

Manipur at a Glance
AN ETHNIC DILEMMA

A Short Article

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ABSTRACT

By Ethnic conflicts we mean those domestic, inter-state or transnational political conflicts in which the actors involved focus on issues relating to Ethnicity. Ethnic conflicts are the main forms of political instability in the multi ethnic societies like Manipur during second half of twenty century and beginning of new century. The goal of this study determinates social context of ethnic conflict in multi ethnic societies with the rise of nationalism based organisation. Balancing ethno cultural diversity and dignity with national integration and cohesion has been a constant challenge for the state policy-maker. Also, This study is to predict the future direction of Ethnic policy in the political system as opaque as the state fight with difficulties.

MANIPUR

Manipur, a sovereign Kingdom came under British rule as a princely state in 1891 and existed until 1947 as an Independent Princely Country. However, in 1949, Maharaja Bodhchandra was summoned to Shillong, the capital of the then Indian province of Assam, and on 21 September 1949 signed a Treaty of Accession under which Manipur was to be formally merged to

India on October 15, 1949. Under terms of this agreement, the government of India announced the formal annexation of Manipur on 15 October 1949. Manipur was a union territory from 1956, becoming a full-fledged state in 1972.

The state Assembly and the council of Minister which elected by the people of Manipur under the provisions of Manipur Constitution Act 1947 by practicing the Universal Adult Franchise were forcibly abolished on the same day by an executive order of the Indian government.

It consist of 9 districts viz. **Bishnupur, Churachandpur, Chandel, Imphal East, Imphal West, Senapati, Tamenglong, Thoubal and Ukhrul**. And later on divided into 16 districts on 8th December, 2016 which 7 new districts are **Tengnoupal**, bifurcated from Channel district, **Kamjong** from Ukhrul, **Pherzawl** from Churachandpur, **Kangpokpi** from Senapati, **Kakching** from Thoubal, **Noney** from Tamenglong and **Jiribam** from Imphal East districts.⁽³⁾ The creation of the new district comes after a long struggle and at the cost of 7 lives lost during the agitation for the same.



Map of Manipur before 8th December, 2016



Map of Manipur after 8th December, 2016

ETHNICS GROUP

Manipur is a state inhabited by several ethnic groups, which have their unique culture & tradition. Some of the major communities are **Meitei, Pangal, Naga** and **Kuki** in which Naga and Kuki belongs to Schedule Tribe whereas Meitei and Pangal live in Valley in which these two ethnics groups are classified as Majority & Minority based on demography and social status. It can be mention that some of the Meitei belongs to schedule caste and majority population of the Meitei schedule caste constitutes at Kakching, Pheiyeng, Sekmai, Andro.

Some Ethnic group of Naga community are Tangkhul, Kabui, Kacha Naga while Thadou, Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Maring, Anal, Zou, Lushai, Kom, Simte and belongs to Kuki Family. However, the Maring and Anal tribes have been assimilated into the Naga fold.

Manipur is a collage of a diverse ethnic and multicultural society. Based on the 2001 Census, Meiteis and Manipuri Muslims account for approximately 14.1 lakh population (58.9 percent), whereas 9.8 lakh population (41.1 percent) belongs to different tribes such as the Naga, Kuki.

FAULT LINES

Some fault lines to ignite tense among the Ethnic groups are :

1. Historical Prejudices
2. Autonomy or Local Self-Governance
3. Non-Inclusive Development
4. Biased Political Structure
5. Property Rights
6. Individual Interests and Personal Ambitions of Leaders
7. Insurgent Groups on Ethnic Lines.
8. Socio Political Organizations in Manipur.
9. Extortion or Illegal Taxation
10. Areas of Convergence
11. Origin
12. Linguistic Affinity
13. Socio-economic and Cultural Relations

Among the various factor, the rise of Nationalism on Ethnic lines is the main factor that work for their own, to gain the power of Administration with the help of Politico of their own, which result to the Biased Political structure. Once it gain the political power, then there's somehow fallen the image of biasness on individual

interest that other ethnic groups are suffer with hue and cry.

RISE OF NAGA & KUKI NATIONALISM AND ITS DYNAMIC CONFLITS

The growth of nationalism among the Nagas of Manipur can be traced back to the first half of 20th century. Jadonang and Gaidinliu rose in revolt against the British in 1930, which may be termed as revivalist movement of the Zeliangrongs. The movement took a semi-military, semi-religious and semi-political character. In the second half of the 20th century, Naga dream and demand for “Unified Nagalim”.

The demand for unification was brought into the sharp focus following the establishment, and ascendance to hegemony, of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) to engage the Government of India through peace overtures and effecting the merger of Naga inhabited hills of Manipur. The main goal of the organisation is to establish a sovereign Naga state, "Nagalim" which would consist of of Nagaland and “all contiguous Naga-inhabited areas” of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and, across the international border, Myanmar.

On 30 April 1988, the NSCN split into two factions; the NSCN-K led by Khaplang, and the NSCN-IM, led by Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah. The split was accompanied by a spate of violence and clashes between the factions.

