

The Social and Political Landscape of Manipur and the Struggle for Land Rights

Jagannathan Punjabkesar, Heinrich Coetzer, Kelvin Nalan Naido

Abstract: *This paper discusses Manipur issue in April - May 2023 that witnessed a series of events which were marked by tension, protests, and also clashes among the two different tribes of Manipur. The state government's recommendation to the central government was triggered controversy, which was later criticized strongly by the Supreme Court. A peaceful demonstration by the All Tribal Students' Union Manipur was being escalated into clashes between the two different ethnic groups, particularly Kuki and Meitei, this resulting in property damage and also unrest along the Churacandpur - Bishnupur areas border. Indigenous land rights, especially for the Kuki tribe people residing in the hill area around the capital, became a focal point of concern due to the alleged abuses by the state government. The religious demographics highlighted a significant Christian population. The majority of people's religion was Christianity. Notably, evictions were carried out under the pretext of forest mapping, ostensibly to curb poppy cultivation. These events that underscored a complex interplay of the indigenous rights, governance issues, inter - community tensions, and religious dynamics in the region.*

Keywords: Manipur, Violence, Kuki, Meitei, Tribals, Christianity, Land Rights, ethnic groups

1. Introduction

On 3 May 2023, ethnic violence broke out in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur between the tribals Meites, most of whom live in the Imphal Valley, and the Kuki tribal community in the surrounding hills. By the date July 29, 181 people had died in the violence. Over 300 injured and approximately 5088 people were displaced.

On 1 April 2023, the Manipur High Court on ordered the state government to send a recommendation to the central government. The decision was later criticized by the Supreme Court. In protest against the Supreme Court order, the All Tribal Students' Union Manipur called for a peaceful demonstration on May 3. After one demonstration, clashes broke out between Kuki and Meitei groups near the border between Churacandpur and Bishnupur districts, followed by the burning of houses.

According to several organizations, there have been reports of guerilla killings by the central security forces and alleged police collusion with the Meitei community. This paper discusses the causes and circumstances that were being faced by the people of Manipur due to negligence of Ruling Government. It also discusses some of the suggestions to keep the peace and Harmony in the state of Manipur.

Ignition of the Violence:

The issues persist among the Hill tribes of North East India and Rebellions in the Districts of Manipur since 2011. Some areas later became independent districts. In the center of the state lies the Imphal Valley: Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur are the areas that are densely populated and dominated by the Meitei people, while the outer regions are mostly hilly areas, sparsely populated and dominated by non - Meitei peoples. People in the valley are mainly Hindu religion and in the mountains mainly Christians.

According to Census 2011, the demographics of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are very different in the regions of hill and valley. The 'Other' category that

includes the general category and other backward categories (OBC) and economically weaker sections (EWS).

The hill and valley regions have a very different religious composition, according to the 2011 census. Data for Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism and undeclared are not shown as they are less than 1% in both hills and valley areas. The category "Some Other" includes other religions as well as uncategorized religions such as Sanamahism. Manipur is a state in northeastern India, bordering Myanmar to the east and south. It consists of the Imphal valley associated with the Kingdom of Manipur and also the surrounding hills inhabited by hill tribes. The Imphal Valley accounts for about 10% of the state's geographical area and 57% of its population, mostly Meites, who are majority Hindus, with a minority of Muslims and indigenous followers of Sanamahism. The surrounding hills make up 90% of the geographical area of the state and 3% of the population belong to tribal groups generally classified as Nagas and Kukis. The Nagas are dominant in the northern regions while the Kukis are dominant in the south. Tribal peoples have Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, while Meites have been given OBC (Other Backward Class) status, some of the others whom are classified as Scheduled Castes (SC) in certain areas. Experts pointed out that the mountainous regions are the part of Zomia inhabited by "non - state" peoples. It was not until the Kukki Rebellion of 1917-1919 that they were administered by British administrators without the involvement of the Meitei state. After India's independence, hill tribes continued to enjoy the privilege of protected status. The Manipur and Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act that were amended in 1960 prohibits transfer of tribal lands to non - tribals except with special permission, preventing and others from expanding into the hills. The Meitei in the valley dominate the political establishment of 60 constituencies, which are located in the valley and 20 or the constituencies are in the mountainous regions. The tribal population is not prohibited from settling in the valley region. But the tribe called Kukis say they don't want to come to the valley, but they have to because there are no roads, schools or hospitals facilities in the mountains. Tribal groups have complained that the government spending and

allocation of the financial budget is disproportionately concentrated in the Meitei - controlled region of Imphal Valley.

