Conflict Situation in Contemporary Manipur

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Abstract:

The state of Manipur can fittingly be termed ‘Miniature India’ taking into consideration the substantive resemblances with the kind of equation heartland India has with the rest of the country in terms of diversity in ethnic composition and demographic variations. Manipur has been caught in conflicts of different kinds and in its multiple. The British during their colonial rule in Manipur exploited the ethnic diversity as their policy. The seeds of ethnic acrimony were sown that was to be blossomed in the contemporary times during the period of British rule. Colonial legacy revisited after Manipur became a part of India. As its aftermath consequences, Manipur had her first experience of considerably large inter-community clashes in the form of Hmar-Kuki Clashes (1959-1960). Afterwards, in the passing decade of the twentieth century, there were series of violent ethnic clashes which have caused huge casualties both in terms of human and material loss. Massive secessionist and insurgency movements based on nationality questions which were to be seen in the later years were sprouted during the first two decades of the merger. And also the state has witnessed splintering of armed groups and factional infighting with large scale casualties cutting across community lines. Thus, the conflict between the state and the non-state armed opposition groups, ethnic conflict between and among different communities and fratricidal factional infighting between different armed groups are the specificities that gives Manipur a stamp of being in conflict situation.

Keywords: Clashes, Conflict, Hmar, India, Insurgency, Kuki, Manipur, Meitei, Naga, Paite.

Introduction:

Many scholars have defined conflict in various ways. Even though, there is a plentiful of definition concerning conflict, it cannot be said with certainty that a single definition of conflict is enough and all-inclusive. LA Coser define Social conflict as a ‘struggle between opponents over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources.’¹ He, in his later publication describes conflicts as struggles between two or more people over values, or competition for status, power, or scarce resources.² According to the glossary of Harvard Law School, ‘Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or actions of one of more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. Conflict can arise between members of the same group, known as intragroup conflict, or it can occur between members of two or more groups, and involve violence, interpersonal discord, and psychological...
tension, known as intergroup conflict. Conflict in groups often follows a specific course. Routine group interaction is first disrupted by an initial conflict, often caused by differences of opinion, disagreements between members, or scarcity of resources. At this point, the group is no longer united, and may split into coalitions. This period of conflict escalation in some cases gives way to a conflict resolution stage, after which the group can eventually return to routine group interaction once again.\textsuperscript{13} A conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur . . . one party is interfering, disrupting, obstructing, or in some other way making another party's actions less effective.\textsuperscript{4} Conflict, as opined by Clinton. F. Fink occurs in any social situation or process in which two or more social entities are linked by at least one form of antagonistic psychological relation or at least one form of antagonistic interaction.\textsuperscript{5} M. A. Rahim defined conflict as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e. individual, group, organization, etc.).\textsuperscript{6} Noting on the causality of conflict, Gary. T Furlong says, it is caused when a boundary and its norms are challenged, threatened, or circumvented which requires an intervention in order to resolve it.\textsuperscript{7} Lynn Sandra defined conflict as ‘the opposition of forces.’\textsuperscript{8} According to Michael. S. Lund Conflict prevails when two or more parties perceive that their interests are incompatible, express hostile attitudes, or...pursue their interests through actions that damage the other parties. These parties may be individuals, small or large groups, and countries.\textsuperscript{9} Michael Nicholson is of the opinion that “conflict exists when two people wish to carry out acts which are mutually inconsistent. They may both want to do the same thing...or they may want to do different things where the different things are mutually incompatible...A conflict is resolved when some mutually compatible set of actions is worked out. The definition of conflict can be extended from individuals to groups (such as states or nations), and more than two parties can be involved in the conflict. The principles remain the same.”\textsuperscript{10} Mayer Barnard defines conflict “as a set of perceptions, conflict is a belief or understanding that one’s own needs, interests, wants, or values are incompatible with someone else’s...Conflict also involves an emotional reaction to a situation or interaction that signals a disagreement of some kind...Conflict also consists of the actions that one take to express their feelings, articulate their perceptions, and get their needs met in a way that has the potential for interfering with someone else’s ability to get his or her needs met.”\textsuperscript{11} From the definitions given in the preceding chapters, the apposite definition of conflict is more or less relative and depends on one’s lived experience and situation. Conflict may appear as a state or situation to some, while for other, conflict may be conceived as a behaviour or process. It gives a salient characteristics of conflict situation. Incompatibility between and among the parties is also found to be common in most of these definitions. Conflict could also be an armed struggle or clash between organized groups within a nation or between nations in order to achieve limited political or military objectives. Although regular forces are often involved, irregular forces frequently predominate. Conflict often is protracted, confined to a restricted geographic area, and constrained in weaponry and level of violence. Within the state, military power in response to threats may be exercised in an indirect manner while supporting the other instruments of national power. Limited objectives may be achieved by the short, focused, and direct application of force.\textsuperscript{12} Even though many global bodies and independent groups attempt to monitor the situation of ongoing conflicts, the definitions of war, conflict, armed struggle, armed violence, revolution, terrorism and other terms which describe violent opposition between states or armed organized groups, are not precise enough to distinguish completely one from the other. For example, the word terrorism is used indifferently by many governments to delegitimize every kind of armed revolt and at the same time by many rebel groups too to delegitimize the armed repression of the government Conflict can exist at a variety of levels: intrapersonal conflict (divergent thoughts and inconsistency in the mind of an individual when he or she tries to make a decision), interpersonal (disagreement between two persons), community conflict (quarrel between two ethnic communities), intra-state conflict (like civil wars), international conflict (like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan), environmental resources conflict (the war in Iraq which may be seen as a manifestation of conflict for control over huge oil resources in the gulf countries ), ideological conflict (conflict between the capitalists and the communists), religious conflict
differences between the doctrines of Islam and Christianity, the conflict between the Islamic nations and Western countries may also be considered as a prodigy of religious conflict), diplomatic conflict (like the gulf of difference one sees between the diplomatic contentions of India and Pakistan with regard to the issue of Kashmir for mobilizing the international community) etc.

