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INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL STUDIES

Migration and conflict in
north-east India:
the case of Manipur

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**Migration and conflict in north-east India:
the case of Manipur**

A thesis submitted to the faculty of International and Intercultural Studies
of the University of Deusto in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

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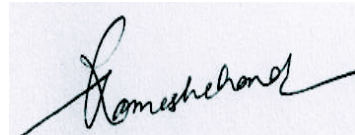
2015



DECLARATION

I, Rameshchandra Ningthoujam, hereby declare that this doctoral thesis entitled ‘Migration and Conflict in north-east India: A case of Manipur’ is an outcome of my own effort undertaken under the supervision of Prof. Daniele Conversi, Ikerbasque Foundation Research Professor, Universidad del País Vasco (Prosoparlam), Leioa, Spain. This work has not formed any basis for the award of any degrees, diplomas or certificates in any of the universities/institutes. I have duly acknowledged all the sources used in the preparation of this thesis.

Date: September 19, 2015

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue background. The signature is cursive and reads "Rameshchandra".

Rameshchandra Ningthoujam

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ABSTRACT

Migration and conflict in north-east India: the case of Manipur

Manipur, a landlocked state within the federal union of India, has experienced one of the longest lasting armed conflicts in south Asia. The Indian State has responded to a local insurgency that began in 1949 by following a two-pronged strategy, the first informed by militarism and the second by what I identify as *developmentalism*, which stresses the unilateral nature of India's nation-building projects. Both strategies have, however, failed to yield any tangible results in terms of any advance or success in conflict resolution.

This dissertation argues that, while the state's merger with the Union of India in 1949 had already led to the formation of resistance movements, other factors must be considered in order to comprehend the multi-layered nature of the conflict. First, the sheer demographic impact of mass migration made up of Bangladeshi, Nepalese, Burmese (Chin-Kuki) and other immigrant communities. Second, the state's efforts to implement centrally planned developmental projects in the area accompanied by massive militarisation, which resulted in human rights violations, the loss of lives and property and an overall deterioration of security.

Because of the dearth of studies conducted in this area, these issues have hardly been documented before; this is also due to the intricate nature of the conflict.

The Indian Government has conventionally blamed the conflict on economic 'backwardness', and has responded with economic incentives. In fact, most political leaders in New Delhi are convinced that economic incentives can in themselves terminate the conflict, therefore misrecognising and denying its political dimensions. This dissertation rather suggests that India's national leaders are implicitly trying to follow Karl W. Deutsch's belief that 'modernization', intended as a combination of policies favouring urbanisation, industrialisation, schooling and the building of communication infrastructures

and transportation networks, will automatically lead to nation-building and, eventually, ‘assimilation’ into the national core. And, while defining the conflict as a question of ‘law and order’, the Indian Government has heavily relied on its army and paramilitary forces to re-establish the rule of law.

The dissertation concludes that such a *developmentalist* path was not implemented by taking into consideration the well-being of the region’s inhabitants, but was rather a concerted effort to exercise full spectrum political dominance and military control over a frontier area and turn it into a ‘normal’ part of India’s national space.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study is undertaken to examine the mutual relationship between migration and conflicts in Manipur, a former ancient kingdom located in a 'region' known as the 'north-east' of the post-colonial Indian state. Migration here is understood as the influx of internal as well as international migrants into the state of Manipur in the post-independence period. The conflict is described as the enduring non-international armed conflict¹ (NIAC) within Manipur. Understanding the relationship between the two concepts is significant (as the study will reveal in successive chapters) as far as India's north-eastern region in general and Manipur in particular is concerned, because migration as a phenomenon largely emanates from the developmentalist² nation-state-building process undertaken by the Indian state.

After Manipur was annexed³ in 1949 labourers, skilled and unskilled, were brought in from mainland India to take part in the developmental projects; this was the starting point of contention. After the completion of the developmental projects, these labourers refused to return to their native lands and this triggered ethnic clashes with the native population. Mostly such clashes were on account of frictions arising out of the sharing of resources (particularly natural resources)

¹ For details of the definition of international as well as non-international armed conflict see International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (2008). *How is the Term "Armed Conflict" Defined in International Humanitarian Law?* .

² The term 'developmentalist' here mainly refers to the militarily induced developmentalism that the Indian Government has been embarking on as the central legitimizing strategy implemented to justify and establish firmer control over these frontier areas. For more details, see Chapter 4.

³ For more details see Chapter 2.

or homeland demands by the settlers etc. This demands a thorough investigation of the politics of India's nation-building project that largely relies on militaristic developmentalism, especially towards the north-eastern region, and how it has deliberately or inadvertently brought migration and conflict to this hinterland.

Theoretical context

Many migration scholars have attempted to offer a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon of human migration since the dawn of mass migration but 'none has been successful'⁴ in elucidating a comprehensive theory of migration. In fact, migration is defined as 'too diverse', 'multifaceted', 'multiform' and 'resistant to theory building' a phenomenon to be explained by a single theory (Arango, 2000). During the second half of the twentieth century many scholars, including Ravenstein (1985) and Sjaastad (1962), tended to explain migration from the perspective of economics. But none of them could evolve an all-encompassing theory of migration.

Sjaastad (1962) argued that migration is the result of 'individual', 'spontaneous', and 'voluntary' choices determined by a cost benefit calculus, including 'psychic cost' (Sjaastad, 1962:85). But his argument fails to explain the 'non-spontaneous' such as 'state sponsored' or 'state facilitated' migration that occurs in some parts of the world. Thus, one cannot fully ignore migration from a political point of view, i.e. 'state sponsored' or 'state facilitated' migration to nationalize the territory as well as the people living in the frontier areas. For instance, state sponsored migration in the northwestern parts of China, the Central Sulawesi of Indonesia, Nabire in West Papua etc.; or the state encouraged migration in the Andaman and Nicobar islands of India, in Mindanao, Philippines etc. - these are examples of politically and strategically motivated migrations.

⁴ Arango, J. (2000). Explaining Migration: A Critical View. *International Social Science Journal*, 52 (165), 283-296 (Arango, 2000:283).

In the same vein, migration in India's north-eastern region is also far from just being an economic issue and is far too complex to be explained by a single economic theory as described by the classical/neo-classical thinkers. Rather, the migration processes in this region seem to be tinged with the politics of a 'nation-state-building' process by the Indian Government. In other words, migration in this region is promoted as part of a nation-state-building mission, which is deeply intertwined with, and invariably related to, modernization or developmentalist approaches. Because nation-building was conflated, and confused, with state-making, the formation of common institutions was imbued with nationalist ideology and founded on 'othering' most tribal areas. This often led to a further fall in the legitimacy of the Indian state and, hence, a loss of control in several regions (Guyot-Réchar, 2013).

Nation-state-building approaches by the Government of India, though not as harsh as Mao's (Chinese Han) expansionist method that eliminated millions of people, rather foster ethnic consciousness and widen the emotional gap between the populations of the north-eastern region and the mainland people of India. This creates an atmosphere of 'us' and 'them' because it bypasses many historical, cultural and social considerations in the process.

Many of India's political elites have observed that the modernist approach to nation-state-building (the developmentalist approach) is the perfect mechanism to nationalise or integrate all the multi-ethnic populations of the fringe territories. The national leaders of India, perhaps, tried to follow Karl W. Deutsch's (1953) philosophy that 'modernization, in the form of increases in urbanization, industrialization, schooling, communication and transportation facilities, and so on, would lead to assimilation' (cited in Connor, 1994:31).

Of course, India (using the developmentalist model as a tool of nation-state-building), since its inception as a republican country, has been able to consolidate around six hundred princely kingdoms to form a country/state called India. But it apparently fails to offer benefits to many of the people of the north-east region since the policy is normally a top-down approach that is executed by

bureaucrats who have little knowledge of the region.⁵ Rather, the region is plagued by an intractable armed conflict situation. The enduring armed movements issue in India's north-east is, by and large, turning out to be an offshoot of India's nation-building processes that largely rely on western countries' state-building approach. That is why one of the former prominent Indian politicians argued, 'India's state making and nation building approach apparently lacks the idea of national consciousness' (Narayan, 2003).

Significance of the study

Manipur has been experiencing one of the longest armed movements in South Asia. The region has also been experiencing violent inter-ethnic conflict since the late 1980s, which mainly stems from the issue of homeland demands amongst the diverse ethnic groups or, often, amongst dominant ethnic groups against the denizens.

The political impasse, in the case of Manipur, is largely hinged on the controversial merger into the Union of India. Other significant factors are: the imposition of the controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958 (hereafter AFSPA) in almost all parts of this region; state facilitated migration; diversity in ethnicity between the mainland and Manipur; centralised politics, in which the managers of the state (i.e. politicians) often take decisions without firm knowledge or very much consideration of the dynamics of ethnic structure in the region, bypassing the integrity of federal structures and so on.

So far, the Indian Government has described the situation in the north-east as the outcome of economic backwardness or a mere internal 'law and order' problem and has responded with economic incentives. That is why the Central

⁵ To date, the Governors in all the eight north-eastern states of India have come from military/police force backgrounds. See details in Baruah, S. (2007). *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 59. Also see Narayan, J. (2003). *Nation Building in India* (Brahmanand, Ed.) Varanasi: Brahmanand Navachetna Prakashan.

Government has been implementing various developmental projects, including the construction of mega dams, transnational highways, petroleum exploration etc., which has resulted in the influx of migrants/immigrants, ethnic conflict, public unrest and so on. It should be remembered that the government at the centre exclusively deputed a ministry, the Department of Northeast Region (DONER), for the welfare and development of this very region; this will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

The above-mentioned issues, such as the controversial merger and AFSPA among other things, have hardly been documented so far and there is a dearth of study conducted particularly in Manipur. It is not only the lack of literature but also because of the complicated armed conflict situation. The researcher, being an insider, is able to provide a detailed account of the issue. This study will largely benefit students of political science, policy studies, development studies, and so on.

Research problem

One can argue that the palpable danger posed by India's neighbouring countries may be the reason for the Central Government to whip up the nationalising mission, and fill up the fringe territories (the north-eastern region in this case) with the 'nation-bearing population'. However, one should not be blind to the environmental, social and political costs that are incurred in the process by the ethnic groups who identify themselves as the indigenous people. Besides, 'filling lands within state boundaries by a population representing the nation-bearing population has its gory character' (Fearon & Laitin, cited in Baruah, 2007).

Throughout the history of international migration movement has been important to the dynamics of interstate conflict (Valeriano, 2009). The typical narrative is that of war causing forced migration or migration movements being used as coercive state strategy to achieve policy goals. The questions ignored in the

literature are what happens when migration is a contributing factor to conflict or violence in the first place (Valeriano, 2009)? How and when does migration lead to conflict? How relevant is the causal path of migration movements to the onset of conflict or violence and what impact does migration have on the onset of conflict throughout history? Most of the studies focus mainly on policy issues or border coordination problems and lack an emphasis on the issue of migration movements and its linkage to the security of the receiving state (Valeriano, 2009).

Overall, scholars know very little about the causal direction of migration (Valeriano, 2009) and the study of the nexus between migration and security largely fails to include the broader impact on international security (Choucri, 2002). A simple review of history shows that conflict causes forced migration, but migration in general is yet to be explored (Valeriano, 2009). Post 9/11,⁶ migration has been seen as an important national security issue with migrants lumped alongside transnational criminals, terrorists and drug traffickers as a problem for the state to deal with.⁷ Fears of the ‘other’ or internal destabilization caused by an influx of migrants are factors that should be added to the causes of war research agenda (Valeriano, 2009).

No doubt migrants play an important role in the economic development of the receiving country as well as the originating country. But an influx of migrants has not only had adverse effects on the delicate ethnic balance of the receiving native population, leading to social and ethnic unrests and political movements, but has also had short and long-term effects on the economy. However, taking the steps to find that migration could cause conflict does not mean that migration should be discouraged; but it is important for the state to make a serious effort to incorporate new migrants before conflict can erupt (Valeriano, 2009). For instance, the loss of land of the people of India’s north-east in

⁶ The 11 September 2001 attack on the United States by an Islamic terrorist group, Al-Qaeda, is popularly known as or referred to as ‘9/11’. It was a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks targeting specific landmarks including the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

⁷ Andreas, P. (2003). “Redrawing the Line: Borders and Security in the Twenty-first Century.” *International Security* 28(2): 78-111, cited in Valeriano, B. (2009).

general, and Manipur in particular, to denizens and the struggle for control over power and tangible economic interests became a source of ethnic conflicts, the rise of insurgent groups, counter-insurgency operations and human rights violations (Baruah, 2007). Besides, the sources of conflict do not seem to be limited to tangible economic interests or control over power, but also extend to values and identity differences. The potential for conflict exists where opposing interests, values or needs tinge our relationships with others. The latent conditions of conflict eventually translate into multiple forms of enmity (Jeong, 2008).

In this regard, we may consider Geiger's (2008) argument that the state's policy programme of resettlement of its expanding population at national fringes not necessarily, but usually, underpins multiple implicit intentions. For Geiger, states fill up their frontiers with migrants not only to seek relief from demographic and social pressures, but also to nationalise the frontier space that has not borne the full signature of the national community before (Geiger, 2008; Baruah, 2007:33-57).

The Government of India, with the zeal of 'nationalising' the north-eastern frontier region and to make the 'Look East Policy' (LEP) successful in its engagement with south-east Asian and east Asian countries, created an economic niche in the region as early as the 1960s and 1990s, respectively. The policy attracted large-scale migrants/immigrants into the region. The north-eastern region also became an 'essential' strategic location, when the spectre of competition for trade and commerce in south-east Asia or east Asia was realized, together with a looming 'threat' to national security from neighbouring countries. In fact, the discourse of development or under-development of India's north-east region suddenly became an inevitable business for the New Delhi Government after the Chinese invasion of India during the early 1960s. In order to expand its control over the north-east region, the Delhi Government tried

various options, prioritising ‘nation-state-building’ or ‘state sponsored migration’⁸ through a militarization process.

Further, the process of India’s nation-state-building or the project of nationalising North-eastern Frontier peripheries has created an unprecedented twist in the demographical structure of the native population that eventually led to an atmosphere of overwhelming ethnic tension. For New Delhi on the other hand, the demographic twist or ethnic dilution in its north-east region, or Manipur in particular, will lead to eventual effective control of the region’s durable problems, if not a lasting solution (Baruah, 2007:35). However, the process of nationalisation to some extent exacerbates ethnic tensions in this region. These nationalising policies have been contested and resisted by the natives, who have unmasked the disruptive substance of militaristic developmentalism.

Accordingly, this study is an attempt to address the ‘state facilitated migration’ process in the context and as part of a broader ‘developmentalist’ drive in India’s north-eastern frontier provinces, particularly in Manipur. The ‘militaristic developmentalism’ approach of the central government, it is argued, is a central legitimizing strategy and ideology implemented to justify and establish firmer control over the frontier areas. For the purpose of this research, militaristic developmentalism is taken as a concept of development that largely focuses on national security - i.e. for the easy movement of the state’s armed forces at the huge socio-political and environmental costs of its own people. Thus, the central argument of the study is whether the Government of India uses ‘militaristic developmentalism’ as a tool of nation-building, i.e. to nationalise, to control or to suppress the everlasting voice of the people of Manipur who have been demanding their basic rights.

⁸ Geiger, D. (2008). *Frontier Encounter: Indigenous Communities and Settlers in Asia and Latin America*, (D. Geiger, Ed.) Copenhagen: IWGIA, (Geiger, 2008), Baruah, S. (2007). *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press (Baruah, 2007)

In addition to this central argument, the study also attempts to examine the following questions:

1. Do India's nationalising projects play an important role in attracting or accommodating migrants/immigrants to the state of Manipur, and how has the process led to violent conflicts in this region?
2. How far are the rights of the indigenous people, including basic human rights, respected in this nationalising process?

In attempting to answer the above questions, the study relies on documents available in the public domain such as books, journals, government documents, reports and other relevant sources. Certain qualitative research methods such as content analysis in order to deduce the theory and the data collected is also employed in the study. Keeping in view the objectives and research questions, the researcher attempted to collect both primary and secondary data. Attempts to conduct the study based on field survey and interviews were given up on account of its sensitive nature. Thus, the researcher was not able to collect any primary data. Most of the immigrants refused to reveal their identities, given the current drive against immigrants (outsiders) by some civil societies as well as by some of the armed oppositions groups. At the same time, officials concerned with migration and settlement refused to disclose this information for the same reasons.

Survey of literature

There is much literature on migration as well as on armed conflict. But there is a dearth of literature on how migrants are facilitated or sponsored by the state to control armed conflict by means of militaristic developmentalism. Some of the literature that is pertinent to the study of migration, armed conflict and nation-building is discussed in this section.

Danilo Geiger's *Frontier Encounters: Indigenous Communities and Settlers in Asia and Latin America* discusses frontier colonisation through 'state sponsored' or 'state facilitated' migration by means of militaristic developmentalism. For Geiger, many states employ migration policies, or tacitly support migration, as they perceive facilitated or sponsored migration 'as either economically and demographically useful, or as a potent instrument for "nation-building" or geo-strategy (defence of national borders and internal counter-insurgency)' (Geiger, 2008).

Sanjib Baruah's book, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (2007) discusses the durable low-intensity armed conflict in north-east India. One chapter in this book, *Nationalizing Space*, is closely related to this study. In this chapter, Baruah discusses how, in recent times, the Government of India has pumped a huge amount of resources and incentives into the north-east region to control the problem of insurgency. For him, the policy of the Indian Government has not brought any significant changes. Instead, it has affected the political life, social fabric and physical infrastructure of the region (Baruah, 2007).

Myron Weiner's book, *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India* (1978) is a significant contribution. This book looks at the 'social and political consequences of the internal migration in a multiethnic low-income society.' Weiner puts forward two specific hypotheses. The first is that the process of modernisation, by providing incentives and opportunities for mobility, creates the conditions for increased internal migration; the second hypothesis is that the modernisation process nurtures the growth of ethnic identification and ethnic cohesion.

Subir Bhaumik's, *Trouble Periphery: Crisis of India's North East* (2009) is another notable piece of work. Bhaumik's book discusses the continued armed conflict situation in India's post-independence north-east region. For him, 'land, language and leadership issues have been the seed of contention' where ethnicity, ideology and religion play an important role in shaping the conflict.

The book also looks at India's apparently failed developmentalist approach that was programmed to combat the continued problems in the north-eastern region.

Urmila Phadnis & Rajat Ganguly's book, *Ethnicity and Nation-building in South Asia* (2001) is another excellent work on ethnic movement in an intricate region, i.e. south Asia. It largely discusses post-colonial south Asian countries' nation-building approaches that needed to be re-assessed since they focused nation-building 'almost exclusively on creating a unified "national identity" based around either common political values and citizenship or a putative majoritarian "ethnic" identity'.

Another notable work is from an eminent thinker and one of the architects of India's freedom, a former Indian Union minister Shri Jayaprakash Narayan's *Nation Building in India* (2003). This book is a collection of articles, public speeches and press statements by the author who discusses the problems of India's nation-building process. To cite one among the many arguments in his book, Narayan claims that 'India was never a nation, nor is it a nation today, because the most important ingredient in the process of nation-building i.e. "national consciousness" and "emotional integration" is woefully lacking even today'. He further argues that India's nation-building process might be shortened by wise leadership or bedevilled by narrowness and stupidity because in a multi-national state, territorial integration may be enough to form a nation-state only with 'emotional integration'.

Beyond Counter-insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India, (2009) is an excellent edited work by Sanjib Baruah. The book as a whole discusses the age-old armed conflict situation, militarisation and human rights violations in north-east India.

Ethnonationalism in India: A Reader (2010), edited by Sanjib Baruah looks at various ethnic movements including separatism, secessionism, sub-nationalism and regionalism. Baruah argues that ethno-national demands in post-colonial India are often accommodated, but there are times when they escalate into intractable conflicts. This may be because of flawed national policies.

Wounded Land: Politics and Identity in Modern Manipur (2005) by John Parratt gives a fair account of the political evolution of modern Manipur from early twentieth century until the present day. The merger of Manipur with the Union of India, militarisation, insurgency, civil rights abuses and the failure of state apparatus are the main themes discussed in this book.

Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People, by United Committee Manipur (2005) looks at the anxieties and apprehensions of native Manipuris over the apparent influx of migrants into Manipur.

Summary of the chapters

Chapter 1 (Introduction) covers the background and aims of the thesis, including theoretical concepts, definitions used and research methodology.

Chapter 2 (Manipur: its past and present) explains the historical background and socio-political and economic structures of Manipur. This chapter is important in providing a broader insight into the issues in this region. The main discussion in this chapter is on how Manipur's two thousand years of sovereignty came under British suzerainty, and later on was controversially merged with the Union of India in 1949. This chapter also gives an account of how economic and cultural factors in Manipur play a significant role in shaping the political identity as well as ethnic consciousness of the natives.

Chapter 3 (Militarisation and the protracted armed conflict) discusses the militarisation, protracted armed conflict and resultant human rights violations in Manipur and tries to explain the root causes. The chapter also looks at the number of counter-insurgency operations that resulted in widespread human rights violations ranging from disappearances to mass rape, torture and the murder of many civilians.

Chapter 4 (India's developmentalist approach: a policy to nationalise the frontier space?) discusses *militaristic developmentalism* - another indicator of how the

Indian Government's nation-building approach is in danger since the Indian armed forces, who are specially trained to defend the country's territory against foreign aggression, are engaged in combating internal law and order problems with extraordinary power of impunity. The chapter also looks at the concept of India's nation-state-building that believes that 'traditional' or 'tribal' societies can be modernised by industrialisation and that this facilitates the nation-building process. The chapter also discusses demographic issues, including displacement of the native population and influx of migrant labour among others, because 'in a sparsely populated frontier region, a developmentalist trajectory invariably means changes in demography and this has made the political trends in the region increasingly more complex and contradictory' (Baruah, 2007:39).

Chapter 5 (Migration in Manipur) discusses the narrative of Manipur's nearly two-millennium old history (dating back to AD 33) that has the tradition of accommodating a pluralistic coexistence and interdependence among the diverse ethnic groups settled in the territory. In the later part of the chapter, the recent phenomenon of resisting new migrants/immigrants, particularly to mainland India, is investigated. It is a recent trend that the tiny, non-dominant, ethnic group(s) of Manipur are seeking greater autonomy, a quest which often ends up in violent conflict and mass displacement.

