identity in Jodha
C Sanasam's *The Potent DNA* (2009)

Ph. Sanamacha Sharma

Professor, English Department, Dhanamanjuri University
Imphal, Manipur, India
Email:sanamacha.ph@gmail.com

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Abstract

Jodha C Sanasam's novel, *The Potent DNA* offers a narrative of Dr. Ayush's life, covering the history of Manipur from the late 1960s through the early 2000s. Dr. Ayush's introspective journey highlights his concern with subjectivity, the dynamics of social mobility, and the impact of national and transnational travel on his perceptions. Dr. Ayush's pursuit of self-understanding and identity formation can be interpreted through Michel Foucault's technologies of the self, reflecting the ways individuals actively shape their own identities within specific power structures. Furthermore, the exploration of self-identity in the context of a changing society aligns with Anthony Giddens's theories of modernity and self-identity, emphasizing the individual's struggle to maintain a coherent sense of self amidst societal transformations. The concept of self-fashioning, as articulated by Stephen Greenblatt, also finds relevance in Dr. Ayush's journey, as he consciously crafts and modifies his identity in response to his environment. These theoretical connections are intertwined with Dr. Ayush's professional life as a medical doctor, his personal aspirations for advancement, and his evolving perspective on the volatile political and social environment that defines Manipur. The novel proposes that the very "DNA" of Manipuri society has become tainted, plagued by corruption and violence. It also suggests that only through the introduction of a healthy replacement, a revitalized societal ethos, can Manipur hope to recover from its current state and pave the way for a more just and harmonious future. The corrupted DNA serves as a metaphor for the deep-seated issues hindering the progress and well-being of the Manipuri people.

Key Words: Technologies of the self, modernity, subjectivity, social mobility, self-fashioning, DNA.

Introduction

Jodha C. Sanasam's Sahitya Academi Award-winning novel, *The Potent DNA* (2009) weaves the narrative of Dr. Ayush, a character whose journey reflects the broader socio-political dynamics of Modern Manipur. Set partially in the late 1960s to the early 2000s, Dr. Ayush's fixation on subjectivity serves as a framework for exploring self-construction and social mobility within the contentious context of a post-colonial Manipur. The act of traversing national and transnational borders, propelled by his academic endeavors, enables a confrontation with new epistemologies and cultural paradigms. Jodha Chandra crafts a narrative that critiques the concept of modernity in Manipur through Dr. Ayush's evolving consciousness. The protagonist's journey is not simply one of personal growth but is intricately tied to the troubling sociopolitical fabric of his home state. As he grapples with his identity amid external influences and internal conflicts, the novelist illuminates the disjunction between personal aspirations and the collective crises faced by a society in flux. The transformation of Dr. Ayush—marked by shifts in attitude and behavior—serves as a crucial commentary on the implications of a shifting political environment and loyalties of state and non-state actors that haunt modern Manipur.

Technologies of Dr. Ayush's Self

The Potent DNA illustrates a microcosm of a broader struggle faced by individuals in oppressive contexts, where external forces dictate personal conduct while simultaneously prompting a quest for self-definition. Jodha's narrative transcends mere character study and invites readers to reflect on the implications of power and selfhood in a fractured society characterized by instability and uncertainty. Michel Foucault's *Technologies of the Self* (1982) are linked to how individuals acquire knowledge in various fields such as economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine, and penology throughout history in European culture. This knowledge, which he refers to as "truth games," is associated with methods that people employ to comprehend themselves. Out of the four types of "technologies" (225) provided by Michel Foucault, I bring in two for the analysis of Dr. Ayush's involvement with his subjectivity — (i) 'Technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject, and (ii) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own nature, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, to transform themselves to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.' (225) Each type, related to a certain type of domination, implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes. In *The Potent DNA*, Dr. Ayush is engaged with his subjectivity, and this engagement can be better understood by using the technology of his self, whether it is about acquiring his medical skills, his career advancement, or formulating his attitudes about himself and his position in and critiques of the volatile political circumstances and unstable social landscape of Manipur.