The violence is being investigated by a panel chaired by a retired chief justice, while the peace committee is investigating the violence that had happened in the state of Manipur which was led by Governor and Security Adviser Kuldeep Singh and members of civil society. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is investigating six cases that were related to the violent conspiracy and ensuring a neutral inquiry to uncover the root causes. The Kuki people, who live mainly in the hills surrounding the capital, have seen indigenous land rights abused by the current state government. Most of the followers were Christians. In each location, evictions occurred due to forest mapping efforts ostensibly to stop poppy cultivation in their region.

The indigenous Meitei community has also experienced increased insecurity since the year 2021 military coup in neighbouring the Myanmar, particularly the influx of refugees from the Sagaing region. The identities of different ethnic groups and communities are armed in the ongoing struggle.

ST status for Meitei:

The Scheduled Tribes Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM) began demanding an ST status for the Meitei people in 2012. STDCM claims that the status restores the harmonious relationship between the people of the valley and the people of the hill regions before the accession of Manipur to India. On the other hand, the hill people see this claim as an attempt to reduce the effectiveness of the Naga and Kuki claims and allow us to invade the hilly areas

2. Political Background

Okram Ibobi Singh from the Indian National Congress (INC) has been in power for the three terms since 2002. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) first came to power in 2017 under the leadership of N. Biren Singh, who managed to overtake INC, the largest party and thus formed a minority government. In the 2022 Manipur Legislative Assembly elections, Mr. Singh won a clear majority for the BJP, increasing the number of seats from 21 (2017) to 32 (2022) in the 60 - member assembly, and went on to serve as chief minister for the state of Manipur. The rise of the BJP to the power in Manipur enabled the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to encourage Vaishnavites to defend Hindutva policies against religious minorities. This included the emergence of Meitei - based organizations and also increased the vigilance, cultural policing, and anti - minority rhetoric.

On 7 November 2022, the Government of Manipur passed an arrange setting aside of the past orders from the 1970s and 1980s that were prohibited towns from proposed Chuachandpur - Khoupum ensured Timberland, which consequently set 38 genealogical towns in Churachandpur within the infringing category. In 2023, the state government in Manipur started to oust illicit workers from the regions of Myanmar from state - owned timberland reserves. Tribal bunches alleged that illegal migration could be a guise

beneath which the Meitei populace needs to drive absent the tribal populace from their lands. In the month of February 2023, the BJP state government started an removal drive in locale of Churachandpur, Kangpokpi and Tengnoupal, announcing the timberland tenants as encroachers—a move seen as anti - tribal.

Manipur Cabinet chosen to pull back from the Suspension of Operation understandings with three Kuki aggressor bunches, counting the Kuki National Armed force and the Zomi Progressive Armed force, in spite of the fact that the central government did not back such a withdrawal. A few Manipuri associations too illustrated in Modern Delhi to press for a National Enroll of Citizens (NRC) to be made with 1951 as the base year, complaining of anomalous populace development in slope areas. The primary viciousness broke out as five individuals were harmed in a clash within the Kangpokpi area of the state, where dissidents accumulated to hold a rally against "infringement of tribal arrive within the title of saved timberlands, ensured timberlands and natural life sanctuary". Whereas, the state cabinet also expressed that the government will not compromise on "steps taken to ensure the state government's woodland assets and for killing poppy cultivation". Social researchers, such as Dhanabir Laishram, have been contended that focusing on those poor Kuki cultivators alone would be pointless. It is the wealthy segment of the Meitei community who are the funders, transporters and venders of poppy and putting the fault on the destitute cultivators. On 11 April, three churches in Imphal's Tribal Colony territory region were bulldozed for being unlawful developments on government land.

On 20 April 2023, a judge of the Manipur Court coordinated the state government to "consider ask of the Meitei community to be included within the Planned Tribes (ST) list." The Kukis dreaded that the ST status would permit the Meiteis buy arrive within the precluded uneven areas. The tribal bunches called for a add up to closed down on 28 April in protest of the state government activities, a day that moreover happened to have been planned for the chief serve N. Biren Singh to visit Churachandpur for the introduction of an open discuss exercise center. The day some time recently the visit, a mob set fire to the exercise center and vandalized it. The total area 144 was conjured on 28 April as well as a five - day internet facilities closed down. The protesters clashed with the police and tear gas shells were utilized to scatter the mobs in the crucial areas. What's been said, straightforwardly, counting by Chief Minister Mr. Biren Singh, is that as well numerous "foreign" (Myanmarese Kukis) are included, there's outside (Chinese, he insinuated) hand, which the Kuki tribals are timberland encroachers, unlawful poppy producers, sedate bootleggers and psychological militants. "Terrorist" is an expression he has been utilized for them more than once and it's been broadly detailed within the national broadsheets.

