



Ethnic Conflict and Harmonization: A Study of Manipur

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About the Author



Brigadier Sushil Kumar Sharma was commissioned into the Indian Army in June 1985. An Alumnus of the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun, he is a graduate of the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, and has attended the prestigious Higher Defence Management Course at Secunderabad. The officer has served in two UN Mission assignments at Cambodia and Lebanon. He has also attended two security related courses at USA and Russia. He has a wide ranging experience of varied Command, Staff and Instructional appointments. He has commanded an Infantry Battalion in High Altitude Area and a Mountain Brigade in Manipur. He was awarded the "Yudh Seva Medal" for leading the Brigade in Manipur. He was the Deputy General Officer Commanding a Mountain Division in Assam. He has been awarded a PhD from IGNOU for his study on Northeast India, and is presently posted as DIGP, CRPF in the Northeast Region.

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Abstract

Manipur is a melting pot of diverse cultures and ethnicities and has gradually evolved into a dynamic multicultural society. The Nagas, Kukis and Meiteis have shared common spaces and have been competing for the same land and other resources, since times immemorial, thereby leading to an ethnic conflict which has often manifested itself in violence and bias against each other. This paper elucidates the background realities, regarding existing ethnic divides between the Nagas, Kukis and Meiteis in Manipuri society, which, over a period of time, has become apparently irreconcilable. Outlining the major historical events and incidents in a time line, the paper enumerates the recent incidents leading to the deepening of these ethnic fault lines and rigidifying of respective positions by these groups, thus diminishing the prospects of arriving at a mutually acceptable resolution for achieving reconciliation and harmonisation in society. In order to propose a starting point to commence the process of reconciliation, certain common areas of convergence prevalent amongst these diverse ethnic groups have also been identified. Before concluding, lessons from Nigeria and South Africa comprising of similar ethnic complexities have been included in strategies for ethnic reconciliation and harmonisation. Following an in-depth multi-dimensional analysis, the paper concludes by proposing a conflict management strategy encompassing the entire social, economic and political landscape of Manipur.

Introduction

The Study

Ethnic conflicts have occurred in almost all parts of the world where under developed or developing societies are coupled with multi-ethnicity. To resolve them is a primary duty of the government and the administrative setup. Though a lot has been done; still much more needs to be addressed. In this era, rapid developments need to be identified over politics. With this as an aim, it was decided to take up a study on the Ethnic Conflict and Harmonization in Manipur.

The Objectives

This study aims to bring out an inclusive approach and strategy to achieve greater ethnic harmonisation and lasting peace in the state of Manipur through a detailed and deep analysis of the issue. The approach towards effective ethnic conflict management is analysed under four important heads to include divergences including ethnic fault lines, convergences, opportunities and threats. The objectives of this study are mentioned below.

- a. To appreciate the unique distinctiveness of each ethnic identity of Manipur along with a review of historically significant events.
- b. To examine Suitable approaches towards successful ethnic conflict management through a detailed study of various fault lines, convergences, opportunities and looming threats related to various ethnic identities of Manipur.
- c. To examine and extrapolate lessons from other places where ethnic harmony exists and ethnic problems were dealt with successfully.
- d. To offer possible solutions or probable options for ethnic harmonization, in Manipur.

Data Sources, Methodology and Scope

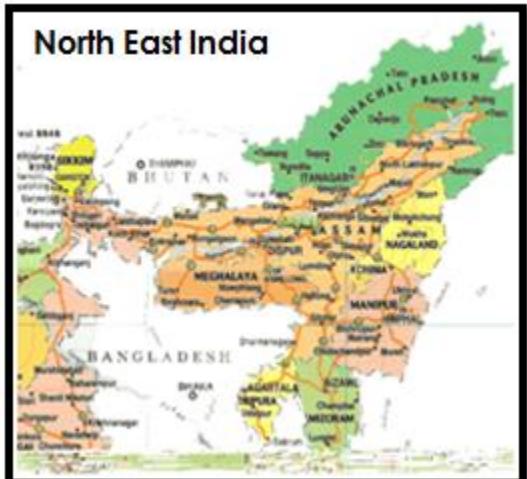
The content of this paper is an accumulation of understanding and knowledge of the region gained over several years by the author. Review of contemporary literature on the subject was carried out to obtain existing views in order to provide the background and acquaint the readers with historical facts. The study is based on first hand knowledge and exclusive suggestions gained while travelling and inter-acting with a wide cross section of the population, through the state over a considerable period of time. Also, the dynamic socio-political nature of the state is recognized through brain-storming and suggestions, fine-tuned through actual ground realities. Surveys have also been conducted to obtain the views of the environment and the stake holders. Another exercise was undertaken to solicit the opinion of experts from various domains to undertake analysis and to corroborate opinion obtained from the common people with opinion formed on the basis of research

carried out. Perspectives of each section of society have been integrated into this study. Besides this, the author has conducted several seminars and talks on similar issues in which a number of scholars, academicians and students from each ethnic domain contributed. Their perceptions and outlook are also well absorbed in the paper.

Ethnicity in North East India and Manipur

Ethnicity and North East India

The term ethnicity's earliest dictionary appearance is in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1972. Its first usage is attributed to the American sociologist David Riesman in 1953. The word "ethnic", however, is much older. The word is derived from the Greek ethnos (which in turn is derived from the word ethnikos), which originally meant heathen or pagan



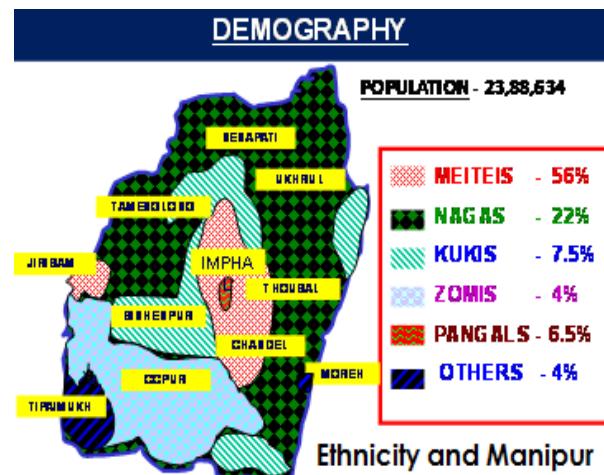
India's North-east has been the home of 200 different tribes speaking a wide multitude of languages. Though the unrest in the region has a history of political causes, the regional conflicts are deeply rooted in its multi-ethnicity. These conflicts are social, political and economic conflicts between groups who identify themselves and others in ethnic terms¹. While studying ethnic conflicts in 'Northeast India', one cannot but look at Manipur which exhibits as many problems that could possibly appear in the discourse of collective conflict. Perhaps it is the only state in the entire north-east which experiences such varied forms of issues and problems. A study on the state will show the complexity of ethnicity and politics that an amalgamated culture could possess.

