

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDE AND ETHNIC FAULT LINES IN MANIPUR

Introduction

Manipur has come under the influences of cultures of many different ethnic groups who came at various times and contributed to the growth of civilization. The Tibeto-Burman or Sino-Tibetan speaking Meiteis, Naga and Kuki-Chins of Manipur, represent a unique South East Asia personality through the ages since the Paleolithic period till contemporary epoch. Prehistory: Manipur being one of the oldest civilizations, the evolution process of the state goes back to pre history. Manipur appears to have received Bronze Age Culture traits from Thailand and Upper Burma where indigenous early metal age culture developed at a comparatively early date around 4000 B.C.

Manipur lost her independence to the British India in the year 1891. From 1892 onwards it became a princely native state under the political control of Government of British India. Accordingly, the administration of the State was under a political agent who was vested with all executive powers. This British rule continued till 1947 when India got independence. According to a merger agreement signed on 21 September 1949 between Maharaja

Bodhachandra, the then king of Manipur, and the government of India, the state was merged into India as a part "C" State on 15 October 1949 and administered by the President of India through a Chief Commissioner. Manipur became a full-fledged state within the Indian Union with a Governor as the Head of the state on 21 January 1972 and the members of the Legislative Assembly were increased to 60. Manipur is a conglomeration of various communities and it is home to thirty-three recognised Schedule Tribes (STs) which broadly belong to the ethnic Naga and Zo (Chin/ Kuki/Lusei) groups. The Meiteis constitutes the majority group inhabiting 10.2 percent of the total geographical area of the state which accounts for about 65.8 percent of the total population of the state. Conversely, the Naga and Zo people occupy 89.98 percent of the total geographical area and accounts for 34.2 percent of the total population of the state. They are represented by twenty (out of sixty) and one (out of three) elected members in the state Legislative assembly and the Indian parliament respectively. Meiteis are confined mostly in the plain districts (popularly known as valley) and Naga and Zo are confined to hills districts of the state.

Manipur state is home to three major communities or the elite groups namely, Meitei, Kuki and the Nagas. The geographical layout of the state demarcates the habitable areas of these groups. The hills are dominated by the Kukis and the Nagas while the central plains also called the Valley is dominated by the Meiteis. The origin and the influx of these communities have always been debated and shrouded in mystery which has created apprehensions among the communities. Manipur is a classic case where ethno cultural boundaries broadly coincide with territorial space. Manipur in

India's north-east has long been riven by conflicts among ethnic groups on issues of exclusivity, dominance and integration. Identities shape conflict that are a creation of political necessity and administrative convenience. The ownership of lands has always been claimed which has created a demographic divide in the state. To protect aspirations of each community they have resorted to raising armed groups and giving it a colour of separatist movement. This ethnic fault line and demographic divide has brought the state into turmoil.

HISTORY OF MANIPUR

Manipur has come under the influences of cultures of many different ethnic groups who came at various times and contributed to the growth of civilization. A concrete civilization appears to have evolved in Manipur long before the historic period. The state was known by different names to different peoples. Few of them includes 'Poirei Meitei Leipak' or 'Kangleipak' to the indigenous people of Manipur more particularly Meiteis; 'Kathe' or 'Ponnas' to the Burmese; 'Hsiao-Po-lo-mein' to the Chinese; 'Cassay' to the Shans; 'Moglai' to the Cacharis and Bengalis and 'Mekle' to the Assamese (as well as to the British in the 18th Century) in the pre-Christian period. The name Manipur was first officially introduced in the early eighteen century during the reign of King Pamheiba, also known as Garibniwaz (1709 – 48 A.D). "Mekhala" was another name of the kingdom as indicated by a coin of the same king describing him as "Mekhaleswar", Lord of Mekhala or Mekhale. As per the Manipur State Archives, Manipur was ruled by 76 kings since 33 A.D. The development of the political power of the Meiteis was related to the control and organization of resources around the central loci of Imphal, and

the entire valley and hills. The Kingdom was later governed based on the written constitution "*Loyumba Shinyen*."

DEMOGRAPHIC FAULT LINES IN MANIPUR

Various ethnic groups belonging to southern-Mongoloid groups, the Tibeto-Burman, the Indo-Aryans and a sizeable section of Tai (Shans) came to Manipur from pre-historic times down to the present day. The present ethnic groups of Manipur, viz the Meiteis, the Naga tribes, the Kuki Chin tribes and other Indian communities are the descendants of those migrating people. Mythologies of the various ethnic groups living both in the hills, as well as the valley, somewhat coincide on the belief of migration of population from the hills to settle in the valley. This divide continually widened in the years ahead, and indeed one of the most daunting challenges before the Manipur administration today is to bridge this hill-valley chasm. Since the hills and valley dwellers have come to acquire different ethnic identities, an ethnic problem needs to be solved along this divide.