On July 19, a video went viral appearing two Kuki ladies, one matured in her forties and another in her twenties, being stripped, paraded exposed on the streets of Manipur, slapped and sexually ambushed and were being brutally raped by probably Meitei men. The ladies were coercively taken absent from the police station when they were escaping

horde violence. The more youthful casualty was purportedly gang - raped and one of the victims' father and adolescent brother was murdered by the swarm whereas attempting to ensure the casualty. In spite of the complaint being held up no action has been taken by the police for more than 2 months until the video emerged into the internet and went viral. The Kuki community people have charged the police of siding the Meitei community. The video risen after more than two months since the occurrence took place as the internet facilities were shutdown in Manipur. One of the casualties said that they have been "left to the horde by the police". On July 20, Manipur Chief Minister Mr. Biren Singh protected his choice to curtail Web get to within the state, citing hundreds of similar episodes happening within the past. The Union government requested social media stages to evacuate all posts showing the viral video. Seven arrests were made within the case, all of them after the viral video surfaced on the most viral list. The Court reacted inside hours after the circulation of the video, caution that the court will mediate on the off chance that the government comes up short to act.

After the media reports circulated approximately the National Commission of Women (NCW) having information of the occurrence as they gotten a complaint within the month of June, the chairperson of NCW said that she did not get a reaction from specialists in Manipur, indeed after she sent the complaint thrice before. The CBI took over the case on 29 July.

Recurrent violence:

On 14 June, almost 11 individuals were shot, counting nine Meitei men. Furthermore, 14 were harmed in a new episode. Agreeing to specialists and other senior administration authorities at the state's capital, the most recent clash has been so extraordinary that many bodies have been hard to identify. A 21 year old was arrested for sharing a post against CM Biren Singh on the social media. He was beaten to passing on a road in Imphal when he was supposed to be in police custody. On 17 June, the Diocese supervisor of Imphal expressed that 249 churches have been burnt in Manipur. The state police confront charges of siding with the prevailing Meitei community. In an exertion to call for peace, resistance pioneers gone by the violence - affected ranges on 29 July.

Supreme Court proceedings:

On 31 July, the Court inquired Manipur government to supply total break - up of around 6000 FIRs related to the savagery within the state. The court moreover communicated stun after learning that it took 14 days for the police to enlist indeed a zero FIR within the case of two ladies being paraded exposed by a swarm and were ambushed sexually in public. The Court also took suo moto cognisance and shaped a committee comprising of resigned Jammu and Kashmir High Court Chief Equity Gita Mittal (who will lead the committee), previous Bombay High Court judge Shalini Phansakar Joshi and previous Delhi High Court judge Asha Menon to see into help and recovery, and designated former Mumbai Police Commissioner Dattatray Padsalgikar to supervise the probe as soon as possible.

Reactions:

The Chief Minister of Manipur, N. Biren Singh, expressed that the riots were affects by "prevailing misconception between two communities" and requested for reclamation of normality.

Shashi Tharoor, a Member of Parliament, called for President's run the show and faulted the BJP - led government, saying it has fizzled to oversee the state.

Peter Machado, the Metropolitan Ecclesiastical overseer of Bangalore, communicated concern that the Christian community is being made to feel unreliable, including that "seventeen churches are either vandalized, tainted or defiled."

Olympic medallist Mary Kom, a local of Manipur, tweeted an request looking for offer assistance for her domestic state.

On 12 May 2023, all 10 Kuki MLAs, counting eight from the Bharatiya Janata Party, issued a explanation requesting a separate body be made to manage their community beneath the structure of India within the wake of the rough ethnic clashes. They charged that the savagery had been "tacitly supported" by the BJP - run state government, which living beneath a Meitei - majority organization after the savagery would be "as great as death" for their community. Five associations of tribal understudies of Manipur in Delhi too requested a test into the charged inclusion of two radical Meitei bunches, Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun within the violence.