Ethnicity and Manipur

Today Manipur is not only suffering from armed movements of innumerable underground organizations but also from a complex ethnic crisis. Being inhabited by different groups of people which can be classified broadly into Meitei, Naga and Kuki, a harmonious existence of the state is being threatened as the interests of one group clash with the other. This has given rise to assertion of group identity; inter group competition for resources, political instability, insecurity and underdevelopment.

¹ Upadhyay Archana, "Terrorism in the North-East, Linkages and Implications", Economic and Political Weekly, December 2, 2006 available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/4418978?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents, Accessed on October 15, 2014

These three groups stayed together for centuries; they developed their heritage parallelly under the respective ethno-social boundaries. There was, however, no attempt on the part of the tribal/feudal elites to coordinate these struggles which could have ignited the process of assimilation in pre-colonial era. The 'divide and rule policy' of the colonial administration in relation to administering the hills and plains of Manipur and the introduction of Christianity amongst the tribal groups of Nagas and Kuki had further widened the cultural gap with Meiteis who are a predominantly Hindu society.



After India's independence, these communities continued to coexist peacefully, however, owing to separate aspirations and perceived insecurity regarding overlapping claim over natural resources, gradually they moved apart. Certain post independence developments deepened these prejudices leading to inter-community ethnic clashes. These clashes also hastened the formation of various armed groups affiliated to respective ethnic communities. The insurgent outfits therefore were not only waging struggle against the establishment, but were now seen more as a necessity against the hegemony and violence perpetrated by rival communities.

Hypothesis of Growth of Ethnic Identities in Manipur

The growth of the Meitei, Naga and Kuki identity is a historical process. Whereas no definite answers can be provided about the origins of these ethnic groups, one can find many contesting hypotheses regarding the origin of Meitei, Naga and Kuki social collectivity.

Meitei Identity

Manipur was known by different names at various periods in its history, such as, Tilli-Koktong, Poirei-Lam, Sanna-Leipak, Mitei-Leipak, Meitrabak or Manipur (present day). Its capital was Kangla, Yumphal or Imphal (present day). Its people were known by various names, such as Mi-tei, Poirei-Mitei, Meetei, Maitei or Meitei.² Meitei history indicates that the Manipur valley was occupied by several tribes, principally seven in number, viz., (i) the Ningthouja or Meitei, (ii) the Angom, (iii) the Khumal, (iv) the Moirang, (v) the Luwang, (vi) the Sarang-Leishangthem and (vii) the Khaba-Nganba. However, overtime, the Ningthoujas or Meiteis subdued the remaining tribes and gradually the name Meitei has become applicable to all the tribes.

² P.lalit, "A Brief History (Puwar) Of The Meiteis Of Manipur", *Tripod*, available at <http://themanipurpage.tripod.com/history/puwarimeitei.html>. Accessed on October 02, 2014.

The forty years rule of Manipur by Pamheiba (1709-1748 A.D.), who is popularly known as Garibniwaz, became the crucial turning point in the evolution of Meitei identity. He made it a point to draw all his subjects within the ambit of newly embraced Vaishnavism, the Vaishnavite movement from Bengal that swept over the Imphal valley resulting into a sudden transformation of the socio-economic formation in the valley from tribalism to ethnicity. The influence of Vaishnavism became very strong and it was visible in the change in their dress, food habit and even in the adoption of Bengali as the script for Meitei language.

Growth of Meitei Nationalism

At the fag end of the monarchy in Manipur, the kings lost much of their authority and independence to the British. In spite of losing their authority to the British, the Kings continued to oppress the commoners by levying prohibitive taxes on the commoners for all socio-economic activities thus inciting political consolidation of the Meiteis against the Monarchy. The political awakening among the Meiteis began against the monarchy. The accommodation of Meitei aspiration within the larger Indian nationalism was not easy. The accumulated grievances of being discriminated had led to the articulation of a demand for secession by some quarters. These accumulated grievances of being discriminated even led to the articulation of a demand for secession by some quarters. In fact, the demand for secession is an extreme expression of wounded nationalism.³

In the post-independence context, the revolutionary movements in Manipur are an outcome of several deep rooted factors, namely, perceived forced merger of princely state by India, the threat posed by the Naga movement, poor governance, neglect from central government and the crisis of identity which are the motivating factor in the revival of Meitei nationalism. Indian apathy towards the political aspirations of the people of Manipur after the merger with India, economic exploitation and the policy of internal economy followed towards Manipur, the bureaucratic aloofness as a result of the imposition of central rule in Manipur for 23 years (1949-1972), growth of a highly educated elite group, followed by a serious problem of unemployment of the youths, exposure of discontented leaders to the ideas of revolution in many countries of the third world including Marxist ideas^{4,5}. The important revolutionary movements are; United National Liberation Front (UNLF), Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA), Peoples' Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) ,Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) and KYKL.

³ K. Gyanendra Singh "Understanding the Ethnic Faultlines in Manipur: A Historical Perspective" available at http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:G0KliU88GeQJ:www.nits.ac.in/departments/humanities/new_hum/social_scanner/7.doc+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=in, Accessed on August 16 2014.

⁴ Gangmumei Kamei "The Ethno-Nationalism in Manipur" Lectures on Manipur History, available at <http://www.vedamsbooks.in/> Accessed on August 16, 2014

⁵ N.Joykumar Singh, op cit, Genesis of the Movements, pp. 26-53 and Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt, op cit, pp.225-231.

Naga Identity

The naga identity in Manipur was mainly spearheaded by Haipo Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu who launched the anti-British movement in 1931. At that time, it was not termed as Naga movement but rather as Kabui and Kutcha Naga movement since the influence of naga movement of Nagaland was not really influencing the nagas of Manipur at that point in time. This only indicates that the Naga identity was in a flux even in the middle of the 20th century.

Growth of Naga Nationalism in Manipur

The growth of nationalism among the Nagas of Manipur can be traced back to the first half of 20th century. The British rule brought many changes in the age-old traditional tribal society. Moreover, the spread of Christianity was a major cause of concern as it was a superimposition of foreign religion and practices over the traditional beliefs and practices. Jadonang and Gaidinliu rose in revolt against the British in 1930, which may be termed as revivalist movement of the Zeliangrong. The movement took a semi-military, semi-religious and semi-political character. The Nagas of Manipur were neither a signatory to the memorandum submitted by Naga Club to the Simon Commission nor took part in Phizo's plebiscite of 1951 on the question of Nagas' independence. Moreover, the Nagas of Manipur were not included in the proposed idea of 'unified Nagaland' as demanded by the Naga Peoples' Convention (NPC) in 1957. The demand for unification was brought into the sharp focus following the establishment, and ascendancy to hegemony, of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and subsequently NSCN (Isak-Muivah) [NSCN (I-M)]. With the strategy of NSCN (I-M) to engage the Government of India through peace overtures and effecting the merger of Naga inhabited hills of Manipur as part of the bargain backfiring on the face of stiff opposition from the Meiteis, the Naga nationalism in Manipur turned assertive and restive⁶.