Michel Foucault explores the relationship between the concepts of "knowing oneself" and "caring for oneself" in ancient Greek and Roman literature, highlighting the transition from traditional political life characterized by a dominant oral culture to the emergence of administrative structures and imperial bureaucracy that prioritized written communication. This process of self-care becomes associated with a continuous written practice, and the self evolves into a subject, theme, or object that is examined in writing. This emphasis on the self brought about a new interpretation of self, like what is observed in Augustine's *Confession*. Then, this introspection results in an evaluation of one's conscience and a process of self-purification, where the self acts as both the judge and the accused (Seneca). During the time of Christianity, this same process transformed into a penitential attitude involving self-punishment alongside self-revelation, emphasizing the importance of self-renunciation. Foucault points out that in Christian confession, there is a link between "disclosure of the self, dramatic or verbalized, and the renunciation of self". From the eighteenth century onwards, "the techniques of

verbalization" have been recontextualized by the human sciences to employ them "without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self." (Foucault, 249). Then, Stuart Hall (1996) observes that during the eighteenth-century enlightenment, the entire social framework of "modernity" was initiated, marking a notable departure from the past. A specific interpretation of "the human subject" – characterized by certain fixed human abilities and a consistent awareness of its identity and position within the established order – first appeared in the modern period. 'The modern age gave rise to a new and decisive form of individualism, at the centre of which stood a new conception of the individual subject and its identity. (...) The transformation (...) which ushered in modernity, tore the individual free from its stable moorings in traditions and structures.' (281) Moreover, Anthony Giddens states that a search for self-identity is a modern problem, having its origins in Western individualism. In pre-modern times, the current emphasis on individuality was absent. The idea that each person has a unique character and special potentialities that may or may not be fulfilled is alien to pre-modern culture. (Giddens, 74) One can also say that a search for self-identity cannot happen without a narrative of self-revelation.

This leads to the consideration of the entry of modern thought into Manipuri history and culture. The disruption caused by British colonial intervention following the 1891 war in Manipuri history led to the slow introduction of modern education, modern awareness, and a modern governance system, which ultimately resulted in the gradual decline of the feudal monarchy, culminating in its integration with democratic India. In the post-merger context of Manipur, the slow integration and endorsement of Macauley's colonial principle of being "Indian (Manipuri) by blood and colour, yet English in tastes, opinions, morals, and intellect," alongside scientific ideas, has woven itself into the fabric of Manipuri culture. This evolution has fostered a new subjectivity, offering a fresh perspective on self-identity and the broader world. An illustration of this new subjectivity can be observed, for instance, in Pacha Meitei's *Imphal and Its Climatic Conditions* (1971) and Dr. Johns in Hijam Guno's *Bir Tikendrajit Road* (1983). In this context, it is appropriate to consider Dr. Ayush as a modern subject and the narrative of Potent DNA as a verbal dramatisation of his identity. Since Dr. Ayush is not grounded in Christian ideology and its confessional nature, his self-revelation occurs without self-renunciation.

In examining Dr. Ayush's narrative, it becomes evident that his subjectivity can be better understood with these Foucauldian constructs, underscoring the complexity of identity formation in a politically unstable modern Manipur. His conduct is thus not merely personal but is influenced by the need to adhere to the norms that govern healthcare, often overshadowed by the larger socio-political upheaval surrounding him. This dynamic of objectivization showcases how external powers shape individual agency, limiting Dr. Ayush's ability to navigate his career freely and authentically. Yet, through his pursuit of medical knowledge and professional advancement, he embodies a self-directed transformation, striving for wisdom and competence. This journey towards self-improvement is fraught with challenges, as he grapples with his own desires for happiness and integrity against the backdrop of societal chaos. The volatility of Manipur's political landscape not only influences his professional trajectory but also complicates his understanding of self-worth and purpose. Dr. Ayush's attitudes towards his identity represent a critical negotiation between embracing personal ambitions and political restrictions.

At that time, Manipur and its colleges were affiliated with Gauhati University. Due to his family's financial constraints, Ayush never imagined achieving significant goals. Although he thought that studying medicine would be too costly, he still dreamed of becoming a doctor. He was unaware of the medical selection information and remarked that it was futile since he could not pursue it. (39) His father, who served as the headmaster of a Middle English School, passed away when Ayush was still young. Before his father's death, they were "a happy family, not very rich, but well enough to eat good food and walk on this earth with a moderate living." (40) After becoming a widow, his mother earned a living by selling local Meitei handicraft draperies from a small shop in the Singjamei Bazaar. (40) His

financial constraints weighed on him as he faced the challenges of "passing an examination, getting admitted into a newly promoted class, payment of fees in the college, the ripple of a wish to buy new clothes," and he felt unable to ask his mother for help. Ayush managed to get into DM College. Although his mother encouraged him, he was hesitant to add to her burden.