In fact, Manipur's cultural and ethnic diversity has started to face even more difficulties as even non-native or denizens begin to advance demands for separate homeland rights. Manipur's pluralism has become subject to crisis due to competition over the ownership of both tangible and intangible resources. The proliferation of homeland demands generally paves the way for the perception of out-group members as the 'other', leading to exclusivity and inclusivity. Manipur's simmering ethnic conflict is often framed as an immigration derived threat to the presumed homogeneity of their ethnic territory and 'native' democracy. Within this complex, ethnic structure, denizens from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and mainland Indian regions are at the receiving end of the conflict.

This development of ‘otherness’ between the people of mainland India, who are considered to be the ‘nation-bearing population’ by the people of the north-east, and the people of the north-east who identify themselves as the ‘indigenous’ population is an appealing argument made in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 (Conclusion) argues that the nationalising effort of the Government of India needs to be re-examined since forced integration (as many of the armed opposing groups of India’s north-eastern region used to claim) has resulted in a protracted armed conflict situation. It is argued that the ‘unity in diversity’ that Indian leaders have been loudly proclaiming since the inception of India is in danger and is likely to be confronted with a host of unpalatable issues. If the Government of India continues with this current militaristic way of nation-state-building then India has to exterminate the entire population of this region, which the country considers to be her citizens. Otherwise, India has to find an alternative solution.

Chapter 2

Manipur: Its past and present

Understanding Manipur's history, geography, culture and socio-political structure is very important to the study of political issues in Manipur. Thus, this chapter analyses Manipur's polity and how the erstwhile sovereign kingdom with a history of around two thousand years came under British suzerainty that later merged⁹ with the India Union. This chapter also gives an account of how the geography and social and cultural factors of Manipur play a significant role in shaping the political identity as well as the ethnic consciousness of the native population.

Geographical setting

Manipur, an erstwhile Asiatic independent kingdom, is one of seven states¹⁰ situated in the 'region' called the north-east¹¹ of the post-colonial Indian state. The state (Manipur) is inhabited by around 2.7 million people (0.22 per cent of

⁹ Opinion ranges from merger/integration to annexation. For details, see Kabui, G. K. (2011, 2-August). *Colonial Policy and Practice in Manipur*. Kangla Online. Also see Parrat, J. (2005). *Wounded Land - Political and Identity in Modern Manipur*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication.

¹⁰ India is a federation of states albeit nowhere in the Indian constitution is the word 'federation' mentioned.

¹¹ India's north-east region is comprised of seven federal states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. It hosts about two hundred and fifty different ethnic tribal communities – i.e. almost half of all of India's tribal communities. This makes India's north-east one of the most ethnically and culturally heterogeneous areas in Asia.

India's total population as per 2011 census). In terms of size, the state is more or less the size of Wales or the Basque Country (i.e. the Euskal Herria that includes the territory of north-eastern Spain and the south-eastern part of France).¹² The state is divided into nine administrative districts with an overall area of 22,327 square kilometres (0.7 per cent of India's territory). The state (or the north-eastern region in general) is sandwiched between Bangladesh on the south, China to the north, Myanmar to the east and Bhutan and Nepal to the north-west. The region as a whole is almost cut off from the rest of India; it is only connected by a narrow strip of land in the northern part of West Bengal, informally known as 'the chicken neck'.

The Meetei¹³ (also written as Meitei) and the 'tribal'¹⁴ communities are the major native/indigenous ethnic communities of Manipur whose linguistic heritage belongs to the Mon-Khmer (Austro-Asiatic) language family and the Tibeto-Burman (non-Sinitic) languages of the Sino-Tibetan language family (Kabui 1991). Hindu and Christianity are the dominant religions, with others in smaller numbers being Muslims, Buddhists and animist communities.¹⁵

Geographically, Manipur is characterized by an amalgamation of scenic beauty, rich varieties of flora and fauna (including rare and endangered species such as *Sangai* and the *Siroi Lily*¹⁶), miles of picturesque paddy fields and a sizable amount of oil and mineral (particularly mica, bauxite and limestone) deposits. Topographically, mountainous ranges and valleys describe the features of the state. The mountain system and valleys of Manipur are part of the Himalayan orogeny with an average elevation of 790 metres above mean sea level. More

¹² This may be interesting: (Urgell 2008).

¹³ Manipur is inhabited by various ethnic communities such as Kuki-Chin-Mizos, Meiteis, Nagas etc. Meiteis, who are non-tribal and predominantly follow Hindu religion, are the dominant ethnic community and mostly settle in the valley.

¹⁴ Das, S. K. (2007). *Conflict and Peace in India's Northeast: Role of Civil Society*. Washington: East-West Center. pp 6-7 (Das 2007).

¹⁵ Christian and animistic culture can be found mainly around the hill districts or the foothills of Manipur respectively.

¹⁶ *Sangai* (the brow antlered deer) – an endangered deer species that is found exclusively in Manipur. The state is also known for a rare flower – '*Siroi Lily*' on *Siroi* hill range – that can be found only in Manipur. Its scientific name '*Lilium Mackliniae*' was named after the discoverer Frank Kingdon Ward's wife 'Macklin' in 1946.

than half of the land area is covered by forest and only one-tenth of its area is fertile alluvial plain, the rest is mountainous or hilly terrain. Some of the river systems such as the Imphal River, the Iril River and the Nambul River among others, provide an ecological environment for the Manipuri civilization. These above-mentioned river systems drain almost the entire valley of Manipur and provide a fertile flood plain. These river systems, particularly the Imphal, once served as a trade route between Manipur and south-east Asian countries via the Chinwin river in Myanmar.

With regard to the relationship between the Manipuri civilization and the geographical features of Manipur, Kabui, in his book *History of Manipur*, argues that the geographical division of Manipur is a determinant factor in the socio-political and historical development of the land (Kabui, 1991).

The Meeteis, who mostly occupy the fertile valley, are advanced in technology and have better social and economic organisations that led to the growth of the kingdom while on the upland, political systems could not develop beyond the village society. The Meetei Empire used to have very sophisticated relations with its neighbouring states. The tracks through the mountain ranges provide routes for both trade and human migration for the little known men of the Indo-Mongoloid race: the dark Negrito and Dravidian and the tall and fair complexioned Caucasoid who trickled into this land in search of habitat and livelihood, for wealth, power and glory from prehistoric times down to the present century (Kabui, 1991).

Geopolitically, Manipur has a very important strategic location, sharing an international border with Myanmar. The state is also situated on the erstwhile trade routes of south Asia, south-east Asia and central Asia. Thus, by virtue of its location, Chinese goods were transported through Manipur (Hanjabam, 2008). That was how silk products or the tradition of keeping silkworms (sericulture), brick making, gunpowder production etc. was known to the people of Manipur as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Accounts of the trade between Manipur and China's Yunnan province are recorded in the Court's Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur – the '*Cheitharol Kumpaba*' composed in *Meetei Mayek* – the archaic Manipuri script (Parratt, 2005). Besides, various ethnic groups belonging to southern-Mongoloid groups, the Tibeto-Burman, the Indo-Aryans and a sizeable group of Tai (Shan community) came to Manipur from pre-historic times hitherto. The present ethnic groups of Manipur, such as the Meetei(s), the Naga tribes, the Kuki-Chin tribes and other Indian communities are the descendants of those migrating people and Manipur's central valley provides the ideal ecological setting for building a civilization – the *Manipuri/Meetei civilization*.¹⁷

In terms of popularity, the erstwhile kingdom of Manipur was recognised by neighbouring states, particularly by the Shan kingdom through the treaty signed between King Kiyamba of Manipur and King Khekhomba of Pong (Shan) Kingdom of upper Burma in the year AD 1470. The Meetei kings had also signed many treaties with the British Empire as well as with the Burmese kings. These include the Anglo-Manipur Friendship Treaty (1762), the Anglo-Manipur Defence Protocol (1763) and the trilateral Treaty of Yandabo between the British Empire, the Burmese kingdom and the kingdom of Manipur (1826).¹⁸

The kingdom of Manipur, and the Meetei kingdom in particular, possessed a distinct political and territorial status for centuries, with a highly literate and developed culture and an advanced literary tradition, dating back to AD 33. In fact, Manipur had established a vibrant and developed kingdom when state formation was unknown in most parts of India (Chandhoke, 2006).

It was on 15th August 1947, when the British Crown left India, that the kingdom of Manipur regained its sovereignty. Eventually, the Manipur State Council

¹⁷ According to the Manipuri historian Professor Kabui, the immigrants brought with them varying degrees of technology ranging from Old Stone Age, rough-stone tools, to more refined Neolithic potters. With the coming of metal tools, mostly bronze, copper and tin during the historical period from Thailand and the Upper Burma cultural zone, the metal civilisation of Manipur was developed mostly through trade (Kabui, 1991).

¹⁸ The treaty of Yandabo (1826) was signed between the Meetei king, the British and the Burmese government when the Burmese army occupied the entire territory of Manipur during the Burmese invasion of Manipur between 1819 and 1826 (still remembered as the 'Seven Year Devastation') (Hanjabam, 2008).

passed the Manipur State Constitution Act in 1947, under which the king also surrendered his power to the people in order to form a popular democratic government through a universal adult franchise¹⁹ (Hanjabam, 2008). However, Manipur's sovereignty was short-lived as the erstwhile independent state merged with the Union of India on 21st September 1949. Whether Manipur was merged with the Union of India of its own free will or whether it was an act of annexation has been a debate between the Government of India and the pro-independent groups of Manipur that will be discussed later in this chapter.

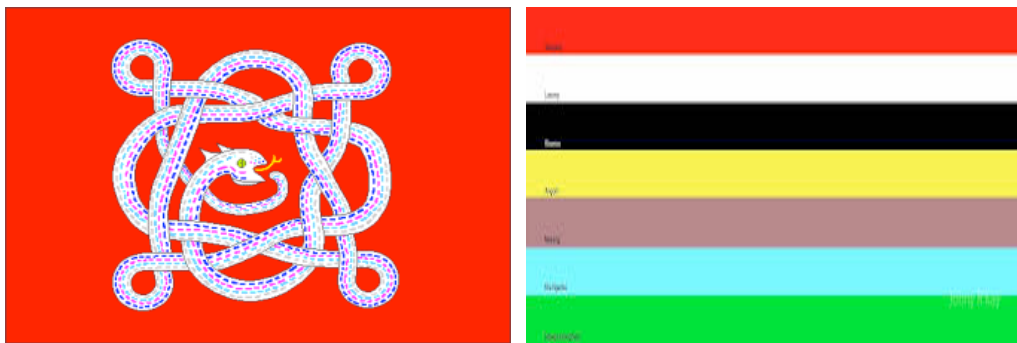


Figure 1: *Flags of erstwhile kingdom of Manipur (alternate).*²⁰

Peoples of Manipur

The people of Manipur are roughly clustered into three main indigenous ethnic communities: the Meetei, the Naga, and the Chin-Kuki.²¹ The Meetei constitute approximately 60 per cent of the total population (Census of India, 2001).

¹⁹ Manipur was the first state to hold a democratic election in India. See Chandhoke, N. (2006). *A State of One's Own: Secessionism and Federalism in India*. London: LSE.

²⁰ Robinson, A. (2005, February 15). *The Rhizomes of Manipur*. Institute of Asia Pacific Studies, University of Nottingham.

²¹ Naga and Kuki are the generic terms for the tribal ethnic communities that cover large numbers of sub-tribes in the whole of north-east India and some parts of Burma where Kuki probably means a Hillman. For details see Kabui, G. (1991). *History of Manipur* (Vol. 1). New Delhi: National Publishing House, pp. 23-24.

Depending on the size of the population²² and the ethnic area towards which they gravitate, some tribal communities have been absorbed into the larger ethnic communities, such as the Naga or the Kuki.²³ Other tribal communities, for example, the Gangte, Paite, Vaiphei and Zou, have recently coalesced and identified themselves as the united Zomi tribal community.²⁴

Table 1: *Distribution of Population by Religion in Manipur (1951-2001)*

Religious Communities	Population						Percent age increase 1991-2001
	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	
Hindu	3,47,325	4,81,112	6,32,597	8,53,180	10,59,470	9,96,894	(-) 5.91
Muslim	37,197	48,588	70,969	99,327	1,33,535	1,90,939	4.3
Christian	68,394	1,52,043	2,79,243	4,21,702	6,26,669	7,37,578	17.7
Sikh	50	523	1,028	992	1,301	1,653	27.06
Buddhist	33	325	495	473	711	1,926	170.89
Jain	150	778	1,408	975	1,337	1,461	9.27
Others*	1,24,486	N.A	83,167	35,490	14,066	2,35,280	1572.69
Religions not stated	N.A	96,668	3,846	8,814	60	1,057	1661.67
Total	5,77,635	7,80,037	10,72,753	14,20,953	18,37,149	21,66,788 **	17.94

* Other religions include recently revived animism and Sanamahism.

²² The population of Purum tribal communities, Tarao tribe, Koirang tribe, Thangal tribal communities, etc. are as small as 503, 600, 1056, 1200 respectively. See Tribal Research Institute (2012, NA NA). *Tribes of Manipur*. Tribal Research Institute. Also see Sanajaoba, N. (2005). *Manipur: Past and Present - The Ordeals and Heritage of a Civilization, Pan-Manipuris in Asia and Autochthones* (Vol. 4). New Delhi: Mittal Publication.

²³ Chiru and Kom tribes often identified themselves as Naga in some districts, but as Kuki in others. Also see Baruah, S. (2010). *Confronting Constructionism: Ending the Naga War*. In S. Baruah, & S. Baruah (Ed.), *Ethnonationalism in India: A Reader* (pp. 239-262). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

²⁴ Between 1997-1998, an ethnic conflict broke out in Manipur between the Kuki and the Zomi tribes due to differences of opinion in naming their unified tribe as 'Kuki'. It was the Thadou-Kuki tribal arm militant groups who were in favour of naming their unified group as the Kuki, whereas the Paite tribe disowned the imposed name. As many as 13,000 people were displaced, around fifty villages were destroyed, nearly five thousand houses gutted into ash and nearly one thousand died.

*** Excluding Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul Sub-division of Senapati District*

Source: Office of the Registrar General of India, cited in Economic Survey of Manipur (2008-09)

Brief account of the history of Manipur

The history of any human civilization is, in a way, the creation of historians based on their perception, reconstruction and interpretation of past events and reflects the power relations and patterns of political domination of their age. The reconstruction of the past depends on the availability of sources and on the method of selection of these resources. In the same vein, Manipuri history is also the outcome of reconstructing the past based on sources categorised into three main headings: indigenous literary sources (including myths), archaeological evidence and foreign travellers' accounts - including archival materials.

Nevertheless, some fundamental questions can be raised such as, whether Manipur's history and civilisation developed an affinity with, or originated from, another 'grand' civilisation, or whether it developed autonomously in the labyrinth of space and time. A related question is whether there was any civilisation at all in the Manipuri (Meetei) kingdom or perhaps some other form of intermediate civilization (Sanajaoba, 1991).

Regarding the evolution of Manipuri/Meetei civilisation, Sanajaoba, an eminent Manipuri scholar, argues that:

Meeteileipak (or also known as Kangleipak) which has been known in the Sanskritized nomenclature as 'Manipur' during the last three centuries had been the cradle of the autochthones which evolved from the stone age culture, the earliest settlers and the other ethnoses in the early period of history. This process of assimilation of the ethnoses was completed in the pre-Christian era with the integration of seven major

principalities, which ultimately emerged into a confederate nationality – the Meeteis (Sanajaoba, 1991:23).

In summary, the history of Manipur and the formation of the Meetei kingdom was deeply intertwined with the history of the ‘Seven Principalities’²⁵. The age-long struggle between the Principalities ‘continued till the Meetei,’²⁶ also known as the *Ningthouja* principality, established its supremacy over the rest and absorbed them one by one into the Meetei/Ningthouja dynasty over a period that lasted several centuries’ (Sharma, 2010:80).

A key factor that helped erstwhile principalities to prevail over the others was the strategic control of resources, including human as well as natural resources around the Imphal valley. In this way, they could exercise supremacy over the surrounding hill tribes. The Meetei Ningthoujas were the ones who achieved this goal.

The Kingdom of Manipur had a written constitution, the *Loiyumba Shinyen*, drafted as early as AD 1110 during King Loiyumba’s period. In fact, it was a Royal Decree in which the king’s subjects in the valley area were entrusted with specific tasks. This was a form of division of labour based on one’s family surname. For example, Thangjam, a Meetei surname, was entrusted with crafts related to smithery (*thang* means sword made of metal, *jam* or *yum* means household which manufactures the same). Likewise, the surname Yenshenbam was responsible for poultry related works. These are some of the traditional surnames found in the valley within the Meitei community. Later on, succeeding rulers made additions to the constitution such as adding new surnames with new tasks and new rules and regulations pertaining to laws of production and distribution of the goods and services etc. For example, Lairikyengbam is a new

²⁵ The history of Manipur or, more precisely, the history of the Meetei (s) is based on the seven principalities namely, Ningthouja (Mangang), Khaba-Nganba, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moirang and Chenglei (Sarang-Leishangthem).

²⁶ Besides the Meiteis belonging to the seven clans, there is a community named the *Lois*. They are believed to be one of the earliest bands of settlers in Manipur who were subdued by the Meeteis. In former days large numbers of Meeteis who committed crimes against the state or those who violated social customs and traditions were degraded to the Lois community as punishment. For further details, see Sharma, H. S. (2010). *Self-Determination Movement in Manipur*. Mumbai: Unpublished.

surname that originally hailed from Bengal and they were entrusted with book-keeping and editing the royal chronicles. This decree was transformed into a complete code of norms and duties to be rendered by all including the hill tribes and other communities over whom the sovereignty of the Meitei Kings ran (Kabui, 2003).

With regard to written records, Kabui, a Manipuri historian, has argued that documentation of the history of Manipur gained its importance through the contact with the British.²⁷ This argument may hold some truth, although Manipur has written historical records called *Puya(s)* dating back to AD 33, the *Cheitharol Kumpaba* being the most reliable. The Manipur State Archive has several *Puya(s)* (ancient historical texts) and chronicles written about clan genealogies, the King's expeditions etc., which are an important testimony of Manipur's history.

In fact, it was the British colonial officials, including the missionaries, who took an interest in studying the lifestyle, culture and beliefs of the people of Manipur. Thereafter, the trend in documenting history slowly began in Manipur's literary society. The early British writings on Manipuri history are, however, mostly written along ethnographic lines. For instance, T.C. Hodson's book, *The Meithei – A Study of the Tribe of the Brahmaputra Valley*, was one of the first books in which ethnographers began to write on the history of Manipur (Hodson, 2011).²⁸ Hodson's book deals in particular with the Meitei ethnic community and discusses the lifestyle, food habits, dresses and ornaments, tradition and customary laws, religious belief systems and practices of the *Meitei* communities. His book, however, lacks a precise account of the history of Manipur.

Among the royal chronicles of Manipur, the *Cheitharol Kumpaba* is considered to be one of the most reliable. The text has records dating back to AD 33

²⁷ See Renuka, K. (2013). *Comparative study on Cheitharol Kumpaba and Rajatarangini*. New Delhi: Unpublished.

²⁸ See also Kabui, G. (1991). *History of Manipur* (Vol. 1). New Delhi: National Publishing House.

(Renuka, 2013). The original text of the *Cheitharol Kumpaba* was written in archaic Meetei script called the 'Meetei Mayek', but later transliterated both into 'Manipuri-Bengali' script and English.²⁹

John Parrat, an expert on Manipur's history, argues that, for the pre-British period, *Cheitharol Kumpaba* is the only source of Manipur's history which has a substantial historical value (Parrat, 2005). He adds that the British administrator did not fail to acknowledge the importance of the *Cheitharol Kumpaba* as the most trusted source of information about the Meiteis, and the British made a pioneering attempt to study and understand its contents during the early nineteenth century. In fact, it was after the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891 that the British administrators took away the *Cheitharol Kumpaba* to preserve it in their custody.³⁰

Professor Kabui, another Manipuri historian, has little reservation regarding the greatness of the *Cheitharol Kumpaba* and argues in his *History of Manipur*:

...the information of events and occurrences prior to the 15th century are very brief and the chronology of the kings is highly confusing. So the events described in the chronicle are all antedated because many modifications and alterations must have been made during the rewriting of the chronicle. So it may not be the most authentic source but is [a] very useful and important document that provides information for reconstructing the early history of Manipur (Kabui, 1991).

²⁹ Bengali (Devnagri) script began to be an adopted script of Manipur during the Hindu proselytisation period under the patron of King Garibniwas - i.e. since the late 19th century. The original Meetei script – Meetei Mayek - had no place during that time. But today, with the efforts of the Meetei revivalist groups, the Meitei script has begun to gain importance in Manipuri society.

³⁰ The *Cheitharol Kumpaba* was transcribed from Meitei (Manipuri) script to *Bengali* script and the same chronicle was translated into English by Bama Charan Mukherjee in the year 1891 at the *Kangla* Palace, Imphal.

‘Hinduisng’ Manipur³¹

It was under the leadership of King Pamheiba (1709-1748), also known as Garibniwas in his Hindu adopted name, that significant landmark changes in the political, social, cultural and religious milieus occurred, altering the entire socio-political and cultural landscape of Manipur. During King Pamheiba’s era, all the subjects of Manipur, particularly the Meetei community, were converted to the Hindu religion – a controversial conversion still haunting many Manipuris.

Today some Hindu (*Vaishnavite*) converted scholars of Manipur along with some Aryan-centric Indian scholars have attempted to trace the Meetei history and civilisation to Aryan mythology, with little evidence to substantiate their proposition, by stating that present day Manipur is the Manipur of the Mahabharata.

There has been a debate over the name of the Meetei Kingdom – ‘Manipur’ - between Hindu followers and the Meetei *Sanamahi*³² revivalist group. The debate is by and large based on affinity with the Aryan (Indian culture) or with the south-east Asian culture. The literal meaning of Manipur (a Sanskrit word) can be translated as the ‘land of jewels’ (*Mani* – jewel and *Pur* – land). In fact, the name ‘Manipur’ was apparently given by the former king of Manipur, King Garibniwas, when the forced conversion to Hindu-Vaishnavism from Meitei *Sanamahism* culture was in full swing.³³

³¹ See Singh, T. K. (2008, February 8). *A Critique of Hindu Proselytisation in Manipur- Ordeals and Upheaval*. Also see Arambam, L. (2008). Historical Evaluation of Puya Meithaba: Indianisation and its Predicaments - A Contemporary Re-interpretation . *The Orient Vision* , V (1), 10-25.