Kuki Nationalism Nationalism can be describe as a desire for political independence; the desire to achieve political independence or a separate entity. With the British raj coming to an end, the Kukis formed the Kuki National Assembly (KNA), in October, 1946. The failure of the state to protect the Kukis from the onslaught of the Nagas, especially NSCN (I-M), during the conflict, gave birth to Kuki Liberation Army (KLA), Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), Zomi Revolutionary Organization (ZRO) and United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF). The failure of the KNA* and KNF to stand up to the expectation, to protect the interests of the community and to resist the onslaught of the NSCN (I-M) has sent strong signals to every Kuki sub-tribe to look for a self-defence mechanism.

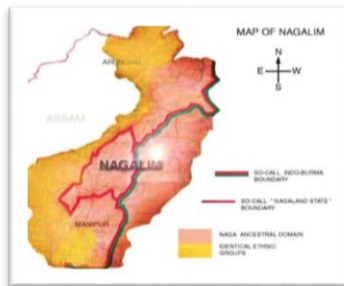
There was a formal cessation of hostilities between Nagas and Kukis in 1997. But these two communities escalated into violence during the 1990s, more precisely 1992–1997 which resulting in the lost of 100s lives on both side. On September 13, 1993, Naga militants allegedly belonging to the

National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muivah) massacred around 115 Kuki civilians in the hills of Manipur. The Kukis refer to the killings as the Joupi massacre after the village which saw the highest number of casualties. Ever since, the community has been assembling every September to remember their dead. The congregation this year was bigger than usual, and was marked by the erection of three monoliths inscribed with the names of 1,157 people who had allegedly been killed by Naga mercenaries during the '90s. "25th anniversary of the Kuki genocide by Tangkhul-led NSCN (IM)," read the plaque on the monoliths. There are different opinions about the root cause of the tense between these two ethnic group. The physical violence formally ended in 1997.

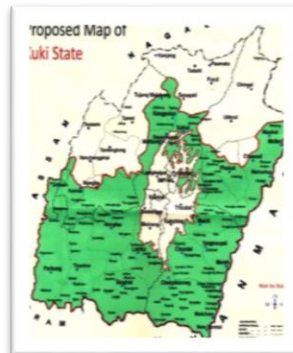


Remembering Joupi Massacre

The government of India is sitting around a table and doing peace talks with the Nagas. But there is an assurance from Kuki as ***“But the Centre should know that until the Kukis get justice, the Naga issue cannot be solved. They have to do justice according to the law of the land.”*** The Kukis’ bitterness with the Indian state is all-pervasive. The ignorance of the Kuki by Indian Government ignite to Kuki youth to fuel Kuki Nationalism more over the past as well as the demand of Kuki Homeland too. The demand for Kukiland (land for the Kukis) is a direct challenge to the demand for Greater or southern Nagaland by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM).



*Proposed map of
Greater Nagalim*



*Proposed map of
Kuki State*

RISE OF MEITEI NATIONALISM

At the far end of the monarchy in Manipur, the kings lost much of their authority and independence to the British. In spite of losing their authority to the British, the Kings continued to oppress the commoners by levying prohibitive taxes on the commoners for all socio-economic activities thus inciting political consolidation of the Meities against the Monarchy. The political awakening among the Meiteis began against the monarchy.

In the post-independence context, the revolutionary movements in Manipur are an outcome of several deep rooted factors, namely, perceived forced merger of princely state by India, the threat posed by the Naga movement, poor governance, neglect from central government and the crisis of identity which are the motivating factor in the revival of Meitei nationalism. These several deep rooted factors pave the way to the emergence of Meitei revolutionary groups in Manipur.

Some of the active revolutionary groups are; United National Liberation Front (UNLF), Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA), Peoples' Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) and Kanglei Yawol Kanba

Lup (KYKL) among which UNLF was the first resistance group which was founded on 24 November, 1964, which stated as its aim not only an independent, socialist republic in Manipur but also that it had a 'historic mission' to liberate Manipur 'from colonial occupation in the larger context of liberating the entire Indo-Burma region, for a common future'.

RISE OF PANGAL OUTFITS

Between the valley based ethnic groups, there is a chaos in 1993. On May 3rd, 1993, more than 100 lives, including women and children, were lost their life, which may be or may not be pre planned massacre. The rise of ideologically backed ethno groups of Meitei might be the cause of the massacre. The exact factor of the massacre is still unclear. Pangals observed the day as "**Black day**" every year. Student bodies still remember the day as "**Sahidee Memorial Day**"

As a result of the massacre of Pangal by Meitei in 1993, the Pangals (Muslims of Manipur) raised militant outfits such as the Northeast Minority Front (NEMF), Islamic National Front (INF), Islamic Revolutionary Front (IRF), United Islamic Liberation Army (UILA), Islamic Liberation

Front (ILF) and People's United Liberation Front (PULF) to counter the challenge on Pangal and to run a parallel economy and control of turf by being visible in the society. The most prominent and long lasted among, was PULF that acted against any anti-social elements among Pangal which operate upto the early period of 21st century. All the Pangal outfits based in Manipur were extinct from the soil. The Pangal's massacre also showers the emergence of Civil Society Organisation and student organisation.