Faced with uncertainty regarding his career path, Ayush, prompted by his friend Brojen, applied for Medical Science within the medical division of the Manipur Government Secretariat. There was no entrance examination for the MBBS program; selection was based solely on high marks in Science from the Pre-University examination. Excelling in Science, he was accepted, yet he felt discontent as he believed his mother would struggle with the financial burden. Additionally, he was reluctant to leave his mother alone with his two younger siblings. However, his mother sought advice and borrowed funds from Ayush's eldest uncle, enabling her to enroll him in the MBBS course at the National Medical College in Calcutta. He traveled to Calcutta, parting ways with his first love, Nomita. This marked the initial event in his relocation to a different geographical area. The author did not elaborate much on Ayush's struggles during his time in medical school. While socializing with students from wealthier backgrounds, he remained aware of his reality and never forgot that at home, his mother, a widow, was shouldering immense responsibilities. He had no justification to participate in activities where his wealthy peers displayed their affluence. (100) He reminded himself of his family's financial constraints. Interacting with wealthy people felt like a form of self-deception. His goal was to gain knowledge, and he needed to respect his mother's dream. Sometimes, he felt he was neglecting that dream. He committed to his studies with renewed determination. He chastised himself for exceeding his financial capacity, regulating his emotions, and guiding his life towards the correct path.

Nevertheless, he got close to Deibyani, (Dini), a fellow Medical student, (a rich brahmin lady from Calcutta with Manipuri connection) and went together to watch movie "The Sun Flowers" at the Globe and going to the Blue Fox for dinner (crab soup with asparagus, spring rolls, chicken fried rice, fish with cream or in another case coffee and burger at the Trincas). He seemed to have developed expensive tastes. Though it was another matter that she ended up paying for it, and they came back in a taxi. Nomita's thought faded from his mind. In Imphal, Nomita was pursuing her BA in English. It was 1965, and Imphal was going through a bad time of near famine, and people were protesting on the road.

Then, in Calcutta, the storm of the Naxalite movement destroyed the houses of rich businessmen. Dini's family was in trouble. But Ayush's medical college was still running as it was carrying out a crucial responsibility of taking care of the wounded people and citizens caused by the political violence. When the Naxalite movement calmed down, circumstances had changed. Ayush was a young man lucky to have the love of two women (Nomita and Dini). Cruel events separated him from the two women. Against her will, Nomita was abducted by one Manitomba, a DSP of the Police Department. Then, Dini and her family became victims of the Naxalite movement's violence, and her father became indebted, forcing her to choose Prashun over Ayush. At this point, he was a medical student, a young and inexperienced individual focusing more on his personal challenges than on the societal and political issues affecting Manipur. After completing his MBBS, he began his career in medicine. His initial challenge arose from the authorities, who assigned him to remote hilly regions and far-flung rural areas for an extended period. He felt disheartened by the postponement of his postgraduate studies. Taking a leave of absence to study, he secured a spot at a medical institute, but instead of earning an MD in Medicine, he received a specialization in Biochemistry. "His ambition to be a physician" was shattered, and he was forced to become "a biochemist." (228)

Dr. Ayush is a hardworking man who wants to control his life and career and take it in the direction of his choice. In him, one can also observe the aspiration of every sincere Manipuri, who seeks a system that promotes professional advancement grounded in fairness, rather than nepotism; merit, instead of bribery; talent, as opposed to mediocrity; sound policy, rather than a state of disorder. The

way he is working upon himself, his conduct and thoughts, his career and the decision to leave even Manipur for a better life, or peace of mind or sanity, all directs towards Foucault's technologies of the self to transform himself "to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality." (225) But this transformation is not easy as he is a family man in medical profession working in a politically conflictual land with terrible law and order situation and he faces several external forces. Dr. Ayush was not satisfied with his small achievement and thought "time, place, and opportunity, the three essential elements of success," had dodged him (197).

He is depicted as a pragmatic and forward-thinking individual, possibly the ideal person who emerged during an inopportune era. Priya, his wife, regarded him as "a brave, gentle and ideal man of good civility, somebody who could face the cruel battles of life coolly." (199) "His perseverance, laboriousness, neatness and cleanliness, his ingrate cool and calm character and frontline activities" (198) were a part of his character. He grew up obedient, hard-working, well-mannered, well-cultured, and in good relationships with friends and with people around him. His self-effacing modesty was his weakness in today's fast-paced competition and chaos, where animosity, envy, self-promotion, and slandering others dominate, along with covert betrayal and malicious defamation. Integrity seems ineffective. (198) Putting aside his personal and family matters and his acts and thoughts often places first "things of the larger general interest, beneficial to others, to friends and relations as the priority". He was not the one "to clutch an advantageous opportunity openly or brazenly," and he assumed that, like him, others would "do things honestly and propitiously". He thought he did not get what he deserved from life, personally and professionally. He "always compared his life to a river which flowed in a grossly wrong direction, a current that had left the fertile land of many a garden, many an orchard far, far behind; a river that had drifted cruelly askew from all the good areas." (199)