³² Sanamahi, a religion mostly followed by the people of Manipur before the arrival of Hindu religion to this hinterland. However, this does not mean that the Manipuri people, particularly the Meeteis, disowned the Sanamahi with the arrival of Hinduism in the eighteenth century. Every Meetei house has a place to worship Sanamahi too.

³³ King Garibaniwas/Pamheiba’s period was the period when the king’s subjects were forced to convert to the Hindu religion. People who did not comply with the king’s wishes were ostracised and sent into exile. For further details see, Singh, T. K. (2008, February 8). *A Critique of Hindu Proselytisation in Manipur- Ordeals and Upheaval* .

As mentioned earlier, some Hindu Brahmins as well as Hindu convert scholars, try to associate Manipur or the Meetei's culture with the Mahabharata or Aryan culture. However they fail to establish a perfect link between the Meetei(s) and the Aryans or with the events of Mahabharata. For example, in the account of *Arjuna's* expedition towards eastern India, it is written that *Arjuna* first visited the *Mahendra* Mountains (i.e. on the eastern *Ghat*) at *Kalinga* from where he further moved to Manipur by the sea; this is evidently not a historically grounded statement (Kabui, 1991).

The Meetei revivalist groups, however, disagree about the Aryan theory and claim that they neither belong to Aryan stock nor are they Indo-Aryan dialect speakers. Instead, they claim that the Meitei community absorbed Aryan elements into its fold as many Aryan colonisers, adventurers and immigrants came to Manipur or passed through this land in the course of cultural colonisation or of trade with south-west China and south-east Asia as Manipur was on the trade route.³⁴

Manipuri historian Professor Kabui (1991) argues that the attempt to place Manipur within Aryan culture or link it to the story of Mahabharata, as some Indo-Aryan or Aryan-centric scholars such as R.C. Majumdar (2007) or Manipuri historians such as Jhalajit (2010) have done, is a reflection of the process of *Aryanisation* (Kabui, 1991). He further argues that many Indian scholars reject the attempt to link Manipur with the events of Mahabharata.

Evidently, the erstwhile kingdom of Manipur, i.e. the former empire of the *Meetei(s)*, was never known as 'Manipur'. There exist various arguments about whether Manipur was thus called since ancient times or whether it is a name of recent origin. In fact Manipur was known by various names such as *Tillikoktong Ahanba*, *Mirapongthoklam*, *Muwapalli*, *Haanashemba Konnaloiba* and *Poirei Meitei* or *Poireipak* (Singh, 2004). Furthermore, the erstwhile Burmese used to call Manipur (and its people) *Kathe*, the Cacharis (present day Cachar, Assam)

³⁴ Arambam, L. (2008). Historical Evaluation of Puya Meithaba: Indianisation and its Predicaments - A Contemporary Re-interpretation . *The Orient Vision* , V (1), 10-25. Also see Kabui, G. (1991). *History of Manipur* (Vol. 1). New Delhi: National Publishing House.

used *Moglie* and the Ahom (Assam) kingdom called it *Meklee* or *Mekhale* (Kabui, 1991).

The naming of this erstwhile independent kingdom using a Sanskrit word – ‘*Manipur*’ - could be a recent one in order to ‘Indianise’ the small state, i.e. a social engineering approach by some Indian nationalists to nationalise this frontier region. Besides, the Royal Chronicle – *Cheitharol Kumpaba* – did not mention the word ‘Manipur’ as the name of the state of the Meeteis. In fact, the term ‘Manipur’ was not mentioned until the end of the seventeenth century. Many scholars believe that the present name Manipur might have come into use only in the modern age, i.e. from the eighteenth century onwards.

Was Manipur annexed or merged?

It must be remembered that the erstwhile sovereign kingdom of Manipur was relegated to the position of a native princely state³⁵ after Manipur was defeated in the Anglo-Manipur War on 27 April 1891. The British Crown did not annex Manipur, even though there was a debate in the British Parliament on this subject. One view expressed was that Manipur should be punished for waging war against the British and it was India’s Anglo-Indian bureaucracy that was in favour of annexation, which would lead to the destruction of Manipur as a political entity (Kabui, 2011). The opposing view was not to favour the annexation of any princely state to the British Indian Empire, as there would be a burden of expenditure on the British Government. Lord Viscount Cross, the then Secretary of State for India, Lord Landsdowne, the then Viceroy to India and Queen Victoria were all opposed to annexation.

The British Government finally decided to rule Manipur indirectly by appointing a five year old young prince – Churachand Singh – as the King on 18 September

³⁵ India under British rule was divided into two forms of administration. One was British India; the other was native states of India subordinated to British paramountcy. Kabui, G. K. (2011, August 2). *Colonial Policy and Practice in Manipur*.

1891. Eventually, Manipur had to pay huge war indemnities amounting to 250,000 Indian Rupees, payable in five years, and an annual tribute of 50,000 Indian Rupees. Manipur also had to take responsibility for the overall defence and security of its internal affairs.

The policy of indirect rule by the British Government gave some autonomy to Manipur such as responsibility for: internal administration, legislation and execution of laws; taxation and maintenance of internal bureaucracy; police and finance etc. However, this autonomy lacked clarity and it turned out to be a pseudo autonomy as the Indian officials interfered in the internal affairs of Manipur to varying degrees (Kabui, 2011).

The British-Indian political agent who was the ambassadorial representative of India's former North-eastern Frontier region became the governing authority of Manipur and introduced many British-Indian administrative systems. In addition, he was entrusted with the post of superintendent of the state, judge-magistrate, executive head of administration and chief of police administration, among other roles. He was also given overall responsibility for hill administration. Furthermore, the Indian Army's Gurkha Rifles had to stay in Imphal to defend the princely state, and the expense was to be incurred from Manipur state's exchequer. Besides, Manipur's administration was taken over by the Government of India until the minor king Churachand Singh reached adulthood (Kabui, 2005).

Apart from the imposition of heavy war indemnities and the annual tribute, British-India also followed a policy of extracting resources from the state to meet the expenses of administration; they introduced a system of taxation that included household tax, homestead tax, agricultural land tax, tax on the export of rice and so on. This system of monetisation of the Manipuri economy was literally a torture to the people of Manipur, as they could not bear these heavy taxes.³⁶ On the other hand, British-India's policy of introducing a free trade

³⁶ *Nupi Laan* or First Manipuri Women's War of 1904 was the outcome of the British policy of heavy taxation. See also Singh, N. L. (1998). *The Unquiet Valley: Society, Economy and Politics*

system as a part of their economic policy led Manipur to change from being self-sufficient to becoming a dependent economy. For example, they allowed the export of Manipur's rice to other Indian states via the Dimapur railhead, allowed the Imphal market to be flooded with Manchester cotton and Liverpool salt and, in due course, weakened the Manipuri cottage industries. That was how Manipur's subordination to the British-Indian government eroded its independent status vis-à-vis the British paramountcy.

Manipur's subordination to the British-Indian Government also marked the beginning of a number of changes in the socio-economic structure and political economy of Manipur (Singh, 1998). The policies of British-Indian authorities that had promoted and enforced imperial interests via indirect rule in the administration of Manipur have significant implications even today. Although the British-Indian bureaucrats made some efforts to safeguard the state's administrative institutions such as Manipur State *Durbar* (council), *Cheirap* (family) Court etc, they also introduced many new administrative departments. These were predominantly staffed by non-Manipuri mainland Indian bureaucrats, particularly recruits from the provinces of Bengal and Assam (Singh, 1998), who knew little about the socio-political structure of Manipur.

This British-Indian legacy was exactly copied by the present day Republican Government of India when Manipur was annexed to the Indian Union on 21 September 1949, bringing in more bureaucrats, labourers, traders etc. from neighbouring provinces or from as far as Rajasthan or Tamil Nadu. Thus major important points included in the memorandum of understanding were bypassed³⁷ – i.e. The Instrument of Accession and Stand Still Agreement signed between

in Manipur (1891-1950). New Delhi, India: Mittal Publications, pp 35-112; Kabui, G. K. (2011, August 2). *Colonial Policy and Practice in Manipur*.

³⁷ The draft Merger Agreement which the Maharaja of Manipur signed included several provisions in favour of the people of Manipur that were shrewdly omitted from the final version such as safeguarding the priority of Manipuris in government employment within the state, restriction of immigrants from India, Manipuri control of imports and exports etc. See also Parrat, J. (2005). *Wounded Land - Political and Identity in Modern Manipur*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication, pp 109-122. United Committee Manipur, (2005). *Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People*. Imphal: UCM Imphal, pp 11-17.

the Manipuri Government and the Indian Government on 11 August 1947 (United Committee Manipur, 2005).

Manipur regained its independent status after the colonial British left India on 15 August 1947 (i.e. almost sixty years ago), but was again occupied by the Republic of India on 21 September 1949. The independent status of Manipur was thus short-lived; the Republic of India militarised Manipur and forced the Maharaja of Manipur, literally imprisoned in Shillong, to sign an agreement to merge with the Union of India.³⁸

The state, which stands out in the annals of India's democratic history by being the first state to conduct democratic elections on the basis of universal adult franchise³⁹ in June 1948, is still hungry for democracy because it has not been given any chance to exercise it. The reasons for this situation will be explained in the subsequent sections.

It should be remembered that after the British left India, the Government of India craftily ignored the already existing 'Manipur State Constitution' that had come into force in June 1948. New Delhi only recognised the Maharaja of Manipur as the envoy of the Manipuri people in order to persuade him to sign the draft of a merger with the Government of India, thus bypassing the State Constitution. The Maharaja of Manipur, however, had already renounced his power to the people of Manipur as well as to the 'Manipur State Constitution Committee'. Thus, under duress, the Maharaja had to sign the 'Instrument of Accession'⁴⁰ according to which defence, external affairs, communications, customs, excise and coinage were entrusted to the Government of India as they

³⁸ See Chandhoke, N. (2006). *A State of One's Own: Secessionism and Federalism in India*. London: LSE, pp. 14-15.

³⁹ By late nineteenth century, Manipur was rocked by a series of democratic movements in opposition to the monarchy system and demanded democracy and representative government. On 12 December 1946 the Maharaja of Manipur finally gave in to pressure and set up a committee to prepare a new constitution for the state. The same was submitted to the Maharaja on 27 June 1947 and the Manipur State Constitution Act finally came into force in 1948. With the enforcement of the 1948 Manipur State Election Rules, Manipur became the first state in India to hold elections on the basis of universal adult franchise in June 1948, Chandhoke, N. (2006). *A State of One's Own: Secessionism and Federalism in India*. London: LSE.

⁴⁰ See also United Committee Manipur, (2005) *Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People*. Imphal: UCM Imphal, Pp 153-155, Appendix XI.

were to the colonial British, when Manipur was defeated in the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891. A Standstill Agreement was also signed on the same day to avoid any hostilities by the Manipuri people.

Given the whole picture of how the administrative affairs of Manipur were managed by the Indian Government even after independence, it would not be wrong to presume that the merger or annexation of Manipur was a pre-determined strategy of the New Delhi Government. This was clearly indicated when the Government of India showed more interest in annexing Manipur into its Union than the imperial power (British) after the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891. Therefore, the contentious merger of Manipur with the Indian Union after being liberated from British rule could be viewed as one of the steps that revealed the exploitative, rather than nurturing, motives of the New Delhi Government towards Manipur.

The *modus operandi* of the Indian Government in integrating the erstwhile princely state of Manipur into its Union brought divided opinion among the people of Manipur regarding the full merger of the state into the Indian Union (Chandhoke, 2006). One group that mainly consisted of the Manipuri branch of the Indian National Congress pressed for full integration. Another group led by a local Communist leader, Comrade Irabot, resisted the merger because it was of the opinion that merger into the Indian Union would endanger the socio-political identity of the Manipuris (Chandhoke, 2006). The Naga(s) were the third group which wanted to join the Pan-Naga group that spread across the border.

Thus the eventual merger of Manipur with the Indian Union is still a matter of contention. In addition, the other princely states of former British-India that were merged with the Indian Union are also facing the same fate as Manipur is today. In fact, for most Manipuris, the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union was the cause of the entire socio-political and economic evils that have haunted Manipuri society.

Conclusion

Manipur, an erstwhile kingdom in south-east Asia, was under British suzerainty from 1891 and finally became a part of the Indian Union in 1949. In terms of its geo-political setting, it continues to be an important land-link between south Asia and south-east Asia, the significance of which has been recognised by India in terms of its engagement with the Look East Policy (LEP). Furthermore, by virtue of sharing a long international boundary (398 kilometres) with Myanmar, the state has become all the more strategically important for India.

In terms of its demographic composition, Manipur is also popularly known as a 'mini-India'. In spite of numerous advantages enjoyed by the state in terms of cultural plurality, customs and food habits, the multiplicity of ethnicity is a matter of concern. This is on account of demands for various homelands.

One of the main cultural and religious dilemmas that the Manipuris are facing at present is the issue of 'Hinduisation' ultimately leading to the 'Indianisation' of the Manipuris. There are revivalist movements challenging the very process of 'Indianisation'.

Though most of the people of Manipur claim that the merger with the Indian Union was an act of 'annexation', the Government of India regards it as 'merger'. The question of whether Manipur was 'merged' or 'annexed' has been debated for a long time. Whatever the case may be, the Government of India cannot obliterate the historical memory of most Manipuris, who remember an independent political entity before it merged with the Indian Union, with its own history, culture, polity and so on. This collective memory includes awareness and pride for Manipur for having its own written constitution even before India had one.

On the other hand, it is also important for the people of Manipur to realise that demanding complete independence from India may lead to bloodshed. The

reality is that the Government of India would never be willing to abandon its dream of nationalising this strategic location (Manipur) because taking control of Manipur is enabling the Indian Government to achieve the goals of its 'Look East Policy' (LEP). This issue will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Therefore, in order to end the impasse, both sides need to engage in unconditional dialogue rather than endless futile debates about the controversial merger of Manipur with the Indian Union. Otherwise, there will be routine killings, ambushes, extortions and 'internal law and order' issues. If not addressed soon, and resolved, these issues could turn out to be huge problems for the New Delhi Government in the coming years.

Chapter 3

Militarization and the protracted armed conflict

India's north-eastern region, and Manipur in particular, has been experiencing not well-known but some of the longest low intensity armed conflicts in south Asia (Baruah, 2007). These conflicts are mostly related to national liberation or sovereignty restoration or the demand for autonomous homelands within the Indian state.

In most of cases, instability in this region is centred on grievance for the loss of sovereignty to India. In Manipur's case, there appear to be two competing arguments about the root causes of the prolonged armed conflict situation. One argument claims that Manipur's problematic 'law and order' situation is exacerbated due to underdevelopment and the economic backwardness of the region. The other argument is related to militarisation and the controversial merger of the erstwhile two millennium old sovereign kingdom of Manipur with the Union of India.

So far, the political impasse in this region has largely been expressed as a conflict between "freedom fighters", "revolutionaries" and "national workers" on the one hand, and on the other, the "colonial army" or the "occupation forces" and the "puppets" of the hegemonic "colonial" or "neo-colonial" India' (Akoijam, 2006). But on a closer look, the trend of the conflict ranges from a secessionist call to the demand for a state or sub-state within the India Union, regional autonomy for ethnic areas within the states, or protection of ethnic areas within the states, or protection of ethnic and cultural identities.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the general narratives of the people of this region usually highlight

⁴¹ Bhattacharjee, J. (2007). *Roots of Insurgency in Northeast India*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing.

... the cultural differences between people in the region and those from 'mainland India', [so] these accounts point to the domineering tendencies of the Central state. Scholars have questioned the 'unequal' and 'forced' integration of the northeast region into the Indian 'mainstream' and the subsequent development of a master–subject relationship between the two. Behind that reading is the awareness of the cultural difference between the Indian 'mainland' and the collective entity called the northeast and the region's significantly higher levels of ethnic and linguistic fractionalization compared to the rest of India (Hassan, 2010:292).

The Government of India on the other hand, has been trying to control this situation through restrictive and coercive policies such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 (hereafter AFSPA or the Act) or through economic incentives. These policies have been contested by many human rights activists and civil societies for their disruptive character. Yet the issues in this region are not well-known and have been relatively little studied within or outside India.⁴²

It may be noted that numerous reports of human rights violations during this prolonged armed conflict have been covered widely by the local media, including the violation of human rights by security forces or by the armed opposing groups (AOGs) from time to time. Numerous fact-finding teams and review committees from the centre also reviewed gross human rights violations under the pretext of AFSPA, including fake encounters, suspicious disappearances, rape, torture, unlawful detention etc., and recommended that the Act be repealed completely.⁴³ But these reports and reviews apparently do not gain New Delhi's serious attention in order to evoke a significant debate in parliament.⁴⁴ Rather, the issue of armed conflict in this region is viewed as a

⁴² See Harriss, J. (2002). *The State, Tradition and Conflict in the North Eastern States of India*. London: DESTIN, LSE. Pp-1.

⁴³ See Reddy, B. J. (2005, June XX). *Report of the Committee, headed by Justice (Retd) B.P. Jeevan Reddy, to Review the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958*. Also see The Times of India, (2009) December 21). 'Armed Forces Special Powers Act responsible for many killings'.

⁴⁴ The Times of India, (18 December 2010) *Terrorism in India's northeast not govt priority: US cable*.

matter of development or under-development, responded to with economic incentives, such as setting up a separate development ministry exclusively for this region (to be discussed in subsequent chapters).

Militarisation and the armed movement

The argument over the armed conflict situation in Manipur has been stuck in a never-ending debate of the ‘which comes first, the chicken or the egg’ variety – i.e. ‘is the armed conflict an outcome of the militarisation process’ or ‘is militarisation in Manipur due to armed conflict’?

In this regard, it is worth remembering that Manipur’s first ‘armed’ restoration, rather an ‘independent’ movement, was started only in the late 1940s led by Hijam Irabot, who had strongly opposed the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union.⁴⁵ There was no such ‘organised’ armed movement in Manipur before Irabot started one (Parrat, 2005).⁴⁶ Other similar (in ideology) armed opposition groups (AOG), such as the Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM),⁴⁷ United National Liberation Front (UNLF), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)⁴⁸, People’s Liberation Army (PLA), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Issac & Muivah (NSCN – IM) etc. were founded only between the mid-1960s and the late 1980s. Therefore, the argument that ‘militarisation of Manipur is due to armed conflict/movement’ seems to be far from the truth.

⁴⁵ Manipur merged/annexed to the Union of India on 15 October 15 1949.

⁴⁶ One should not confuse this with the Naga movement that was founded contemporaneously with Irabot’s movement. The first Naga independentist movement – the Naga National Council (NNC) – was formed in 1946 in and around Kohima and Makokchung towns of Naga hills.

⁴⁷ The Revolutionary Government of Manipur no longer exists today. It dwindled sharply by the end of 1970 and has become defunct since then. See Bhaumik, S. (2009). *Troubled Periphery*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd. p. 111.

⁴⁸ Manipur was also known as Kangleipak in pre-historic times. For details see Kabui, G. (1991). *History of Manipur* (Vol. 1). New Delhi: National Publishing House.

The militarisation of Manipur (during India's independence) was apparently under some influences from Indian nationalist political elites as well as the bureaucrats who were very much in favour of the annexation of Manipur, who wanted to destroy Manipur as a political entity for waging war against them and proposed coercive action against Manipur (Kabui, 2011). Therefore, one can argue that the militarisation of Manipur was a premeditated effort to annex this erstwhile kingdom.

Manipur is located at a very strategic location. Realising this, the Government of India was determined to mount a huge military base in this region. Furthermore, the Chinese invasion of India in the early 1960s made for a more conscious effort by New Delhi to work on national security and consolidate the fragile boundaries such as the north-east region; this stimulated the militarisation process.

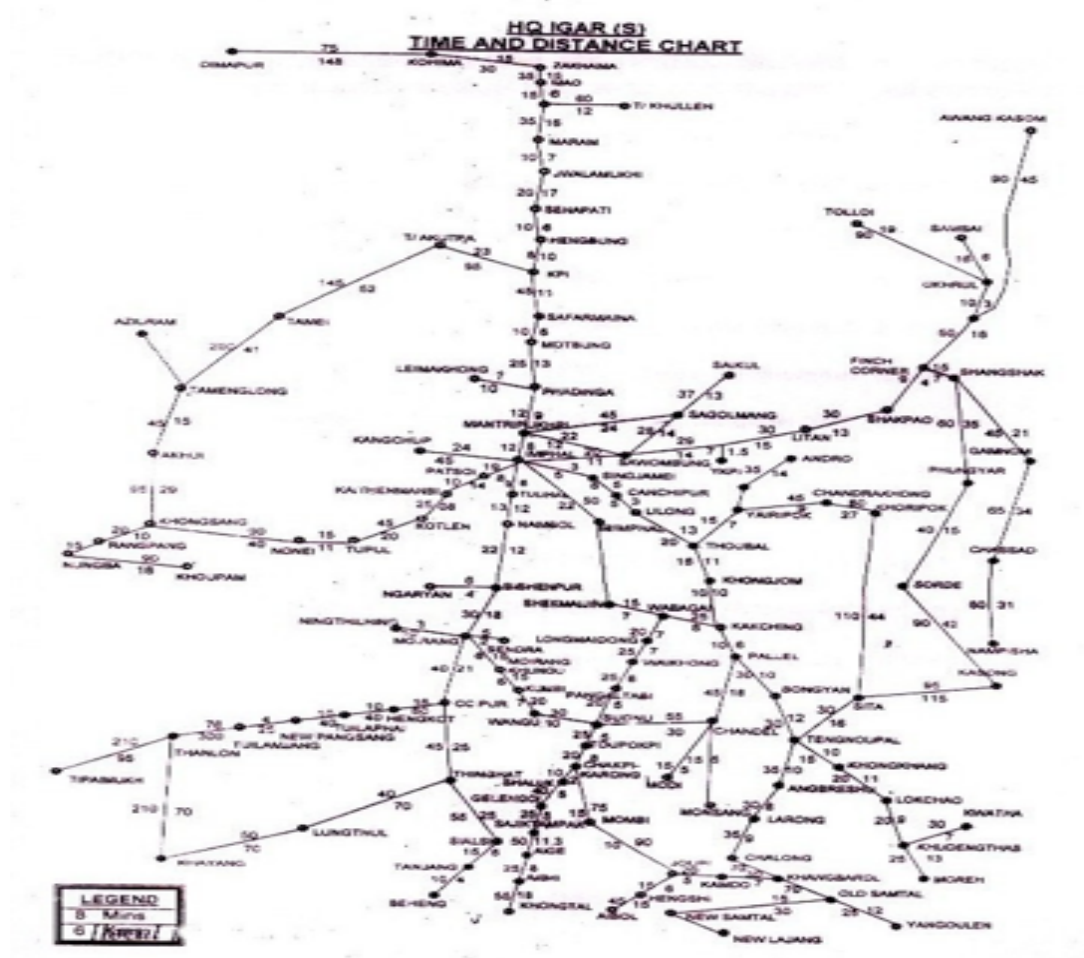
Thus, it was 15 October 1949 that marked the beginning of the Indian militarisation in Manipur and heralded the end of a nearly two thousand year old kingdom disgracefully.⁴⁹ Disgracefully, because the erstwhile Kingdom of Manipur was not merged with the Union of India according to the free will of the people of Manipur, but apparently annexed by military might.⁵⁰ A battalion⁵¹ of the Indian Army (Gurkha Rifles) had already been sent to Imphal before the formal merger/transfer of power on the above-mentioned date, occupying the Palace premises (the *Kangla*) to ward off any possible agitation from the people of Manipur (Rustomji, 1973:109). Since then, Manipur has witnessed a gradual expansion of Indian military cantonments within its territory (see Figure 2).

