

Socio-Political Analysis of Centre-State Relations in India: The Case of Manipur

Moirangthem Thomson Singh (MA Student)

Javeed Ahmad Bhat (Assistant Professor)

**Department of Political Science, School of Humanities,
Lovely Professional University, Punjab**

Abstract:

The principle aim of this paper is to dissect the nature of the Centre-State relations in India with special reference to Manipur, taking in the account of the socio-economic and political complications that hinders the approach to a more secure and unrivaled relationship. It further explains the political history of the state in brief, questioning the accountability of the Central Government and its role as a facilitator to satisfy the interests of the Manipuris. Moreover, the eventual fate of the State with the Union of India is given essential accentuation in this paper.

Keywords: Centre-state relations, socio-political, economic complications, accountability, facilitator, interests.

Introduction:

History stands witness to the glorious and heavenly history of Manipur as a sovereign kingdom with a 3000 years old history. Much of the details are found in the “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*”, the royal chronicle of Manipur, which records a total of 79 Kings with **Nongda Lairen Pakhangba** ascending the throne in 33AD. Remarkable administration of the Ruler incorporate the “*Loyumba Shinyen*”, an illustrious declaration gave by Lord Loyumba in 1110AD which had its source from the early codes and conventions of the State. Also recognized by powerful foreign nations such as

the Shan kingdom of Upper Burma and the British, Manipur was indeed a cradle of civilization with a distinct polity and territory. Mentions can be made of the “**1470 Agreement between the King Kiyamba of Manipur and Khekhomba of Pong, the Anglo-Manipur Friendship Treaty of 1762** and the **Anglo-Manipuri Defense Protocol of 1763** and **the Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826** after the **Seven Years Devastation (1819-1826)**.

Early relationship between India and Manipur happened after the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891, when there was a proposal to form “**Purbanchal Pradesh**”. However, in 1947, Manipur asserted herself as a political entity when the **Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947** was adopted on 8th May. The Constitution came into effect on 26th July with Manipur becoming a democratically elected constitutional monarch. One of the finest legal documents, the MSCA contained 11 chapters and included every elements a democratic nation would expect of: Constitutional Head, Chief Minister, Council of Minister, State Assembly, Executive, Judiciary, etc. When the British left India, the treacherous attempts of the Indian leaders are reflected in trying to make Manipur a part of the country. The approval of the use of force when Manipur resisted joining the Union is still under question. Later on, the Maharajah of Manipur was summoned to Shillong, house arrested and coerced under duress to sign the Manipur Merger Agreement on September 21, 1951. The ascent of revolt was the principal significant result as a response to the intense takeover of the State.

Rise of insurgency:

The ascent of uprising in the State can be followed back to the hours of Hijam Irabot Singh, a Communist head of Manipur, who led the Communist Revolutionary Movement from 1948 to 1951. The main reasons behind the rise of insurgency was due to the ‘Demanipurization of the Government’, where the administration of the state was completely taken over by the culturally different mainland Indians. It further led to exploitation of the economy of the State where there was monopolization of the economy with resources gathered in the hands of the bureaucrats. This was seen as an ‘internal colonialism’ by the Manipuris. With the problem of unemployment among the educated youths rising, the exposal of western ideas of revolution was what empowered the youths to take up arms against the Indian authorities. The issue of rebellion was additionally strengthened with the rise of ‘Meitei Nationalism’, which led to the establishment of the UNLF,

PREPAK, KYKL, KCP, and so on. However, there is ambiguity in the term 'Meitei Nationalism' and it originally refers to the loyalty to the Meitei as a nationality as well as to the multi-ethnic state of Manipur. Moreover, the Naga movement in the Naga Hills (present day Nagaland) was one reason that prompted the ascent of NSCN-IM claiming parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The Kukis' longing for a homeland has further intensified the problem of insurgency with the KNA, KNO, UKLF, etc coming into existence. With more than 50 military outfits operating in the state, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 was imposed in the State in 1972.