Kuki Identity

The Kukis were first heard in 1777 during the Governor Generalship of Warren Hastings, when these tribes frequently attacked the British subjects in Chittagong. In 1845, their large scale migration caused anxiety to the old Kuki inhabitants of the hill people. In order to bring a solution to the problem, Mc Culloh, the then Political Agent of Manipur, settled them down in such a manner that they act as guards on exposed frontiers. Like the term Naga, the Kuki is also a generic term applied to the various sub-tribes, viz., Thadou, Paite, Hmar, Simte, Zou, Gangte, Vaiphei, Guite, Ralte, Sukte, etc. In Manipur, they were known as Khongjais before the use of the term Kuki.

⁶ K. Gyanendra Singh, Ibid 3

Growth of Kuki Nationalism in Manipur

The growth of Kuki nationalism also started, like the Nagas, initially through mobilization of the Kukis against the British. The Kukis resisted the British who forcefully wanted to recruit and send them to France as Labour Corps during the World War I. This incident which is popularly known as 'Kuki Rebellion' might be seen as the anti-colonial freedom struggle of the Kukis. With the Nagas and other tribal groups in the region getting their homelands, the young generations of the Kukis also became restive. The sense of desperateness has increased manifold with the NSCN gaining ground in the hills of Manipur since 1980 and the Naga demand for unification started becoming louder. The demand for a Kuki homeland called 'Zale'n-gam: land of freedom' was spearheaded with the formation of underground government called Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and its armed wing Kuki National Army (KNA*) in 1988. However, the territorial claims of the Kukis overlap the territorial claims of the Nagas in Manipur. This therefore, creates insecurity and anxiety within the Kukis bringing them closer as a community against the perceived hegemony of Nagas.

Pangals

The Manipuri Muslims or the Pangals, as they are commonly called, came to Manipur from Assam and Bengal towards the beginning of the last century and settled down in the alluvial plains of Imphal. They form 7% of the population of Manipur today. The Pangals live together in large villages in the fertile tracts along the main road on the banks of the Manipur and the Iril rivers. They speak the Manipuri language but use the Urdu script and generally abide by the prevalent Muslim customs of other places. They mostly keep to themselves and do not mix freely with either the Manipuris or the tribals. They have not yet displayed any territorial aspirations and presently appear to be looking for peaceful coexistence with other communities in the state.

Nepali

During the period of British influence it was found necessary to raise an army of Gorkhas. Since they were the inhabitants of the hills they were ideally suited for operations in the hills. They were allowed to settle in Manipur after retirement. Gradually their family members and relatives joined them and settled there. There is a sizeable population of Nepalis concentrated in small pockets like Sagolmang, Pukhao, Dolaithabi, Ekou, Mantripukhari, and Chingmeirong. Other areas where Nepalis are settled in small settlements are Kanglatongbi, Kalapahar, Motbung, KPI, small hamlets along the NH-39/2 in the Senapati district, along the Imphal-Tamenglong road in Tamenglong district, Sugnu, Shairo, Chakpikarong etc. The migrant Nepalis have settled as graziers and as farm labourers in the southern extremity of the valley near Shairo and follow a lifestyle very similar to the tribals. The population is generally not affected by insurgency and they generally follow the lead of the dominant group in the area.

Ethnic Conflict Management

The Fault Lines

Historical Prejudices

The growth of the Meitei identity, Naga identity and Kuki identity has evolved through the history. After the imposition of British rule, in 1891 there emerged a system of unjust social and religious discrimination and exploitation under the influence of a very conservative and orthodox Hindu Vaishnava institution called Brahma Sabha, which deeply hurt the feelings and sentiments of the people in general and the non-Hindu tribal people of Manipur in particular. That was perhaps the beginning of the emotional alienation of the hill people from the Meitei people. It is also a well-known fact that the kings of Manipur and later even the British used the Kukis to attack the Nagas to keep them under control, which widened the gap between them⁷. In the long history of Manipur there was not a single instance of communal riot in Manipur's history until December, 1992 when riots broke out between the Nagas and the Kukis; these continued upto 1995. This lasted for precisely 30 hours (03-04 May 1993), however, the casualties were not less. It was sparked off due to a rumour and subsided as soon as it flared, as there were no outside instigators to fuel the divide and the other factor was the entrenched social binding. It was followed by another communal/ethnic flare up between the Kukis and the Paites who belonged to the same Kuki-Chin Mizo groups in the year 1997–98. Thus historical prejudice is keeping hatred among different ethnic groups alive.

Autonomy or Local Self-Governance

The issues generating conflict in Manipur are not always related to factors outside the state such as the demands of Nagaland or the merger with India. There are deep divisions within the state as well. The divergent political aspirations of ethnic groups in Manipur is fed by a belief that adequate political power is a necessary precondition for retaining their cultural identity and, more so, for all round development. The difficulty arises when the aspirations for cultural identity and development are connected to a demand for exclusive administrative boundaries for 'self-governance'. Given the nature and magnitude of the ethnic diversity of Manipur, the plurality of its population and the shared geographical and cultural spaces, it is virtually impossible to come up with an acceptable division of territory. Against this back drop the politics of ethnic identities and exclusive divides has not gone well for the people of Manipur at large⁸.

⁷ L.S.Singh, "Manipur Society: Emerging Dynamics" (Seminar held at Leimakong in Manipur on August 18, 2012).

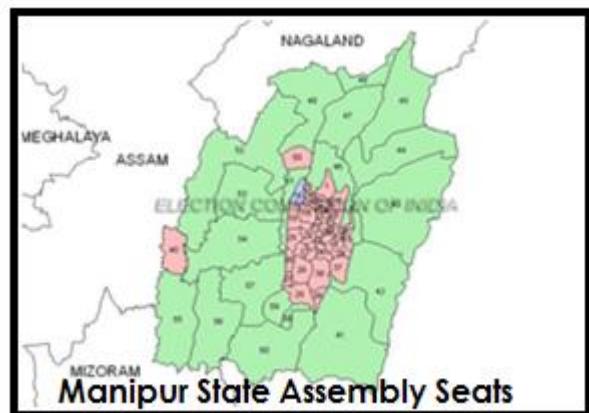
⁸ Amarjeet M. Singh, *Conflicts in Manipur*, National Institute of Advanced Studies, 2010, available at <http://www.nias.res.in/docs/B1-2010-Manipur.pdf>, Accessed on October 10, 2014

Non-Inclusive Development

There is a perceived bias that the state government is utilizing all their sources and funds in Imphal Valley while the hills which need more attention have been neglected. Developmental works even if carried out by the government seem to be biased and the disparity between the hills and the valley is stark. Non-inclusive growth has led to unemployment, under development and disenchantment amongst the people in the hills and is one of the reasons for continuing insurgency in Manipur for many decades in spite of abundance of natural and human resources. Scheduled Tribes status has not helped the poor tribal people due to lack of awareness, only the elites among the tribes are availing the benefits from it. Non inclusive development at national level can also be attributed to only two parliamentary seats assigned to the state of Manipur. This insignificant representation at the National level is also depriving the state of its right for allocation of funds.