Modern Subject, Social Mobility, and the Feeling of Helplessness

Dr. Ayush's journey from a humble background to a stable, middle-class life (with his doctor wife) involves new expectations, both from himself and from others. His enhanced socio-economic status has resulted in feelings of anger and dissatisfaction towards himself and the political landscape. After several years of medical practice, particularly from the 1970s to the 1990s, he found himself in his 50s, consumed by rage and depression, feeling powerless to change his circumstances. Writing of the self in modern society, Anthony Giddens brings up the individual experiencing feelings of powerlessness in relation to a diverse and large-scale social universe. In contrast to the traditional world, it is supposed, where the individual was substantially in control of many of the influences shaping his life, in modern societies that control has passed to external agencies.' (191) With external agencies like the self-serving insurgent groups and an unfair, biased system, Dr. Ayush experiences feelings of powerlessness. Unwanted disturbances in his professional and personal life make him feel alienated and experience ceding control of his life to external forces. In addition to the complete lack of ethics and favoritism in the workplace, there was persistent pressure from revolutionary organizations. The armed non-state actors labelled him as a wealthy capitalist, a foe of society, whereas he was merely living the life of an ordinary employee. He had already contributed as much as he could on numerous occasions. To extract more money, those deceitful, predatory bandits threatened him with their guns. Even worse than their threats were their contempt, mockery, intimidation, and crude language, which was unfit for use by even the most despicable animals. Various groups forcibly occupied his home several times; he was obligated to provide them with lavish meals. (228)

In Manipur, following independence and its merger with the Indian Union, there was a significant transformation in the social, political, intellectual, and psychological structures that shape identity formation. This complex transition is rooted in dialectical principles due to the dual pressures on both the exercise of will and a challenge to that will. The pro-Indian faction was working to instill a sense of Indian identity and history among the populace. Meanwhile, an anti-Indian faction began to emerge, motivated by a political desire to restore the pre-merger, independent Manipuri identity; this

group, often referred to as insurgent, revolutionary, or militant, gained considerable strength in the late 1970s and 1980s. In addition to the claims made by these state and non-state entities that influence every aspect of society – cultural, political, and religious – there is a growing recognition of alternative forms of social, theological, and psychological organization, which have emerged alongside the expanding literary and technological advances brought about by television, cable television, and subsequently, the internet. In this complex and contentious environment, Dr. Ayush's independence is consistently tested, and he is deprived of the opportunity to focus on his personal and professional growth.

The once-idealistic revolutionary of the 1970s has transformed into something new. The number of revolutionary factions and their members has increased significantly. It was apparent that the movement was no longer centered on patriotism or liberation. Instead, it had become a gathering of power-hungry, wealth-seeking, crime-inclined youths who were not controllable by their parents or guardians, having organized these revolutionary groups under different banners. They firmly believed that the gun equates to power and wealth. (232) A segment of the population perceived the Government of India's indifferent attitude as justification for believing that if the Government of India showed no concern for them, then they must take responsibility for themselves and their land. (233) However, Dr. Ayush saw it differently, attributing it to the absence of an effective policy, asserting that if India genuinely cared, the issue could have been appropriately addressed from the outset.

His family tolerated the bullying of the insurgent groups. They would come and take him away sometimes. Besides, threatening other doctors with guns and bullets, they put their guns to their victims' heads. They harassed the innocent physically and took them away on ransom demand, and kept them till money was received. That was in addition to the regular extortion payments of thirty to forty thousand rupees every three to four months. (191) They terrified them with "no sense of humanity – just like animals from the jungle or like reckless goons, (...) they keep harping that what they do is for the land, but the land will be nowhere if such people are going to run it. If things continue in this bizarre way (...), where will it lead to (...) no one will be able to live." (192) Initially, he sympathized with the revolution, particularly because Manipur was facing a dire situation, with ministers openly embezzling vast sums of money, appointments based on favoritism, promotions rife with corruption, and certain subservient IAS officers behaving like deities. Now he believed that the rebels had exceeded their limits, portraying themselves more as terrorists; their conduct was a shame even to those who engage in terrorism. (192)