The Arab-Israel conflict is a historic conflict and it may also be regarded as a conflict between Arab and Israeli interests. The Catholic-Protestant conflict in Northern Ireland is a notable example of. Historic conflict. Many conflicts in the world have a supposedly racial or ethnic basis including the conflicts in Kosovo, Rwanda, Somalia etc. Another type of conflict is the conflict between government and guerrilla groups or groups engaged in asymmetric warfare.

The United Nations Organization (UNO) at the later part of nineteen forties, declared war of all forms illegitimate except the wars of defence and wars sanctioned by the UN Security Council and the laws of war existed carrier became irrelevant. The international Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) coined the term international humanitarian law by the mid twenty century to replace the laws of war. Since then wars of all forms carne to be popularly known by the term armed conflict.

According to the interpretation of ICRC, an international armed conflict involves the armed forces of at least two states in the conduct of armed hostilities. A non-international armed conflict is a confrontation within the territory of one state between the regular armed forces and identifiable armed groups, or between armed groups. Internal disturbances occur when the state uses armed force to restore and maintain order, without there being a full-fledged armed conflict. Internal tension occurs when, in the absence of internal disturbances, force is used as a preventive measure to maintain law and order.13

As far as armed conflict is concerned, even defining the same is not free from conflicting interpretations due to clashing national and regional imperatives and different compulsions and conflict of interest between two countries. Wallenstein, Peter and Margareta Sollertherg observed: “An armed conflict is a contested incompatibility which concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths.” 14

An armed conflict may be international or internal (national). In international armed conflict, the combatants belong to two different countries whereas in internal armed conflict the combatants belong to the same country. In case of international armed conflicts there is not much contention while terming a war or war like situation between two nations as an international armed conflict as in the cases of the international armed conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, in case of internal armed conflict, different perceptions are developed many a time. One group would like to term a secessionist armed struggle as internal armed conflict, the activists of the movement are appreciated as a force to be reckoned with and their activity is justified as martyrs’ duty for a genuine cause of self-determination as envisaged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations Organization. On the contrary, the other group who does not subscribe the former school of thought would definitely have termed it a law and order problem, created by insurgents and sometimes by terrorists.