Biased Political Structure

The political structure in the state leans towards Meitei domination because 40 state assembly seats are for Meitei-dominated areas in the Imphal Valley and only twenty seats for the hills ; thus giving overwhelming majority to the Meiteis in decision-making. This is due to the high density of Meitei population in the valley regions. This political arrangement is seen as an instrument of continued domination by the Meiteis over the hill people thus depriving them of their rightful developmental initiatives. The ethnic feelings that have thus spilled over into the political arena have deepened the sense of ethnic separation and self-identification in Manipur.



Property Rights

Land has been the root of many conflicts in Manipur and Northeast in general. In Manipur, the socioeconomic and political systems are centred on the issue of land. Land, particularly for the tribals, has remained as the single most important physical possession. Land as a territory also plays an important role in shaping the cultural and ethnic identity. Furthermore, the tribal communities have a symbiotic relationship with the land and forests on which their livelihood depends. Therefore, for many centuries they have been dwellers of the forests. However, there exists a line of difference in the way traditional land ownership system functions for both the tribal groups. The Naga tribes have three tiers of land system—clan, village and individual lands while for the Kuki, it is the chief who is the owner of the land or who is considered as the 'lord of the soil'. In the Naga areas, the land

holdings are under the control of the village administration which exercises executive, judicial and administrative autonomy which is not necessarily true for the Kuki where the chief is seen to be more arbitrary in exercising his authority. However, both the respective chiefs of each group are bound to take the village elders into confidence in matters concerning land distribution, disputes and other matters⁹.

The present land laws in the state, allows tribals to purchase land in Imphal Valley but no Meities from the Imphal Valley can purchase land in the hills, this is seen by the Meiteis as discriminatory. This different set of rules which govern land ownership in Manipur, in turn, has created animosity between the tribals and the Meiteis. The demand of the Meiteis, is that, all the citizens of the state should be governed by the same rules whereas the hill people (tribals) stick to their claim that 'different origin has different destiny'. Differing perceptions comprise the biggest challenge for reconciliation and conflict resolution in Manipur. The Tribals are apprehensive that introduction of new land laws will result in their dispossession by the more affluent 'outsiders'. The Land Revenue Act is also seen as a precursor to the ban on jhum and restriction on forest rights.

Individual Interests and Personal Ambitions of Leaders

At present the people of the state, be it any community or tribe only want development in their areas to improve their day to day life. Be it medical or educational facilities, job opportunities, electricity etc. However, it is the individual interest and personal ambitions of the leaders (tribal, political, societal organizations and insurgent groups) which keep stoking the sentiments of people against each other thus keeping their relevance alive. Thus we have countless bandhs and blockades which serve the vested interests of these so called leaders and which succeed in only bringing misery to the people. A recent example being, the 120 days blockade of NH-2 by the Kukis and the Nagas in 2011 and the Momoko molestation incident in December 2012 which highlighted the personal ambitions of leaders and their nexus with Underground Organizations.

Insurgent Groups on Ethnic Lines

The continued insurgency across Manipur by various groups aligned along ethnic lines has generated institutions of its own. These armed groups have their own apparatus and functionaries who levy taxes and try to channelize their respective ethnic clans to follow their diktats. These groups fall broadly into four categories: the Meiteis, the Nagas, the Kukis and the Pangals (Meitei Muslims). The situation has been further compounded by the inability of successive state governments to meet the growing aspirations of its people. This dissatisfaction, with the state government, too has also gained an ethnic dimension since the tribal groups were generally critical of the state government which was largely dominated by the Meiteis. Armed conflict in Manipur has thus been increasingly polarized along tribal lines. And the diversity of interests on the ground has thrown up a large

⁹ Roluahpuia, "Tribal Discontents in Northeast India: The Cry of the Subaltern in Manipur," *JNEIS, January, 12th, 2013*, available at <http://www.jneis.com/?p=463>, Accessed on October 10, 2014

number of groups. But these groups are not without some commonalities. All of them have devised a number of means to generate revenues primarily from within their areas of domination. However, the cumulative impact has been a break down in law and order and the administrative machinery. Some people consider that having a militant outfit from their community is essential for their survival and to look after their interests.

Bandhs and Blockade

Bandhs, general strikes and blockades need no description for any Manipuri because every person has been either directly or indirectly victimized by them. Bandh calls are generally made to protest against inaction/indifference of government authorities towards a particular section of the populations grievance which always are always seen as a minor issues. The bandh is supported by volunteers who, more often than not, are educated yet unemployed youth. This often leads to mindless violence, casualty and damage to public and private property. If the Government of India was to rank any of its states for having the maximum number of illegal activities of strikes, bandhs and economic blockades in a year, the crest-fallen State of Manipur will definitely be "topping the list¹⁰.

The economic loss is only one side of the story. While most of the economic losses can be repaired and rebuilt, the loss of faith, trust and understanding has very high costs and consequences. This 'new culture of aggressive social action' in the form of bandhs and blockades on local issues and small pretexts has cascading effects on the rising growth impulses/index and also to the ethnic divide.

Socio Political Organizations in Manipur

The socio political organizations play an important role in the creation and sustenance of social demands and looks after the common aspirations of society; hence these are primarily based on social identities which are primarily based on Meitei, Naga and Kuki identities¹¹. These organizations are meant to bring reforms in society and put across the legitimate aspirations of the people. However, with time, these organizations have developed a nexus with underground organizations and have practically become their frontal organizations. They are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to fuel their divide. The molestation incident of Ms Momoko (Manipur Actress) by Livingstone (cadre of NSCN (IM) which was followed by the blockade of in the Imphal Valley during Christmas, is a vivid example of socio-political organizations fuelling ethnic divide. This was a law and order incident which resulted into a blockade and counter blockade causing inconveniences to the locals and fuelled the ethnic divide.

