

IDENTITY, CONTESTATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH EAST INDIA: A STUDY OF MANIPUR, MIZORAM AND NAGALAND

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Abstract. *The buzz word 'development' encompasses growth with institutional changes. Despite some basic commonalities, India's North Eastern-most three immediate neighbouring states – Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur have got asymmetric development performances due to asymmetric institutional structures. Of the states, Manipur is quite different from other two and experiencing nearly a complete breakdown of its development mechanisms in the recent years, especially in 1990s. Communal violence, human rights violation, and uncertain law and order condition, etc. are the fallout of institutional failure and consequently these factors led the State's economy to a crippled one. Infrastructure, especially, road and communication aggravates to the present state of condition, and also breaks relationship with the neighbouring states, among the communities within the State. Otherwise, this state should have been one of the most advanced states in the country when we traced the early history and its development trajectory. Why is the government (centre) apparently benign with the states of Mizoram and Nagaland when dealing with public demands while it appears to be malignant in Manipur? What factor(s) led to mass uprising, conflict in the State of Manipur and remains unsettled so long – are also raised in this paper.*

Key-words: *Development; Institutional Structure; Infrastructure*

1. Introduction

The buzz word 'development' relates to less developed regions or economies. It is also a dynamic process which transforms an economy from a relatively backward to

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a more advanced one (Singha, 2011). In nutshell, it encompasses growth with institutional changes. Therefore, rich in resources (say, economic resources) alone is not sufficient for development of a region, unless they are fully exploited or efficiently utilised. At present, there are number of countries (e.g. African nations, East Asian countries) in the world which have rich natural resources, but are still poor and under-developed. On the other side, the countries like, USA, Japan, and European nations are considered as developed in the world which have relatively limited natural resources. Most of the poor nations, at present, in the world are heavily plagued with upheavals and political uncertainties. Probably, that led them to impoverish. Therefore, development of a state/region requires effective policy measures with strong social, political and economic resources (Singha, 2011).

India's North Eastern Region (NER) consists of eight states¹, is a 'mixed bag' of several ethnic groups, covers an area of 262,500 km² (8% of India's land mass) and its population is 45.6 million. The region is endowed with rich natural resources (NAAS, 2001) and agriculture is the principal sources of revenue of the region and plays a pioneering role in strengthening the region's fiscal backbone (Singha, 2012). Socially, ethnically and topographically, these states have some basic commonalities and anthropologists classify them as *Tibeto-Burman* speaking communities of *Mongoloid* race, excepting some sections of Tripura and Assam. However, in a broader homogenous outlook, there are lots of inter and intra differences as well among them, in terms of social, cultural, political and economic structures. Consequently, overall development condition defers from one State to another, one community to another, depending on the policy and accessibility to resources. For the present study, of the region, the eastern-most three States – Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur have been selected on the basis of their proximity, similarities of physiographical conditions, social and political structures. Of the three, the State of Manipur has been encountering social upheavals, ethnic crisis, and human rights violation, etc. for the last two to three decades. However, the condition is opposite for the case of other two States. As the law and order conditions have improved significantly, these two states have shown a dramatic improvement in the overall development levels in the recent years.

With these realities, the paper attempts to analyse the approaches that have been adopted for economic growth, culture, identity, and other social structures. What are the similarities and differences in their development trajectories, and what are the factors that are responsible for these differences and similarities in the region. Why is the government (centre) apparently benign with Mizoram and Nagaland when dealing with public demands while it appears to be malignant in Manipur? What

¹ The Eight States of NER are- Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura

factor(s) led to mass uprising in the State of Manipur and remains unsettled so long – are also raised in this paper? Further, it also tries to find out some possible alternative ways and means of the social upheaval and mass uprising.

2. Brief Profile of the three States

Before analysing the issues of identity, contestation and development, it is pertinent to have a glimpse of socio-economic status of the three states. Brief history of the states also helps in understanding the reason why a particular state behaves differently from one another, and it is also a basic concern for the national leaders. Table 1 depicts the socio-economic structures of these States, and from it, one can easily infer that the State of Mizoram is relatively better than the other two, in terms of Human Development Index (HDI), literacy rate, Per Capita Income (PCI), and Below Poverty Line (BPL), etc. and Manipur falls at the bottom in this context.

Table 1
Socio-economic Structure of Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram in 2011

Parameters	Nagaland	Manipur	Mizoram
Population (in Lakh)	19.00	27.20	10.90
Area (in '000 sq. km)	16.50	22.30	21.00
Literacy (in %)	80.00	80.00	90.00
HDI (in 2005)*	0.770	0.707	0.790
BPL (in % in 2006-07)	31.86	30.52	20.76
PCI (in Rs)	21434	29684	45982

Source: Collected from the respective states' Statistical Handbooks, Economic survey (2011)

* Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram were 4th, 5th and 2nd positions respectively in the Country