Dr. Ayush called the revolutionary groups who dreamt of restoring the pre-British independent Manipur as "violence mongers" owing to their activities of "shedding fresh blood, secret killing and elimination of lives, and extortion of huge sums of money." They were running a parallel government, and nobody dared to puncture their "pumped-up pride." They did whatever they like with at the premises of administration, socio-economic offices, educational institutions" and treated officials in all the establishments "like stooges, headless, spineless and helpless slugs". All the government officials behaved like somebody "who, after a brain stroke, had lain down paralyzed and immobile." The picture was like "those grotesque animated creatures in science fiction movies, armless, legless, headless, lifeless figures with scars of bullets and explosion wounds everywhere on the body." The thirst for power, the hunger for corrupted money, the cunning "give and take" continued without interruption in the modern Manipuri life.

Once known as the 'Sana Leibak', the 'Golden Land', Manipur has now turned out to be ...a blasphemous land of anarchy, in a state of inert helplessness. Manipur remained more than what it was, a backwater and an outpost of a new colony ruled by a different set of administrators. A land where the bad defeated the good, the good acceding to what the bad did, was the comment that frequently appeared in the socio-cultural as well as political scenario. (2-3)

In the 1960s and 70s, there was the unholy nexus of Engineer-Contractor and woman-kidnapping culture. Engineers, contractors, and police bent laws to suit their selfish and avaricious purposes, as was evident in the attempted kidnap of Madhu and later Nomita's abduction and marriage against her will, and the way engineers and contractors joined hands to loot government coffers freely. In the 1990s, things went from bad to worse. Dr. Ayush, who had been to and seen better places and lives, was not happy with the kind of changes taking place in Imphal city. Imphalites were happy and proud that the label of Imphal had been changed from "town" to "city" as it was developing like other Northeastern cities like Guwahati and Shillong. In fact, in the last fifteen-twenty years, Imphal had become "like a wounded mongrel, blind and deaf with broken limbs," moving on a rough road. It claimed to be a city, but electricity shortages, water problems, and bad roads were common. "The minimum basic amenities of human civilization that could be expected anywhere in any other city of the world in this modern era were not visible in Imphal." (1) Only a creamy layer of the citizens which included both the rich, top government officials as well as "the goons, gangster-heads, drug-lords, explosive-dealers" were blessed with "the luxury of these unseemly rare facilities." (1) "All the evils of the world, like corruption, nepotism, partiality, cynicism, sadism, suspiciousness, theft, burglary, murderous crime," are found in this little corner of the world. Dr. Ayush judged that Manipur had sunk into a shameless state where bribery was practiced brazenly, and the only way to gain favor was to abase oneself before the powerful or to wield force through guns and armed followers. Wickedness spread unchecked, and people committed such acts openly, with startling audacity and no hint of shame. (200) Dr. Ayush, overwhelmed by helplessness, has entered a pathological condition. He experiences a sense of being pursued by external forces that strip him of all ability to act independently, or he finds himself ensnared in a chaotic whirlwind of events, swirling helplessly within it.

Subjected Subject and Self-fashioning

Dr Ayush is an MD in biochemistry and wants to work honestly towards achieving those ambitions and in such a political circumstance, he cannot attain anything or transform himself "to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality." (225) The presence of external forces (it may be social, economic, political, or organizational) complicates the discussion of the technologies of the self as the will of the self, or self-autonomy, is destabilized. With contemporary education and a restructured employment landscape, Dr. Ayush encounters a phenomenon akin to what prominent figures experienced during the Renaissance: "an enhanced self-awareness regarding the crafting of human identity as a deliberate and artistic endeavor," where fashion serves "as a means of indicating the development of the self." (Greenblatt 2) Greenblatt's concept of "self-fashioning" pertains to the process of constructing one's identity and public image in alignment with a framework of socially recognized standards, alongside the intentional effort to strive towards becoming a respected figure within society. Stephen Greenblatt further argued that the process of shaping one's identity – what he called "self-fashioning" – was constrained by external forces. Autonomy, or the freedom to define oneself independently, was not the central issue. Instead, identity was molded through powerful social structures. 'Autonomy is not the central issue: the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity – that of others at least as often as one's own.' (1) Autonomy is just one facet of a deeper, more complex dynamic: the ability to shape identity, both our own and that of others. Modern ideas offer Dr. Ayush fresh insights into both individuals and society, yet some counterforces aim to contest and stifle these perspectives. He finds himself in a situation that Greenblatt describes as involving 'a new stress on the executive power of the will'; however, there is also 'the most sustained and relentless assault upon the will.' (1980:1)