According to Dr. Banerji Chaka, Legal Officer, ICRC, South Asia Delegation, New Delhi, the benchmark for the armed violence to qualify as ‘armed conflict’ is based on the criteria given hereunder:15

- Recognition by the international community: The armed violence in a province, despite continuing uninterrupted for significant spell with huge human casualties remains a mere ‘law and order’ problem without the recognition by the international community as armed conflict.

- Magnitude of the conflict: Sometimes the casualties in terms of human lives lost and properties destructed due to armed violence have been so voluminous that international bodies and powerful nations had no other option, but to recognise the prevailing state of affairs as armed conflict.

**Manipur: Demographic Profile:**

Northeast India is a homeland of diverse ethnic communities. Primordial mobilization and ethnic nationalism had resulted to the dismemberment of Assam. To cite an example, the states of Nagaland (1963), Mizoram (1972) and Meghalaya (1972) have been created by ceding out territories from Assam. It set into motion a trend of ethnic groups aspiring and asserting demands for their own
separate homelands. Manipur, a state in Northeast India bounded on the east and south by ‘Upper Burma’, on the west by ‘Cachar’ district of Assam and the north by the state of Nagaland also has several communities and tribes found all over the state either exclusively confined or scattered or co-existing. Manipur can aptly be called ‘Miniature India’ considering the substantive similarities with the kind of equation mainland India has with the rest of the country in terms of multiplicity in ethnic composition and demographic variations.

Manipur has a total land area of 22,327 sq. kilometers with a population of 2,855,794 2011. The area of the plain is approximately 2,230 sq. kilometers and the remaining 20,097 sq. kilometers are hills. Nine-tenths of the state’s area has been reserved for the scheduled tribes as the non-tribal and Meiteis are not allowed to buy land in the hills. Manipur is inhabited by the Meiteis, Meitei-Pangals (Manipur Muslims), Mayangs (people coming from other regions of India), Nepali and tribal population which comprises of thirty-three recognized scheduled tribes and some smaller sub-tribes still demanding constitutional recognition as separate tribes. The thirty-three recognized scheduled tribes in the state are – Aimol, Anal, Angami, Any Kuki tribe, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Kharam, Kom, Koirao, Koireng, Lamkang, Mao, Maram, Maring, Any Mizos (Lushai), Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Poumai Naga, Purum, Ralte, Sema, Simte, Suhte, Tangkhul, Tarao, Thadou, Vaipehe and Zou. The ethnic diversity in the region, over the period of years, has more or less been manifested in the form of fragmentation since the (Indian) post-independence era.

Colonial Policy of Ethnic Divide:
The British colonized Manipur after her defeat in the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891. British during their colonial rule in Manipur exploited the ethnic diversity as their policy by allowing the valley to be administered by the Meitei king and the Hill tribes by the British political agent, by indiscriminately categorizing the tribál population into two – the Nagas and the Kukis and using one against the other. Historically speaking, the usual practice of divide and rule in the consolidation over different ethnic tribal groups of Manipur had been the cornerstone of the British policy towards Manipur’s hill tribes. In this way British colonial forces had first released the ‘genie’ to pursue ‘divide and rule’ policy.

The Kuki Rebellion: 1917-1919 and Jadonang Movement: 1930-32:
The maneuvering of the British colonial masters during the Kuki rebellion of 1917-19 and the Jadonang movement of 1930-32 provides ample evidences of using one against the other in the effort to subdue them. The Kuki rebellion (1917-1919) candidly defied the colonial British design erupted due to forced labour recruitment policy of the government to raise a labour corps for the allied forces during the First World War. According to LalDena, the military operation carried out by the British imperialists is one of the costliest they had ever taken since the great revolt of 1857. The Kuki rebellion was followed by Kabui rebellion (1930-32). It was launched under the leadership of Haipou Jadonang, a Kabui from Kambiron of Tamenglong district in Manipur. It was essentially a revivalist and anti-British in character. During the Jadonang movement also ‘Kuki scouts’ were used in containing it. The colonial policy of Kuki settlement also strained the inter-ethnic relations. In 1840, Mc Culloch, the then Political Agent, purposively adopted the policy of allowing the settlement of Kukis on the frontlines and even among the Nagas. The dual purpose of Kuki settlement in and on the frontiers of Manipur was that the war like Kukis has to act as a buffer first against the Burmese and second against the recalcitrant Nagas and Lushai tribes” This was the time when the seeds of ethnic acrimony were sown that was to be blossomed in the contemporary times.