On 29 May, hundreds of ladies from Kuki, Mizo, and Zomi tribes organized a challenge at Jantar Mantar in Delhi, requesting intercession by the central government to conclusion communal pressures in Manipur state. The ladies waved national banners and held blurbs announcing themselves as Indians, not workers, whereas scrutinizing the state government blending tensions by removing of Kuki villagers.

On 30 May 2023, eleven worldwide and national award - winning sportspersons from the Manipur state said that they will return their grants in case the regional astuteness of the state is compromised. The sportspersons said that if the government does not meet their requests, they will not speak to India and will not offer assistance in preparing modern talent.

On 1 July 2023, Joseph Pamplany, Diocese supervisor of Thalassery in Kerala, said the savagery is supported by the Modi government and RSS to annihilate Christian communities in Manipur.

On 14 July 2023, the BJP's vice - president from the state of Mizoram, R. Vanramchhuanga, surrendered from his post blaming BJP governments within the middle and the state of supporting demolition of churches.

On 20 July 2023, Modi broke his months - long hush after a video of two ladies being paraded exposed and subjected to outright acts of sexual attack by a gather of men went viral. He said that the incident disgraced India which no

blameworthy will be spared. The Silent Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been criticized for being quiet on the viciousness for nearly three months, for not going to the state and for maintaining a strategic distance from the broader circumstance in his explanation after a disturbing video appearing two ladies being paraded bare that went viral.

The parliamentary resistance beneath the Indian National Formative Comprehensive Union (INDIA) tabled a no certainty movement around the emergency to create Modi address the circumstance in more detail to parliament. Modi conveyed a two hour discourse primarily centered on the achievements of his government and scrutinizing the resistance for "slandering India" through the vote, to which resistance MLAs strolled out. A while later, Modi addressed the strife, expressing that "there would soon be peace in Manipur" which the entire nation would get behind determination endeavors. The movement fizzled as anticipated due to the overpowering BJP larger part, with it being seen more as a way to constrain Modi to talk approximately the matter and exhibit the solidarity and control of the INDIA grouping.

Media coverage:

Standard media channels from India disregarded the Manipur strife for a whereas, and secured it as it were after a viral video surfaced appearing two exposed ladies being paraded by a mob in the streets of Manipur state. Major daily papers and broadcast media from Manipur and the rest of India have been maintained a strategic distance from announcing on savagery confronted by the Christian - majority Kukis, whereas highlighting savagery by Kuki aggressors. Three of the foremost read English daily papers within the locale did not indeed report on the occurrence of a mob burning a lady and a boy alive. The Sangai Express referred to Kukis by the adjective word "aliens" in a piece, of while a writing within the Imphal Free Press legitimized the villagers plundering arms from the security powers within the state.

On 21 July, ANI inaccurately detailed that a Muslim man has been captured in association to the occurrence in which two exposed ladies were seen paraded persuasively by a swarm in a viral video. ANI afterward apologized for the tweet, saying that it was based on an wrong perusing of already distributed tweets by Manipur Police. In Manipur State, the arrive address is closely tied to the address of character, politics and control. Indeed nowadays, conflicts over arrive stay a repetitive marvel. The issue of arrive independently might gather enormous ethnic assembly within the state, irrespective of tribes and non - tribals. What makes the MLR and LR case contested is that the plan or the demand for its extension within the slopes isn't just the agenda of the state, but one moreover sought after by associations based within the valley. While this pits one community against the other, it encourage replicates, in the event that not reinforces, the existing hill-valley partition in the state. The categories "hill" and "valley" gotten to be not unimportant markers of topography, but location of contestation. This contestation plays out within the way which tribal communities struggle to hold their rights by

articulating the "hill" distinctiveness. While for the state, the first step to expand the Act within the slope will be to avoid the villages/areas from the "hill" tag. The other is through upkeep of land records beneath the valley district, implying the appropriateness of the Act or redefining the meaning of the slopes. It has become one of the foremost way of effective methods attempted by the state to extend the Act into the slope regions. What is accomplished through its expansion is get to tribal lands, giving the plausibility for encourage control and administration. Hence, for a state like Manipur, one may not supervise and overlook the control relation - ships and the address of get to when it comes to understanding the issue of land, conflict and rights.



Map of the religious distribution in the state of Manipur. Meitei Hindus (orange) and Meitei - Pangal Muslims (green) are predominant in the dense urban valley region, whereas Christians (blue) predominate in the sparsely populated tribal hilly regions.