⁴⁹ 15th October has been remembered as a 'Black Day' by the people of Manipur.

⁵⁰ "Is there any Brigadier (sic. Indian Army) in Shillong?...." was the response from the former Deputy Prime Minister Shri. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in 1949 when the then Governor of Assam, also Political Agent in Manipur, reported to the Deputy Prime Minister that the people of Manipur were not prepared to merge with the Indian Union (Rustomji, 1973: 109, cited in Baruah, S. (2007). *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Also see Parrat, J. (2005). *Wounded Land - Political and Identity in Modern Manipur*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication. p 115.

⁵¹ One battalion generally ranges from 300 to 800 soldiers, but there are usually 500 or more soldiers in a battalion in Indian armed forces. For details, see Manipur Police, *A Brief History Of Manipur Police*.

Figure 2: Sketch showing military installations of Inspector General Assam Rifles (IGAR) - south Manipur, India.



Source: Justice First, December 2008 Vol. I. No. I.⁵²

Today, Manipur has 26 battalions of Assam Rifles, 10 battalions of the Indian Army, 12 battalions of Central Paramilitary Forces (CRPF) and 12 battalions of Manipur Rifles and Indian Reserve Battalions (IRB) (The Times of India, 2009), plus, there are as many as 30,000 or more civil police, Manipur Police, including Commando, Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Traffic Police, Excise, Narcotics etc. (Robinson, 2005). Very recently, some three to four battalions of

⁵² Also see Hanjabam, S. S. (2011). Manipuri People's Right to Self-Determination. *Gandhi Marg*, 32 (4), 525-543.

Village Defence Force (VDF) (One India, 2009) and one exclusive battalion of women IRB have been added to the state force (Hueiyen News Service, 2014). According to a report by United Committee Manipur (UCM, 2005), there are more than 44,320 armed personnel of the central security forces stationed in the state; this means there is one member of armed forces personnel (excluding state civil forces) for every 60 citizens in Manipur. This ratio increases to one member of armed forces personnel for every 5 to 10 civilians if all the new additional battalions as well as the civil police are included. It is not quite clear why the Government of India needs to deploy such a huge number of armed forces personnel in a tiny state like Manipur, which has a population of only 2.3 million, unless it is a mission to nationalise (colonise) this hinterland space.

Visitors to Manipur certainly experience some disturbing scenes, such as the heavy presence of armed forces personnel at every corner of the state. It may also be of surprise that the Indian militarisation project did not spare schools, colleges, universities and many other public buildings. Ironically, Manipur University may be the only university in the country to have an Indian Armed Force unit within its campus (see Figure 3). In addition, the area of land occupied by state armed forces exceeds that occupied by villages (Yumnam and Konsam, 2006 cited in Hanjabam, 2008). India's militarisation and controversial merger of Manipur as a whole has become the epitome of bad governance and the state's high-handedness. The politics of India's north-eastern region and Manipur in particular appears to be most unpalatable when the central government imposed the notorious and controversial law – the AFSPA, 1958.⁵³

⁵³ The Jeevan Reddy (Supreme Court Justice) Committee recommended the complete repeal of the Act in 2005. However, the Indian government is neither ready to publish the report publicly nor to table the issue in parliament. For further details, see Reddy, B. J. (2005, June XX). *Report of the Committee, headed by Justice (Retd) B.P. Jeevan Reddy, to Review the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958*. Also see the Supreme Court Justice (Redt) J.S. Verma's report on Ramachandran, S. K. (2013, January 24). *Don't allow Army men to take cover under AFSPA, says Verma*. The Hindu.

Figure 3: An Indian para-military camp within Manipur University campus.⁵⁴



Photo credit: the author

⁵⁴ See Hanjabam Shukhdeba Sharma, *Self-Determination Movement in Manipur*. Unpublished thesis, p. 237.

Militarization and human rights issues

Militarisation has been of great concern for the people of Manipur for a very long time. But of even greater concern is the repercussions of this militarisation project in which the military is empowered, either to kill on mere suspicion or detain or arrest without any official warrant letter, any person infringing the constitutional law – and to do so with impunity. And that activity is authorised by one of the most controversial Acts – the AFSPA.⁵⁵ Thus, the law and order situation in Manipur went from bad to worse and began to affect the entire state system, leading to the gradual rise of numerous separatist militant groups, community ill feeling, devastating ethnic violence, anti-national feelings, categorisation (if not ghettoisation) of mainlanders and north-easterners etc.

As a matter of fact, the AFSPA 1958 was initially imposed to suppress the Naga movement during the late 1950s exclusively in the Naga Hills area (Reddy, 2005), but this Act became synonymous with a dreadful spectre throughout north-eastern India and also recently in Jammu and Kashmir. The political disputes in Jammu and Kashmir, the problem of militarisation and consequential

⁵⁵ Section 4 of the Act enumerates the special powers of the armed forces, which are deployed in a State or a part of the State to act in aid of civil power. The Section reads as follows:

"Special powers of the armed forces. — Any commissioned officer, warrant officer, non-commissioned officer or any other person of equivalent rank in the armed forces may, in a disturbed area, —

(a) if he is of opinion that it is necessary so to do for the maintenance of public order, after giving such due warning as he may consider necessary fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law or order for the time being in force in the disturbed area prohibiting the assembly of five or more persons or the carrying of weapons or of things capable of being used as weapons or of firearms, ammunition or explosive substances;

(b) if he is of opinion that it is necessary so to do, destroy any arms dump, prepared or fortified position or shelter from which armed attacks are made or are likely to be made or are attempted to be made, or any structure used as training camp for armed volunteers or utilised as a hideout by armed gangs or absconders wanted for any offence;

(c) arrest, without warrant, any person who has committed a cognizable offence or against whom a reasonable suspicion exists that he has committed or is about to commit a cognizable offence and may use such force as may be necessary to effect the arrest;

(d) enter and search without warrant any premises to make any such arrest as aforesaid or to recover any person believed to be wrongfully restrained or confined or any property reasonably suspected to be stolen property or any arms, ammunition or explosive substances believed to be unlawfully kept in such premises, and may for that purpose use such force as may be necessary."

For details, see Reddy, B. J. (2005, June XX). *Report of the Committee, headed by Justice (Retd) B.P. Jeevan Reddy, to Review the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958.*

human rights violations, have fortunately become widely known and recognised by international agencies. However, the armed movement/conflict in north-eastern India in general, and Manipur in particular, has been rather perceived as a mere ‘internal law and order problem’ that has occurred due to the economic backwardness of the region.

On the contrary, the AFSPA enacted in 1958 and amended in 1972 was made more heinous, with dehumanising manifestations of the obsession with power in the name of state security, and complete indifference to human security (Roy Burman, B.K, cited in Hanjabam, 2008). As mentioned above, the Act gives Indian armed forces legal immunity for their actions (see Figure 4). There can be no prosecution, suit or any other legal proceedings against anyone acting under this law. Nor is the government's judgement on why an area is found to be ‘disturbed’⁵⁶ subject to judicial review.

Therefore, AFSPA 1958, in a real sense, can be termed a ‘colonial tool’ for continued colonisation in this post-colonial era; the Act inherited the same powerful political potency as its prototype – The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Ordinance 1942,⁵⁷ that was imposed against the Indians who protested against the British during the early 1940s (‘Quit India’ movement).

Further, the paradox is that the Indian armed forces, who are specially trained to defend the country’s territory against foreign aggressions, are engaged in combating internal law and order problems with an extraordinary power of impunity. There have been a number of counter-insurgency operations that have

⁵⁶ Section 3 of the AFSPA 1958 has the power to declare areas to be disturbed areas, ‘if, in relation to any State or Union Territory to which this Act extends, the Governor of that State or the Administration of that Union Territory or the Central Government, in either case, is of the opinion that the whole or any part of such State or Union Territory, as the case may be, is in such a disturbed or dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary, the Governor of the State or the Administrator of that Union Territory or the Central Government, as the case may be, may, by notification in the official Gazette, declare the whole or such part of such State or Union Territory to be a disturbed area’. For further details, see Reddy, B. J. (2005, June). *Report of the Committee, headed by Justice (Retd) B.P. Jeevan Reddy, to Review the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958*.

⁵⁷ AFSPA 1958 is the colonial legacy which the coloniser (British) used against the colonised Indians to suppress the movement of Quit India during the early 1940s.

resulted in widespread human rights violations ranging from disappearances to mass rape, torture, the murder of civilians and so on.

The unavailability of authentic official data on human casualties is an obstacle to the study of the intensity of the conflict in this region. Nevertheless, most scholars have referred to data from the South Asian Terrorism Portal (SATP) or from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). Some human rights organisations claim that there have been more than 50,000 deaths since the late 1970s due to armed conflict in the region (Ranvijay 2010). However, reports released by the government do not give a complete and accurate picture of the extent of the violence. Many abuses, as Parrat (2005) argues, are not even reported - especially physical or sexual assault - either because of intimidation, or lack of understanding of the official procedures, or simply because the victims have no confidence in the state administration. Information that is gathered is only of high profile cases that provoke enough public outrage (Parrat, 2005).

Figure 4: *People of Manipur protesting against the conduct of Indian armed force personnel as well as against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act*





Source: (Robinson, 2005)

Some of the counter-insurgency operations conducted in India that are remembered for the harsh conduct of the Indian armed forces personnel, and which caused gross human rights violations (particularly inflicted by the Assam Rifles and the Indian Armies) are: Operation Blue Bird (Manipur, 1987), Operation Bajrang (Assam, 1990), Operation Rhino (Assam, 1991-92), Operation All Clear (Bhutan-India border areas, 2003) and Operation Dragnet (Manipur, 2006).⁵⁸ These operations are remembered by the most of the people and human rights activists because of the widespread human rights violations – especially using villagers as human shields to prevent possible ambushes from rebel groups.⁵⁹ The armed forces personnel who were involved in the crimes of murdering, raping and torturing civilians during these counter-insurgency

⁵⁸ For further details see Hanjabam & Homen, T. (2013). Armed Conflict, Human Rights and Peace Building in Manipur in Homen Thangjam & Sukhdeba Shrama Hanjabam (Eds.), *United Nations and Human Rights in Manipur: Representation to the United Nations System & Concluding Observations/Communiqués/Remarks 1991-2012* (pp. 1-20). New Delhi: Forward Books.

⁵⁹ Hanjabam, S. S. (2008). The Youth Panorama in Northeast India. *Asia-Europe*, 5 (4), 50-62. p. 166.

operations have yet to be prosecuted; the provisions of the AFSPA may protect them from prosecution.⁶⁰

Some of the incidents which have attracted large-scale protest for their gross human rights violations are as follows:

- *Heirangoithong* incident of 14 March 1984 when thirteen people including two children were killed and over thirty injured by the indiscriminate firing of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel.
- Operation Blue Bird at *Oinam* on 10 July 1987 when fifteen civilians were killed while many became the victim of physical and mental torture, rape and illegal detention.
- *Tera Bazar* incident of 25 March 1993 in which five civilians were killed and many others received bullet injuries. However, no enquiry has been instituted to date.
- Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (the then Regional Medical College) incident of 7 January 1995 where the CRPF personnel shot dead nine persons in retaliation for attacks by some unidentified members of an armed opposition group.
- *Malom* incident of 2 November 2000 in which ten civilians including a sixty-three year old woman and a boy, a National Bravery Award winner, were shot dead by the Assam Rifles convoy in retaliation for an armed ambush by some unidentified armed groups. A brutal combing operation was conducted resulting in inhuman treatment of the local people. ‘Iron Lady of Manipur’ Ms. Irom Sharmila’s fast unto death is very much related to the brutal and indiscriminate killing on that day.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Section 6 of the AFSPA confers a protection upon any Indian armed forces personnel acting under the Act. No suit, prosecution or other legal proceeding can be instituted against such a person ‘in respect of anything done or purported to be done in exercise of the powers conferred by this Act’, except with the previous sanction of the central Government. For details, see Reddy, B. J. (2005, June XX). *Report of the Committee, headed by Justice (Retd) B.P. Jeevan Reddy, to Review the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958.*

⁶¹ It is well worth remembering that a lady from Manipur named Irom Sharmila Chanu, a strong believer in the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence, has been on hunger strike since 2001 demanding the revocation of this controversial Act from the soil of Manipur.

- The Great June Uprising of 18 June 2001 when eighteen people including a woman were gunned down by CRPF personnel in indiscriminate firing to control the agitation.⁶²
- *Pangei Bazar* incident of 9 April 2002 where Ms. Robita Chanu, an eighteen year old student at Naorem Bihari College and Mr. Khundrakpam Ashem Romajit Singh, a school student, were allegedly killed by CRPF's indiscriminate firing in the aftermath of an ambush by an unidentified armed group.
- 23 July 2009 incident, in which Ms. Rabina Devi, a pregnant woman shopping with her two year old son in Imphal, and another twenty year old man, were gunned down by city police commandos.
- *Andro* incident of 1 November 2009 in which seven youths were gunned down by 28th Assam Rifles troops on suspicion of being militants.

It has been reported that from September 1980 until May 2007, as many as 2,675 civilians and 1,314 militants were killed, while 2,061 civilians were injured and only 865 militants surrendered to the Government authorities (Hanjabam, 2008). Thus, it can definitely be inferred that basic human rights have been much compromised in India's militarisation process. Despite all the extra-judicial execution mentioned above, the Indian Government has apparently displayed apathy to date. The inability to bring justice to any single victim by prosecuting the perpetrators of the atrocities is testimony to the apathy of the government.

It would not be exaggerating to say that this harsh law – the AFSPA, 1958 – is against the basic institutional norms and practices of a civilised democratic and republican country. It also implies an underlying racist, paranoiac and jingoistic nationalism. The AFSPA has done huge damage to the souls and minds of the people of north-eastern India, and Manipur in particular.

⁶² In the aftermath of the extension of ceasefire 'beyond territorial limits' between the Delhi and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) in June 2001, the people of Manipur strongly opposed the move and in the ensuing protests eighteen people were killed (The Hindu, 19 June 2006).

Paradoxically, many of former Members of Parliament and even the former Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, have claimed that the Act is ‘inhuman’. Unfortunately, this inhuman law is still being imposed against the will of the people undermining constitutional provisions – Article No. 21, the right to protection of life and personal liberty. Retired Supreme Court Justice Mr. Jeevan Reddy, in a Committee Report submitted in 2005,⁶³ recommended repealing the Act altogether. However, central government is yet to react on the recommendations.

The AFSPA, albeit understood by the people of Manipur as a discriminative law, is unlikely to be repealed as the central government by and large relies on coercion, i.e. militarism to further their nationalising mission and control the enduring problems of the north-east.⁶⁴

Militarisation and human rights issues from indigenous people’s perspective

Cobo gives a commonly accepted definition of indigenous people as

...communities, peoples and nations are those, which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of the society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued

⁶³ The report, submitted to the Indian Government on 6 June 2005, was not made public even after one year of submission. The Hindu (newspaper) published the said report on 8 October 2006. For details, see Shukhdeba Sharma Hanjabam, “The Meitei upsurge in Manipur,” *Asia-Europe Journal* (Springer) 6, no. 1 (January 2008): 157-169.

⁶⁴ Joshi, S. (7 February 2013). *Army’s stand makes it hard to amend AFSPA: Chidambaram*. The Hindu. Also see, Joshi, S. (3 February 2013). *Ordinance spares police, army men*. The Hindu.

existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.⁶⁵

In its preamble, the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) also emphasises the rights of indigenous peoples to 'be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such', while referencing the histories of oppression against them. In operative Article 33, the Declaration affirms the rights of indigenous peoples to 'determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions' (Hanjabam & Thangjam, 2013:92). The people and communities of Manipur can be considered as indigenous people because they have distinct cultures, territories and histories as already mentioned (Chapter 2). Further, the grievances of most Manipuris stem from their distinct cultural identities and deep connection to their traditional territories that are affected by state developmental projects within their traditional lands. Therefore, the people of this region can easily be identified as indigenous people.

India has ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 107 that was founded on the assumption that indigenous and tribal populations (ITPs) would disappear with the advent of modernisation. Although India is also a party to a number of international human rights instruments (Hanjabam & Thangjam, 2013) it has yet to ratify the important ILO Convention No. 169 that focuses mainly on the rights of indigenous and tribal people.⁶⁶ This is possibly because Convention No. 169 gives more teeth to indigenous peoples and that could be a hindrance to India's zealous nation-state-building. Articles 3, 4 and 7 of ILO Convention No. 169 state that indigenous peoples should have the right to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms in full, without hindrance or discrimination; that they should enjoy the general rights of citizenship without

⁶⁵ Cobo, J. M. (20 June 1982). *Martinez Cobo Study of the Problem of Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations*. Also see Xanthaki, A. (2007). *Indigenous Rights and United Nations Standards: Self-Determination, Culture and Land*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁶ India ratified ILO Convention No. 107 on 29 September 1958, just one year after the promulgation by the International Labour Organization. For further details, see ILO Conventions No. 169 and No. 107.

discrimination; and that they should have the right to decide priorities for development, respectively.

Welcoming the fact that India is a signatory to many international human rights instruments, the international community, including the United Kingdom, is pressing the country to ratify the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment or its Optional Protocol (Hanjabam & Thangjam, 2013:125). Other countries that are seeking information regarding the human rights situation which is affected by the controversial AFSPA 1958 are Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Slovakia, United States of America, France, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.⁶⁷

Some of the recommendations made by the international community that have a direct bearing on the situation of India's north-eastern region are:

1. Ratify ILO Convention No. 169 concerning indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries (Ghana and Iraq have made this recommendation)
2. Ratify Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court
3. Ratify Convention Against Torture as soon as possible by passing appropriate domestic legislation and ensure that the instrument of ratification is fully consistent with the Convention
4. Ratify the Convention of Enforced Disappearance
5. Make the moratorium on the death penalty permanent by ratifying the second optional protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Source: (Hanjabam & Thangjam, 2013:129-130)

As previously mentioned, the violation of the rights of the indigenous peoples, particularly by Indian armed forces in combating or in retaliation against the

⁶⁷ See Hanjabam & Thangjam (2013). *United Nations and Human Rights in Manipur: Representation to the United Nations System & Concluding Observations/Communiques/Remarks 1991-2012*. New Delhi: Forward Books.

reactionary activities of the armed opposition groups, has been of grave concern for a very long time. In support of this claim, two case studies from Manipur are discussed: (i) extra-judicial execution and (ii) exploitation of natural resources. These cases are mostly drawn from the UN Special Rapporteurs' visit to north-east India, including Manipur in the last two or three years.

(i) **Extra-judicial execution.** Extra-judicial killing is not uncommon in north-east India or in Manipur. A recent Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed to the Supreme Court of India by one of the civil society organisations - Extra-judicial Execution Victims Families Association of Manipur (EEVFAM) through an NGO, Human Rights Alert (HRA), Manipur - claims that 1,528 people have been killed in the last thirty years (i.e. since 1979).⁶⁸

Various UN Special Rapporteurs have submitted reports and posed concerns about the human rights situation in India, particularly in the north-east region. These include: Christof Heyns, Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Frank La Rue, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Maina Kiai, Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Margaret Sekaggya, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; and Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. Their reports were submitted to the Ambassador, Permanent Representative and Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations Office in Geneva on 9 September 2011. However, the Government of India has yet to act on these issues (Hanjabam & Thangjam, 2013).

(ii) **Exploitation of natural resources.** For the last five to six decades, the government of India has been exploiting the natural resources of the north-eastern region without much consideration of the social and environmental detriments. This includes, oil and other minerals exploration, construction of mega-dams etc. Unfortunately, all these projects greatly affect the native people.

⁶⁸ The Times of India, (2 October 2012) *1,528 Victims of Fake Encounters in Manipur: PIL*.

So far, many civil society organisations in Manipur have filed PIL or even submitted reports to UN agencies such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and to other agencies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) etc.

Acknowledging the issues in the north-eastern region of India, Manipur in this case, the UN Special Rapporteur Professor James Anaya in his letter dated 6 April 2009, brought to the attention of the Government of India his report to the Human Rights Council (HRC/12/34/Add.1, paras 161-172) – *Special Rapporteur’s 2009 Report* – that discusses Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People.⁶⁹ Anaya’s report was particularly about the violation of indigenous people’s rights in the construction of the *Mapithel* dam (Thoubal Multi Purpose Project) in Manipur. Various issues were raised in his letter such as: forceful displacement without appropriate compensation, the duty to consult and obtain free, prior and informed consent, use of excessive force including military and para-military forces, non-compliance with the relevant international standards including the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, i.e. ILO Convention No. 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations, etc. (see the illustrations below).