¹⁰Manipur witnessed 628 bandhs and blockades during the last 15 years, from 1995 till June 2010, causing huge loss to the tune of Rs 2828 crore in the state exchequer, said Chief Minister O Ibobi Singh in the House of the Manipur Legislative Assembly July 9, 2010. available at www.sinlung.com/2010/.../manipur-had-628-bandhs-blockade-in-15.html Accessed October 05, 2013,

¹¹G.K.Singh, *Understanding the Ethnic Faultlines in Manipur: A Historical Perspective*, Publisher, 1992, available at www.nits.ac.in/department/Humanities%20new/new_hum/social.../7.doc Accessed on August 21, 2013

Extortion or Illegal Taxation

The menace of extortion or 'tax collection', as it is referred to in local parlance by Underground Groups (UGs) has assumed dangerous proportions in Northeast states. In Manipur, extortion is rampant, affecting the life of all the people. Manipur is principally connected by roads, to the rest of the country and to Myanmar, by national highways NH-2 and NH 37. With no rail links, these national highways, especially NH-2 is the state's main lifeline and link to the rest of the country. Extortion along these highways by Naga, Kuki and Mehei groups is rampant. In the recent years, there has been a gradual but visible substitution of ideology by sheer greed. Extortion has become a flourishing industry in the Northeast and more so in Manipur. It is an easy source of income for the insurgent groups, which is primarily being utilized for their own comfort by the upper echelons of the underground cadres. This industry has flourished over a period of time and is deep-rooted in the society. Taxation by the underground groups from their tribal community is not justifiable. To continue the practice of taxation and extortion, underground groups keep the ethnic communities divided. If peace and mutual trust is achieved among the communities then the perceived reason would be proved futile and hence their thriving industry will choke to death.

Areas of Convergence

Now the challenging question is; "Is there any area of convergence in this environment of historical prejudices and inter societal trust deficit?" The answer to this question is and should be a big 'Yes'. One can see the much desired light in the midst of the present darkness which is indeed a passing phase in Manipur's journey to peace and prosperity for all. There are certain fundamental points of affinity and commonality among the various ethnic communities of Manipur and their cultures which will ultimately overcome the forces of separatism and disintegration and usher in an era of reawakening and reconciliation in the state¹². The areas of convergence centre around certain features which are analysed below.

Origin

The racial origin of the predominant ethnic communities of Manipur namely the Meiteis of the valley and the tribal communities in the hills are one and the same. They are, by and large, the descendants of the Mongoloid race. This is evident from their general facial characteristics although some divergence of features among the Meiteis is found due to intermarriage with people from the West. There are evidences galore which testify that both the so called hill people and the plains people of Manipur lived together in the hills as the valley was waterlogged in the early pre-historic period. When the water receded after a considerable period of time, the valley became dry and fit for human habitation. Some of the people came down from the hills and settled in the valley finding it more suitable for

¹² S. Singh, "Manipur Society: Emerging Dynamics" (Seminar held at Leimakong in Manipur on August 18,2012).

agriculture. Thus they came to be known as the Meiteis of the valley area while those who continued to live in the hills came to be known as the hill people of various tribes. This theory of the identical origin of the people of the hills and the valley of Manipur is strongly supported by T.C Hodson in his book *The Meiteis*, which is considered a classic to be referred to in any study about Manipur. It is also supported, more significantly, by the oral literature of these various communities.

Linguistic Affinity

Another area of convergence is the linguistic affinity of these communities. All the languages or dialects spoken by these communities belong to the same linguistic family, i.e., the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. That is the reason why there are a large number of similar words with similar meanings.

The view that the Manipuri language (Meiteilon) and the languages or dialects spoken by other communities of Manipur as members of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages is supported by the well-known linguistic scholar Dr. Grierson in his book *Linguistic Survey of India*.

Yet another area of convergence is the fact that the Manipuri language or Meiteilon is the lingua franca of all the communities living in Manipur. It is the only medium through which all the people communicate with each other for socio-economic and cultural interaction.

Sports

Sports is another binding factor which has cemented the social fabric of the multiple ethnic communities of Manipur. This tiny State is known for its exemplary performances in sports at both National and International levels which include Boxing, Weightlifting, Football, Archery and Martial Arts. It is the only institution which enjoys respect and honour of all sections of the people irrespective of tribal affiliation. Five Olympians from this tiny State took part in the London Olympics 2012 and the support that each of them received across the length and breadth of the State irrespective of their ethnicity, speaks volumes of the value of sports in the State and also the kind of role it can play in binding the communities together.

Socio-economic and Cultural Relations

Another important area of convergence is the age old close socio-economic and cultural relation among the ethnic groups. The following points deserve mention:-

- a. Almost all the communities have the 7 clan system.
- b. In many social ceremonies and festivals of the Meiteis there is ample space for the hill tribal communities. For example, In the Meitei King's Coronation Ceremony (Phambal Tongba) it is imperative that the King and the Queen

- wear Naga costumes. The traditional Meitei Yumjao or the great house, the original residence of the Meitei King is made in the Naga style¹³.
- c. In the Laih-Aoba festival, the most important traditional festival of the Meitei the enactment of the romantic episode of the meeting of the god Nongpok Ningthou and his lady love, goddess Panthoibi dressed in Tangkhul Naga costumes is essential.
 - d. In the marriage ceremony of the Meiteis, the use of 'Leirumphu', a Naga shawl is indispensable. Without it no marriage is complete. This customary practice is prevalent even today.

Inter-Community Marriages

The customs and traditions of all communities of Manipur allow inter-community marriages and there are many successful examples of couples living together and their children also imbibing the ethos of both communities. Though not the norm in earlier years, with the increase in exposure and an increased interdependency, intercommunity marriages are not being viewed with the same negativity as they used to be earlier. Also these marriages are the most important pillars of cross cultural exchange of ideas, thoughts and practices. They act as a bridge that fill the gaps or barriers that have been laid by the rigid society.

Common Identity

Another area where one sees all communities of Manipur come together is when they are outside the state be it Delhi, Bangalore or any other city in India. The north-eastern communities form strong bonds with each other when they live away from their home state. There is no ethnic differentiation among the tribals outside Manipur.

Unique case of Saikul

There are a large number of examples existing within Manipur today which give us hope that all communities can coexist together in peace and harmony. One such case is the Saikul sub division of the Senapati district. All villages in the Saikul settlement are predominantly Kuki except for two substantial villages—Thangalsurung, a Naga village and Ekou Bazar, a Meitei village. Nepali's are scattered all around almost equally in the entire region. The majority is of Kukis (about 65%) with Nepalis (20%), Meiteis (10%) and Nagas (5%) forming the rest of the population.



¹³ Thomas C Hodson, *The Meiteis—A Study of the Tribe of the Brahmaputra Valley* (Obscure Press, 1908).