3. Consequences

- **Guerilla and Ethnic Pressures:** Manipur has experienced longstanding issues related to guerilla and ethnic pressures. Different aggressor bunches have worked within the locale, requesting more prominent independence or freedom. These bunches have locked in in acts of savagery, driving to clashes with the Indian government and security forces.
- **Human Rights Concerns:** The struggle in Manipur has raised human rights concerns, with charges of extrajudicial killings, vanishings, and other manhandle by both security strengths and activist bunches. Gracious society organizations and human rights bunches have been pushing for responsibility and equity in these cases.
- **Developmental Challenges:** In spite of its social abundance and characteristic excellence, Manipur faces formative challenges. Framework, healthcare, instruction, and business openings are ranges that have required noteworthy improvement.
- **Economic Battles:** The state's economy is generally agrarian, and there's a got to broaden and fortify it. The

need of businesses and constrained financial openings have driven to issues like unemployment and underemployment.

- **Geopolitical Area:** Manipur's geological area, bordered by Myanmar to the east, has suggestions for cross - border intelligent, exchange, and security. This region's affectability moreover crosses with India's "See East" arrangement and endeavours to improve network with Southeast Asia.
- **Ethnic Differing qualities:** Manipur is domestic to a few ethnic bunches, each with its unmistakable dialect, culture, and history. Overseeing these different characters and guaranteeing evenhanded representation has been a challenge.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

It's critical to note that these issues are complex and multifaceted. Arrangements require a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the issues. A few potential proposals include:

- 1) Dialogue and Transaction: Empowering tranquil discourse between the government and different partners can be a way to address grievances and discover enduring solutions.
- 2) Development Activities: Contributing in foundation, instruction, healthcare, and financial openings can offer assistance address a few of the fundamental issues contributing to unrest.
- 3) Human Rights Responsibility: Guaranteeing responsibility for human rights manhandle and giving equity for casualties can offer assistance modify believe between communities and the authorities.
- 4) Promotion of Culture and Character: Recognizing and regarding the social differing qualities of Manipur can cultivate a sense of having a place and inclusivity among different communities.
- 5) Cross - Border Participation: Given its border with Myanmar, upgrading cross - border participation can encourage exchange, people - to - people contacts, and security coordination.
- 6) Inclusive Administration: Guaranteeing representation and interest of distinctive ethnic bunches in decision - making forms can offer assistance make a more comprehensive and even - handed political environment.

Advancing peace and communal concordance in a law based nation requires a multifaceted approach that includes different partners, counting the government, respectful society, devout and community pioneers, and citizens. Here are a few techniques that can contribute to cultivating peace and communal harmony:

1) Rise to Rights and Justice:

- Guarantee break even with rights and openings for all citizens, notwithstanding of their religion, ethnicity, or background.
- Build up an unbiased and effective equity framework that addresses grievances and gives convenient equity to all.

2) Instruction and Awareness:

- Advance instruction that emphasizes resistance, understanding, and regard for diversity.

- Join instruction almost diverse societies, religions, and histories to cultivate sympathy and diminish stereotypes.

3) Interfaith Dialogue:

- Organize interfaith discoursed and talks to energize understanding and communication between diverse devout groups.
- Highlight common values and objectives that can bridge divides.

4) Community Engagement:

- Empower community - led activities that bring individuals from distinctive foundations together for shared exercises, talks, and projects.
- Center on tending to neighborhood issues collaboratively.

5) Media Responsibility:

- Advance dependable and fair announcing that maintains a strategic distance from emotionalism and stereotypes.
- Energize media to highlight positive stories of inter - community cooperation.

6) Authority and Part Models:

- Devout and community pioneers can play a noteworthy part in advancing peace by pushing for resistance, solidarity, and respect.
- Political pioneers ought to prioritize national solidarity and condemn divisive rhetoric.

7) Laws and Policies:

- Sanction and uphold laws that forbid segregation and despise discourse based on religion, ethnicity, or other factors.
- Make approaches that empower integration and inclusivity.

8) Social Trade and Arts:

- Bolster social trade programs, craftsmanship presentations, music concerts, and other occasions that celebrate differing societies and traditions.
- Craftsmanship and culture can be effective instruments for cultivating understanding and connection.

9) Struggle Determination and Mediation:

- Set up instruments for settling clashes gently through arrangement and mediation.
- Empower discourse rather than

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