Colonial Legacy Revisited:
The post British colonial state of Manipur embarked on a journey towards democratic governance and tried to reconsolidate the plural forces through the reintegration of hill ethnic communities by electing a 53 member assembly in the election (1948) under

the provisions of the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 which was drafted with Kuki and Naga representatives as well. After merger (to India), Manipur became a ‘Part C’ state and was granted statehood after a long gap in 1972. At such a political vacuum created by the absence of representative assembly following Merger different conflicting demands such as demand for statehood, independent Manipur, integration to Lushai Hills, Naga integration and independence rise to prominence.

**Hmar-Kuki Clashes (1959-1960):**

As its aftermath consequences, Manipur had her first experience of considerably large inter-community clashes in the form of Hmar-Kuki Clashes (1959-1960). The post independence Government of India (GoI) introduced scheduled lists for certain tribes and castes of the country and all the then tribes under Kuki ethnic group got separate recognition in the scheduled list under the constitution of India in 1956. After this, political formation in the hill areas of Manipur assumed narrow community interests and it consequently led to the emergence of tribe-wise political parties like the Hmar National Council, the Vaiphei National Organization, the Zou National Congress, etc. Suprisingly, while driving out the non-Thadou tribes from the Kuki fold, the Thadou political leadership still clung to the term Kuki as its common nomenclature and adopted a policy of re-Kukiazation of the erstwhile Kuki tribes. One of the fundamental causes of the Hmar-Kuki Clashes in 1960 was the direct outcome of this policy. Another factor responsible for the Hmar-Kuki conflict was the question of re-grouping of different tribes of Manipur into two groups, namely, Naga group and Kuki group. Disturbed by the rising Naga movement, the then Manipur administration perhaps felt the necessity of regrouping the hill tribes into Naga or Kuki and submitted the strange proposal namely, the regrouping of all the non-Naga tribes of Manipur as Kukis to the union government for endorsement. Any non-Naga tribes unwilling to identify themselves as Kukis were to be regarded as is purpose, ‘Nagas’ and treated as ‘Naga Hostiles’. As a matter of fact, this issue came up sometime in the month of October, 1959 for secret discussion and decision and the question was said to have come up at the instance of the union government. For this purpose, the Manipur administration invited public opinion of all tribes concerned as to whether they would join either of the two groups - Naga or Kuki.

The Hmars strongly protested the proposal for regrouping the tribes in Manipur into Kuki or Naga on the grounds that – the Hmars never called themselves even from their forefathers and would never do so in future; the term ‘Kuki’ was wrongly given to them much against their will, consent or interest by the British officers; and grouping or terming various communities as Kuki or Naga against their consent was quite unconstitutional and was clearly against the fundamental rights conferred to them by the Indian constitution and it was therefore legally objectionable. Coupled with it, the movement for creation of Kuki state by forming Kuki National Volunteer (KNV) and also imposing ‘Kuki fee’ of Rs. 10 per household among the various non-Naga tribes. The spark of the Hmar-Kuki communal war was ignited when armed Kuki volunteers first forced Hmar villagers at Rovazawl of Tamenglong district to contribute the ‘Kuki fee’. The demand of the Kuki fee was perhaps based on the notion that many Hmars, though given a separate recognition, were still regarded as the subjects of Singson chiefs and had to pay the fee as a token of their loyalty to the Kuki leadership. On failing to get the fee, the whole village was completely burned down on 08 February 1960. The consequence of this incident was electrical as armed clashes and serious incidents took place not only in Manipur but also in some districts of Assam and Naga Hills and Tuensang areas.