Figure 5: *People of Manipur protesting against the controversial construction of the Mapithel dam.*

⁶⁹ See Shukhdeba Sharma Hanjabam & Urikhinbam Nobo, (2013) *United Nations and Human Rights in Manipur: Representation to the United Nations System & Concluding Observations/Communicues/Remarks 1991-2012*. New Delhi: Forward Books.



Source: *Center of Research and Advocacy Manipur*, <http://cramanipur.blogspot.in/2014/02/protests-against-construction-of.html>

Figure 6: *Indigenous fisher folks of Manipur protesting against the Government's controversial displacement, land grabbing and appropriation of their livelihoods.*



Source: *The Hueiyen Lanpao*, 2014

The Government of India, however, in its response of 4 June 2010, rejects Professor Anaya's recommendation that it should comply with the UN definition of indigenous people, claiming that the Government has its own definition and that it is unacceptable for the UN Special Rapporteur to seek to impose a definition on the Government of India. It further claims: "A precise definition of indigenous peoples has not been included in the Declaration on Indigenous Peoples that was adopted after 22 years of prolonged negotiations. Thus, any attempt to produce a definition now is neither desirable nor productive". The Government's response further warns that: "the Special Rapporteurs should not attempt to expand the application of the Declaration to unrelated groups, like the tribal peoples in India, through his interpretation of experiences of what he calls other indigenous people" (Hanjabam & Thangjam, 2013:99).

Although the Government of India has rejected Professor Anaya's recommendation to define the people of north-eastern India as 'indigenous people', the generally accepted working definition of the UN of indigenous people cannot be denied; according to this the people of Manipur perfectly fall into the category as we have seen above.

How successful is AFSPA 1958 in maintaining law and order?

A legitimate question may be asked whether the AFSPA 1958, which was imposed in the north-eastern region to supposedly 'maintain law and order' in the late 1950s, has actually succeeded in maintaining law and order in Manipur? To answer a simple 'yes' or 'no' would be extremely difficult for the Indian Government because, apart from the Mizo rebellion settlement in the mid 1980s, no significant results have come from the fifty-five year long imposition of the Act in this region. Instances of the escalation of armed violence, fake encounter, rape, torture and harassment and involuntary disappearance, as discussed above, bear testimony to this. Despite reports of heavy human casualties, the Act is

unlikely to be repealed in this region because the Indian Government's goal is to nationalise this frontier region through its coercive actions.⁷⁰ That is the reason why the Government is determined to give more power to armed forces personnel under this Act.

On the other hand, the Government's guiding principle of enacting coercive policies to deal with ethnic dissent in this frontier region is apparently losing credibility, and hence legitimacy. Delhi's strategy of adopting restrictive or coercive actions (such as through the controversial AFSPA 1958) begins to reveal the state's key weakness. In fact, the violence committed by armed military personnel against civilians itself delegitimises the credibility of the state that has claimed to be the biggest democratic country in the world. In addition, the protracted armed conflict situation in this region has ultimately given an unusual emotional depth to the 'us-them' situation between the people of north-eastern India and the mainlanders.

Furthermore, the Act has turned out to be discriminatory because it is being imposed 'exclusively' in the north-eastern region (and Jammu and Kashmir since the 1990s), albeit the law and order situation in other regions of India, such as the eastern corridor (Communist Party of India Maoist issues), the city of Delhi (where there are frequent occurrences of rape and racial/hate crimes) or bomb blast/terrorist attacks in Mumbai, Godhra (Gujarat) riots or Muzaffarnagar (UP) riot cases are equally a cause for concern.

Ironically, when the Act was imposed in the north-east region, there were very few armed rebel groups. But today, more than sixty major rebel groups are operating in the region (Bhaumik, 2009). Among the seven north-eastern states of India, Manipur heads the list in terms of the highest number of militias (IMC, 2002, cited in Baruah, 2007:5). Today, there are almost forty groups operating in Manipur alone.

⁷⁰ See Joshi, S. (7 February 2013). *Army's stand makes it hard to amend AFSPA: Chidambaram*. The Hindu.

Thus, it can be argued that the Act, imposed in this region in 1958 to supposedly control the ‘law and order’ situation, does not serve this real purpose at all; in fact it has never brought any significant solutions. Rather, it has opened a Pandora’s Box of all the evils in Manipur including murder, rape, torture, disappearances, illegal detention, etc. Furthermore, the Act has become a money-making instrument for many state as well as non-state actors since huge amounts of money are poured in to the state’s armed forces departments (Marathumpilly, 2014).⁷¹

It is true that in the last two to three years, violence in the north-east in general has scaled down considerably. Yet, violence in Manipur continues to remain high (see Table 4, Chapter 4). The economic policy of giving enormous economic largesse to this region seems to be a staple response of the central government. These policies have been contested vociferously by many of the civil society organisations.

The underlying problem in this region is apparently not only one of underdevelopment, but also of recognition and acceptance from the centre. The matrix of Manipur’s prolonged armed conflict largely centres on the controversial merger of its two thousand year old sovereign kingdom with the Union of India without any reciprocation of recognition of its identity. Manipur, albeit considered to be the first state to conduct democratic elections in the annals of India’s democratic history,⁷² has been encountering a continuing armed conflict situation since the mid 1960s because the province has not been given the chance to practice democracy since the inception of India as a republican union of states (Chandhoke, 2006).

⁷¹ The Government of India prepares a budgetary allocation for all the security forces every financial year. The Assam Rifles that are mostly deployed in the north-east and Manipur in particular have been allocated a sum of Rs 3,580 crore - i.e. 35.80 billions of Rupees. For further details, see Marathumpilly, S. (2014). *The Rot In The Assam Rifles. The Tehelka*, 11 (40).

⁷² Manipur was the first province of the present India to conduct a democratic election under Universal Adult Franchise in July 1948, with M.K Priyobrata being the first Chief Minister of Manipur. However the government formed through this democratic election was short-lived when the Government of India annexed the province in 1949 completely bypassing and ignoring the interests of Manipur.

It may be argued that Delhi's political dispensation in the north-east region in terms of nation-building is not necessarily bad in itself. However, it can also be argued that when the notion of nation-state-building is carried out through coercive policies and militarisation it lacks legitimacy and credibility. It could, in the end, be a setback for the robust and zealous nation-building project of India.

Thus, the path that the Indian Government embarked upon, which greatly relies on coercive action, is unlikely to bring a long lasting solution in this region, as it largely lacks the space for settlement through democratic dialogue. Manipur does not fit easily into a standard democracy in today's post-colonial era. The human rights record in north-eastern India, especially in Manipur, would put many country's democracies to shame (Baruah, 2007).

Conclusion

Despite the coercive attempts by the state to maintain law and order, many violent conflicts have continued to occur hitherto with serious implications. Violence such as inter-group ethnic clashes have become frequent and have taken a heavy toll on life and property. At the same time, separatist violence exists alongside inter-ethnic competition for resources and opportunities, in which the state finds itself pulled in different directions with little ability to provide solutions.⁷³

Nevertheless, the real cost of the way India has chosen to engage with the challenge of independentist militancy is the erosion of the principles of rule of law, accountability and transparency (Baruah, 2007). To handle a complex and fragile situation such as India's north-east or Manipur, an understanding is needed of its core issues as well as utmost patience and respect. The first step is to acknowledge the history of the underlying conflict. It is this history that often explains why people feel as they do and it can suggest possible remedies for the

⁷³ Hassan, M. S. (2010). Secessionism in Northeast India. In S. Baruah, *Ethnonationalism in India: A Reader* (pp. 291-315). New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 291.

current situation. A history of past events should be taken seriously, then, to assess not only its impact on the development of an ongoing conflict, but also possible approaches for conflict management or resolution (Jeong, 2008).

Problems occur when the initiatives towards conflict resolution are hindered by a refusal to recognise the legitimacy and rights of the groups that have been marginalised by discriminatory social structures and norms. In addition, a lack of agreement on a suitable process for resolution has been an obstacle to discussion about substantive issues (Jeong, 2008). Had the Indian Union dealt with the root causes of the ongoing conflict at the very beginning the situation would have been different and there would have been a better outcome. The forced militarisation and counter-insurgency operations indirectly show the biased attitude of the Indian Union towards the people of Manipur. They show the inhuman and worthless treatment of the people of Manipur by the Indian government as massive militarisation was imposed in the state, completely ignoring the outrage of the people, and knowing that militarisation would eventually cause gross and systematic human rights violations.

The AFSPA 1958, which is de facto discriminatory but non-distinctive between insurgents and civilians, reflects the distrust of the Indian government towards the whole population of Manipur; it has put everyone's life under threat. As we have seen, there are no politically democratic steps taken for conciliation; both parties counter attack in a destructive and hostile manner.

The oppressive structures that have been created through the draconian law in the north-eastern region have aroused feelings of insecurity, anger and inferiority among the population. In the long run such feelings have resulted in hostile behaviour and conflict. As the Indian armed forces are given legal impunity for behaviour ranging from torture to murder, it is not surprising to see an increasingly hostile attitude and conflict towards the New Delhi government by the local population. On the other hand, the culture of violence or the extortionist way of life practiced by local insurgent armed groups towards the general population is equally torturous. Caught in the crossfire, basic human rights are compromised. Thus, India's militarisation process in this region

neither solves conflict nor attempts to bring peace; rather it has become a viscous cycle of force, violence and hatred.

Ironically, India's mission of maintaining the law and order situation in Manipur has led to the emergence of many secondary problematic issues. Conflict between different ethnic groups that the state did not witness before the merger is now being seen. Women's organisations and associations are speaking out against the high prevalence of sexual violence carried out with impunity by the Indian army. The massive expenditure on the military has impacted on expenditure on welfare for the people. The underdeveloped economy is still stagnant and there is no sign of improvement.

Chapter 4

India's developmentalist approach: a policy to nationalise the frontier space?

This chapter deals with India's developmentalist approach to nation-state-building in the north-east region, and Manipur in particular, of the post-colonial Indian state. The developmentalist approach here mainly describes the militarily induced developmentalism that the Indian Government embarked on as the central legitimising strategy implemented to justify and establish firmer control over these frontier areas.⁷⁴ Accordingly, militaristic developmentalism is taken to be a concept of development that largely focuses on state-building for the sake of national security, i.e. for the easy movement of the state's (Indian) armed forces with huge socio-political and environmental costs for its own people. These policies have been vehemently resisted by the people of this region.

Towards 'state-building'

As a union of nearly 600 erstwhile princely states, India became an independent state on 15 August 1947, which is relatively recent in the history of nation-state formation. Nevertheless, India left no stone unturned in its objective of forming a robustly unified nation. Within a short space of time, India made much progress. The country has succeeded in the rehabilitation of some ten to eleven million people who were uprooted by India-Pakistan partition. Further, India has

⁷⁴ Developmentalism is also defined as the ideology of development for development's sake at whatever cost (Conversi 2012:21-22).

succeeded in holding sixteen⁷⁵ Lok Sabha (House of the People) general elections and stands today as the largest democratic country in the world with an excellent score on political pluralism (9.58).⁷⁶ It has also advanced greatly in respect of economic and infrastructural expansion along with particular advancements in science and technology, including nuclear technology.

With all these changes proceeding hand in hand, Indian leaders also emphasised national integration with utmost fervour, organising various programmes and national schemes that have been put in place to bring the entire state closer to the goal of forming a single unit, that is a 'nation-state'.⁷⁷

However, the integrationist efforts of India need to be re-examined since the merger resulted in a protracted armed restoration movement in the north-eastern state and the 'unity in diversity' that India's political leaders have been eulogizing since the country's inception has been confronted with a host of political issues.

Although, the state-building process in India is not as harsh as the then Mao's (Chinese Han) expansionist method that eliminated millions of people, it ultimately fosters ethnic consciousness and widens the gap between the population of this region and the mainland people of India, creating an atmosphere of 'us' and 'them'. This is because the process compromises the rights of marginalised sections of the country.

Perhaps the palpable danger posed by neighbouring countries may be a valid reason for the central government to stir up the nationalising mission; but not giving due recognition and proper respect to the basic rights of the people of the north-east means that most of the nationalising projects are unlikely to be successful.

⁷⁵ The Sixteenth Lok Sabha election was successfully conducted in May 2014 and is the latest to date.

⁷⁶ Firstpost, (30 April 2013) *India ranks 38 in Index of Democracy, Norway tops list*. The Firstpost.

⁷⁷ India's National Integration Day has been observed every year on 31 October (since the assassination of India's former Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1984).

...India was never a nation, nor is a nation today, nor can suddenly become one tomorrow. The process of integration will take time here as elsewhere. It might be shortened by wise leadership or bedevilled by narrowness and stupidity (Narayan, 2003:406).⁷⁸

The idea of state-building orchestrated from New Delhi for the north-eastern region in order to manage Chinese expansion has created various secondary issues such as demographic change and displacement due to the construction of mega dams,⁷⁹ transnational highways etc. Further, it has also created unprecedented corruption, ethnic conflict, drug and arms smuggling and crime.

Thus, it can be argued that India's state-making process lacks the idea of national consciousness. In fact, most of the political leaders, if not all, think that the developmentalist approach (economic incentives) is the answer to the north-eastern region's age-old armed conflict issues. Perhaps the national leaders of India are trying to follow Karl W. Deutsch's (1953) philosophy that 'modernization, in the form of increases in urbanization, industrialization, schooling, communication and transportation facilities, and so on, would lead to assimilation' (cited in Connor, 1994:31) and thus end the problem. However, the enduring problems of the north-east, or Manipur for that matter, are not the outcome of backwardness or underdevelopment as the government of India perceives, but by and large an offshoot of coercive state-building processes.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Narayan, J. (2003). *Nation Building in India*, (Brahmanand, Ed.) Varanasi: Brahmanand Navachetna Prakashan.

⁷⁹ Despite the fact that north-east India falls within a seismic zone, New Delhi is planning to construct nearly 300 dams in the region including mega dams at Tipaimukh, Manipur and Subansiri, Arunachal Pradesh. See Yumnam, J. (27 August 2012). *Oil Exploration: Boon or Bane for Manipur*. The Hueiyen Lanpao.

⁸⁰ See Hassan, M. S. (2006). Explaining Manipur's Breakdown and Mizoram's Peace: the State and Identities in North East India. *Crisis States Programme*, I (79), 1-31. Also see Parrat, J. (2005). *Wounded Land - Political and Identity in Modern Manipur*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication. pp. 109-121.

State-building (nationalising north-eastern frontier space) through a developmentalist approach

The political interest in north-east India drastically changed after the Chinese incursion⁸¹ in 1962. Before that India's diplomatic interests were largely centred on the political economy of western countries. However, financial crises in western countries may be another reason why India's political elites shifted their economic strategy towards the booming south-east and east Asian economies, where north-east India and Manipur were so vital. In view of this, the logical focus of India's nation-state-building (developmentalism) on its north-eastern region is apparently 'embedded in the institutions of the Indian state that have been put in place in pursuit of the goal of nationalizing space' (Baruah, 2007:35).

In fact, the northeast region as a whole was neglected or hardly known to many of India's political elites, if not for the so called 'mainland people' (Narayan 2003). For most of mainlanders, this region is perceived as an untamed frontier, settled by 'wild head hunting tribes' (Narayan, 2003). But the humiliating defeat against China in the Sino-India War of 1962 encouraged the Government to deal with this wild region through restrictive policies as well as with economic responses to counter the ethnic dissent, arguing that the dissatisfaction (i.e. armed movements) in the region is a consequence of underdevelopment and economic backwardness.

Since then, the Government of India, realising the looming external as well as internal threats, began to engage this region in its political dispensation somewhat seriously. There was even a proposal from one opposition party in the Indian parliament that some 100,000 farmers from Punjab should be settled in the north-east (particularly in the former North Eastern Frontier Agency, NEFA) in order to assimilate the area into India (R. Guha, 2001:295 cited in Baruah,

⁸¹ The Chinese Army had advanced up to the Brahmaputra valley of Assam during the Sino-Indian war of 1962. For further details, see Bhaumik, S. (2009). *Troubled Periphery*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd. pp. 16.

2007) after the Chinese incursion. This attitude clearly shows that the state's policy programme of resettlement of its expanding population at national fringes not necessarily, but usually, underpinned multiple implicit intentions. In this regard Geiger claims that the state fills up its frontiers with migrants not only to seek relief from demographic and social pressures, but also to nationalise the frontier space that has not borne the full signature of the national community before (Geiger, 2008; Baruah, 2007).

Geiger (2008) further argues that nationalising frontier peripheries is usually a policy carried out by ruling political elites to explore the accessibility of loosely settled frontier areas and subsequently resettle their growing population to areas with untapped 'development potential',⁸² or to encourage so-called 'state-facilitated' migration to the margins of their national territories along with a militarisation process.

However, these policies can bring a host of problems in the long run, such as socio-political unrest (usually ethnic conflict) due to the demographic distortion that is created in the process. On the other hand, the constitutional safeguard that was instituted in the troubled north-east region during the Nehru era - such as the Inner Line Permit System (ILPS), the Sixth Schedule⁸³ etc. - and which segregates the people of this region from India's national politics, is clearly questionable. This is a matter of frustration for many of the political leaders, particularly the nationalist/rightist groups who believe in the idea of the 'nation-state'.

Furthermore, 'the rules of exclusion enforced by the ILPS and the restrictions on property ownership by non-tribal people in the tribal regions of Northeast India effectively compromise the constitutional right to free movement of Indian citizens' (Baruah, 2007:51). Thus, it is the desire of the Government to remove

⁸² See Bernard Nietschmann (1986). *Economic Development by Invasion of Indigenous Nations: Cases from India and Bangladesh*. Cultural Survival Quarterly 10 (2), pp. 2-11 (cited in Geiger, 2008, pp. 3-73).

⁸³ The Inner Line Permit System and Sixth Schedule are some of the constitutional safeguards that contain provisions concerning the administration of tribal areas in India's north-eastern region. It is a policy of non-intervention that restricts land/property ownership by non-tribal people in the tribal states of India's north-eastern region.

all these protective tribal policies and engage this troubled region in the ideology of militarily induced developmentalism to achieve smoother nation-state-building or to deal with protracted ethnic dissent in the region.

But whose development, whose benefit is it?

Driven by the perception of underdevelopment and backwardness, and owing to the looming threat to national security provided by the apparent economic opportunities in south-east Asia, economic policies focusing on the ideology of developmentalism, such as the Look East Policy (LEP), or the establishment of a separate ministry for the north-east region – the Ministry for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)⁸⁴ – have been gradually gaining momentum since the early 1990s. These developmentalist projects, particularly the setting up of the DoNER ministry and the launch of LEP, were embarked on with the understanding that the entire north-eastern region would benefit in the fields of border trade, tourism and infrastructure; eventually there would be jobs for the educated unemployed youth in the region and this would discourage young people from taking up arms.⁸⁵ However, the projects have not provided the desired results so far (Bhaumik, 2009:232). In fact, the Annual Report 2007-08 of the Employment Exchange, Manipur, reveals that there are as many as 598,117 educated unemployed young people in Manipur itself - i.e. approximately 26 per cent of the whole population of Manipur are unemployed (see Table 2) (Department of Labour & Employment, Government of Manipur, 2008).

⁸⁴ North-east India is the only region that has a separate ministry for development.

⁸⁵ See one of the speeches, which has become a cliché, given by the Governor of Manipur: http://manipurassembly.nic.in/html/gov_add96.htm. (accessed 29 September 2014).

Table 2: *Estimated number of educated unemployed in Manipur from 1994-2005*

Educational Level	Year-1994	Year-1996	Year-1998	Year-2005
Matriculation	101,497	118,535	151,224	183,825
Undergraduate	34,415	40,795	57,801	75,842
Graduate & Above	32,479	32,363	48,809	55,349
Total Educated	168,391	191,693	257,834	315,016

Source. *The Live Register of Employment Exchange as on 30-06-2005. Annual Plan (2006-2007), Planning Department, Govt. of Manipur, December 2005, Volume I*, cited in (Kengoo, 2012)

It can be observed from the above table that the number of educated unemployed people has been gradually increasing in spite of various developmentalist initiatives by the Indian Government for the betterment of the people of the northeast and Manipur.

Of course, some people from this region have benefited, but the developmentalist policies have been subject to strong criticism particularly from civil society organisations. For instance, the developmental projects initiated by the centre for the so-called ‘betterment for the backward–underdeveloped people of the north-east’ is a paradox. A significant component in the economic enhancement of the region, i.e. tradable items listed in the border trade (items from India exported to south-east Asian countries), are not however manufactured in any of the north-eastern states but in Punjab or Mumbai or Gujarat;⁸⁶ this ‘backward’ region only serves as a transit point.

The fact is that the zealous developmentalist policies of the Government directed towards the north-east, making this region a *special region*⁸⁷ and pumping in huge amounts of money, only creates an economic niche that either attracts or ‘facilitates’ a large-scale influx of migrants into the region. This overwhelms the native communities and sometimes eventually leads to violent

⁸⁶ With the exception of Assam, no other states in north-east India have large-scale industry.

⁸⁷ India’s north-east has been designated as a ‘*special category*’ region and has been receiving a huge amount of lapsable as well as non-lapsable monetary assistance from the centre. The North Eastern Council (NEC) ‘receives 90 per cent of the plan assistance as a grant and 10 per cent as a loan, while other Indian states receive only 30 per cent as a grant and 70 per cent as loan’ (Bhaumik, op.cit 232).

ethnic clashes between the migrants and the native population. Thus, India's nation-state-building in this region has created an unprecedented distortion of the demographic structure of the native population. Although the demographic distortion or ethnic dilution in the region may lead to effective control of its enduring problems, the policy is unlikely to bring a lasting solution. Furthermore, the policy has resulted in an unprecedented spread of large-scale corruption, the proliferation of armed extortionist groups, civil society discontent etc. Besides, the building of mega dams, road and railway construction, mining and so on have displaced thousands of people which has eventually led to social unrest in the region.

The developmentalist policy has been applied at significant cost to the social, environmental and political affairs of the people of this region. As a result, questions have been raised by sections of civil society, scholars and environmentalists among others, about the credibility, legitimacy and sustainability of the developmental programmes that the New Delhi Government has embarked on in the north-east.