Socio-political issues in the State – An Analysis:

Of all the prevailing socio-political issues in the state, the most important one would be the imposition of the **Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958**, which has been found to violate not only some articles enshrined in the Indian Constitution but also some International Conventions and protocols. A bare law with just six sections gives unbridled powers to the armed personnel to detain and even kill a person without questioning. This has resulted in the loss of lives of 8,000 innocent villagers and 12,000 members of armed groups, with a total number of 1528 cases of fake encounters in the state. The rape and murder of Manorama Devi by the 7th Assam Rifles and the subsequent naked protest by the womenfolk of Manipur in 2004 is still worth remembering. The provisions of the AFSPA clearly violates the **Article 14, 21 and 22** of the Indian Constitution.. Moreover, it has been found to violate some of the provisions of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the ICCPR), the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, the Convention Against Torture (CAT), the UN Principles on Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra- legal and summary executions, and the UN Body of Principles for Protection of All Persons Under any form of Detention.**

Manipur has been a home to several ethnic groups since days of yore. These ethnic gatherings has been dwarfed by the inundation migrants from mainland India since the abrogation of the Foreigners' Permit System by Major General Himat Singh in 1950. The total population of Manipur stands at around 28 lakhs, out of which the total population of the indigenous people is calculated to be around 18 lakhs and the remaining 10 lakhs to be of the Non-Manipuris, owning

large shares in the market. This calls for a need to preserve the indigenous population of the State. The **Inner Line Permit (ILP)** is one such legislation which would allow the indigenous population save not only their population but also their culture and traditions. **The Manipur People's Protection Bill** which was passed by the Manipur Legislative Assembly in 2018 is as yet hanging tight for the consent of the President of India. The demand of the ILP has resulted in injury and even death when a student Sapam Robinhood was killed during the protest. Additionally, the failure to implement the ILP would not ensure the **Article 3, 8, 26 and 33** of the **United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples**.

Besides, the push of the BJP Government to pass the Citizenship Amendment Bill in the wake of the demand for ILP has further escalated the problem. The most contentious bill would allow demographic invasion not only to Manipur, but to the North-Eastern States as a whole. Mention can be made of the indigenous population of Tripura which now stands at around 30% of the entire population. Bringing in a question of '*cultural assimilation*' to the completely different North-Eastern part of the region is a grave violation of the '*right to self-determination*'. Without any constitutional safeguards to preserve the indigenous population of the state, the CAB would further pose a threat to the survival of the indigenous people. Mention can be made of the strong opposition by the Mizos, having the constitutional safeguards under **371(G)** of the Indian Constitution and the ILP already in practice. In addition to this, the promise of the Centre to protect the linguistic, cultural and social identity of the indigenous people is perplexing, taking into account the case of the Amri Karbis in Guwahati and Karbi Anglongs in Karbi Anglong district. The CAB, an ultimate legislation of the **G.S.R. 685(E)** notification of the Ministry of Home Affairs made on 7th September, 2015, is not one of the policies followed by Japan, USA and other international countries where no one is made to delay without a passport. Not only this, the Centre's claim in taking a stand against religious persecution when they themselves have failed to respect the Muslim population in the country is quite contradictory. The accretion of the illegal migrants would further impoverish the country. India, being the second largest populated country in the world, stands on the 103rd position in Global Hunger Index out of 119 countries with 21.9% of the population living below the national poverty line.

The issue of Border Pillar no.81 along the Indo-Burma border in Manipur is yet another issue regarding the encroachment of the territorial area of the State. The concern of the Manipuris

regarding the territorial integrity of Manipur dates back to 1952 when the '*Kabaw Valley*' was completely transferred to Myanmar by Jawaharlal Nehru as a token of peace, without consulting the Manipuri leaders. Regarding the BPN81, **Article 1** of the "**Boundary agreement between the Government of India and the Government of the Union of Burma**" which was signed on March 10,1967, clearly describes the places and the extent of the border from north to south, with the border pillars at their respective places. The BPN81 is the new erection of the older Pillar 18, which was located on the right bank of the Manjet Lok river. It was beyond 300m on the right side of the Manjet Lok. But, the current position of the BPN81 is on the left side of the river. There were also public claims regarding the inscription the BPN81 - "**11 AR E-coy, veri on 3-10-2017**". There were questions whether the Assam Rifles stationed at the area had the authority to transfer land to other countries. Moreover, the Centre's statement that the claim of the villagers was baseless and unsubstantiated; there was no confusion as to the alignments, further failed to satisfy the villagers who happened to be residents since time immemorial. The negligence of the Central leaders regarding the boundary issues with Myanmar was additionally found to occur since the 1980s. Another bone of contention is the NSCN-IM's demand to form '**Nagalim**', an integration of the Naga inhabited areas of the present day Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and even Myanmar. This has been unanimously opposed by the concerned states. Moreover, the agreement regarding the '**Framework Agreement**' signed in 2015 was never disclosed to the public. And also the agreements regarding the 'Indo-Naga Peace Talk' which concluded on 31st of August,2019 remains concealed. The claim of the NSCN-IM to integrate the Nagas in Manipur with that of Nagaland is controversial, regarding the fact that the presence of the so-called Naga tribes in Manipur came only in the 1980s after their formation. With cultural and linguistic affinities among all the Meiteis and the so-called Naga tribes of Manipur, the historical bonds between them dates back to prehistoric times. This emotional bond is even reflected till today in the ritual, traditional and religious practices like the Lai Haraoba, Mera Houchongba, weddings(of the Meiteis) and even in monuments and inscriptions. It is further justified by the presence of historical events recorded in the '**Cheitharol Kumbaba**.. Moreover, there are also rejections from some tribes to be called themselves as 'Nagas' like the Kabuis, Zeliangrongs(Zeme, Liangmei and Rongmei) who claim to be themselves and not Naga. Besides these, the policy of 'Divide and Rule' seems to be renewed. There is possibility of formation of "Territorial council" or "Pan Naga