2.1. Mizoram: Mizoram is one of the eight states of NER, covering an area of 21,087 sq km with a total population of 10.9 lakhs as per 2011 census. Mizo is a collective noun, consisting of around eight distinct tribes like Lushai, Raite, Hmar, Paite, Pawih, Lakher (Mara) with many other sub-tribes. Though *English* is considered as an official language, different tribes have different dialects. *Mizo* – the mother tongue of *Lushai* tribe is used as lingua-franca in the State now. As for the geographical boundary, the State shares border with the nations – Myanmar in the east and Bangladesh in the south and the Indian State – Tripura in the west. In the northern side, the state shares boundary with the Indian States – Manipur and Assam. Under the British administration, Mizoram was known as *Lushai Hills District*, as it is a rugged hilly terrain. It was one of the districts (Lushai hills) of Assam till it became a

Union Territory in 1972 and thereafter it was re-named to Mizoram, became the 23rd State of the Indian union on February 20, 1987.

2.2. Nagaland: Nagaland, the land of Nagas, covers an area of 16,579 sq km with a population of 19.8 lakh as per 2011 census. It shares border with the Indian state of Assam to the west, Arunachal Pradesh and part of Assam to the north, Manipur to the south and the nation of Myanmar in the east. Like Mizoram, the State is mostly mountainous, except small/negligible areas (small part of Dimapur) bordering Assam. The State was a part of Assam till it became 16th State of the Indian Union, established on December 1, 1963. The Nagas (people of Nagaland) comprise of 17 major tribes and over 20 sub-tribes, and each tribe or sub-tribe, speaks a different dialects. Though **English** is considered as an official language, *Nagamese* – a distorted Assamese and Bengali language, is used as lingua-franca in the State. Probably, Assam's dominance in the pre-statehood period and large number of Bengali migrant workers reached the State on the eve of early statehood for different developmental works could have been the birth of this language (Nagamese).

2.3. Manipur: Manipur covers an area of 22, 327 sq km with population of 27.2 lakhs as per 2011 census. The State came under the British rule from 1891 till 1947 and after their departure on 14th August 1947; the State was annexed to Indian Union as part 'C' State¹ on 15th October 1949 (Sharma, 2011; 2010). Ultimately, the status of full-fledged statehood was given on 21st January 1972 and became 20th State of Indian Union. Geographically, the State consists of two regions – hill and valley. The former consists of five districts – Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Churachandpur (CC Pur), Chandel and Senapati, with a total area of 20 thousand sq km (9/10th of the State's geographical area), and the latter region covers four districts – Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur, with 2238 sq km of area (1/10th of the State's geographical area). Interestingly, the valley area is inhabited by 61.5 percent of the state's population, and hardly 38.5 percent of the State's population lives in the hill region of 9/10th of State's total geographical area. The community or ethnic group inhabits in the valley is known as *Meitei*, a non-tribe community including Meitei Pangal (*Meitei Muslim*). On the other hand, a total of 33 recognised tribes with other sub-tribes inhabit in the hill areas of Manipur (Hanjabam and Raginibala, 2011). Though different tribes and sub-tribes in the hills speak their own dialects, Manipuri (*Meitei-lol*), the mother tongue of *Meitei* community, is considered as lingua-franca of the State as *Meitei* is the dominant community in the State. Manipur borders with the

¹ Part C states included both the former chief commissioners' provinces and some princely states, and each was governed by a Chief Commissioner appointed by the President of India

nation of Myanmar on the east and the Indian States of Nagaland on the north, Assam and Mizoram on the west, and a portion of Myanmar and Mizoram on the south (refer to Figure 2.b).

3. Development Indicators of the three States

Economic development is a primary and most important driver for overall development of human society. To determine economic development and growth level of these States, the conventional parameters like State Per Capita Income (SPCI) and State Domestic Product (SDP) have been computed in Table 2. As we can see that the state of Mizoram is on the top in terms of both Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of SPCI and SDP with 6.3 percent and 9.1 percent respectively in the last five years (2004-05 to 2008-09). However, Manipur is at the bottom during the same period, as shown by the CAGR of SPCI and SDP with 2.9 percent and 4.9 percent respectively.

Table 2
State Domestic Product and Per Capita Income (at Constant 2004-2005 Prices)

States	Component*	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	CAGR#
Manipur	SPCI	18.64	19.48	19.43	20.11	21.17	2.9
	SDP	4603	4907	4992	5267	5652	4.9
Nagaland	SPCI	30.27	33.07	35.07	37.32	38.92	6.4
	SDP	5421	5986	6454	6978	7399	8.1
Mizoram	SPCI	24.66	25.83	26.31	28.47	31.92	6.3
	SDP	2400	2577	2693	2988	3437	9.1

Source: Author's estimation from Economic Survey (2010)

Note: * SPCI is in term of rupees in thousand (Rs in '000) and SDP is in term of Rs in Crore

#CAGR implies Compound Annual Growth Rate (in %).