Moreover, what does it mean when the Indian military deployed in this region, whose purpose is to safeguard the state from external aggression, is involved in civil developmental projects?⁸⁸ And where does the issue of indigenous people's rights stand when these developmental projects are carried out without the consent of the native people (see Figures 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9)? Yet, this has been the harsh reality hitherto. It is therefore necessary to reconsider the meaning of 'development' in India's north-east region. Development should not mean the construction of tall skyscrapers or six-lane transnational highways without considering the basic rights and living standards of the people. Ironically, the people of Manipur receive a maximum of six to seven hours of electricity per day despite the fact that the New Delhi Government has constructed numerous hydropower projects in the state.

⁸⁸ Also corruption has spread to the very top of the country's largest paramilitary force – the Assam Rifles. For details see Marathumpilly, S. (2014). The Rot In The Assam Rifles. *The Tehelka*, 11 (40).

Figure 7: Indian army personnel who are supposed to safeguard against external threats are seen to be involved in internal civil issues, such as a public meeting/protest held against the construction of Tipaimukh dam in Manipur



Source: (Yumnam, 2012)

Figure 8: *Native people of Manipur protesting against the construction of Tipaimukh dam.*



Source: (Yumnam, 2012)

Figure 9: *Native people of Manipur protesting against oil exploration*



Source: *The Imphal Free Press, 19 August 2012 and the International Forum: Democracy and Cooperation, 2012.*

Developmentalism as a Trojan horse to deal with armed conflict

In general understanding developmentalism, as a modernist concept, is usually 'linked to liberal ideology and to the idea of progress' (Grosfoguel, 2000). But for India, the idea of developmentalism apparently relies on a coercive method: the people of the north-east region are subject to oppression.⁸⁹ If we take the case of Manipur, the politics of this province have been the epitome of bad governance in south Asia, if not throughout Asia. The political impasse vis-à-vis the rise of the armed struggle or ethnic conflict that has plagued the state's political system for several decades is undeniably hinged on the controversial merger of Manipur's 2,000 year old kingdom into the union of India, in which the people of this state claim that their basic rights were not taken into consideration.⁹⁰ Thus, it is imperative for the New Delhi Government to understand these underlying factors.

Top-down policies - i.e. when the centre takes a decision without having a concrete knowledge of the dynamics of the ethnic structure of the region, bypassing federal structures - also contribute to the complex problems of the region. For instance, the promulgation of the National Security Ordinance during the regime of Smt. Indira Gandhi was a clear symptom of ill consideration.⁹¹ The promulgation (including the imposition of AFSPA 1958 across the north-eastern states) lacked due consideration of India's federal

⁸⁹ Connor conceives of developmentalism as a means of nation building or national destroying. See Connor, W. (1994). *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 39.

⁹⁰ Other significant factors are: the imposition of AFSPA; the rapid infrastructural transformation that displaced much of the native population, violation/encroachment on federal structures etc.

⁹¹ The plan to set up the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) is another act violating India's federal system, Article 74 (1) of the Indian Constitution. See also, Chari, P. (March 2012). *National Counter Terrorism Centre for India: Understanding the Debate*. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies.

structure; or the ruling government did not take into account the rights of the people living at the frontier.⁹²

No doubt the armed movement in the region posed a serious threat to national security, challenging the lawful authority with the potential to hold the state to ransom. Nevertheless, the top-down centralised policies unnecessarily led to the creation of ruling classes who, during decades of the country's independence, failed to offer a democratic solution to the socio-economic and political problems of the people (People's Democracy, 1980), eventually leading to the central government's loss of integrity. There has, therefore, been a vicious cycle of claims and counter claims over whether New Delhi's developmentalist approach contributed to the protracted armed conflict situation in India's north-east region or whether this approach has brought any real development to the people of north-eastern India.

Of course, political problems can occur anywhere in the world. However, they occur when there is 'poor implementation, bureaucratic sabotage and half-hearted enforcement of existing provisions' (Scherrer, 2002:196). Hassan, a former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) civil servant who served in northeast India, argues that: 'it is the poor performance of political institutions in India, particularly the violation of the federal principle by the Central state, and the emergence of the patterns of "cosmetic federalism" – the national state's centralizing tendencies and its overriding power to cut up sub-national territories – that explains why rebellions have occurred so frequently in the region' (Baruah, 2007; Hassan, 2010:292).

⁹² Mention may be made of the fact that as many as eighteen people were shot dead by Indian para-military forces on 18 June 2001 in Imphal valley in Manipur. The people were protesting against the Government of India's announcement of a ceasefire agreement with the Naga (sic NSCN-IM) rebel group that was beyond Naga's territorial limits and which provoked the sentiments of most of the non-Naga ethnic communities settled in the region. The treaties were signed without the knowledge of the people of the region and with no official consultation with the government (Chief Ministers) of this region. For Delhi, political reconciliation, economic incentives, or weakening the rebel groups by splitting them up have been the most significant means of dealing with the protracted armed conflict situation in north-east India since the self determination movement that began in this region from the late 1940s.

In Manipur, the current political problems are not limited to just one or two issues. Rather, rapid modernisation, the unequal power structure and intra-community competition over resources (including natural and economic), class-caste based conflict, historical legacy etc. all contribute to the complex situation (Hassan, 2010). However, it cannot be denied that the manner of New Delhi's governance in a multi-ethnic frontier province such as Manipur exacerbates the situation. For instance, as part of the counter-insurgency operation, the New Delhi Government backed one of the armed rebel groups in Manipur against other rebel groups (Bhaumik, 2009:150) with ominous consequences.

To blame the Delhi Government for all the problems that Manipur faces today, or has been enduring over the last fifty to sixty years, would not, of course, be fair. However, one of the important factors behind the rise of an armed movement in Manipur is that politicians, as well as officials of the state, have refused to adopt a democratic method that can keep India united and strong.

No doubt, the New Delhi Government has been controlling the problem of armed insurgency movements in the north-east through a variety of means, although it has not brought about a lasting solution.⁹³ In an exceptional case, the state of Mizoram that was once the centre of fierce armed movements during the early 1980s has become a peaceful state. Other than that, the path that the New Delhi Government embarked on has apparently been less effective, bringing more trouble to an already problematic situation in this region. For instance, the periodically organised dialogues (or covert negotiations) between the Naga rebels (sic NSCN-IM) or the Kuki-Zomi rebel groups on the Suspension of Operation (SoO) treaties has brought more hatred amongst the ethnic communities of Manipur rather than bringing a solution (Bhaumik, 2009).⁹⁴

When practising its political legitimacy against the activities of armed opposition groups from various indigenous communities in the north-east region, New Delhi, as Bhaumik (2009) argues, did not follow Western colonial,

⁹³ It is highly important to learn that the Manipur State government has recently been involved in the centre-rebel negotiations.

⁹⁴ Also see R.N.Ravi, (15 November 2012) *Chasing a Chimeric Peace*. The Hindu.

post-colonial, or even British models of counter-insurgency except for utilising military concepts such as the village regrouping⁹⁵ of Malaysia. Rather, it went by the precepts of the traditional Hindu realpolitik statecraft, by the teachings of the great Kautilya (also known as Chanakya) who advised India's first trans-regional empire builder Chandragupta Maurya after Alexander's departure from India. Kautilya's four principles of *Sham* (political reconciliation), *Dam* (monetary inducement), *Danda* (force) and *Bhed* (split) have been amply applied by New Delhi in dealing with the insurgent issues of north-east India, more than anywhere else in post-colonial India (Bhaumik, 2009:90-91).

Among the seven north-eastern states, Assam and Manipur have recorded the highest insurgency-related violence (Hassan, 2010:293) (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: *Insurgency related killings in northeast India.*⁹⁶

Year	Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Tripura
1992	0	161	165	0	0	96	98
1993	3	131	423	0	0	173	183
1994	3	271	350	4	0	192	238
1995	3	270	321	7	0	213	257
1996	5	451	275	7	4	304	189
1997	10	537	495	4	0	360	274
1998	7	783	244	20	0	112	265
1999	2	503	231	22	7	148	303
2000	34	758	246	36	9	101	514
2001	63	606	256	40	0	103	312
2002	32	559	239	66	-	90	386
2003	39	401	205	79	1	86	296
2004	43	315	212	47	4	97	164

⁹⁵ Village regrouping involves the settlement of populations in peripheral villages to form an urban nucleus. It is emerging as a major development strategy in rural Malaysia where populations are relocated into planned, geographically centralised settlements large enough to support urban services that could not be provided to small villages. For detail, see Courtenay, P. (1990). Malaysia's Village Regrouping Policy and an Example from Malacca. *Geography*, 75 (2), 128-134.

⁹⁶ Besides this report, there is also data recorded for violence and fatalities at the South Asian Terrorism Portal (SATP). For further details, see the data sheet of SATP - <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/database/fatalitiesnortheast2006.htm>. (accessed 19 May 2013).

2005	NA	242	331	29	-	40	73
2006	NA	158	261	24	2	84	59
2007	NA	437	408	18	NA	108	36
2008	NA	373	492	12	3	147	27
2009	9	392	416	5	1	18	11
2010	0	158	138	20	0	3	3
2011	41	94	65	29	1	15	1
2012	4	91	111	48	0	61	2
2013*	1	23	22	16	0	11	0
Total	299	7651	5906	533	32	2562	3691

Grand Total: 20,674

*Data available until 19 May 2013 on South Asian Terrorism Portal.

Source: Government of India, *Economic Survey*, 2004-2005 (New Delhi: Ministry of Finance, 2005) and Institute of Conflict Management (IMC), Data sheet. www.satp.org (2009), cited in Hassan, *Secessionism in Northeast India*, 2010:293⁹⁷

It is evident from the above data that the entire region except for Mizoram, but particularly Manipur and Assam, are susceptible to violence. Thus, it is imperative that the Government seeks an alternative mechanism for dealing with it since the current developmentalist approach is not serving the purpose for which it was designed. However, if the Delhi government is determined to continue with the current mechanism for conflict resolution or nation-state-building, then will India have to exterminate the entire population of this region, which she considers to be her citizens, just as Mao did to his Chinese citizens. The peace process in north-east India will be an unrealisable dream then and national security will certainly be at stake.

India's nation-state-building - a banal project?

Whether the people of north-eastern India, and Manipur in particular, accept or reject India's nation-state-building in principle or not, the nationalist political

⁹⁷ Data from 2001 to 2013 has been added with reference to the South Asian Terrorism Portal. For further details, see Sahni, A. *Survey of Conflicts & Resolution in India's Northeast*. South Asia Terrorism Portal - <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume12/Article3.htm>. (accessed 19 May 2013).

elite at the centre are deeply steeped in a nationalised vision. In fact they became the carriers and replicators of nationalist ideology, either consciously or unconsciously. The history and culture of the entire north-east region is completely compromised by its unconscious nationalism. Even the National Anthem of India fails to mention its north-east region when it wittingly mentions the entire socio-religious and political landscape of India.⁹⁸ People living in the north-east region often perceive this attitude as an act of socio-political and cultural exclusion.

Thus, the nationalist ideology that largely relies on a purely *mentalist* definition of nationalism on the part of the New Delhi government lays fertile ground for the development of a subconscious, emotional sense of ‘otherness’ (Scherrer, 2002), the ‘us and them’ (Connor, 1994) syndrome that ultimately widens the gap between New Delhi Government and the people of this region.

In a similar note, Guyot-Réchar (2013) argues that

...rhetorically, the representatives of the Indian state claimed to be working towards the region’s integration into an Indian nation. But on the ground, awareness of India as a nation was restricted to a limited time space, and official initiatives to shape new forms of belonging were narrowly articulated around frontier state authorities themselves... In the process, state-making contributed to the creation of North-East India, a fragmented region impossibly divided into territorial ‘homelands’ based on exclusive claims to indigeneity, whose relationship to India is marked by enduring alienation and a marginal place in the country’s ‘national imaginary...’ (Guyot-Réchar, 2013).

⁹⁸ See the English transliteration of India’s National Anthem at http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urduhindilinks/txt_janaganamana.pdf. (accessed 17 September 2013).

Conclusion

Although the Indian Government's strategy of nation-state-building through the developmentalist approach is apparently rooted in the institutions of the Indian state that were put in place in pursuit of the goal of nationalising the frontier space, the strategy is unlikely to be sustainable. This is because key issues (i.e. official dialogue on the controversial merger of Manipur with the Indian Union, acknowledging Manipur not only in cartographic representation but including its 2000 year old history and culture in the academic curriculum, among others) are apparently missing in the process.

Of course, recognising the socio-political space of the north-east, its history, people, culture etc., does not mean that the people of this region will find a ready-made solution to its lasting problems. Nevertheless, prolonged refusal to recognise the people of the region and its identity, at the cost of India's nation-state-building project, needs to be seriously considered if the New Delhi Government wants to bring peace to the region. Taking the issue seriously would ultimately lead to some significant positive outcomes.

No doubt, developmentalist projects in India have brought about certain infrastructural changes and it may be that some people in the north-east region have benefited; but these projects have apparently failed to win the hearts and minds of the people or to offer benefits to a wider group to date. The resulting situation has met with a host of problems.

Thus, it can be summarised that the *developmentalist* or *modernist* path that the Indian Government embarked on was neither implemented as the result of a considered decision by the policy makers at the centre (New Delhi) about what would be best for the well-being of the people of this region, nor was it part of a mission for all round development in the region. Rather, it was an attempt to

exert control over this frontier region, to make it a 'normal' part of India's national space (Baruah, 2007:35). This path will ultimately lead to a disastrous outcome, i.e. to rely on the strategy of filling up (nationalising) this fringe region with nation (Indian) bearing migrants will only exacerbate the socio-political problems of the region.

Chapter 5

Migration in Manipur

Once a sparsely populated area, Manipur has recently witnessed large-scale migration from south-east Asia. Until the second quarter of the twentieth century, it was a melting pot of many new migrant groups. But new forms of migration have emerged as a consequence of the search for livelihoods, or very recently, on account of the impact of climate change, particularly from Bangladesh. There may be other forms of migration linked to various issues, such as ethnic conflicts or displacement due to infrastructural installations.

Before Manipur's merger with India, the erstwhile sovereign kingdom put in place a migration policy through a department called the *Foreigner's Mauzadar Office*, instituted in 1903, which helped to build a common culture shared by ethnic groups and to mitigate possible ethnic tensions. However, this policy was abolished soon after Manipur merged with India. This resulted, among other things, in an enormous increase in the migrant population. According to the Census of India 2001, the number of migrants exceeds that of native tribes in Manipur.⁹⁹ This has alarmed the local population, which democratically registered a protest by demanding the introduction of the 'Inner Line Permit System' (hereafter ILPS)¹⁰⁰ to monitor the unregulated influx of migrants. The influx also alarmed the armed opposition/separatist groups.

⁹⁹ Cited in United Committee Manipur, (2005) *Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People*. Imphal: UCM Imphal. p. 60.

¹⁰⁰ The Inner Line Permit System is an apparatus for checking the influx of any non-native populations into the north-eastern region and some other selected regions of India during the colonial period. In 1950, the permit system was repealed in the state of Manipur. However, the system still exists in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland and some districts of Assam. For further details, see Appendix IV of the report of United Committee Manipur, (2005) *Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People*. Imphal: UCM Imphal. pp 127-134.

In view of the background highlighted above, this chapter analyses migration trends into Manipur from ancient times to the present day. It also discusses how migrants/immigrants who were assimilated into Manipuri society during ancient times have become unwanted guests, particularly those migrants from the so-called ‘mainland Indian states’.

As such, the history of Manipur can be roughly divided into four periods: the pre-historic, ancient, medieval and modern (albeit when the ancient period ended and the medieval and modern periods began is a matter of contention).¹⁰¹ For the purpose of the study, which avoids a debate on historiography, the periodisation used is as follows:

1. Pre-historic period: Before the reign of King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (for which no reliable records are available);
2. Ancient period: From King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba’s reign (AD 33–154) to King Ningthou Khomba (AD 1432–1467);
3. Medieval period: From King Kyamba (AD 1467–1508) to King Charairongba (AD 1697–1709); and
4. Modern period: From King Pamheiba alias Garibniwas (AD 1709–1748) to the merger with India (1949).

Migration during the ancient period (AD 33–fifteenth century)

Since human migration has been understood as the movement of persons from one area to another, it can be said that the waves of people coming from outside the region of Manipur can be traced to the ancient period. As such, the earliest references to migration in Manipur are recorded in an ancient Manipuri text, the *Poireiton Khunthokpa* (the migration of Poireiton). It is recorded in the text that Poireiton came to Manipur along with a group of people from the *land of death*.

¹⁰¹ See Subramaniam, C. (2005). Periodisation of Indian History. *Revolutionary Democracy Journal*, XI (1), NA. Also see Kabui, G. (1991). *History of Manipur* (Vol. 1). New Delhi: National Publishing House.

The reason why the migration took place appears to be the search for a land free from death and disease (Renuka, 2013). However, as is the case with other ancient Manipuri texts, the time period as to when the migration took place is not precisely stated. Nevertheless, going by the tradition of contestation for power between Nongda Lairen Pakhangba¹⁰² and Poireiton before the foundation of the Ningthouja (also known as Meetei/Meitei) dynasty, it is apparent that the migration happened around the time of the succession of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba to the throne, or just prior to it.

Also, to consider Poireiton's migration to Manipur to be around AD 33, i.e. around the succession of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, would seem to be plausible given the fact that Laisana (or Laisna), the wife of Nongda Laren Pakhangba, was the sister of Poireiton. This is because the notion of matrimonial alliance or the custom of giving wives to the ruler of neighbouring states, or to the victorious opponent, was commonly practised more for political than for other reasons. Therefore, the tradition held by scholars and historians is that Laisna married Nongda Lairen Pakhangba after the defeat of Poireiton in the battle for the throne. This appears to provide a significant point in establishing a pertinent link with Poireiton's migration to Manipur.

Given this, it is certain that migration in some form or other had taken place in Manipur from a very early period. Mention can also be made here of the fact that Manipur was known by different names in ancient times; *Poirei Meetei* was one of them. Perhaps, this could have been after the immigration of Poireiton to Manipur.

It may also be noted here that although migration in Manipur occurred from a very early period, the causes or motives behind it were different from one period to another. From ancient times down to the modern day, migrants entered Manipur on three different occasions. Firstly, in the ancient period they were either brought as war captives or came as travellers to explore the land. As such,

¹⁰² King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba is considered to have been the first king of Manipur.

the visit of Shamlung, the younger brother of Pong King Shukampha¹⁰³ of the Shan kingdom, provides the earliest evidence of people entering Manipur after Poireiton's migration. It is mentioned in the *Poireiton Khunthokpa* that after his expedition to Pasha (another name for Bengal), Shamlung visited the Meetei land and stayed at Apong Ingkhol (an erstwhile homestead of the Pongs in the Meetei kingdom) for 10 years (Parratt, 2005).

The *Cheitharon Kumpaba* (the Royal Chronicle) gives numerous instances of people being captured as booties of war by the Meetei kings. One such instance occurred around the thirteenth century AD when the Cacharis waged a war against the Meetei King Koiremba. *Cheitharon Kumpaba* mentions the capturing of various prisoners during the war including a Cachari priest named Appheraja. What is interesting here, among other things, is that the importance of war captives can be viewed in two different ways. On one hand, they can be considered an essential aspect in understanding how people were assimilated into Meetei society in earlier times. On the other hand, apart from political issues, they were significant from an economic point of view, in the sense that they supplemented the required labour for agriculture and other manual work.

Migration during the medieval period: (sixteenth century–eighteenth century)

In the medieval period, most migrants came as refugees, fortune seekers or as invitees by the kings for state purposes, for example, interpreters, writers, priests etc. Among these, interpreters and writers set foot as the earliest migrants during the medieval period. *Cheitharol Kumpaba* mentions that as early as the sixteenth century AD, a writer by the name of Gabichandra came to Manipur from Takhel (Tripura) during the reign of King Lamkyamba (1512–23) (Parratt, 2005). It is also said that *Lairikyengbam* or the writer's families belonged to the Roys of

¹⁰³ Jhalajit, op. cit., p. 70.

Sylhet (now Bangladesh) and held important positions in the royal circle. They were gradually absorbed into Meetei society and today are one of the Meetei clans (Sharma, 1997).

Other historical events concerning migration during the medieval period are the mass inclusion of Muslim war captives into Meetei society during the reign of King Khagemba in the seventeenth century AD and migration that occurred in the form of cultural exchange with neighbouring kingdoms. Records about the exchange of a Meetei drummer with a Shan harpist as a mark of the cordial relationship between King Kiyamba of Manipur and Choupha Khekkhomba of Shan kingdom after a joint expedition against Burma (Myanmar) are also found in the *Cheitharol Kumpaba*.¹⁰⁴

The medieval period is significant in the history of Manipur because from this period onwards we witness the embryonic growth of a pluralistic society, discussed in detail in the following sections.

Beginnings of a pluralistic society

The medieval period in Manipur is marked by military expeditions and territorial expansions on account of which the ancient kingdom began to interact increasingly with neighbouring countries such as Burma (Myanmar) and China in the east, Assam in the west and Sylhet (Bangladesh) and Tripura in the south-west. At the same time, there were also flurries of cultural exchanges as well as political contacts with these neighbouring kingdoms – the reflections of which are found in the socio-cultural practices of present day Manipur.

Another significant development during this period was the emergence of proselytizing activities in the ancient kingdom. Mostly, Hindu proselytizers who travelled to Manipur were those Hindu missionaries from Bengal and Assam or

¹⁰⁴ For details, see Parratt, S. N. (2005). *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*. Ney York: Routledge.

from the mainstream Indian Hindu belt during the Mogul (also known as *Mughal*) period in the early eighteenth century, i.e. during Aurangzeb's period (1658–1707). They were the victims of religious oppression. For instance, the Hindu missionaries from the west - i.e. India during Aurangzeb's period - feared for their lives and in order to preserve their religion had to look for a safe haven and somehow reached Manipur.

The series of confrontations between the powerful Mughal forces and the erstwhile Ahom Kingdom, particularly during the reign of King Suremphaa (1751–1769), possibly created the basis for escalating Hindu proselytizing missions in Manipur.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, western neighbouring kingdoms such as the Ahom (now Assam), the Chachar (also now in Assam) and Tripura were under the influence of Hinduism which was in full swing during that time (Kabui, 1991). Thus, the Hindu religion might have reached Manipur through cultural exchanges.