Cultural Body”. This will in turn lead to the idea of a ‘state within a state’ and administrative integration, paving a greater way for the demand of integration of land. Though cultural integration is not opposed, the result would seem to be consequential once the administrative divisions are integrated. Any developmental process of the Nagas in Manipur may be fruitful if it is through the State government of Manipur since there is presence of Autonomous District Councils in the State. These has been the demands of the Manipuris and the Civil Society Organizations of the state. Regarding the territorial integrity of the state, any adjustment in the domain of the state would bring about a grave threat to the country building process. The territorial State of Manipur has been in existence even before the Constitution of India .It is not lawful to incorporate the territory of Manipur in the Indian territory. Nor can it diminish the territorial integrity of Manipur as it existed in 1947 under the *uti Possidetis Juris*, rule of International Law.

The above mentioned issues have deepened the need for sovereignty of the State. This can be justified by the status of Manipur as an independent entity according to the **Section 7(1) (b) and (c) of the Indian Independence Act, 1947**. It also fits the criteria to be an independent state as per the basic parameters of **the Montevideo Convention, 1933** during the period from the independence until the illegal annexation (1947-49). Besides, Manipur emerged as the first democratic constitutional monarchy in the whole of South Asia with the adoption of **Manipur State Constitution Act (MSCA)** on 26 July,1947. This legal document is still a living document and the provisions of the agreements signed later fails to abrogate the MSCA.

Another view in support of the argument is the para **9 (5) of Indian Independence Act, 1947**.

According to this, the *ex post facto* laws of any order made under this section of the Indian Independence Act, 1947 could not abrogate the Manipur State Constitution Act (MSCA), 1947. Not only this, the section 8 of the **Instrument of Accession** indicates that Manipur was still enjoying the sovereignty and the **Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947** enacted on 1 January, 1947 was still in force. The demand of the Pre-Merger Political Status makes the legality of the Manipur Merger Agreement signed on September 21, 1951, to be apparent. The provisions of the **Manipur Merger Agreement** cannot over-ride some articles, viz. **Articles 6,7 and 8** in the **Instrument of Accession** signed by the then King of Manipur on 16th August,1947. Other justifications include the violation of the **article 2(4) of the UN Charter** and the **UN General**

Assembly Resolution 2625 of 1970. Moreover, the King of Manipur who signed the Merger Agreement was incompetent to enter an agreement, as he was the nominal head of the State. Neither it was ratified by the members of the State Assembly. The request of the King to discuss the problem with the State Assembly members was declined by the authorities who made him sign the Agreement.

The issue of the demand further brings out the failure of the Government of India to stick to the ethical and democratic norms after the Accession was signed . After the Accession of Kashmir was signed by Hari Singh, Jawaharlal Nehru made a declaration that the accession was subject to plebiscite of the people of Kashmir when peace and order would be restored to the State. It didn't happen in the case of Manipur. Neither a distinct constitutional status (like that of Kashmir) was given. Moreover, Jammu and Kashmir State sent a representative to the Constituent Assembly of India and accepted the Constitution of India. But no representative of the State of Manipur was sent to the said constituent Assembly and accepted the Constitution of India.