With the emergence of modernisation and growth of socio-economic status of the people, the requirement of energy has also diversified from the traditional (fire-wood, biomass, dung, etc.) to modern modes, especially towards electricity. Therefore, in this modern world, electricity plays not only an important role of sustainable development, but also it is considered as a parameter of overall development (Burney, 1995). In the findings of some scholars (like, Qurashi and Hussain, 2005; Altinay and Karagol, 2005) found that the electricity is an essential commodity for promoting living standards and the level of material progress of a country, and the

very living standard or development is often measured in terms of per capita electricity consumption. Table 3 shows the level of per capita electricity consumption in three States. From this parameter as well, Mizoram is placed on the top with per capita electricity consumption of 377 kWh in 2009-10, compared to 218 kWh for Nagaland and 240 kWh for Manipur. The growth rate of per capita electricity consumption of Mizoram during the twenty-nine years has been 15.6 percent, and is above the other two States.

Table 3
Per Capita Electricity Consumption (in kWh)

States	1981-82	1989-90	1999-00	2009-10	Growth Rate
Nagaland	34.2	85.6	84.7	218.0	6.6
Manipur	7.9	79.5	69.5	240.2	12.5
Mizoram	5.6	65.0	120.8	377.0	15.6

Source: Collected from Statistical Handbooks of the respective states, Economic Survey (2011)

The third dimension of development indicator included in this paper is the infrastructure disparity index, which shows disparity of infrastructure in the states. Availability of adequate infrastructure, especially road and communication facilities, is the pre-condition for sustainable economic and social development (WDR, 1994) in a society, and often, the very development is impeded by the low quality and limited accessibility or disparity of infrastructure (Klytchnikova and Lokshin, 2011).

Table 4 depicts the intra-state disparity of infrastructure, quality and quantity of road network of the States. The coefficient of variation (CV) of intra-state disparity of infrastructure index in Mizoram is placed at the lowest level with 26.07 percent (lower the CV, lower the disparity). As for Manipur, it is found to be on the top in term of disparity with 49.46 percent of CV. It implies that the disparity rate (49.46%) in Manipur is very high compared to Mizoram (26.07%) and Nagaland (with 30.59%). In term of road length per 100 sq km as well, the disparity index of Mizoram is at the bottom with CV of 43.33 percent. However, Manipur falls at the top of disparity of this index (with CV of 80.78 percent). This indicates that Mizoram is much better than other two states in terms of infrastructure indices.

Table 4
Intra-state Disparity of Road Network and Overall Infrastructure Index

States	Component	Road Length /100km ² *	Surfaced Road % Total Road*	Intra-state Disparity of Infrastructures**
Manipur	Mean	15.53	1.60	39.35
	Std. Dev.	12.54	0.21	19.46
	C.V. (%)	80.78	12.88	49.45
Nagaland	Mean	15.82	0.56	33.74
	Std. Dev.	7.82	0.37	10.32
	C.V. (%)	49.44	66.00	30.59
Mizoram	Mean	8.09	1.08	27.15
	Std. Dev.	3.51	0.41	7.08
	C.V. (%)	43.33	38.15	26.07

Source: Singha (2011)

Note: * while constructing indices of Road length and Surfaced road (column 3 and 4), the weightage assigned by DoNER (length and surfaced road) are 24 and 2 respectively; ** 21 components (7 major and 14 sub-components) have been included while constructing State Infrastructure Index (SII), given in column 5.

Coming to the conflict issues, Table 5 shows the magnitude of insurgency related fatalities. From the Table one can easily identify that the insurgency related fatalities or conflict in Manipur is figured out as an exceptionally high. The number of killings of human lives due to the recent spurt of armed conflicts has reached to death of 5767 people in 20 years from 1992 till March 4, 2012. However, the number of fatalities in Mizoram is nearly zero. The state of Mizoram has shown excellent performance in terms of law and order condition, not only in NER but also in the country as a whole. Similarly, Nagaland is also seen as a settled State in the aftermath of ceasefire agreement between insurgent groups and the government, especially from 1997¹. The economic condition of Nagaland has also increased significantly in the recent years. Using above parameters, the state of Manipur can be categorised as a crippled State. Therefore, it is very important to analyse why the immediately neighbouring states with similar geo-polical characters (Mizoram and Nagaland) have got different development trajectories. Why has Manipur been different from other two states and become an epicentre of violence at present?

¹ Though there were some instances of inter-group (intra-state) conflict, Nagaland also became peaceful after entering into cease-fire agreement between Naga insurgent group and Government of India in 1997

Table 5
Insurgency Related Killings in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram (1992-2012)

Year	Manipur				Nagaland			
	Civilian	Security	Terrorist	Total	Civilian	Security	Terrorist	Total
1992	84	30	51	165	34	33	29	96
1993	266	91	66	423	62	43	68	173
1994	189	98	63	350	110	26	56	192
1995	183	64	74	321	80	25	108	213
1996	117	65	93	275	144	48	112	304
1997	233	111	151	495	104	38	218	360
1998	87	62	95	244	26	14	72	112
1999	89	64	78	231	26	4	118	148
2000	93	51	102	246	13	4	84	101
2001	70	25	161	256	25	2	76	103
2002	36	53	101	190	5	2	29	36
2003	27	23	148	198	3	3	31	37
2004	40	41	127	208	35	1	22	58
2005	138	50	143	331	9	0	31	40
2006	107	37	141	285	10	1	81	92
2007	150	40	218	408	20	0	88	108
2008	131	13	341	485	42	2	101	145
2009	77	18	321	416	7	0	11	18
2010	26	8	104	138	0	0	3	3
2011	25	10	30	65	7	0	8	15
2012*	8	9	20	37	1	0	12	13
Total	2176	963	2628	5767	763	246	1358	2367