Since time immemorial these tribes here have maintained a harmonious relationship and led a peaceful way of life. They have overcome their conflicts by conducting periodic talks between the village chiefs. In these talks, mutual decisions regarding their problems/conflicts are taken and then followed by all religiously. Even during the ethnic clashes between Nagas and the Kukis during the 1992–95 conflicts, the Kuki village chiefs protected the Naga community and vice-versa. Besides this, the villagers are mainly dependant on agriculture. They share a common platform for their agricultural produces' paving a strong foundation for mutual trust and harmony. The different tribes here are inter-woven to the extent that the people of one tribe can speak in the language of the other tribes thereby decreasing the communication gap. They even participate in each other's cultural events.

If a significant region like Saikul in Manipur can look beyond the disparities of the tribes that inhabit it and peacefully coexist why a state as magnanimous as Manipur can, not be able resolve the entire issue and move in the direction of growth and development.

Prominent Incidents sustaining Ethnic Divide

Ceasefire With NSCN (IM) and The Naga Peace Accord

After nearly 50 years of fighting and turmoil, the ceasefire between the Government of India and the NSCN (IM) was signed on 26 July, 1997 and that became effective on 1 August, 1997. Both the parties agreed to peace-talks to bring about a solution to the vexing Naga problem. The ceasefire in Nagaland had political implications in Manipur particularly on the Manipur insurgency movement. The demand of Greater Nagaland by NSCN (IM) with tacit support from the Naga Ho Ho, Naga political parties, church leaders, Naga intelligentsia had created a political storm in the region particularly for the state of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The NSCN (IM) leadership wanted the ceasefire between the outfit and GOI to be extended to the Naga inhabited areas of Manipur where NSCN (IM) had a sizeable presence. The Manipuri's feared that GOI may accede to the NSCN (IM) demand of 'Greater Nagalim' which would result in the re-drawing of inter-state boundary with the Naga dominated districts going to Nagaland. This claim of NSCN (IM) is fiercely contested by the Meiteis and opposed by most of the elected representatives as well.

A framework agreement was signed between the National Socialist Council of Nagalim – Isak-Muivah [NSCN(IM)] and the Government of India on August 3, 2015. The leadership of NSCN(IM) has shown flexibility and realism in terms of its willingness to alter goals from complete sovereignty and Greater Nagalim to acceptance of the constitutional framework of India. The Nagas of Manipur, have deep rooted connections with the NSCN(IM) – led Naga insurgency. The Naga Peace accord will have a definite and positive impact on Kuki and Meitei insurgencies in Manipur. With the non-territorial resolution framework agreement in place, the demands for a sovereign Manipur and Kukiland have lost their

relevance to a large extent. The Implementation of the Naga peace accord will bring peace and harmony in Manipur in the years ahead, once the realisation sinks into the psyche of the Meiteis and the Kukis that the concept of a Greater Nagalim – no longer poses a threat to their existence in the region.

Cancellation of Delimitation Process

The Government of India decided to delimit the assembly/parliamentary constituencies in various states based on the population figures according to the 2001 population census. The Delimitation Commission proposed to increase three assembly constituencies in the hills and reduce the same in the valley. Subsequently, a section of the valley community lodged complaints to the Manipur government regarding the population data of Senapati district. The Manipur government conveyed the problem to the Registrar General, the Census Commissioner and the Delimitation Commission that the 2001 population census in some sub-divisions shows abnormal growth rates.

The population figure of Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of the Senapati district of Manipur appeared in the Census of India; Provisional Population Totals (published on April 2001) were cancelled on administrative and technical problems. This census figure problem appears to be an ethnic and regional political-gimmick. Losing three assembly constituencies in the valley areas raise ethnic sentiments and passions of the majority Meitei community. The present trend of census problem and delimitation again manifests ethnic intolerance and demographic hegemony.

Sadar Hills Agitation and Blockade

The demand for the creation of the Sadar Hills district came first from the Kuki Chiefs' Zonal Council in its meeting held on 3 September, 1970. The leaders of Kuki Chiefs' Zonal Council met the then Home Minister KC Pant in July 1971, and placed their demand for a separate district comprising of Sadar Hills. The demand for this district is by Kukis to basically have an exclusive administrative setup for Kukis. However, non-response from the government forced the Kuki leaders to impose an economic blockade on the two lifelines of Manipur from midnight on 1 August, 2011. Finally on 1 November, 2011 the Government of Manipur signed an agreement with the Kukis and agreed to grant the area of Sadar Hills, the status of a separate District, thereby calling off the 91 day blockade. The state government agreed to upgrade Sadar Hill into a full-fledged district at the earliest, after submission of the report of the District Re-organization Committee.

Since the inception of the Sadar Hills demand, the Nagas have opposed it based on their claims of being the first settlers and the Kukis as the later settlers. The Nagas have been resisting arbitrary encroachment and creation of artificial boundaries of their land since the colonial period and hence this attempt on the part of the Government of Manipur to create the Sadar Hills district without consulting the Nagas was strongly opposed by them. Perhaps because of this opposition, the upgradation of Sadar Hills by the creation of the three sub-divisions has not come to effect as yet.

The Meiteis' demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) Status

The Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM), has demanded, that the Meitei community of Manipur be given a, Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. They feel that the Meiteis have been neglected for the last six decades and having been facing impediment from all kinds of developments. Once the Meiteis are included in the ST list, their land will have constitutional protection under the fifth schedule which will allay their fear of extinction. Substantiating its demand, the committee said that the Meiteis are recorded as the main tribe of Manipur under the Province of Assam by the Government of British India as per their 1901 census. It mitigated that the ST quota of 33 percent being enjoyed by the STs in Manipur will continue to be protected under the Article 16(4) even after Manipur becomes a tribal state¹⁴.

Tribals, cutting across ethnic lines, have denounced the Meiteis' demand as preposterous and an attempt to deepen the widening socio-economic and political cleavage between the valley-based caste Hindu Meiteis' and the hill tribes' of the state. To the tribes in the hills of Manipur the main reason for the Meiteis seeking ST status is to avail the opportunity of job reservations and is a ploy to attenuate the fervent political demands of the Kukis and Nagas, as well as a tacit strategy of the dominant valley dwellers to make inroads into the hill areas of the state¹⁵.

Way Forward For Ethnic Harmonization

Ethnic conflicts in Manipur are not phenomenal only for Manipur. They are world-wide. There is visible change among the youth who want peace and prosperity. Time has now come to address the ethnic fault-lines and strengthen the areas of convergence to bring harmonization. Lessons from other parts of the world and Northeast India have been incorporated while attempting to propose a strategy for conflict management and possible resolution in Manipur. Recommendations are given in the succeeding paragraphs.