Kuki

Kuki, a generic terminology, pre-dates the British inquest, but became better known through items of literature written by colonial academics and officials. Kuki predates Mizo by over two millennia. This is corroborated by the Pooyas the original script of the Meitei people of Manipur, which refer to 'two Kuki Chiefs named Kuki Ahongba and Kuki Achouba were allies to Nongba Lairen Pakhangba, the first historically recorded king of the Meithis (Meiteis), in the latter's mobilisation for the throne in 33 AD.

The Meitei

The origin of the Meiteis cannot be precisely determined from the literature available. It was observed that the origin of the Meiteis is obscure. This has become a subject of endless debate. There are those who claim that the Meiteis are descendants of Arjuna of Mahabharata and are therefore Aryan in origin. Others believe that they, like the tribal people, belong to the Mongoloid race. This is because most of their written records were composed after they became Hindus and therefore are not very authentic as per history.

The Nagas

The Naga tribes' .The Nagas are concentrated in the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh of India and Somra Tract of Upper Burma. The Nagas have no written historical record about their origin and the route of migration to their present inhabitation; some writers believed that Nagas immigrated from three directions - North East, North West and South East. However it is a general believe that the majority of the Nagas immigrated from South East through the corridor of Indo-Myanmar border to the Naga Hills. The Nagas belong to the Mongoloid stock.

Socio Political Analysis and Implications

Manipur has emerged as a conflict zone with the three struggling communities competing and contesting to carve out their exclusive political and geographical space through ethnic mobilization. Such diametrically opposing pattern of political mobilizations has produced a conflict situation, or to be more precise, an "Ethnic Triangle" amongst the Nagas, the Kukis and the Meiteis. The prevailing conflict is rooted in the overlapping of political space imagined by the elites of the respective struggling communities. The

conflict prevailing in Manipur may be classified into two types depending on the nature and pattern of the conflict i.e. Vertical Conflict and Horizontal Conflict. The vertical conflict is the type of conflict that prevails between the Government of India and the struggling communities of Manipur as represented by the insurgent groups, on the one hand. On the other hand, the horizontal conflict refers to the conflict between the struggling communities of Manipur or between different insurgent groups. Of the two types of conflict, vertical conflict stands out as the principal conflict while the horizontal conflict remains as the secondary conflict. The vertical conflict is considered as the principal conflict on account of the fact that all other forms of conflicts are its by-products and that its resolution is central to the resolution of other forms of conflict or crises prevailing in Manipur. On the contrary, it is the horizontal conflict that assumes important place in the solution of Manipur. The resolution of horizontal conflict would present the government with one voice of the people of Manipur which would be in the interest of all the three communities. It is this conflict which is fuelling the so called insurgency based on tangential ideological themes. The horizontal conflict can be resolved by addressing the basic contentious issues of each community and then addressing them holistically together.

The fallout of these ethnic differences is seen on normal civil life of the people. The effects can be summarized as follows:-

- (a) Identity crises and aspirations of each community resulting in Hill – Valley divide and armed conflict with each other and with the government.

- (b) Demands of these communities within and outside the Indian Union.
- (c) Running of parallel government, extortion, territorial control and politico underground nexus.
- (d) Lack of development and progress.
- (e) Involvement of Myanmar and China in supporting Indian Insurgent Groups (IIG)

Having seen the origins and the history of state in general and each community in particular it is felt that there is a need to address the issues compassionately. The conflict resolution can be addressed in the following manner:-

- (a) Initial Ground work.
- (b) Initiation of Confidence Building Measures.
- (c) Immediate to Short term measures.
- (d) Long term measures.

The ethnic divide is basic bone of contention and the rest are manifestations born out of this conflict. The insurgent situation is sub set of the ethnic conflict. It is complex situation which requires a mature political handling and consensus of all actors – state and Non state. The horizontal conflict needs to be addressed first to trigger the resolution of vertical conflict. The overall effect of this ethnic conflict is on the population.

The citizens have suffered due to various Bandhs and counter Bandhs. Children, women, elders, workers all have a stake in the future of the state have suffered at the hands of these armed groups purporting ideological based struggle. These groups have no inclination to take forward the peace

process or even participate. They do not want a solution. The very facet of life suffers. The state of Manipur suffers – all for identity crisis and ethnic fault line.