Year	Mizoram			
	Civilian	Security	Terrorist	Total
1992	0	0	0	0
1993	0	0	0	0
1994	0	0	0	0
1995	0	0	0	0
1996	0	0	0	0
1997	0	4	0	4
1998	0	0	0	0
1999	0	0	0	0
2000	2	5	0	7
2001	4	7	1	12
2002	0	0	0	0
2003	0	1	0	1
2004	0	1	0	1
2005	2	0	0	2
2006	1	0	1	2
2007	2	0	6	8
2008	0	4	1	5
2009	1	0	0	1
2010	0	0	0	0
2011	1	0	0	1
2012*	0	0	0	0
Total	13	22	9	44

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (2012)

Note: * Data till March 4, 2012.

4. Why is the Manipur different from Other Two States? ■■■■■

As mentioned above, development processes cannot be preceded unless and until social, political and cultural institutions are placed in proper order. Though, it is very difficult to quantify, the role of these non-economic factors or institutions has been recognised as very significant factors for attaining sustainable economic development. Chaotic social and political institutions often translated into violence or social upheavals in NER. Consequently, it leads to negative impact on States' economic condition (Bohlken and Sergenti, 2010). It means, violence breaks down economic structure and impoverishes society. At present, in NER, a large section of people are living in the web of insecurities which are not created by them. Delving deeper into the causes, one could ascertain that this is in fact largely caused by failure of the state (Acharya, *et al.* 2011).

Mizoram and Nagaland had been the victims of a large number of conflicts, ranging from self-determination to ethnic clashes and so on, for over five to six decades. But Mizoram has been largely peaceful since the signing of the *Mizo Accord*¹ in 1986 and the state of Nagaland has also almost settled down from late 1990s after the signing of ceasefire agreement between India Government and warring armed groups. However, the magnitude of upheaval and conflict in Manipur has been increasing day-by-day, is primarily caused by a number of factors like human rights violence, insurgency movement, religion, and political autonomy movement, etc. The deployment of over-sized security forces in the state and mushrooming of insurgent groups has also had many adverse impacts in the State (CICS, 2005). All these issues have often resulted to fatality of lives in the region or State.

For the present paper, blockades in the National Highways (bandhs), protests, ethnic violence, and insurgency related fatalities, etc, are considered as *social upheaval* in Manipur. It is one of the most important factors that holds the development to ransom in the State now (Sharma, 2011; Bohlken and Sergenti, 2010; CICS, 2005). The causes of the underlying continuous upheaval situations in Manipur in the recent past can be categorised broadly into three major heads in the section 4.1 to 4.3.

4.1. Defects of Meitei Community

Meidingu Pamheiba (1708-1747 AD) became the king of *Kangleipak* (earlier name of Manipur) on 23rd August 1708 AD. He was influenced by *Hinduism* and with the help of *Shantidas Gosai*, a preacher from Sylhet, now in Bangladesh, converted himself from the *Sanamahi*, the original religion of Meitei to the *Ramanandi Sect of Vaisnavism*

¹ Mizoram became a peaceful state after signing peace agreement between insurgent group Mizo National Front and Government of India in 1986

(Hinduism) in 1710 A.D, (Tensuba, 1993). He introduced first time the term “Maharaja” in place of “Meidingu or Ningthou” for the King, and *Manipur* in place of *Kangleipak* (Kamei, 1991). King Pamheiba expelled all his *Maichous* (scholars) and people who opposed to this new religion (Hinduism) to far away from the central valley or the kingdom, *Kangla*, the fort situated at the heart of the State capital- Imphal. As an effort to popularise Hinduism and to make it as a state religion, on a full moon day of October (*Wakching* in Meitei), in 1729 AD, he collected all the Holy books (*Puya*) related to *Sanna-Mahi* religion and burnt them completely, devastated the ancient Manipuri (Meitei) scriptures and cultural history. This is known as *Puya-Meithaba* among Meiteis till today and the day is being remembered as *black day* in Manipur every year (Sharma, 2011). King (Meidingu) *Pamheiba* wanted to rewrite the Meitei/Manipuri history in the line with the Hinduism. To intensify further his movement, he levelled the people who defied Hinduism, as *untouchable* or *backward* community. For instances, the ‘*Loi Communities*’ of Manipur which are believed to be the earliest known settlers of Manipur, also known as the *Chakppa*, the ardent followers of the traditional religion (*Sanna-mahi*), were chased out to the far-flung areas by the King (but remained in the valley) on the ground that they refused to embrace Hinduism and levelled them (*Lois*) as degraded community (Sharma, 2011). As they were still remained in the valley, subsequently they assimilated with Meitei Community and slowly converted themselves as well to Hinduism. However, as they were deprived of economic resources for long in the far flung areas, government initiated as affirmative action for alleviation from the backwardness and included them under the Scheduled Castes (SC) list. As the infrastructure condition improves in the valley coupled with reservation for SC, their economic status has raised significantly in the recent decades, and at present, no difference is noticed between the *Loi* and *Meitei* community in Manipur, excepting the SC category.