Future of Manipur with the Union of India:

Economic Exploitation: The ultimate fate of Manipur with the Union of India seems to be unbecoming regarding the fact that the state has been economically and culturally exploited. The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) was about Rs. 231.67 billion (US\$ 3.59 billion) in 2017-18 with total merchandise exports from the state increasing to US\$ 2.65 million in 2018-19 (up to February 2019) from US\$ 0.19 million in 2014-15. The policy of 'internal colonialism' seems to be revitalized. This is justified by the lack of developmental parameters in the state with 36.89% of the people pushed down below poverty line and unemployment rate among educated youths even higher than that of the national average (74.04). It stands at a large number of 7,49,935 out of the total 27,21,756 people of the state. Moreover, the market share of the Non-Manipuris is found to be around 50% of the total share. It was mainly due to the allowance or the influx of Non-Manipuris in the state with the abrogation of the Foreigners Permit System by Major General Himat Singh in 1950. This led to the rise in number of Non-Manipuris at a massive rate, to 1021 in 1951 from 500 in 1949. Now, the present number of Non-Manipuris is around 10 lakhs

Another issue, the construction of the Loktak Hydro Power Project led to the submerging of nearly 80,000 acres of agricultural land. It generates a lot of revenue worth 7000Crores per year and

another 5000 Crores in tax. According to the statement release from the finance secretariat of Manipur, only 6000 Crores obtained from this project is used for development of the state, the other 6000 Crores going to the Centre. In addition to this, the chromite mining to be done in parts of Ukhrul and Chandel was approved by the Government of India through the Indian Bureau of Mines and the Ministry of Mines. Mining leases and licenses were given to private companies during 2007-12. But, the Memorandum of understanding was signed without the consent of the people of the land. Proper Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) was neither conducted.

The condition of educational facilities in the hills and the harrowing condition of the National Highways of the State is given a short shrift till now. In 2016, the total number of students in government school that appeared the 10+2 examination in Ukhrul district (one of the hill districts) was only 150 students. Picking out two 10+2 government school in Imphal West district, say T.G. Higher Secondary School and Johnstone Higher Secondary School, the number of student who appeared the exam was 1722. The wide difference is even witnessed in their examination result when only 5 students 72 (15.3%) passed the exam in Ukhrul and the pass percentage in the abovementioned two schools was 56.09 percent. In addition to this, the deplorable condition of the National highways can be termed as 'unserviceable' with muddy roads worsened by landslides form time to time. Besides this, there is no effective and immediate response regarding the economic blockade along the lifeline of the state by various Naga groups. The worst one was the inflation and shortage of foods and commodities resulting from the economic blockade by the UNC (United Naga Council) from 1 November 2016 to 19 March 2017 on the National Highways NH 37 and NH 2. It lasted for 139 days.

Cultural Invasion:

The basic fundamental connotation of '**Unity in Diversity**' seemed to be the icing on the cake when India was first formed as a **Sovereign, Secular, Socialist, Democratic, Republic** in 1950. With more than 560 princely states brought together, the underlying mutual consensus among them would be none other than the 'mutual respect of religion and culture'. It might be from the primitive doctrines that the idea of unity is defined in terms of uniformity in every aspect. With over two thousand ethnic groups with physical, cultural, racial, linguistic, social and religious differences in India, the unity defined in terms of 'commonness' seems to be self-contradictory. This might,

in turn, give birth to racial discrimination, or say cultural invasion, which is also a living example in India. Moreover, the push of the BJP to make a legislation for the Uniform Civil Code (Article 44 of the DPSP) is quite controversial. A common set of rules to govern each citizen of the country belonging to different backgrounds has been a topic of debate for years. Not only will it violate the secular characteristics and rights of the Indian Constitution but it will also promote disrespect and discrimination of different types of religion.

Linguistic imperialism can be the first approach to forced cultural assimilation. It is when these aspects are broadened that it spreads to what is known as 'cultural colonization'. The '**Sinhala Only Act, 1956**' and its consequences are an example of it. This argument is further strengthened by the declaration of '**Urdu**' as the federal language of Pakistan in 1948, '**Bengali Language Movement**' that followed and the subsequent **Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971**. Coming to India, the intention of imposing "**Hindi**" was clear from the Union Home Minister's water-test statement on National Hindi Day in New Delhi on September 14, 2019, though he clarified it later. With 23 official languages and over 700 dialects spoken all over the country, India stands out as one of the most multilingual countries in the world.

Coming to Manipur, the *composite culture* of the Manipuris and the *social cohesive society* composed of several ethnic groups was defiled by the rise of Hinduism in the 18th century. The Meiteis have already had a tragic history when they were forcefully converted into Hinduism under the order of the King and the Brahmanical scholars. Not only the old Meitei sacred texts "*puyas*" were destroyed but there was also a complete confusion of race, religion and language. The revival of the Meiteis tradition and cultures by the Sanamahi cult took greater scales in the past few decades until it was nipped in the bud by the advent of Hindu fanaticism, mainly because of the rise of BJP in the state. Several incidents which hurt the sentiments of the Meiteis have happened since then. Mentioning an example, the plan of the BJP Government in Manipur to construct a 'Ras Leela Hall' inside the premises of the most sacred place of the Meiteis, The Kangla.