Inclusive Development

The ethnic divide existing in this troubled state is deep rooted. The differential in development between the hill and the valley areas is glaring. These differences are increasing rather than diminishing by the day and therefore, there is an urgent requirement of addressing this issue of; the biased approach of the government in implementing developmental projects in the hill areas. A classic example is to be found in South Africa, where, one of the most important steps taken by the African National Congress (ANC) government in South Africa was aimed at addressing the roots of economic inequalities. The ANC introduced an ambitious plan of action; called the Reconstruction and

¹⁴ STDC announces phase-wise agitation demanding ST status for Meiteis, "Imphal Free Press" available at <http://ifp.co.in/page/items/27200/stdc-announces-phase-wise-agitation-demanding-st-status-for-meiteis> Accessed on November 15, 2014

¹⁵ Thongkhola Haokip, "The Politics of Scheduled Tribe Status in Manipur", SAGE, 2015, available at http://www.academia.edu/8473146/The_Politics_of_Scheduled_Tribe_Status_in_Manipur Accessed on February 15, 2015

Development Programme (RDP). The RDP was aimed at encouraging disadvantaged groups, especially blacks, to participate equally with others in business¹⁶. Similarly in Manipur there is a need to usher in inclusive development so that all sections of the society benefit from it. Certain important areas for undertaking inclusive development especially in hill areas are development of infrastructure, better educational facilities, provision of basic health facilities, enhancing employment opportunities, skill & capacity development in the youth, equal representation in government jobs and provision of civil administration in the remote areas. Sincere efforts of the government towards inclusive development in hill areas will surely mitigate the trust deficit and lead to better relations between the communities.

Unbiased Political Structure

The structure of the South African government was constitutionally changed to make way for a government of national unity. Power-sharing mechanisms were included in the constitution to prevent the ethnic or racial domination of any group¹⁷. Similarly there is an urgent need to tackle the issue of political bias in as far as number of state assembly seats for hills and valley areas is concerned. The first step towards this would be a fresh population census in the state by the centre; as the last census done in the state in 2001 is marred in controversy. For this reason, the delimitation exercise granting three additional assembly seats to the hill areas and correspondingly reducing the same number of seats from the valley could not be implemented. Based on the fresh census, the seats in the State Assembly need to be re-allocated in the State, and if required additional Districts may be created to cater for the re-allocation of seats. This will ensure a balanced representation of all the areas and communities as per their current population numbers and will assuage the hurt feelings of the people in the hills who see it as denial of their constitutional rights at the behest of the biased government of Manipur. The representation from the hill districts in the state government is yet another area wherein a lot can be achieved by ensuring proportional representation in the ministries. Certain important ministries must be allotted to the MLAs representing the hill districts if the feeling of neglect and bias has to be assuaged. A minister for hill development may also be appointed like DoNER ministry.

Autonomy or Local Self-Governance

In South Africa homelands were dismantled and nine provinces in place of the former four provinces were created so as to distribute power between sub-national units. This arrangement led to empowerment of the indigenous people and made them stakeholders in furtherance of peace and development¹⁸. Similarly, in Assam, Bodoland Territorial Council, an autonomous administrative unit was constituted under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India. This autonomous administrative unit has been created with the

¹⁶ Emmy G. Irobi, *Ethnic Conflict Management in Africa: A Comparative Case of Nigeria and South Africa*. 2005 available at prezi.com/7xv42d24mmc1/ethnic-conflict-project-south-africa. Accessed on February 15, 2015

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ ibid

mission of accomplishing development in the areas of economy, education, preservation of land rights, linguistic aspirations, socio cultural and ethnic identity of Bodos and above all to speed up the infrastructural development of communities. In Manipur there is a case for granting autonomy to certain areas in a similar manner to meet the aspirations of ethnic communities by empowering them and making them stakeholders in their development, peaceful coexistence and harmony. Extension of sixth schedule to the present Hill District Councils with enhanced administrative and financial powers will meet majority of the aspirations of the tribal people and would certainly lead to equitable development and harmonization. This arrangement will not only ensure territorial integrity of ethnically diverse Manipur but also create space for the tribes like Nagas and Kukis to prosper and preserve their identity. For instance, tribal groups might be given the option of establishing non-territorially defined autonomous bodies in order to perform their religious, cultural, linguistic, and other welfare functions. This model of autonomy is suited for all ethnic groups. This model of autonomy would assume greater significance in view of the need to counter territory based demands, such as that of the Nagas for the integration of all Naga-inhabited areas in Northeast India into one administrative unit¹⁹. Furthermore it will also address the concerns of the Meiteis regarding redrawing of the state boundaries. However, to ensure allegiance of all communities to the Manipur State the funds for these autonomous bodies may be routed through the state government maintaining proper accountability and transparency.

Uniform Land Rights

Land in Manipur is extremely dear to the tribes. Therefore, insecurity about losing their land often leads to conflicts. However, gradually but surely, there is a need to implement common and uniform land laws in the entire State while addressing the genuine fear of the tribal population, of their becoming refugees in their own land. The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act of 1960 needs to be looked at in today's context in the sense that the hill region, which comprises about 90 percent of the total area of the State, contains only 35.45 per cent of the total population, while the valley region with only 10 per cent of the total land area has to support 64.55 per cent of the total population. The valley people cannot purchase land and settle in the hills while the hill people can purchase land and settle in the valley. As the hill people feel, land is the only thing they have, a uniform land law acceptable to all tribes may be mooted to bring about harmonization.

Sports and Cultural Exchanges

Today, sports is a binding factor in the whole of Manipur, thanks to the tireless efforts of MC Mary Kom and other sports celebrities, which has united the State and its youth in an essential way. Developing and marketing the sports talent of the people will have many advantages as it cultivates talent, brings the youth of different sections to a common table, refocuses their efforts towards a noble purpose and weans them away from insurgency.

¹⁹Amarjeet M. Singh Ibid 8

There is also a need to establish sports nodes in different parts of the State, especially the hill districts, to nurture the talent pool available there and also make all communities equal stakeholders in this arena. This is a potent and effective recipe for achieving harmonization in this fractured society.

There is also a need to bridge the cultural and societal gap. Respect and knowledge of each other's culture and traditions will certainly assist in bringing about harmonization and understanding. The promotion of local customs and traditions by organizing the Sangai Festival every year, which is a State level festival like the Horn Bill festival in Nagaland is today providing a platform for the cohesiveness of different ethnic groups under a single umbrella.