However, the communities who did not assimilated with the Meitei are the different communities (*tribes*, at present) in the hills. They continued to follow their original religion (e.g. *Tingkao Raguang Chap* of *Kabui* community), and recently converted into *Christianity* after the arrival of British and Christian Missionaries (Singha, 2011). Still, some tribes are practicing their traditional faiths (not Christian) till today. Generally, the socio-economic conditions of the tribes are relatively weaker than the valley (Meitei) due to prolonged neglect of their basic needs, lack of proper infrastructures and economic resources. Like *Loi Communities*, they were also treated as untouchables by the Kings, one after another and subsequently by the Meitei as well, on the same ground. This is the genesis of division between the two communities (Tribe/hill and Meitei/valley), and leads to social upheavals and demands for self-determination, greater autonomy (Hassan, 2007). This idea has also been highlighted by Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005) in all over the world. Using 448 observations, they explored that the religious and ethnic differences are important social cleavages; the social response to this heterogeneity could generate violence and civil war. Besides, not

much care and attention was given by the King of Manipur as well (Hassan, 2007) and despite different reservation policies of job, education, land regulation, etc., their economic and political power were still relatively weaker than the Meitei due to limited presence of the state for long. Tribal organisations believed that they have been excluded and the state government has not been fair in distribution of resources to their areas. The poor condition of educational and health services, adverse economic conditions and poor infrastructure in these areas have often been the source of tribal complaints and their consequent anti-state mobilisation (Hassan, 2006), and led to anti-Meitei movements. They resort to call for economic blockades in the National Highways passing through hill areas, which led to huge economic losses in the State (Shimray, 2004).

Figure 1

a) Agitators burn goods laden trucks; b) A mode of Agitation; c) Stranded trucks on the NH 39



Slowly, the demand for separate States of the tribes has emerged. To trace the origin, the demand for merging *Mao area* (Northern part of Senapati District of Manipur, bordering present Nagaland) into Nagaland was initiated in the pre-statehood period and formed tribal revolutionary movement thereafter (Singh, 2011), but not as strong inclusive of all hills/tribes as of now. As the state is connected with the rest of the country by the two National Highways (NH 39 and NH 53) passing through the hill areas, the economic blockades on these key roads (blockades in NH) has become one of the most effective means of the tribes, to put pressure on the government to redress their grievances (Shimray, 2004). Besides, religious, economic and political factors, the other important factor that helped to divide the two communities – the Meitei and hill is MLR&LR Act 1960 in Manipur¹.

¹ This Act does not allow valley people (Meitei) to buy and own land in the hill

4.2: Dominance over the Land

When *Meitei* insurgent groups (mainly United Nations Liberation Front or UNLF) started fighting for sovereignty or independence of Manipur in the early 1960s, the Naga insurgent group led by National Socialist Council of Nagalim- Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) was also fighting for *Greater Nagaland*, demanded for merging all the Naga dominated districts of Manipur¹ with the present-day Nagaland. With the intensification of Naga integration movement, the polarisation of hill communities into two – Kuki and Naga, and division between hill and valley have deepened (Singh, 2011; Shimray, 2004). However, after realising their unachievable mission, the demand of the Naga integration or merging with present-day Nagaland has now narrowed down to a mere separate administrative arrangement of the community within the Indian framework, but separate from the Manipur government (Singh, 2011; Mentschel, 2007). In nutshell, the complex problems faced by the State can be analysed in few equations:

- i) if the aspiration of NSCN-IM or Naga for separate arrangement for the community or Naga integration is granted, *Kuki* group (equally strong tribal group) will not be remain silent as we have seen 123 days economic blockades in 2011 on the issue of creating the *Sadar Hill* area as a revenue district (refer Figure 2 a).
- ii) At the same time, *Kuki* group is also fighting for independent homeland by bifurcating Churachandpur district and a portion of Senapati district (*Sadar Hill* portion) and Chandel districts from the present-day Manipur (Cline, 2006). If the *Kuki*'s demand is met, will Naga remain silent, as half of the Senapati district (*Naga*'s proposed capital) is losing from their hand (Shimray, 2004)?
- iii) *Hmar* (another tribal group lives in Churachandpur district, bordering Mizoram) is also demanding for merging the district with present-day Mizoram (Rajagopalan, 2008), which *Kuki* claims it as their homeland. This is again resulted in fratricidal clashes, which have then spread into the communities at large.
- iv) Alternatively, if the two major hill communities – both Nagas and Kukis compromise themselves over the issue of *Sadar Hills* area of Senapati district and jointly demand two separate States (one each of *Kuki* and *Naga* respectively) by bifurcating hills from the State, will the *Meitei* be satisfied with the four valley districts – Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur districts? *Meitei* will not leave easily for two reasons. One, as the National Highway (NHs) is passing through the hill areas and control over the NHs will be out of the hands of *Meiteis*. The Highway blockade by the hills/tribes is one of