Greenblatt also states that 'self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other – heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist – must be discovered or invented to be attacked and destroyed.' (9) For Dr. Ayush, the Manipur dominated by armed militants and corrupt politicians represents an unfamiliar, adversarial culture (the Other) that

he must confront to create a new identity and challenge, even though any attempt to eradicate it can only exist in his imagination. Paradoxically, for the militants as well, the Indian government and its representatives in Manipur serve as the Other against which they must forge their political identity and rationalize their acts of violence. The general populace is in distress, and the advancement and growth of the state are hindered. The public, along with Dr. Ayush himself, desires a tranquil environment and a stable, ordinary life. 'They did not want anybody who would play with their lives. They wanted to steer their lives themselves. They wanted some space to do so.' (299) Dr. Ayush, like many ordinary people with aspirations, struggled to find the opportunity to direct his own life, which led him to seek it in a different state and country. Following the mistreatment at the hands of armed, self-styled warriors for freedom, he departed from his home state since he had the resources to make that choice. It is his growing sense of helplessness, of constant undermining of his self-autonomy, that drove him to decide to leave his hometown. His growing sense of helplessness compels him to make a deliberate attempt at shaping and forming his identity. While this decision was influenced by significant external pressure, it was also a conscious act of will, a purposeful decision.

Ironically, despite the governmental corruption and insurgency problems in post-colonial democratic Manipur, an increase in literacy and opportunities provided by higher education leads to employment breaks. With employment comes interstate and international travel (for the employees and their children). In a democratic society, the issue of personal autonomy has gained increased significance. The reality is that, even within a democratic framework, he experienced significant infringements on his personal freedom and autonomy by armed groups that manipulated the exploitative political landscape of a liberated nation. Yet it was Dr. Ayush's newfound social mobility and his advancing educational credentials and opportunities provided by the democratic setup that empowered him with a sense of agency and autonomy to shape his own identity, even amid disturbing external challenges, in pursuit of his aspirations. His involvement in a National Conference of the Indian Academy of Biochemistry in Bangalore introduced him to a professor from Germany, who subsequently invited him to Bonn, where he spent two years conducting scientific research focused on DNA and genes aimed at developing a synthesized vaccine for AIDS. (201-2)

Dr. Ayush, who "compared his life to a river which flowed in a grossly wrong direction", must find a new course. Overwhelmed by the distressing political environment in Manipur, Ayush left and took up residence alone at Dehradun Medical College. He left behind his wife, children, relatives, and close friends, as well as his homeland, opting for the mountainous region of Dehradun rather than enduring fear and uncertainty in his own home in Manipur. 'Water when obstructed in all directions would overflow and spill over. Or if it finds a small aperture or a fissure to sip out or escape, it's its natural propensity to create a new course and run freely out. That's it; my life at Dehradun is a new chapter of my life. I am nothing but water.' (226) At Dehradun, he became acquainted with Lieutenant General Santosh Kumar Lal, who had been posted in Manipur twice, now posted in New Delhi as the Command in charge of Security and Intelligence, Eastern Zone, (226-7). General Lal visited the town for his nephew's wedding. He met Ayush to inquire about the possibility of undergoing specific blood tests at the Medical College Hospital due to health reasons. General Lal expressed his fondness for Manipur and its progressive people, and asked Ayush about his reasons for leaving his homeland.

The office of the PMO summoned Dr. Ayush to Delhi for an Educational, Cultural, and Health Exchange Programme in Thailand. This program involved a collaborative investigation into AIDS across three countries (the USA, Thailand, and India), requiring doctors from each nation. Additionally, it encompassed missions related to External Affairs, including intelligence gathering, international secret agency networks, and deceptive tactics in deceitful crimes and crafty murders. The individual's one-year tenure included opening a bank account in his name, which the government would use for large financial transactions, with the money then to be given to a designated person. In Bangkok, he continued his research on AIDS along with Thai and American doctors. He resumed AIDS research in

Bangkok with Thai and American doctors, theorizing that "changes in the environment could affect the inherent characteristics, behaviour, the body configurations, and the like that living organisms carried from their original ancestors in terms of aberration in their genes, including the DNA pattern." (263) Following a hotel shooting incident involving Northeast Indian militants, he returned to India. Subsequently, his DNA and HIV vaccine research took him to Chicago, accompanied by his wife, Priya, and their children. Priya perceived his intense dedication had made him emotionally distant. (266) When he finds himself in a new environment and culture, his career soars to greater heights, traversing across nation-states, as he embarks on the journey to becoming a global citizen, surpassing ethnic regional identity and national boundaries.