Synergised Socio political Organisations

Another step taken in South Africa towards peaceful conflict management was the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which helped to heal the wounds inflicted by the apartheid system. A similar structure existed in Manipur in the pre-British occupation era when the Meitei king was honoured by all tribal chiefs and their problems were mutually addressed in the king's court and a mutually amicable solution was reached and thereafter implemented preventing conflicting situations. In the present context there is a need to integrate the activities of the socio political organisations in their respective areas of influence. The same can be achieved by highlighting not only issues relevant to their respective tribes but also the minority tribe members of other tribes who are living/settled in their respective centres of influence. The majority Meiteis and minority ethnic groups need to put their heads together and devise new mini constitutional arrangements to address specific concerns of grievances especially; local autonomy and minority rights guarantees such as quota reservations for universities, jobs, and the continuation of the application of Schedule VI within a new federal structure with more political, economic, cultural or administrative autonomy. These arrangements will provide security and promote economic prosperity for the ethnic minorities²⁰ The impact of these small acts will have far reaching deeper impact which will be registered by all and sundry.

Role of Religious Organisations to Mitigate and Educate

Religious institutes are playing their part very well in the State of Manipur. This has led to harmony and peace in the region. The region has never witnessed any violence on the lines of religion. We have to understand, accept and appreciate the fact that the church has become an integral part of the tribal people's (or hill people's) society. The need of the hour is to educate the heads of the religious institutions to deliver messages of peace to all who attend their functions and act as a bridge for all communities. Besides, they can also act as an important source of education in far- flung and remote areas of Manipur.

²⁰ Dr Irengbam Mohendra Singh "Causes of ethnic conflict in Manipur & suggested remedies" April 27, 2011 available at <http://ccrhs.wordpress.com/2011/04/27/causes-of-ethnic-conflict-in-manipur-suggested-remedies/> Accessed on October 20, 2014.

State and National Integration Programs

In order to bring about harmonization, there is a need for different sections of the society to interact and get to know about each other. State sponsored integration tours should be planned for taking people to different places within and outside the State. This will not only help broaden their horizons, but also make them realize that there is a larger world outside their villages and tribe. People are good and the need of the hour is to come together and work for common development and peace.

Government Initiatives to check Bandhs & Blockades

A political will is evidently missing from the government's attempt to curb the bandh culture. If the requisite political will can be gathered, then a suitable legislation can be introduced to ban the bandhs after a detailed study on the bandh culture in Manipur. The State Government must open a centralized democratic and apolitical public grievance redressing cell (GRC). This should be a quasi-judicial office. The GRC may be constituted under a retired High Court Judge, assisted by one rights activist, one social worker, a student representative, a woman leader or Meira Paibi representative (irrespective of whether the other appointees are women or not), one litterateur, one journalist, one doctor and one engineer. In fact, Manipur has seen a number of Joint Action Committees till date. Every bandh is actually backed by a JAC. In future, any such JAC should first approach the GRC. The GRC should try to convene a meeting in the next 24 hours. They should communicate the decision to the government for needful action²¹. The government must also introduce/implement a citizen's charter in law enforcing agencies. Police reform has been long overdue in this country, but a state like Manipur needs it with no time to spare. The citizen's charter will surely help the police department become public-friendly and more active.

Need of Paradigm Shift in Ideologies

The cultural differences between the various parties of Manipur namely the Nagas, Kukis and Meiteis are well known. The need of the hour is to sit together and work out a solution which is agreeable to all parties. However, each party needs to move that extra mile in order to usher in peace and tranquillity in the region. Nothing seems impossible when there is a political and peoples will for a common resolution; the 'Cold War' has ended, the 'Wall of Berlin' was destroyed and there have been many such historical bonds formed over time. Hence there can be an answer to this problem too, provided communities shed away their parochial mind-set for the greater benefit of peace and prosperity.

²¹Mohammad Imtiyaj Khan, "An open letter to Manipuris: Stop the bandh culture," *E Pao*, September 22, 2013, available at http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.opinions.An_open_letter_to_Manipuris_Stop_the_bandh_culture Accessed on 08 December 08, 2014

Tackling Insurgency

Like in South Africa where the state has prevented further violence by developing multiple democratic approaches, there is an urgent need to tackle insurgency in Manipur at the political level so as to assuage the fears of all communities and lead them towards peace and prosperity and ethnic harmonization in the region. A quick resolution to the Naga peace talks will be a step in the right direction and its successful implementation will instil faith among other stakeholders in the region. The government also needs to fast track the peace talks with Kuki groups which are in Suspension of Operation agreement so as to show its sincerity towards early and peaceful resolution of the issues. There is a need to shift the focus to progress, development and coexistence rather than division. Also there are a large number of retired government employees especially those from the armed forces and para-military forces whose potential, needs to be exploited. Apart from this demobilization, comprehensive rehabilitation of cadres of various groups will strike at the roots of insurgency and will also provide the youth with better employment options and wean them away from being recruited by insurgents.

Collective Consent for ST Status to Meiteis

Grant of ST Status to Meiteis will give them more employment opportunities and land security. Since the Job reservation within the state has been streamlined, ST status to Meiteis is unlikely to have any impact on job avenues of the Nagas and the Kukis within the state. Though, Meiteis will gain advantage of ST status for central govt jobs ; this will not affect job avenues of Nagas and Kukis in Manipur. That notwithstanding apprehensions of Nagas and Kukis is relevant and needs to be clarified /addressed. For grant of ST Status to Meiteis a collective consent of all tribes and within the Meiteis is imperative for ethnic harmonization in Manipur.

Need for Focused Perception Management/ Psychological Initiative

The challenge in Manipur is to perhaps manage the perceptions of its several communities and tribes towards each other, in particular, and towards India in general. Psychological initiatives are required in order to highlight the area of convergence historical/cultural linkages, while educating the public on the benefits of peace and prosperity and contrasting them with the ill effects of extortion and taxations. Seminars and symposiums wherein representatives of all tribes participate will go a long way towards bringing in, ethnic harmonization in this great State of India.

Conclusion

An in depth understanding of the characteristic of ethnic divide will enable us to devise a strategy for conflict resolution thereby leading to peaceful coexistence and harmonization in our country. Latent suspicion, historical prejudices and current friction areas, etc, tend to enhance in scope in the absence of a dialogue between the stakeholders. The channel for constructive dialogue should accordingly be facilitated by stressing on the issues which

have scope for early convergence like, economic progress, education, employment etc. The 'compulsive pull' of the fruits of modernization and improved quality of life has the potential of overcoming a vast majority of socio political hurdles, thus they need to be given a chance. There is also a need to improve the socio political environment by enhancing the representative character of the various elected political bodies. Attempts at 'reaching out' to the Nagas by the Meitei polity like visits by the Chief Minister, Home Minister and Minister for Tribal Affairs to the Naga/Kuki inhabited areas needs to be undertaken. We need to reiterate here that it is as it has always been, 'easier said than done'; but it has to be done. The resolve has to have some beginning and even though it will face stiff opposition, it will be lauded in the long run and the resilience will pay off finally.

Image Source:

- <http://www.tehelka.com>
- <http://www.nelive.in>

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