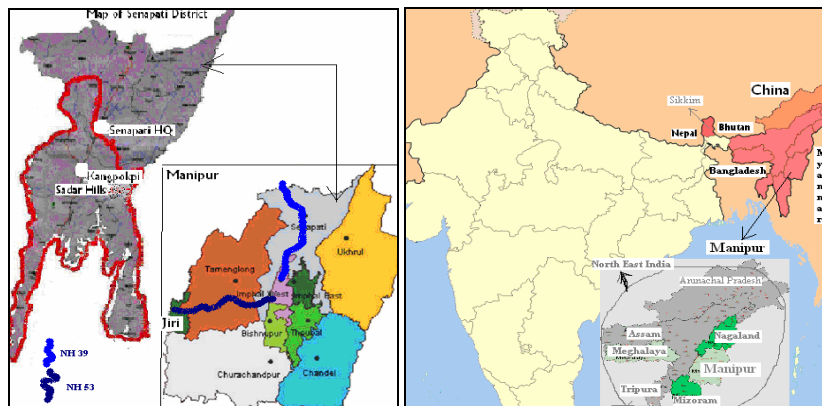
¹ The identity of Nagas of Manipur is still not clear and who (how many tribes) are included under this (*Naga*) broader category

the most difficult problems encountered by Meiteis even the administration is controlled by them. It is the only means of transporting essential commodities (food, petroleum products and life saving drugs, etc.) from the other parts of the world. Secondly, besides operation of insurgent groups in the hills, the dream of independent Manipur is also losing its dream.

- v) If the fourth option (one each state for Naga and Kuki) is granted, two more issues will come up: One, the *Jiribam sub-division* under Imphal East district, where Meitei community dominates (marked as *Jiri* in Fig. 2:a) should also be given a separate State, as it is not possible to reach this sub-division by crossing other two States. Two, if the hill areas (Districts) are separated from the valley, will the thousands of hill people those who have already settled for years in the valley leave the valley, as no Meitei is allowed to own or buy land in the hills under the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (MLR&LR Act 1960) Act?

Figure 2

(a) Disputed Sadar Hill Area; (b) Location Map of Manipur



4.3. Demand for Sovereignty and Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act

With the growth of separatist movement, Manipur was declared as a 'disturbed area' in 1980 (Harriss, 2002) and subsequently the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 (AFSPA) was promulgated. There are allegations of the very Act being misused by the members of the state forces, as the Act allows security forces to kill anybody in mere suspicion of anti-national. Also, the Act permits/allows even the lowest rank of security force (an illiterate Sepoy) to kill anybody on the same ground mentioned above, and no complain can be made against them. Besides killing, there have been

number of cases of rape and enforced disappearances of young children by the state forces (Manoharan, 2012). Therefore, the Act has resulted gross violation of fundamental human rights in Manipur in the last few decades (Das, 2011; Goswami, 2010; Chasie and Hazarika, 2009; Mentschel, 2007), and consequently leads to unprecedented people's uprisings in the State. For instances, the agitations like, self-immolation by student leader like Pebam Chittaranjan, naked demonstration of women agitators and hunger strike by Irom Sharmila Chanu for more than a decade, etc. Besides, many unwanted atrocities have been done by the security forces, e.g. rape and murdered of Thangjam Monorama by paramilitary Assam Rifle (refer to the Figure 3).

Figure 3

(a) Irom Chanu Sharmila- fasting for 11 years against AFSPA; (b) Naked Protest against Rape and Killed of Thangjam Manorama by state Forces; (c) Self-immolation of Student leader, Pebam Chittaranjan against AFSPA; (d) Thangjam Monoram, was raped and killed by state Forces on 11 July 2004



However, the very draconian Act (AFSPA) is not practically operated in the hill districts of Manipur, though it was enforced in the hill area initially. Knowing the consequences and with the growing demand of the civil organisations, the Government of India set up a five-member committee in 2004 under the Chairmanship of Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy, former Judge of the Supreme Court of India. The committee submitted its report in 2005, and recommended for the repeal of the Act (Part IV, pages 67-81). But the government has not removed this Act, and continues to deploy excess security forces at the ratio of 1:40 (1 security personnel for every 40 civilians) in the State (ICFFR, 2009). Due to the defects of the Act *per se* and misused of it by the security forces, the problem of insurgency and its related fatalities have increased significantly in the last two decades.