A New DNA for a New Manipur

After more than five years, including one year in Dehradun, one year in Bangkok, and four years in Chicago, he returned home for a year and a half to focus on his AIDS project in the early 2000s while his wife and children remained in Chicago. During this time, he struggled with personal anguish and felt resentment that Manipur did not share his deep sense of belonging. (295) He saw no improvement in the situation and found it to be increasingly entrenched in a more severe and incorrect state. (297) He contemplated extending his research to Manipur and Nagaland, but recognized the futility of such efforts in his homeland, which desperately needed urbanization and modernization with proper infrastructure. (297) With a heavy heart, he noted that Manipur was severely afflicted by a multitude of devastating diseases. Her heart, kidneys, lungs, liver, and most critically, the essential centers in her brain, had been diseased for far too long and were no longer functioning. (297) The prevailing view was that the armed revolutionary youths, who extorted money from both the government and citizens, were responsible for this decline, leading the land and its people toward ruin. (9) His former acquaintance Sudhir had transitioned into a politician, whose arrogance and inflexibility made it challenging for him to collaborate with other Cabinet ministers and lesser officials, whose primary focus was to accumulate wealth, manipulate power, engage in nepotism, and partake in corruption, all without regard for the land and its inhabitants. Amidst this struggle for power, wealth, and influence, the militants had emerged as the principal actors. They declared that they had achieved the change they sought: the complete dismantling of the government. However, this so-called freedom they fought so fiercely for was only within their reach, intended solely for themselves and not for the populace. Perhaps they lacked any further plans for what to do next. (299)

In providing a scientific rationale for the circumstances in Manipur, Dr. Ayush referenced his ongoing research on DNA and considered Puccini's hypothesis that the erosion of ethical standards in his homeland and its surrounding regions contributed to the further degradation of the original DNA, ultimately resulting in the DNA becoming entirely nonfunctional as a complete entity. (303) He pondered whether the detrimental substances from World War II might have adversely affected the DNA of that generation, as individuals displaying a lack of human values bore resemblance to those born in the years after World War II. He thought it would be

A good project, then, to remove the disrupted and dismantled DNA and replace it with some original healthy DNA. This measure might be the only solution to restore the old Golden Land of Manipur. Would everybody essentially require DNA transplantation? (303)

In the following moment, he dismissed it as merely "a day-reverie of a perverted biochemist only." (303) With a pessimistic outlook, he speculated that the 'environment of violence, corruption, muscle power, money power, and similar factors may have induced alterations in the DNA of the population of Manipur, and these detrimental changes could result in a long-lasting irreversible impact (my italic) on the genes of future generations.' (304) Although Manipur may have deteriorated, Dr. Ayush perceived a glimmer of hope for positive change in his old friend Sudhir, who was described as "a man of rare and upright character" (299). Sudhir envisioned that 'Manipur would achieve improved

lives, a better standard of living, and a lifestyle comparable to that of people from other countries around the world.' (299) To facilitate positive transformations in Manipur, his old friend established the National Convention Party and proposed several resolutions in this context.

Upon seeing Nomita at the wedding of the home minister's daughter, Ayush wanted to reconnect with her since she was someone who had held a special place in his heart thirty years ago. He still harbored lingering feelings for her. She was now a widow; her police officer husband had died in a confrontation with militants. She was managing a private school. He overcame his hesitation and visited her there. He worked at a government-funded institute that received substantial grants from the Bill Gates Foundation, focused on AIDS management and human development. He aimed to support her school by reaching out to the foundation, which often helps educational institutions in remote and overlooked areas. Nomita worried that people might gossip about his visit. However, he reassured her that, for his peace and happiness, he would face anything that came, and he was not afraid at all. After a lengthy discussion about his life and medical research, he declared that a new day had begun in his life after a long period of darkness.

The excesses of militants and corruption within government offices led him to believe that nothing good could emerge from Manipur. After reconnecting with Nomita, another issue emerged – the long-buried resentment that he had kept silent for years, linked to Nomita's kidnapping and their subsequent separation. Moreover, Dini's forced decision to marry Prashun, which was understandable and, to some extent, forgivable, left him in a terrible emotional state. His whole resentment towards life probably originated from that point. He dedicates himself fully to his career, marrying a woman he does not love. Throughout the narrative, he never shows the same affection for his doctor wife as he does for Nomita and Dini. Upon hearing Nomita's voice at a wedding, his mood transformed completely. Ultimately, engaging in conversation with her, despite being married with two children in Chicago, seemed to alleviate the emotional burdens he had been unknowingly harboring for years. Isn't that the reason he remarked, 'Here a new dawn has opened in my life today after a long spell of darkness.' Perhaps from that point forward, he was ready to make amends with Manipur, notwithstanding the chaos, violence, and deterioration. Reestablishing his connection with Nomita instilled in him a sense of hope for something virtuous and untainted. For this reason, he blessed her and himself like this, 'May my Nomi have a healthy DNA, pure to the innermost core'. 'May the DNA of everybody in our land, nay, in the whole world, including mine, be as healthy and potent as my Nomi's DNA is.' (352) It articulates his ultimate aspiration to reveal the inherent goodness and purity that lies within every individual, which can be likened to the essence of God Himself. It is solely this goodness and purity within humanity that possesses the ability to purify society from its decay, violence, and corruption.

Jodha C Sanasam emphasizes that characters like Ayush, Nomita, and Sudhir embody the new DNA for a new Manipur, and it is they who will chart their paths like water flowing around rocky obstacles and make Manipur a better place. The narrative commences with Dr. Ayush meeting Nomita at a wedding. The entire storyline can be interpreted as a revelation of his self without renunciation of his self. The discourse of his novel is monological rather than dialogic in the sense that it is concentrated on Dr. Ayush as a modern subject who is deeply engaged with the technologies of his identity. Although the notion of a politically dysfunctional Manipur occupies his thoughts, his self-centered focus on advancing his career and personal growth comes at the expense of community spirit and even his family. When he is chosen to pursue a medical education based on his qualifications, he refrains from criticizing the government. His frustration with the system starts when he is assigned to a location distant from the city. When compelled to select MD in Biochemistry rather than Medicine, he perceives this as highly unjust; however, ironically, it is this very field of study that leads him to Chicago, a First World city. At a certain point in his life, he views himself as an ordinary individual caught between the demands of insurgent factions and a corrupt government.

He was described as "a widow's son from a poor family" (136). As he prepares to travel to Bangkok, his conversation with Director General Mehta indicates that he starts to perceive himself as a god incarnate. Ayush stated that if one can achieve that, one is already endowed with the attributes of being God himself. God resides within you, and everyone has the potential to become God. If you fully believe you are God, you are destined to become God. (250-51) His view is that Buddha, after a long search, finds there is no God because he himself is God. It is because Dr. Ayush thinks himself to be a god that he takes on the tone of an enlightened soul and blesses Nomita, himself, and the world of Manipur with a healthy DNA. He frames the concept of God around worldly success instead of spiritual depth, material gains rather than sacred values. In modern times, self-disclosure is done without self-renunciation. Self-renunciation becomes significant only when one believes there is a Higher Being before whom one must reveal and renunciate one's oneself. God disappears in modern times, and His place is taken by man himself. If a modern man dramatizes his self, then it is done for himself as both the actor and the audience. In such an egocentric modern theater of his self, disconnected from his roots, tradition, and culture, loneliness and inauthenticity reign supreme. Although married to a doctor and with two children, he is distant from his family. His personal life lacks intimacy and meaning, leading to a sense of isolation that he tries to escape by immersing himself in his work.

However, one can also say that Dr. Ayush's individual emancipatory politics is moving towards life politics, a politics of lifestyles, which Anthony Giddens claims as "a politics of self-actualisation" in a reflexively ordered environment connecting self and body to global systems.' (214) His reconnection with Nomita can be taken as an escape into intimacy and an attempt to secure a meaningful life in a known setting that has eluded him for much of his life. Perhaps Dr. Ayush seeks an inner authenticity – a fundamental trust that allows him to perceive his limited lifespan as a cohesive whole amidst the backdrop of swiftly evolving external conditions and hopes to reach a state of self-fulfillment as is indicated by his feeling of "rowing down a canoe alone in a vast stretch of still calm water". (352) He returned home, and that rainy night, alone in his room and distant from his family in Chicago, his thoughts drifted to Nomita. She was a woman who had loved him in his youth, when he was poor and naive, a woman he could help but not marry. He wasn't in the rain, but he felt cleansed of the grime of past years, his mind and heart renewed. Nomita, once his love, remained someone he seemed to cherish from afar, someone he could assist but never truly be with. That he was not actually in the rain highlights the gap between experience and perception, physical and mental. Nevertheless, this cleansing, occurring only in his mind in the twilight of his life, was perhaps enough. This suggests a shift from the self to the other, which comes with the hope of redemption and peace.

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