Observation of Sahidee Memorial Day

HUE AND CRY IN THE VALLEY

Apart from the many internal issue of time to time inside their respective ethnic lines, there's an occurrence of many issues between the hill and the valley. ***Divisive tendencies in a society are often caused by uneven distribution of opportunities.*** The Peace talk of Naga becomes a defensive tool for the Nagas but it severely hit the sentiment of the Valley based people as a question of state integrity. In 2001, 18th June, 2001, 18 (Eighteen) lives were lost and many wounded while protest against the Ceasefire agreement. The Bangkok declaration, a ceasefire agreement "without territorial limits" signed between government of India and NSCN (IM) made the 2001 June, a horrendous month. Assembly Hall was set to fire, Chief Minister's Secretariat was completely razed, four MLAs and the speaker of the time were injured. 15 Official residences of Legislators, Political party office, government vehicles were destroyed. Peoples of Manipur pay tributes to the 18 soul every year, observing the day as **"The Great June Uprising Day"**. The political figure was also totally break down in the state.



Observation of "The Great June Uprising Day"



Manipur Assembly hall in Flames which was brunt down by the protestors

After the Pangal's Massacre, Direct violence has slowly been replaced by "structural and cultural violence". As per Paul Farmer, "structural violence" includes any violence or suffering caused by the structures and institutions of a society. People who suffer from structural violence cannot control the conditions that have caused their suffering. That is exactly what is happening in Manipur. ***Sometimes, Polarization of wrong propaganda makes the Pangal to feel like a treat upon them.***

In these few decades, after the Pangal's massacre, numbers of Pangal has been lynched to death in series at several Meitei constituent area which the Pangal confused the situation weather the situation is a threat to Pangal or any other reason behind.

Though this ethnic group has its own 400 years long history, ***the Ethnicity electoral system makes the Pangal helpless while entering the political arena which results in the failure of making a rational structure of the society.*** Pangal remains the most backward section in the society in all fields.

Besides the Internal issues, some national policies which triggered the ethnicity lines of

Manipur also disturbed the environment. Citizenship Amendment bill 2016, that passed in Lok Sabha in 2018 is one of the recent issue. As the bill clearly mentions to provide citizenship of 6 (Six) migrants' sections from 3 (Three) neighboring countries of India based on the religion which totally threatens the Ethnic identity of Manipur.

Sl.no.	Ethnic Group	Numbers of Elected MLA from the Group		
		In 2007	In 2012	In 2017
1	ST (Naga & Kuki)	20	20	20
2	Meitei	38	37	37
3	Pangal	2	3	3

SCENARIO OF THE SOCIETY

Manipur being Multicultural society, all the ethnics groups developed their heritage parallelly under the respective ethno-social boundaries. The 'divide and rule policy' of the colonial administration in relation to administering the hills and plains of Manipur and the introduction of

Christianity amongst the tribal groups of Naga and Kuki had further widened the cultural gap with Meitei.

Certain post independence developments deepened some prejudices leading to inter-community ethnic clashes. These clashes also hastened the formation of various armed groups, civil society organizations, student organizations, which were affiliated to respective ethnic communities. Some of the bodies were not only waging struggle against the establishment, but were seen more as a necessity against the hegemony and violence perpetrated by rival communities.

A harmonious existence of the state is being threatened as the interests of one group clash with the other. This has given rise to assertion of group identity; inter group competition for resources, political instability, insecurity and underdevelopment. ***Mutual Emotional Integrity of all the Ethnic Group exists only in Paper and Dialogues.*** Besides, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act imposed in the state did not allowed the valley Meitei and Pangal groups to settle in the hills whereas the hill tribal's were allowed to settle in the valley.

Besides, the armed cadres are being used as leverage by those who do not want the Manipur conflict to get resolved. As long as the groups are allowed to retain their armed cadres and camps, Manipur will remain a dilemma for the state and a predicament of the North-Eastern region.

Governments are sometimes nervous while coming to the resolution of Ethnic based issue and sometimes takes political advantages over the issue. ***The central governments play a diplomatic role not only between Naga & Kuki but also between Hills & Valley.*** By treating conflicts involving ethnic minority groups as irregular, highly sensitive and nationally significant, it is likely that the government is creating greater insecurity by distorting public perceptions of ethnic relations and reinforcing negative predispositions when the Naga issue comes. We must aware of the Cultural factors that define one ethnic by self and others, discrimination in political, social and economical dimension and consensuses.

CONCLUSION

The proposition that ethnic conflict has been one of the most significant impediments to modernization, development and growth in the state, considering that 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic diversity' in the Manipuri context are fundamentally elusive concepts. Many scholars have tried to make sense of the complex interplay of ethnicity, conflict and development but too often from a singular rather than from a plural perspective. Any issue must not bring up if it will affect another ethnic group. We should forward to those issue for the development of all. Now. it's mandatory to predict out the resolution to eliminate the tension of ethnicity.

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*It's time to solve !!
It's time to unite !!!
For a New Manipur,
For a Peaceful Civilization.*