Despite the existence of this draconian Act since 1980, violence and insurgency movement has not been brought down till date (CICS, 2005). Still, the government entrusted the security forces to play an interventionist role in the State and officially, the remaining wings of the Government do not have a definite role in the issue (Maring, 2008). In other words, according to Shimray (2004), the current socio-political problem in the region leads to the threatening of India's internal security. In spite of socio-ethnic sensitivity and political instability, the concerned issues are not addressed in political and democratic terms but with the might of armed forces (Acharya, *et al.*, 2011). Excess militarization with no protection of the people, limited development initiative and unequal administration mechanism, leads to self-alienation and frustration of the people. Prolonged deployment of the security forces and the longevity of extremism in the State often reinforce popular perception of government's insincerity in resolving the conflict is also well acknowledged (Hussain and Deka, 2011).

5. Why is the Upheaval not Solved?

The complex issues that have been confronted by the State while taking development initiatives in the State can be summarized as follows— *Meitei* armed groups seeking an independent homeland (pre-merger status), opposed to the territorial divisions demanded by Naga and Kuki groups (Robinson, 2005) is getting momentum in the recent years. Goals of the various *Meitei* movements generally are similar to those of other groups already discussed. However, the different dimension of *Meiteis* (Manipur) from other two (Nagaland and Mizoram) is that the *Meitei* armed groups are fighting not only for a separate homeland, but also a return to traditional religion, cultural practices including eliminating the Indian script for writing. We have witnessed some significant movements that have attempted to restore the traditional *Meitei* religion, the *Senamahi* and *Meitei script* in the recent years (Cline, 2006).

They (*Meitei* armed groups) have also been trying to make a unified command by integrating all the armed groups of North Eastern Region of India (e.g. ULFA of

Assam, NLFT of Tripura, etc.) to fight against the government of India for a common goal of separation/freedom from India. This strategy is noticed by the Government of India as well [e.g. India's national events like Independence Day on August 15, Republic Day on January 26 are being boycotted by the major armed groups of NER]. Above all, no Meitei armed group has shown their willingness to have political negotiation (to settle within the Indian framework) with the government in the five decades of insurgency movement (Cline, 2006). Also, some of the major Meitei armed groups have sought to project a *pan-Mongoloid identity*, and they have built linkages with other groups across the boundaries in this context (Rajagopalan, 2008). It is a great threat to India's internal security and integrity. From the geographical perspective as well, the NER (seven States out of eight, Sikkim), including Manipur is connected by a narrow strip of land approximately 20 km at Siliguri of West Bengal State and the region shares border with China, Myanmar and Bangladesh (breeding ground of several insurgent groups of NER). Therefore, integrating all the major insurgent groups of the region (NER) might have adverse impact for the security of the country.

However, the tribal armed groups of Manipur (Kuki and Naga) do not cooperate to the movement of integration of the insurgent groups of NER initiated by the Meitei armed groups, as they are against the Meiteis, demanding for separation from the State or Meitei, but not from India (Singh, 2011). Knowing these realities and keeping the threats posed to the nation in mind, Government of India has devised a mechanism to use one community against the other. Therefore, the communal conflicts in Manipur have increased significantly in the recent past. For instance, a number of tribal armed groups are actively collaborating with Indian troops against the Meitei insurgent groups (Bhaumik, 2007). Probably, this is the reason why, security forces do not interfere in the communal and fractional conflicts in the State (Singh, 2011), and conveniently centre (government) does washed off their hands in this regard, and saying that it is a "state affairs" (Mentschel, 2007). Evidences are numerous. To mention a few – altogether 800 people were killed, 480 wounded and 5713 families had been displaced during the bloody Kuki-Naga conflict in the 1990s. In 1997, in the Kuki-Paite clash, altogether 162 people were killed, 93 got injured, 71 were kidnapped and 3521 houses were burnt (Hussain and Phanjoubam 2007). In 2011, Manipur was cut off from the rest of the world for straight four months (123 days) due to the economic blockades called on by Kuki and counter blockade called on by Naga over the issue of territorial dominance in Sadar Hill area of Senapati district (Bachaspatimayum, 2012). The present divide and rule policy of the government further aggravates and multiplies the social upheaval (Sharma, 2008). The Government of India has been making dual commitment to different communities in the State, and plays delaying tactics in dealing with the conflicts in the region (Singh, 2011). On the other hand, the Naga community accused the

Central government of appeasing the Meiteis and blamed for not settling the Naga issue for the sake of Meiteis (Shimray, 2004).

Initiative of State legislature on the issues is concerned; they are hypnotized by the party high command from the centre (Delhi). It is also clear that some of the social groups and leaders have benefited from the high levels of subsidies paid out by the centre (Harriss, 2002). For instances, at present, most of the contract works meant for development of Manipur are jointly carried out both by armed groups and their leaders (involved directly or indirectly). Therefore, very often, the State government is often termed as a percentage government in Manipur. They cannot be called as *people's representatives* as the votes can be bought by money and muscle power. Citizens in the State do not rely on the present representative election system. For instance, in 2007, the 9th Manipur Legislative Assembly election was decided by 37 percent of voters only, and it was also bought by the means mentioned above (Bachaspatimayum, 2012). The neglect of the society by the government (both centre and state) led to social upheaval and its burden is now being faced by the country (Hassan, 2007). However, by and large, the other two States (Mizoram and Nagaland) have moved towards the peace and its result is visible now.