**Manipur in Conflict Situation of Insurgency and Counter Insurgency:**

Massive secessionist and insurgency movements based on nationality questions which were to be seen in the later years were sprouted during the first two decades of the merger. The Naga insurgency with its agenda of dismembering the Naga settled areas of the state for ‘sovereign Nagaland’ began to be felt in the early part of the 1960s. The 1964 ceasefire between GoI and Naga rebels covered three Manipur hill subdivisions of Tamenglong, Mao and Ukhrul. It generated a fear among the people of Manipur that the areas will soon be made part of the Nagaland. It prompted the All Manipur peoples’ Convention (AMPC) to submit a memorandum to the government in protest against the inclusion of cease-fire agreed upon between the GoI and the self styled FGN. There were also similar movements for the integration of Chin Kuki Mizo areas under the inspiration of the Mizo National Front. The United National Liberation Front (UNLF) which claims to be fighting for
restoring the ‘lost sovereignty’ of Manipur also came into existence. By the time statehood was granted to Manipur, the whole of the state was caught in the conflicting situation of insurgency and counter insurgency. By 1980, Manipur came under the shadow of Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 which allows killing of civilians without accountability. Since then the state has been caught in a cycle of violence.21

Conflict Situation due to Armed Outfits in Collision Course:

At present, Manipur has more than 30 armed outfits espousing different objectives some incompatible and in collision course with the other. Just to cite an example, the ‘Kukiland’ demanded by the Kuki outfits include a sizeable portion of the territory which the National Socialist Council of Nagaland Isaac Muivah (NSCN-IM) led Nagas would like to see some day as part of their aspired ‘Nagalim’. Even among the Chin Kuki Mizo outfits, there were many which do not comply with the idea of Kukiland and espoused for a counter homeland. In fact, no solution seems to be at sight as the demands of these myriad of outfits could not be narrowed down to any common denominator. And also the state has witnessed splintering of armed groups and factional infighting with large scale casualties cutting across community lines.

Conflict Situation due to Violent Ethnic Clashes:

Again in the passing decade of the twentieth century, there were series of violent ethnic clashes which have caused huge casualties both in terms of human and material loss. At seeing such never ending clashes, a watchful British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) commentator once described Manipur as “India’s Bosnia”. The first in the fray was the Kuki-Naga clashes which occurred in 1992.


The Kuki-Naga clashes which started in 1992 continued unabated till the year end of 1998. Not all tribes in the Kuki-Chin group were involved in the clashes. It was more or less between the Thadou Kukis and the ‘Nagas of Manipur’. “KNO”22, alleged that progroms against Kuki started only after the National Socialist Council of Nagaland Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM)23 faction was created on 30th April at 5.30 am., 1988, Muivah’s altercations with Khaplang resulted to the killing of a multitude of committed Naga Nationalist. At such juncture, Muivah, fearing Naga retribution initiated an anti-Kuki drive as a diversion scheme. It is quite pertinent that Muivah because of his enmity with Khaplang no longer feels secure to operate from Burma. So, in his quest to establish his base in the hills of Manipur he might have found it inevitable to evict the Kukis as he viewed them with certain skepticism. The trouble started brewing up in the Kuki-Naga relationship. It heightened by May 1992 with increasing cases of torture, killing, mysterious disappearance, and violence against women.

In the meantime, news started reaching Imphal that there were also cases of abduction and mysterious disappearance of Nagas allegedly due to the handiwork of the KNF cadres. The District Magistrate concerned by such development, issued an order in the later part of July, prohibiting the holding of licensed guns and asked the holders to deposit their licensed guns at the Government Custody. The public leaders and the village Chiefs raised their objection against the said order stating that the existing turmoil in Moreh was not an ethnic clash since it was limited only between the NSCN-IM and KNF. Mass exodus of Naga civilians started from Moreh area on 13 July 1992, after KNA served Quit notice to Tangkhuls residing in Moreh on 30th May, 1992.24