There was a significant landmark for the absorption of Hindu migrants into the Manipuri/Meetei society during King Kyamba's period. Although King Kyamba did not himself convert to Hinduism, he provided a safe haven for Hindu Brahmin refugees during the great Muslim expansion in India. Apparently, King Kyamba was the first king of the Meetei (the Ningthouja) dynasty who employed Brahmins as priests or as astrologers in royal dealings and rituals. *Bamon Khunthok* or the migration of Brahmin to Manipur, a Manipuri text, states that Brahmins of family names such as *Lairikyengbam*, *Adhikarimayum*, *Sijagurumayum*, *Leihaothabam*, *Takhurchangbam*, *Phurailatpam* etc. came to Manipur during King Kyamba's reign. They apparently came from present day Gujarat, Kanpur, Assam, Sylhet, Nandagram and Kharadah (Kabui, 1991) and were generally employed as royal scribes. By and large, these Brahmin migrants were known for their skill in foreign (Meeteilon/Manipuri as well as Sanskrit) languages. It was these polyglot migrants who had apparently helped to enhance Manipur's economy vis-à-vis dealing with foreign trade and foreign affairs.

¹⁰⁵ Singh, T. K. (2008, February 8). *A Critique of Hindu Proselytisation in Manipur- Ordeals and Upheaval*. E-pao.

Therefore, they were allowed to marry local women and thus were absorbed into the Manipuri/Meetei society.

Apart from these western immigrants (i.e. the Brahmins), some of the Shans, the Pongs, the Kabaws etc. were also absorbed into the Meetei society. They were generally war captives. They later became subjects of the rulers of Manipur in Kabaw Valley and were either engaged in military service or in civil administration.¹⁰⁶

Migration in the modern period (nineteenth century onwards)

During Manipur's early modern period migration was more or less the same as that in the medieval period and included refugees, fortune seekers, religious missionaries etc. These immigrants began to expand in the valleys and hills and some were absorbed into the Meetei society.

However, in the contemporary or post-colonial period, Manipur has experienced a gradual influx of new migrants. Among new migrant/immigrant communities, Nepalese, Bengalis, Chin-Kukis, Tamils and Bangladeshis are the main groups.¹⁰⁷

With regard to the Nepali community, the colonial British brought them during the mid-twentieth century¹⁰⁸ as they served in the British Indian army as sepoy (military), milkmen, porters, herders etc. Later on, they settled in the valleys and hill areas of Manipur, particularly in the neighbourhoods of Mantripukhri, Kanglatongbi, Pangei and Serou. Other Nepali groups also came after World War II and the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and settled in the above-mentioned neighbourhoods, particularly at Saiton village in the Bishnupur district of Manipur.

¹⁰⁶ Kabui, G. (1991). *History of Manipur* (Vol. 1). New Delhi: National Publishing House.

¹⁰⁷ Whether the arrival of Indian state actors including the Indian armed forces after the merger of Manipur with the Union of India should be considered as migration has been a dilemma for many Manipuri migration scholars.

¹⁰⁸ See Kansakar, V. B. (1984). Indo-Nepal Migration: Problems and Prospects. *Nepalese Studies*, 11 (2).

The Bengali migrant community came with the Meetei community who returned back from Sylhet (Bangladesh) after the ‘Seven Years Devastation’¹⁰⁹ (1819–26 - also popularly known as ‘Chahi Taret Khuntakpa’ in local language). These communities are currently settled in Serou village in the Thoubal district of Manipur.

The third group is made up of the Chin-Kuki communities.¹¹⁰ They mostly belonged to the refugee community that came to Manipur during the Burmese military regime. During the Khadawmi Operation of 1967 under General Ne Win’s command as many as 20,000 Kuki people fled the Kachin and Shan states of Burma (Myanmar). Those Kuki populations took refuge in India’s north-eastern states, particularly Manipur and Mizoram. More Kuki people came during the late 1980s.¹¹¹ They generally belonged to the student groups who were protesting against the dictatorial rule of the military junta. These student groups along with other Chin-Kuki refugees who settled around Moreh town formed a refugee association there on 12 December 1993 and named it the Kuki Students Democratic Front (KSDF).

The fourth group is the Tamil communities who were traders during the colonial British period. This community originated from India but had already lived in Burma for decades. However, during the military dictatorship under General Ne Win (i.e. since the early 1960s), this community fled Burma fearing for their lives and took refuge in many parts of India, including Manipur. They have not been allowed to enter Burma since then. Some tried to re-enter by sea or land

¹⁰⁹ The Seven Year Devastation or *Chahi Taret Khuntakpa* (1819–1826) was a period when the Manipuri population decreased due to constant invasion by the Ava (Burmese) under the command of General Mingimala Bandula. The devastating invasion was a long awaited revenge for what the Manipuri/Meetei Kings, particularly King Garibniwas, did to the Burmese people for many years. During that time, Manipuri people generally took shelter in Sylhet, Assam and other neighbouring kingdoms. They finally came back in 1950 and were allowed to resettle in the Checkon area of Imphal region. For details, see Singh, I. M. (2012, April 19). *Objective Burma - Part I Chahi Taret Khundakpa of Manipur*. The Kangla Online - <http://kanglaonline.com/2012/06/objective-burma-%E2%80%93-part-i-chahi-taret-khundakpa-of-manipur/> (accessed 26 August 2014).

¹¹⁰ This does not mean that all the Kuki communities in Manipur are refugees, but some groups are.

¹¹¹ Refugees International: A powerful voice for lifesaving action, (2009) *India: Close the gap for Burmese Refugees*. Washington DC: Refugees International.

but were either turned back or imprisoned. Many Tamil populations have taken shelter at Moreh town in Manipur since then and their population reached up to 3000 families.¹¹² However, due to the Kuki-Naga conflict during the early 1990s some Tamils left Moreh for other safer places. Nevertheless, there are still around 400 to 500 Tamil families in Moreh town (Roy, 2012).

The fifth group is made up of Bangladeshi immigrants who entered Manipur via Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya. Recently, Manipur has witnessed an influx of Bangladeshi immigrants who are mainly victims of natural disasters such as floods, famine or cyclones. They mostly take shelter in and around Jiribam town in the Imphal East district of Manipur.

The sixth group is composed of miscellaneous groups including ‘economic migrants’, particularly labourers who came recently, mainly in the second half of the twentieth century - i.e. after Manipur was annexed/merged with the Indian Union. It is difficult to imagine how such an underdeveloped hinterland region like Manipur, that has been affected by endless armed conflict, has attracted so many new migrant communities. Therefore, some of the probable factors influencing the unrestrained entry of new migrants/immigrants into the territory of Manipur are highlighted below:

1. Annulment of ILPS in Manipur during the early 1950s

The Inner Line Permit System (ILPS), a policy of ‘protective discrimination’¹¹³ that was put in place for the tribal/indigenous people of India’s north-east region, was the brainchild of Mr. Elwin (a companion of Mr. Nehru) who came to India as a Christian missionary during the colonial era and later became a

¹¹² Roy, E. (2012, July 29). *A border town called Moreh*. Journal of North East India Studies (JNEIS).

¹¹³ A policy of non-intervention or exclusion that is enforced by a provision called the Bengal Eastern Frontier Act 1873, which restricts property ownership by non-tribal in the tribal states of Northeast India which on the other hand, contradicts the constitutional right of free movement of being an Indian citizen. For further details, see Baruah, S. (2007). *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; pp 51–53.

tribal activist.¹¹⁴ Mr. Nehru's *philosophy of tribal development* gave birth to the Inner Line Permit System in this frontier region.

It was indeed a useful tool for protecting the cultures and traditions of the tribal/indigenous communities settled in what was perceived to be a 'wild region'. However, this tribal policy which Mr. Nehru embarked upon was criticised by most of the unitarist and nationalist sections of the Indian political elites. They argued that the idea of tribal development - i.e. the tribal protective system was focused on the 'exclusion' of tribal people from India's socio-political dispensation - could ultimately lead to the state breaking up (creating the idea of otherness – mainlanders vs. north-easterners) rather than building a robust nation-state.¹¹⁵

As the new political elites now realised the economic opportunities in respect of south-east and east Asia, they recognised that the north-east region, once perceived as a living museum for natural wonders and human tribes during the Nehru era, should no longer be kept aloof from the centre's political dispensation.

Nationalist feeling among the political elites became intense when the political influence of China began to be felt upon the region and New Delhi slowly began to consider its geo-strategic importance, invoking a real or imagined threat from neighbouring countries.

Hence, it was the Chinese invasion of the early 1960s that exposed India's vulnerabilities in the north-eastern region. In fact, it was the Naga rebels who began to make officials of the post-colonial Indian state anxious. Beginning with the China war, politicians as well as Indian state bureaucrats began to see external and internal 'enemies' in this frontier region coming together and constituting a looming threat to national security (Baruah, 2007). In such

¹¹⁴ Elwin, V. (2009). *A Philosophy for NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh)*. Itanagar: Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

¹¹⁵ Baruah, S. (2007). *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp 37-39. Also see Haokip, T. (2010). India's Northeast Policy: Continuity and Change, *In Man and Society: A Journal of North East Studies*, VII.

circumstances, India may not be ready to grant another protective law like the ILPS to Manipur in the future.

Thus the Indian Government was determined to withdraw this by-law as early as the 1950s in order to strengthen the nationalising process in this frontier region. The strategic importance of the frontier region was also highlighted in the annexation of the Kingdom of Sikkim in 1975.

2. Exclusion of Nepali nationals from the term 'foreigner' in India's Foreigner (Protected Areas) Act 1958 (re-imposed in the late 1970s)

Under Section 1(3) of the Foreigner's (Protected Areas) Act 1958 (FAP), Nepali nationals were exempted from the status of 'foreigner' and allowed to enter into any part of India, including Manipur. Thus Nepali nationals soon became an integral part of Manipur's demographic structure. The exemption of Nepali nationals from this by-law was repealed in a 1978 Amendment under Section 1(3), yet the influx has remained constant (United Committee Manipur, 2005:27). The Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed in 1950 could be the main reason for the influx. Article 7 of the treaty allows any citizen of Nepal to move freely in any part of India without a passport or visa. Nepali citizens are also allowed to live or work in any part of India including Manipur.

3. Ill-defined and poorly protected international boundaries with Myanmar

Unclear demarcation of the international boundary between India and Myanmar has been a great concern to the people of Manipur with regard to its impact on the influx of illegal immigrants. The porous international border has also provided a safe haven for insurgent groups and smugglers dealing in arms, drugs and other contraband goods.¹¹⁶

4. Occurrence of man-made as well as natural disasters in the neighbouring countries, particularly in countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal.

¹¹⁶ See STRATRISKS, (27 July 2013) *Eastern India new smuggling hub*. Stratrisks.

The Bangladesh Liberation War in the early 1970s, ethnic and religious refugees from Myanmar due to dictatorial military junta, victims from constant devastating floods and cyclones in Bangladesh, the unstable government in Nepal etc. have all contributed to the massive influx of migrants/immigrants to the north-eastern region of India including Manipur. Myanmar's decades-long oppression by the military junta led many settlers (including Tamils, Rohingyas and other ethnic groups¹¹⁷ from Kachin state in Myanmar) to take shelter in Manipur's border town of Moreh¹¹⁸.

5. Rapid infrastructure development

Rapid infrastructural development has turned north-east India into an irresistible economic niche¹¹⁹ resulting in a large-scale influx of migrants/immigrants into the region that overwhelms native communities. These new migrant/immigrant communities are mainly labourers who come from so-called mainland Indian states. When these migrant/immigrant groups refuse to return and try to settle in Manipur violent clashes eventually erupt between them and the native population. Further, it is important to understand that the economic policy of the centre has resulted in an unprecedented spread of corruption at all levels of the political establishment. These policies resulted in the superimposition of a corrupt and clientelist class directly subordinated to the orders of the Indian

¹¹⁷ The case of Burmese Kuki migrants has been a complicated issue as they share their ethnicity with some of the ethnic groups of Manipur. See United Committee Manipur, (2005) *Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People*. Imphal: UCM Imphal. Also see Singh, M. A. (2009). *A Study on Illegal Immigration into North-East India: The Case of Nagaland*. New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (Singh 2009).

¹¹⁸ A recent but unofficial estimate claims that there are around 740,484 non-Manipuri populations as against 670,000 tribal/indigenous and 751,208 Meetei in Manipur's total population. For details, see The Hueiyen News Service, 2012. Further, reports by local NGOs such as the Federation of Regional Indigenous Societies (FREINDS) and the United Committee Manipur (UCM) reveal that fifty per cent of the total population of the *Jiribam* subdivision in the Imphal East district is made up of Bangladeshi immigrants. They further claim that there are around two hundred thousand Nepalese immigrants in Manipur. For details, see United Committee Manipur, (2005) *Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People*. Imphal: UCM Imphal.

¹¹⁹ India's north-east has been designated as a 'special category' region and has been receiving a huge amount of lapsable as well as non-lapsable monetary assistance from the centre. The North Eastern Council (NEC) 'receives 90 per cent of the plan assistance as a grant and 10 per cent as a loan, while other Indian states receive only 30 per cent as a grant and 70 per cent as loan' (Bhaumik op.cit 232).

Government as overlords of the new state-directed regional economy. The social disruption brought by India's new developmentalist policies has also led to a proliferation of armed extortionist groups. All of these activities at the centre engendered much social tension and dissatisfaction within civil societies.¹²⁰

6. Unwillingness to do menial jobs

Most of the migrant communities take menial jobs and work as domestic helpers, rickshaw pullers, cart pullers, mobile ice-cream or juice vendors, cobblers, barbers, masons etc. as the local Manipuri people find these jobs unattractive and demeaning.

7. Counter-insurgency operation in Mizoram

The counter-insurgency operation codenamed 'Operation Jericho' in Mizoram during the mid-1960s to suppress the movement of the Mizo National Front (MNF) for a sovereign Mizo nation resulted in many Mizos fleeing to nearby states including Manipur.¹²¹ Ethnically Mizos are the kith and kin of the Kuki(s) of Manipur who are mostly settled in Churachandpur district.

8. Nepalese as the source of income for tribal chiefs

The Nepalese have been known for their bravery since the British period. For this reason, Nepali families are invited by tribal chiefs in Manipur to look after their huge plots of uninhabited land in the hill districts. In return, the Nepali population utilises these vast hilly lands for grazing as well as for dairy farming. The tribal chiefs, on the other hand, collect informal/unofficial taxes from these Nepali families.¹²² That is how some of the Nepali population are also accommodated into the tribal lands.

¹²⁰ The building of mastodontic dams and road/communication infrastructure, the expansion of extractive activities and mining in disputed areas (including forced land grabbing) and other activities at huge cost to Manipur's environment and culture, have resulted into adverse effects including the displacement of thousands of people. This has led to a spiral of social unrest and state repression affecting the harmonious coexistence of the entire region.

¹²¹ Tochhawng, J. V. (2012). *The Mizo Uprising: Assam Assembly Debates on the Mizo Movement, 1966-1971*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

¹²² An interview with a Nepali grazing family at Mayaiching Khongjai hill of Senapati District, Manipur.

9. Political opportunism

Although there is no official documentation on whether local Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLA) support undocumented migrants in procuring ration cards, driving licenses, voter identity cards or birth certificates etc., the fact that this occurs is an open secret, as the number of migrants continues to increase (United Committee Manipur, 2005). One shocking case is that the ‘Nganukon Refugee Colony’ with 820 voters in Kumbi Constituency (i.e. Manipur’s 29th Assembly Constituency in Bishnupur district) is a village entirely settled by Bengali as well as Nepalese ‘refugees’.¹²³ But, listing these ‘refugee’ communities on Manipur’s Electoral Roll¹²⁴ explains everything about the ethics and political principles of the local politicians (MLAs).

Reports by the United Committee Manipur (UCM) also reveals that there are around 704,488 migrants, including offspring, as against 670,782 indigenous tribal populations, which is around 31 per cent or about two thirds of the total population of Manipur - i.e. 2,293,896 (UCM report 2005). Further, it is allegedly claimed by an ILPS activist that one of the local MLAs for the Jiribam sub-division of Imphal East district is involved in legalising illegal migrants in Manipur (Lisam, 2014).

10. Preference for non-Manipuri in privately run ‘English medium’ schools

Western English education entered Manipur as early as the late nineteenth century with the establishment of the Johnstone M.E. School in 1877 at Imphal under the patronage of King Chandrakirti.¹²⁵ There were very few ‘English medium’ schools until the middle of the twentieth century and most of them

¹²³ Refugees from the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971.

¹²⁴ Electoral Office Manipur, (2014) *Electoral Rolls*. Retrieved 23 August 2014 from Chief Electoral Officer, Manipur.

¹²⁵ British political agents such as Captain Gordon, Major General W.E. Nuthall and R. Brown all tried to introduce western (English) education during the early 1870s, but they all failed as the people of Manipur had no interest in western education. For details, see Jamini, (2006) *Education in Manipur*. Imphal: Rai Pravina Brothers. pp. 30.

were Catholic Mission schools.¹²⁶ These schools began to perform very well in local board examinations from the late 1970s and 1980s. Thus, inspired by the success stories of these mission schools, many ‘English medium’ schools were set up across Manipur, but run by private local entrepreneurs. However, these local entrepreneurs prefer to employ non-Manipuri people, generally mainland Indians and particularly southern Indians,¹²⁷ to local educated graduates (see Figure 10, classified advertisements from local newspapers).

Figure 10. *Two newspaper clippings of classified advertisements for jobs in Manipur during the 1990s.*

WANTED

- Two Non Manipuri Asst. Teachers for lower classes.
- Minimum Qualification: Matriculate
- Scale of pay: Negotiable
- Eligible Candidates may apply to the undersigned through the Manager, M/S Ruhini Bandage on or before 23-1-1999
- Interview will be held on 24-1-1999 at 9.30am at the office chamber of the M/S Ruhini Surgical Bandage Industry, 7/C. Govt. Industrial Estate, Takyel. Tel. No. 222674.

**Sd/- Laishram Biren Singh
Administrator
Little Bird English School
Heirok Part II, Khunou**

¹²⁶ Pettigrew School, a christian mission school established in 1895, Don Bosco High School, Imphal, a Catholic Mission school established in 1957 were prominent Christian mission schools in Manipur.

¹²⁷ The literacy rate of Kerala has fared very well in India’s education index with more than 90 per cent for many years. Many graduates from Kerela somehow also reached Manipur during the 1980s and 1990s in search of jobs and they mostly found jobs in these booming ‘English medium’ schools in Manipur.

WANTED

I want teachers for the following post:

1. B.Sc or equivalent (for maths and science)
Post-1 (Non-Manipuri)
2. P.U/B.A (For nursery rhymes having at least three years experience)
Post- 2 (ST/SC)

Date of interview: 30th Jan 99. Time: 10.00 am

**Secretary
The Just Divine Standard English School.
Paobitek, Near Thongkhong Luximi Bazar, Manipur, P/O
Wangoi.**

“Quarter will be available free”

Source: *The Imphal Free Press*. Date of publication – 18th and 20th January, 1999, cited in *United Committee Manipur (2005:58)*

Demand for re-implementation of ILPS

Manipur has not experienced any violent clashes between migrants and the native population such as has occurred in Assam or Tripura. But for a long time, armed opposition groups have been showing concerns over the influx of immigrants/migrants. From time to time, they set deadlines for the migrants/non-Manipuris to leave the state (though those deadlines were not met). There are also reports that some militant groups are allegedly involved in attacking/killing non-Manipuris.¹²⁸

One of the first protests demanding the deportation of foreigners to their native lands erupted in the early 1980s. The All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU) in alliance with All Manipur Students' Coordinating Committee (AMSCOC)

¹²⁸ South Asian Terrorism Portal, (2011) *Militant Attacks on Non-Locals in Manipur since 2001*. Also see, *The Times of India* (8 September 2012). *Migrants insecure after rebel group's 'quit notice'*. The Times of India.

spearheaded the movement in early February 1980 and again in mid-1994 (United Committee Manipur, 2005:52). The main reason for the protest was the abrupt increase in the decadal population growth rates of 1951–61 and 1961–71 respectively¹²⁹ (see Table 5). Between 1961 and 1971, the decadal population growth decadal rate of Manipur (37.53 per cent) was much higher than that of National Decadal Growth Rate of 24.80 per cent (see Table no 4).

Table 4: *Decadal population growth rate of India between 1961 and 1971*

Indian States	Population (millions)	Decadal Growth Rate (per cent)
Andhra Pradesh	43.5	20.9
Assam	14.95	34.71
Bihar	56.35	21.31
Gujarat	26.69	29.39
Haryana	10.03	32.33
Himachal Pradesh	3.46	23.04
Jammu & Kashmir	4.61	29.65
Kerala	21.34	26.29
Madhya Pradesh	41.65	28.67
Maharashtra	50.41	27.45
Manipur	1.07	37.53
Meghalaya	1.01	31.51
Mysore	29.29	24.22
Nagaland	0.51	39.88
Orissa	21.94	25.05
Punjab	13.55	21.7
Rajasthan	25.76	27.83
Tamil Nadu	41.19	22.3
Tripura	1.55	36.28
Uttar Pradesh	88.34	19.79
West Bengal	44.31	26.87
India	547.95	24.8

Source: *Extracted from the report of the United Committee Manipur (2005)*

The above table clearly shows that there was population growth in all the north-eastern states of India between 1961 and 1971 which far exceeded national growth. Referring to Manipur's growth during this period, one of Manipur's

¹²⁹ See United Committee Manipur, (2005) *Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People*. Imphal: UCM Imphal. p. 51

demographers, Mr. A.B. Sharma, in his draft policy report on the population of Manipur which was submitted to the Government of Manipur in 1976, reveals that of 37.53 per cent of the decadal growth rate, 18.21 per cent could be attributed to immigrant communities (United Committee Manipur, 2005:52). This might be the reason why the student organisations agitated for the deportation of illegal migrants during the early 1980s.

The agitation was called off when a draft agreement was signed between the Government of Manipur and the AMSU along with AMSCOC.¹³⁰ However, the proposals of the agitating committee, which were accepted by both sides during the settlement, have yet to be realised. On the other hand, the Act of Indian Citizenship 1955 made it nearly impossible to identify Indian citizens or illegal migrants.¹³¹

Demand for re-implementation of ILPS (second phase)

From the middle of 2012 until the time of writing, there has been a fervent movement for the re-implementation of ILPS in Manipur. The Joint Committee for the demand of Inner Line Permit System (JCILPS) currently spearheads the movement, which is a conglomeration of civil society bodies.¹³² The demand committee allegedly claims that the ILPS is the only mechanism for controlling the influx of migrants/non-Manipuris into Manipur.¹³³ However, since the

¹³⁰ The first phase of the students' agitation (early 1980s) ended with an agreement signed between the then Chief Minister of Manipur, PHE & Sports Minister (Manipur) and Presidents of AMSU and AMSCOC respectively. The second phase of the agreement (mid- 1990s) was signed between the then Chief Secretary to the Government of Manipur in the presence of the Governor of Manipur with the concurrence of the Ministry of Home affairs, India. For further details, see: United Committee Manipur, (2005) *Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People*. Imphal: UCM Imphal, pp. 52–53.