6. Recommendations

Richards and Bekele (2011) explored that mere improvement in the state's delivery services *per se* is unlikely to alter the conflict situation significantly without addressing its causes directly. Therefore, after analysing the complex equations of social upheaval of Manipur, we can arrive at a conclusion that the problem is not a permanent and irreparable one. Nash Equilibrium condition can be achieved if the political will and institutional structures are placed in proper order. To curtail social upheaval and frequent economic blockades in Manipur, some of the possible recommendations are given below.

- As there is limited road network connectivity in the State – between hill and valley, and inter- state connectivity (Manipur and other neighbouring States), development of road network in the State is need of the hour. As there is only one road (NH 39) linking the State with the rest of the country and it is often interrupted by the hill communities for their various demands, the need for operationalising other two highways (NH 53 and State Highway 150) is very essential, i.e. 1) National Highway 150 (approx. 350 km) connecting Kohima, Jessami of Nagaland; Ukhrul, Imphal, CCpur, Tipaimuk of Manipur; and Aizwal of Mizoram, 2) National Highway No. 53 (approx. 240 km) that connects Imphal (Capital of Manipur) and Silchar in Southern Assam. Definitely, this can bring better communication/connectivity among the States and will bring inter-personal relationship between the hill and valley. Similarly, the timely completion of the ongoing construction of railway line (approx. 150 km) that

connects Jiribam, a border town of Manipur near Cachar district of Southern Assam to Toupul of Manipur, about 35 kms in the west of Imphal (Capital city of Manipur) is very important, not only for transportation facilities but also for better communication and accessibility of the people. This would definitely relief the people of Manipur from the clutches of economic blockades to a great extent, and brings varied communities closer to one another. Even, Meitei may allow the demand of hills (separate arrangement for the hills), provided the rail and road communication is well developed and it is ensured that the hill people do not disturbed the highways.

- The *Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958* is to be repealed permanently from the State. People of this State should be given a right to life. Government should initiate peaceful means to solve the conflicts and public demands of Manipur. Thousands of innocent people in the State have been victimised by this Act. Instead of imposing this inhuman Act, government should create infrastructural facilities, income and employment generating facilities as a sign of love, belongingness, and oneness to the people of Manipur. Country's policy of *unity in diversity* should be translated with an appropriate institutional mechanism, honest approach for development of Manipur with maximum equality. It will definitely reciprocate positively from the people of Manipur.

- Government (centre) should be honest and have strong will to solve the institutional drawbacks that have been hampering the State's overall development for long. Government should not apply dual policy for appeasing few section of the society. Often, genuine movements of the civil society are being politicized and consequently, the movements get lost on the way. For instance, Oinam (2008) confirmed that how the leaders of two civil organisations in Nagaland and Manipur—Naga Hoho and the Ima Keithel women organisation respectively succumbed to the pressure exerted by the contending forces. As a result of which, basic objectives of the movement have been distorted on the way. Therefore, instead of applying divide and rule policy, government should extend unconditional developmental works, irrespective of individual community interest, irrespective of political party. At the same time, civil society should also support the initiatives taken up by the government.

- Modification of MLR&LR Act 1960 is important, allowing valley people (non-tribes of Manipur) to live in the hills is also an urgent need of the government so as to bring about security of life and peaceful co-existence among the varied groups of people, between hill and valley. Till date, the Act does not allow valley people to live or own land in the hill area, while hill communities can live and own land in any part of the State. For this purpose, Meitei (dominant group) should also come down from the class (community) hierarchy and do away the religious differences, especially the segregation of community on the basis of caste and religion.

- Warring communities and the armed groups should also understand that the separation is not the panacea for the problems faced by them. Development cannot be determined by a mere demarcation of geographical area. Also, the demand for autonomy or separate arrangement is not ensure that there will not be any further sub-division of the State. We should not forget that there is *centre-periphery* difference anywhere under the sun. Therefore, alternative ways are to be explored for sustainable development of the society. For this, education should be given at the precedence in the State.

7. Conclusion

Despite some basic commonalities, India's North Eastern-most three immediate neighbouring states – Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur have got asymmetric development performances due to asymmetric institutional structures. Of the States, Manipur is quite different from other two and experiencing nearly a complete breakdown of its institutional structure in the recent years, especially in 1990s. Though, the other two states of Mizoram and Nagaland had been the victims of a large number of conflicts, ranging from self-determination to ethnic clashes and so on, for over five to six decades, they have been largely peaceful since the signing of the *Mizo Accord* in 1986 and ceasefire agreement in Nagaland from late 1990s.

However, the magnitude of upheaval and conflict in Manipur has been increasing day-by-day, is primarily caused by divide and rule of the government. The deployment of over-sized security forces in the state and mushrooming of armed groups has also had many adverse impacts in the State. All these issues have often resulted to fatality of lives in the region or state. The conflicts and uprisings could have been solved in Manipur long before if India embraces the State as its own part through economic development policies.

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