Besides, the North-Eastern states are separated by their racial contrasts, yet in addition by their one of a kind and wondrous cultures and traditions. The subject of cultural assimilation to the mainland Indian patterns, either by compulsion or consent, isn't to be put on the table. Cultural integration is a different thing but it might also lead to assimilation in the long run. One can point

out why the United States is described as a '*melting pot of cultures*'. But, in a complexly religious and diverse country like India, the very quintessence of '*cultural mosaic*' should suggest a positive translation to '*multiculturalism*' or '*ethnic pluralism*'.

Extra-Unconstitutional Authorities:

Several cases of unlawful detentions, heavy military deployment, non-disclosure of agreements, extra-judicial killings, human rights violation cases, etc. have justified the use of unconstitutional means in the State. Democracy, by the definition goes, is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. *What does it mean when you can't even criticize the Government?* - a clear indication that excessive and unchecked power given to the ruling party often leads to dictatorship. The case of Kishorechandra Wangkhem, a journalist of Manipur, is an example. He was booked and jailed under NSA for criticizing the BJP Government. The consent as well as the consensus of the people has to be the essence of democracy. Transparency in their workings should be reflected in their activities. Such is not the case in Manipur. The non-disclosure of the '**Framework Agreement**', as well as the details of the '**Indo-Naga Peace Talk**' between the Government of India and NSCN-IM, an outfit which claims large areas of Manipur, is an example of it. The obscurity in their dealings is conspicuous to the Manipuris, as to whether it might affect the territorial integrity of the state. It is a matter of whether the 'PEACE TALK' might result in a peace for only one side on ethnic lines and in broader terms, in pieces.

Moreover, the gross and abuse of military force is still a big question. In Manipur, there is a check-point in every two kilometres and locals are frisked in their own land. It is even a greater issue when this unchecked power is used against the students. The students wing in Manipur always play an important role in social, economic and political reforms and has been a pillar to the sustenance of democracy in the state. Students take part in protests and agitations with many of them getting injured or even put to death (Sapam Robinhood, a student who died after he was hit by a rubber bullet while participating in a protest demanding implementation of Inner Line Permit in 2015). Nikhila Henry, an author of the book "*The Ferment: Youth Unrest in India*" was once asked, "*This is the only university (Manipur University) which has an army camp on its campus. What does that tell you?*"

In an incident inside the university in September, 2018, 89 students and 6 teachers were arrested in a midnight-raid during the exams, for being part of an agitation seeking investigation and allegations against the mismanagement and corruption charges against the Vice-Chancellor, AP Pandey. Moreover, with regard to the heavy deployment of military personnel in Manipur during the 'Indo-Naga Peace Talk', the State Government doesn't even have an answer. They have been allowed to station at colleges in Imphal, despite the SC's mandate on military forces to not occupy school premises (*Nandini Sundar and Others vs State of Chhatisgarh on Kuly, 2011, exploitation of children in orphanages in the state of Tamil Nadu vs Union of India and others, etc.*) It is a clear violation of the fundamental rights and against the mandates of the Indian Constitution to make protective and healthy environment for education. After all, the Education Minister of Manipur has already argued to make education a free zone.

Thus, the basic democratic aspects seems to be missing from the Central authorities in dealing with issues in the state. What they call 'Political stability' comes at the cost of violence and even death. There is a need of democratization of the existing nature of inclined democracy. Resorting to the use of military power has made everyone question whether it is military might, but not democratic values that has been holding the country together for this long.

Conclusion:

Thus, the thorough analysis of the issues in the state gives an inkling on how the functionality of the representative democracy with regard to a state inhabited by minorities, is effective. In addition, it has come to realize that the legislations of the Centre is mostly answerable for the political strife in the state. As a whole, legislative authoritarianism in the country has been delighted in bringing about the '*tyranny of the majority*'. This calls for equal representation at every level, be it at the Parliament or wherever necessary, in order to bring uniformity in the working of the Government.

A healthy relationship between the Centre and the State can only be ameliorated by the presence of a responsible Government which protects the 'rule of law'. A government which enclasps the right to object and reject, and most importantly which furnishes the idea of nationalism by providing the growth and survival of all people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, gender, sex, etc., can only help democracy live to its fullest. The soul of popular government lies in respecting

one another and the obligation to maintain that conviction. Manipur still hopes for such an exquisite atmosphere where such interests and aspirations are sustained and it is up to India to execute long haul arrangements for the growth of communal harmony, overall development and peaceful co-existence among all the ethnic communities in the country.

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