¹³¹ See United Committee Manipur, (2005) *Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People*. Imphal: UCM Imphal, pp. 52–54.

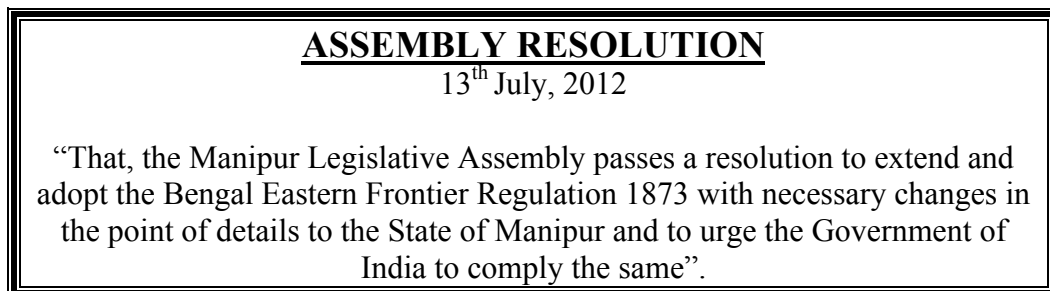
¹³² Earlier, the Federation of Regional Indigenous Society (FREINDS) initiated this very movement.

¹³³ *The Hindu*, (11 May 2013) *Agitation to press for implementation of ILP in Manipur*.

middle of 2012 it has been in disagreement with the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India.

So far, the Legislative Assembly of Manipur has in three sessions discussed the issue of ILPS and unanimously passed a resolution to ‘extend and adopt the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873’ to extend the ILPS in Manipur (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: *The Manipur Legislative Assembly Resolution on ILPS*



**RESOLUTION PASSED BY
THE MANIPUR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN ITS
SITTING
HELD ON JUNE 13, 2013**

No. 109

That, the Manipur Legislative Assembly unanimously resolves to urge Government of India to extend the provision of Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 for extension of Inner Line Regulation to the State of Manipur or to enact a suitable Clause (5) of Article 19 of the Constitution of India

Th. Lokeshwar Singh
Speaker,
Manipur Legislative Assembly

Source: *Th. Homen, Assistant Professor, M.B College, Manipur*

In spite of the Assembly resolutions, the Government at the centre is not ready to accept this proposal. Moreover, the Manipur Government is apparently not empowered to implement this law without the centre's consent. It is unlikely that the Indian Government would consent to the proposal of re-implementing ILPS in Manipur, bearing in mind that the ILPS is the means of distancing the people of this region, thus creating an 'us' and 'them' sentiment between the people of the region and the mainlanders.

Background of ILPS

The ILPS directive comes under the purview of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873. Under this directive, a 'citizen of India' - i.e. a citizen of mainland India (apart from the north-east) - is required to obtain an official travel document, issued by the Government of India, to enter the region. The regulation also states that, if any Indian citizen (non-north-easterner) fails to

obtain the ILP document and is found entering these protected areas, s/he is liable for legal prosecution - i.e. imprisonment for a maximum of one year or a penalty of a maximum of up to one thousand Indian Rupees or both. The states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland came under the ILP regulation, but since the early 1950s this by-law is no longer applicable to the state of Manipur.

What does JCILPS say?

The opinion of the JCILPS is that the suspension of ILPS in Manipur in the early 1950s has caused a heavy influx of undocumented migrants/immigrants in the state (see Table 5) and eventually led to social unrest. They claim that the re-implementation of ILPS is the only solution to control the unchecked influx of foreigners (*Meetop* or *Mayang* in Manipuri) and reduce the state's problems, including the overwhelming demographic transformation.

Table 5: *Decadal population growth rate of India and Manipur from 1931 to 2001*

Year	Population in Millions		Decennial Growth Rate (in %)	
	India	Manipur	India	Manipur
1931	278.98	0.45	11.00	16.04
1941	318.66	0.45	14.22	14.92
1951	361.09	0.58	13.31	12.80
1961	439.02	0.78	21.51	35.04
1971	548.16	1.07	24.80	37.53
1981	683.18	1.42	24.66	32.46
1991	846.30	1.84	23.85	29.29
2001	1027.02	2.29	21.35	24.86

Source: *United Committee Manipur (2005)*

From the above table it can be inferred that there has been a dramatic increase in the growth rate of migrants, particularly from 1951 to 1961. It is unlikely that the abrupt increase in the population growth rate during this period could be the

result of a high fertility rate among Manipuri people or better health facilities, because the health care system was not that developed during that time.¹³⁴ Therefore, there may be some truth in the JCILPS's argument that the suspension of ILPS has caused a population upsurge in the state.

On the other hand, it is debatable whether the provisions of ILPS are suitable for detecting, repatriating or deporting foreigners (popularly referred to as *Mayang*) from Manipur. How can the base year for the detection of illegal foreigners be delineated when the Citizenship Act of India 1955 allows any person to become an Indian citizen who is born on or after the 26th day of January 1950 but before the 1st day of July 1987, or on or after the 1st day of July 1987 but before the commencement of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003 and either of whose parents is a citizen of India at the time of birth etc.?¹³⁵

It is further debatable whether the preconditions of the ILPS demand committee contradict Article 19 (d) of the Indian Constitution which states that any Indian citizen can travel to any part of Indian territory. It is also not quite clear whether the demand for ILPS is realistic when the vision or intention of the Indian Government is to engage this frontier region without restraint in order to enhance economic engagement with south-eastern countries and to deal with Chinese expansion.

Illegal immigration drive or anti-Mayang movement?

Mayang, from a historical point of view, are those people who were the inhabitants of the Cachar District of Assam. The former king of Manipur, King Kiyamba, who came into contact with the Cacharis in AD 1504, called them *Mayang(s)* (Kabui, 1991). For most of the people of Manipur today, however,

¹³⁴ One of the oldest hospitals of Manipur – the Regional Institute of Medical Science (RIMS), formerly known as the Regional Medical College, (RMC) - was established only in 1972.

¹³⁵ For further details, see Citizenship Act of India 1955.

Mayang (though it was the terminology used for the Cacharis during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries) has nothing to do with people from Cachar.

Some Manipuri scholars try to interpret *Mayang* as those people who are non-native, non-Manipuri or any individuals who are foreign to native Manipur. However, it is difficult to accept this interpretation because contemporary Manipuris would not call a Chinese, a Thai or a Burmese migrant a *Mayang*. For most of the people of Manipur today *Mayang* are indisputably those people who have sharp features (broader eyes, sharper nose), brown skin colour etc. - i.e. broadly the Aryans of mainland India.

Also by reviewing the reports of the United Committee Manipur (UCM, 2005) as well as local news reports, one can observe that the ILPS agitation is tending to give negative signals – *Mayang*-phobic and Meitei-centric agitation. If the agitation is about checking the heavy influx of illegal immigrants to Manipur, then the ILPS demand committee should also address the illegal Burmese Chin-Kuki migrants who can easily intrude into Manipur.

It should be remembered that the erstwhile sovereign kingdom of Manipur tackled the issue of migration successfully without much ado. The society was also able to integrate people coming to Manipur. The main reason could be the scarcity of manpower due to the constant wars with neighbouring kingdoms, particularly the Burmese. Another reason could be the abundance of resources. There was a time when Muslims who were war captives were offered Meitei women and assigned appropriate Meitei surnames. Similarly, there is the case of Brahmins who migrated from the west – ‘*nongchup haram*’ (western gateway). So there was no problem with migrants in Manipur Kingdom.

Of course, there might certainly be a reason why Manipuri people tend to see ‘*Mayangs*’ as the primary threat to the demographic structure of Manipur. Baruah’s ‘nationalizing space’¹³⁶ argument and India’s developmental

¹³⁶ See Baruah, S. (2007). Nationalizing Space: Cosmetic Federalism and the Politics of Development in *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 33–58

paradigm¹³⁷ (that attracts or facilitates immigrants) can help us to demystify Manipuri vs. *Mayang* in ILP demand discourse, and these have been discussed in previous chapters.

Delineation of base year to detect (illegal) immigrant/foreigner/meetop/non-Manipuri

As per the agreement that was signed between AMSU, AMSCOC and the Government of Manipur on 9 November 1994, the state government agreed to undertake immediate steps to detect illegal foreigners based on the electoral roll of 1948, in which the process of identifying foreigners followed the provisions of the Foreigner Act 1946.¹³⁸ Unfortunately, this process has never been carried out. Besides, the detection and repatriation of illegal foreigners based on the 1948 electoral roll becomes more complicated or almost impossible when the provisions of India's Citizenship Act of 1955 are taken into consideration.

There are further complexities surrounding the identification of illegal foreigners. The detection of illegal immigrants has turned out to be a big problem for the government, as some illegal immigrants are kith and kin of some of the ethnic communities in Manipur. To campaign against these illegal immigrants tends to divide people on communal lines that may create more tension among the fragile multi-ethnic populations. These complexities and the provisions of India's Citizenship Act of 1955 together with the fact that most immigrants who entered Indian territory have not followed the legal procedures to become fully-fledged Indian citizens complicates the issue of identifying illegal migrants.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ See Geiger, D. (2008). *Frontier Encounter: Indigenous Communities and Settlers in Asia and Latin America*, (D. Geiger, Ed.) Copenhagen: IWGIA.

¹³⁸ See United Committee Manipur, (2005) *Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A Threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People*. Imphal: UCM Imphal, pp 141–144.

¹³⁹ See Singh, M. A. (2009). *A Study on Illegal Immigration into North-East India: The Case of Nagaland*. New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis.

Conclusion

In a recent trend, the tiny, non-dominant, ethnic group(s) of Manipur are seeking greater autonomy, a quest which often ends in violent conflict and mass displacement. Manipur's cultural and ethnic diversity began to face even more difficulties when the denizen communities started advancing demands for separate homeland rights. Manipur's pluralism has been put in crisis due to competition over the ownership of both tangible and intangible resources. The proliferation of homeland demands generally paves the way for the perception of out-group members as the 'other', leading to exclusivity and inclusivity. In fact, Manipur's simmering ethnic conflict is often framed as an immigration-derived threat to the presumed homogeneity of their ethnic territory and 'native' democracy. Within this complex, ethnic structure, denizens from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and mainland Indian regions are at the receiving end of the conflict.

With regard to the debate surrounding ILPS, it is worth noting the experience of Nagaland, which has had the ILPS since its inception, but also has a huge number of migrants,¹⁴⁰ particularly in and around the towns of Dimapur, Kohima and Makokchung.¹⁴¹ In addition, a new social category has emerged which is popularly known as *Semiya* – a cross breed between the Sema tribe of Nagaland and Bangladeshi Muslims. Thus, it is imperative to consider whether the re-implementation of ILPS in Manipur would really control the unchecked migrants/non-Manipuris or whether it would meet with the same fate as in Nagaland.

¹⁴⁰ Government of Nagaland, (2007) *Evaluation Study on Employment Opportunities Foregone by Nagas and Employment of Non-Nagas in the State*. Kohima : Directorate of Evaluation, Government of Nagaland.

¹⁴¹ More than four lakh migrant populations constitute Nagaland's total population. For details, see Singh, M. A. (2009). *A Study on Illegal Immigration into North-East India: The Case of Nagaland*. New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis.

However, filling up the national frontier peripheries with migrants that have not borne the full signature of the national community to nationalise the frontier space would ultimately have a negative effect on governance, migrant communities and the native populations.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The politics of recognition has been a persistent theme in Manipur's troubled politics since its merger with the Indian Union in 1948. This emanates largely from the Indian state's consistent lack of recognition of and respect for the people of Manipur. This issue has been analysed in depth in Chapters 2 and 3. But mention may be made here of the fact that a number of separatist militant groups based in Manipur regard the merger as illegal and unconstitutional. Moreover, many of the Manipuri intelligentsia express bitterness about the way it was brought about. Manipur, which had a millennium-old unbroken history as a sovereign kingdom, was integrated into the Union of India not as an equal partner but as a 'Part C State' according to which the country was directly ruled from New Delhi through its political agents.

The visible frustrations of the people of Manipur over the persistent lack of recognition have been expressed in movements such as the demand for statehood and the demand for the Manipuri language to be included in Schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution during the early 1970s and 1990s, respectively.

The majority of the people of Manipur continue to claim that merger with the Indian Union was an act of 'appropriation'. The Government of India, on the other hand, terms it as 'merger'. Whatever the case may be, the Government of India cannot eradicate historical reality and needs to recognise that Manipur was an independent political entity before it was merged to become part of the Indian Union. What needs to be considered in order to pave the way for peace in this trouble-torn state is that it has its own history, culture, polity etc. It would also be helpful if the Government of India took into consideration and respected the fact that the people of Manipur had a written constitution before India had one of its own. This would be in line with what many nation-states have done post-World War II. For instance, in order to foster peaceful coexistence in the

emerging international order many ‘aggrandizing countries’ made political apologies for the misdeeds they committed.

Equally significant to note on the part of the people of Manipur is that years of armed struggle have only resulted in bloodshed and loss of lives. Thus, the demand for complete independence from India carries further potential for bloodshed. Therefore, in order to end the impasse, both sides should take part in an unconditional dialogue. Otherwise, the cycle of violence will perpetuate, leaving a heavy toll on the people. As we have seen in previous chapters, there are different aspects of the conflict as well as the root causes, and such a dialogue could provide a platform where grievances can be aired, historical problems analysed and resolved so as to provide a way for the people of Manipur to start to lead normal lives.

Such a dialogue will surely be complex, given the fact that there are multiple stakeholders based on culture, ethnicity, language, tribe etc. In fact, one of the hindrances to ending armed conflict in Manipur has been inter-ethnic contestation over resources and opportunities, into which the Indian State finds itself pulled in with little ability to provide solutions.¹⁴² This aspect has been analysed in Chapters 4 and 5.

On the other hand, the justification for coercive policies, the real cost of the way India has chosen to engage with the challenge of militant demands for independence, can be viewed as an erosion of the principles of rule of law, accountability and transparency. In order to handle such a complex situation like India’s north-east, or Manipur in this context, an understanding is needed of the core issues as well as utmost patience and respect. If a fragile relationship is to be managed effectively, the first step is to acknowledge the history of the underlying conflict. It is this history that often explains why people feel as they do and which can suggest possible remedies for the current situation. A history of past events must be taken seriously, to assess not only its impact on the

¹⁴² Hassan, M. S. (2010). Secessionism in Northeast India. In S. Baruah, *Ethnonationalism in India: A Reader* (pp. 291-315). New Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp. 291.

development of an ongoing conflict, but also possible approaches for conflict management or resolution.¹⁴³

It must also be remembered that problems arise when initiatives towards conflict resolution are hindered by a refusal to recognise the legitimacy and rights of groups that have been marginalised by discriminatory social structures and norms. In addition, a lack of agreement on a suitable process for resolution has been an obstacle to discussions on substantive issues (Jeong, 2008). Had the Indian Union dealt with the root causes of the ongoing conflict at the very beginning, the situation would have been qualitatively different. The forced militarisation, development which is not people friendly and counter-productive, counter-insurgency measures - these show the hostile attitude of the Indian Union towards the people of Manipur. The inhuman and worthless treatment of the people of Manipur by the Indian Government is certainly demonstrated when massive militarisation was imposed by the state, completely ignoring the public anger expressed by the people. This was despite the fact that militarisation would eventually cause gross and systematic human rights violations, or that development would hardly benefit the people of this region.

Further, the AFSPA 1958 that was imposed in the region to maintain law and order became a *de facto* discriminatory apparatus of oppression and control. This is because the Act could not precisely distinguish between insurgents and civilians. In the eyes of the Indian State, any one inhabiting this 'wretched region' of the world is usually a suspect. Thus, the Act epitomises the distrust the Indian State has towards the whole of the population of the region. As we have seen, there has not been any instance of democratically determined conciliation; both parties continue to counter attack each other in a destructive and hostile manner. The ultimate result has been more bloodshed, which only aggravates the problem.

¹⁴³ See Jeong, H.-W. (2008). *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage Publication.

Ironically, India's mission of maintaining law and order in Manipur through its militaristic and developmentalist approaches has rather led to the emergence of inter-related secondary issues. Conflict between different ethnic groups that the state did not witness before the merger is now escalating. Women's organisations and associations are speaking out against the high prevalence of sexual violence committed with impunity by the Indian Army. The massive expenditure on the military has impacted the state at the cost of welfare of the people. The underdeveloped economy is still stagnant and there is no sign of improvement.

In fact, the oppressive structures that have been created with the draconian law – AFSPA 1958 – in the north-eastern region have aroused feelings of insecurity, anger and inferiority among the population. Eventually, such feelings resulted in the creation of a hostile and conflictual mindset. Besides, given the structure according to which the Indian armies have legal impunity for torture and even murder, it is not surprising to see the increasingly hostile attitude and conflictual behaviour towards the New Delhi Government by the local population. On the other hand, the culture of violence and the extortionist way of life practiced by local armed groups upon the general populations is equally disturbing. Caught in the crossfire, basic human rights are compromised. Thus, India's militarisation process in this region has neither resolved conflict nor has it attempted to bring peace. Rather it has become a vicious cycle for violence and hatred. Issues related to developmentalism were analysed in Chapter 4 and it was concluded that the strategy of nation and state building by the Indian Union was initiated through a developmentalist approach. This is rooted in the institutional mechanisms that enhance the goal of nationalising the frontier space. However, the strategy remains unsustainable and rather precarious on account of missing or bypassing core issues in the process. These core issues, as we have analysed in the previous chapters, are that of recognising the people, their identity, culture and history. Recognition itself no doubt cannot guarantee a ready-made solution to enduring problems. Nevertheless, taking the issues seriously would ultimately lead to some significant positive outcomes in the form of bringing peace to the

region. In the name of state and nation building such issues cannot be pushed into obscurity as has been done in the past.

Further, developmentalist projects in India have brought about tangible changes in infrastructural development and it may be that some people in this region have benefited in the form of spoils. But the benefits have yet to be percolated to the grass-roots level and benefit all. If they do not, the resulting situation will be much agitation.

Last but not least, it is concluded that the developmentalist or ‘modernist’ path that the Indian state has taken for the north-eastern region has resulted from the perspective of select ‘experts’ in New Delhi; thus, it is exogenous in nature. Yet as we have seen the project has not resulted in overall development, as it did not take into account local realities and needs. Instead, as the aim was to exact control and submission, its mission has been to nationalise the frontier space; the result has been disastrous - relying on a strategy of filling up (nationalising) this fringe region with nation (Indian) bearing migrants has exacerbated the socio-political problems of the region.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the claim for greater autonomy of non-dominant, ethnic group(s) in Manipur is one of the factors contributing to violent conflict and mass displacement. In fact, Manipur’s cultural and ethnic diversity has begun to face even more difficulties as different communities start to advance demands for separate homeland(s). Manipur’s pluralism has become subject to crisis due to competition over the ownership of both tangible and intangible resources. The proliferation of homeland demands generally paves the way for the perception of out-group members as the ‘other’, leading to exclusivity and inclusivity. In fact, Manipur’s ethnic conflict is often framed as an immigration-derived threat to the presumed homogeneity of its ethnic territory and ‘native’ democracy; hence the emergence of the demand for the Inner Line Permit System (ILPS).

At the same time it is also worth noting that the ILPS demand also serves the well-being of immigrants. At a time when outsiders are continually targeted, a

mechanism for monitoring the entry of migrants/immigrants, their movement and place of residence, can guarantee their safety. In terms of human rights, especially of migrants/immigrants and minorities, an ILPS-like mechanism can guarantee their safety and protection.

Thus, the following are listed as recommendations:

- The Government of India should respect, recognise, and acknowledge the people of the north-east region not merely as a cartographic existence but also in the context of history and culture. This could be done by incorporating the age-old history and culture of the north-eastern states (particularly the states of Assam, Manipur and Tripura) in school/university curricula. In order to achieve this, the Government of India will need to reform its educational curriculum system.
- The militarisation or militaristic approach to maintaining law and order in the region should be reviewed, as it has not brought about any visible or lasting solutions. Such measures have also failed to win the hearts and minds of the local people.
- The Government of India should initiate dialogue with the insurgent groups in Manipur along with key stakeholders. So far, the Indian Government has held a few dialogues – with one of the Kuki rebel groups and another with a valley based armed group in Manipur. However, this was without the involvement of key stakeholders, such as local NGOs and other related organisations. Selective negotiation with a few rebel groups resulted in factional fighting and more killing among these groups.
- The legal power (impunity) conferred on the Indian Army, paramilitaries and the Manipur Police (particularly State Police Commandos) under the provisions of AFSPA 1958 should be reconsidered, as it has resulted in more killing, disappearances and crimes (such as rape, torture) etc. against the civilian population.

- Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee's recommendation in his 2005 report to repeal AFSPA 1958 completely from Manipur should be tabled in the Indian Parliament; the report should be made public as the committee was officially instituted by the Indian Government.
- Justice J.S. Verma's recommendation in his 2013 report on crime against women, including crimes committed under AFSPA 1958, should be considered and discussed seriously in the Indian Parliament, as it was also officially instituted by the Indian Government.
- The Government of India should recognise the conflict in Manipur as 'armed conflict' rather than simply an 'internal law and order disturbance'; use of the might of the Indian Army amongst the civil populace is unethical because the Army are trained to defend against external aggression or threats to national security.
- To date, the merger of Manipur has been contentious and most of its people continue to regard the event as an act of appropriation. The Government of India should settle the debate over the merger issue.
- India's developmentalist or modernist approach should be indigenous people friendly because these developmental projects are executed at huge environmental and socio-cultural costs to the native population. Further, the developmental approach should involve all current as well as potential stakeholders in order to avoid any improper circumstances in future processes.
- Implementation of ILPS should be considered for the betterment of the native population as well as for the security of migrants.

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