Meanwhile, Sadar Hills District Students Union made an announcement of Manipur Bandh on 22 – 23 July 1992 to press the demand for creating a full-fledged Sadar Hills district with the administration jurisdiction boundary of Kangpokpi as its boundary. The bandh was shelved for some time after the state Government had assured to take a decision with due consultation. The said bandh was afterwards observed for forty-eight hours with effect from 1 a.m. of 1st September.25

There were also conflicts between the Kukis and the Nagas at Chandel district over the recruitment of teachers for CADC scheduled to be held on 5 September 1992. On the eve of DPC, the KSO, Chandel called a bandh at the district which resulted into some violent fracas as there was a tussle between the Naga applicants who came for the interview and the Kuki youths at the Kuki dominated areas. Similar incidents of preventing Kuki candidates by the Naga militants at ‘Moreh’26 side were also reported. In fact the crisis worsened further with the involvement of the civilians from both the Kuki and the Naga applicants due to fear of narrowing their chances of getting employment over the recruitment of teachers for CADC. The demand for Sadar Hills was construed by the Nagas as a step
towards the realization of Kukiland. In connection with it NSCN-IM took the stand that it cannot include even an inch of the land of the Nagas. Such stand of the NSCN-IM was later parroted by the overground organisations of the Nagas.

In a short spell, a two day long meeting was organized by the Zeilangrong Youth Front on October 1 and 2 at Noney of Tamenglong district. It resolved to unite the 59 Zeilangrong villages situated at Henglep of Churachandpur district, Sadar Hills of Senapati and Mao West. KNF which has been in existence since 1988 seeks a separate Kukiland within India consisting of the districts of Chandel, Churachandpur parts of Tamenglong and parts of Senapati. NSCN-IM also had the agenda of integrating all Nagas to unite under one common political entity. So, in the process the Naga ultras must have felt the inevitability of either driving out the Kukis or assimilating the intermediary tribes in their fold either through persuasion or coercion. According to NSCN-IM, the active collaboration of the Kukis with the Indian occupation force and the demand for the creation of Kuki homeland by carving out of the Naga territory was the genesis and the crux of the Kuki-Naga clashes. Muivah’s fury against the Kukis is understandable as KNA joined hands with NSCN-K to constitute the IBRF in 1990.Inter-village disputes on boundary questions were there between the Kukis and the Nagas, some of which were left unsolved by the British Colonialism. And ‘ethnic complexion has been injected by the leaders of both the communities - the Kukis and the Nagas to further their political agenda”.

The Government of Manipur during 1992 -1994 was complacent in dealing with the clashes. When RK. Dorendra when he became Chief Minister of Manipur on April 1992, found the state exchequer empty and that the state has already been burdened with a fiscal deficit of approximately Rs. 80 Crore. His ministry was shaky from the word go. It was a coalition and the party wise number of MLAs were - Congress-I: 13, MPP: 11, Janata Dal (defected): 10, Congress S: 03, Manipur Congress (MC): 07, National People’s Party (NPP): 01, KNA:01 and 06 other unattached members. Despite it, his party colleagues and former Chief Ministers Rishang Keishing and RK. Jaichandra commanded more loyalty among some of the MLA’s of the Cong-I, MC and unattached.

According to the then Governor V.K. Nayar, Rishang Keishing presented him a proposal to form an alternative ministry with him as the leader. He further alleged that the CM not only failed to discipline him but also his inaction left the field free for Rishang Keishing to carry out his evil designs of adding and abetting the NSCN-IM and subvert the government and police. Shri R.K. Jaichandra also revolted against the Congress Legislator Party (CLP) and party leadership for failing to display political will and give direction to the administration, and also for not taking action against ministers and legislators for their alleged links with the underground elements. In protest, he threatened to resign from the MPCC(I) on 18 September 1993. It was also the time when the NSCN-IM dictated the Naga MLA’s for resigning from the Dorendro Ministry on or before 31 December 1993. This was also further complimented by the threat of resignation by Rishang Keishing if no actions were taken up by the party high command for removing Dorendro from the Chief Ministership. The President of MPCC(I) also came out openly against the Chief Minister for his non-performance and for sacrificing party interests. The coalition partners were also divided in three groups. Besides, R.K. Ranbir of MPP too wanted to become Chief Minister. