

Re-examining politics to re-define the future

ICFAI University
Nagaland holds
'Conversation on Politics',
an interdisciplinary post
graduate students' seminar

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What is 'politics'? Is it the tango around elections? Or is the political in our lives defined by the choices we make every moment of it? Power, authority, structures, language—these have come to define the notion of politics in a way that has taken politics away from the commons and made it an exclusive domain. To overturn the tide, we, the people, need to define our challenges and "redefine the politics of imagination."

This was discussed today at the ICFAI University (Department of Political Science) Nagaland's Interdisciplinary Post Graduate Students' Seminar titled 'Conversation on Politics'.

Re-examining politics

Power, authority, language and time—these constructs are generally used to define the idea of politics, explained political and legal anthropologist Dr. Dolly Kikon in her inaugural address.

"The idea of politics may be related to these concepts but they need to be re-examined," said Dr. Kikon, speaking to an auditorium of post graduate students from various disciplines. The first question to ask in this pursuit is what is the political in our lives?

Every breathing second, she asserted, politics helps us situate ourselves in this world through notions of accountability, the choices we make that affect the collective, our practice of compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation as political beings. How do we react to, and engage with, social events happening around us?

Unwinding the concepts, Dr. Kikon highlighted that in a true de-

mocracy, *power* lies in the hands of the collective, the people. Movements around the world, like the Occupy movement in the US or in Asia against the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act have put power back in the hands of the collective, she noted.

In the same vein, do we use our *authority* as active members of society? We should ask ourselves about child rights, or where our food is coming from, encouraged Dr. Kikon. As political beings, we need to engage with ideas of justice that affect the immediate and larger world around us.

Time—how do we connect with the past and the present? What is the future we aspire for? Political dreams and life aspirations, said Dr. Kikon, are charted over a lifetime and cannot be restricted to a short time frame.

Most of all, while engaging with each of these issues, we need to reconstruct *language*. "Language can be used as symbols of power and violence, but also as a symbol of justice and peace," observed Dr. Kikon, quoting Nobel laureate Toni Morrison and Naga author Easterine Kire. For this, listening needs to become a tool in our kit from which we can develop a language that connects cultures all over the world. This, then, is politics.

Re-defining the future

Editor of *The Morung Express*, Dr. Aküm Longchari began his 'Conversation on Politics' with the "dilemma of truth"—is the concurrent existence of many truths the politics of interpretation or diversity that interprets the human kind? He wondered, then, what is the truth of our dilemma? He was referring to the Naga "caravan" that began its peaceful journey, got waylaid but is now in the hands of young Nagas—should it be taken back to its original course, or the path laid by the hijackers or be led to a new destination altogether?

"Together we need to find answers."

Sharing an exercise with the students on how to visualise the struc-

tures of power, Dr. Longchari noted that "For the ones at the bottom of the structure, the common people, peace means change. For those on top, peace means for those at the bottom to suffer peacefully in the status quo." This is what is happening in Nagaland today at every level, from family to government.

It is thus for those in the middle, the educated, to empower and educate one another—"we can walk together with the people and create change." Changing the face at the top level will not bring change in Nagaland, he observed. "We have to rethink our future and dream new dreams."

In this, he suggested reconceptualising time. "If we can agree on what Nagaland will look like in 2050, we can work ourselves backward from there and not be confused today," he said. For all of this, a change of structure would be required lest "our past becomes our future."

"Our biggest challenge today is for us to define our challenges, currently being defined by others. We need to redefine the politics of imagination," asserted Dr. Longchari, highlighting the conflict between power and justice/rights, "a clash of the authority and the revolutionary."

Citing the instance of MK Gandhi's non violent movement, he wondered if the movement had imagined a new relationship between people and power structures, then the product of the movement, that is the Indian State, may not have turned out to be so violent. Taking the example of Article 371-A, he observed that it has reduced the question of a peoples' self definition to a question of tribes, and the question of rights to a "special status."

Redefining our imagination would, then, be the "critical yeast in bringing our dilemmas together so we can find new pathways into the future."

The second session saw paper presentations from post graduate students of ICFAI University Nagaland.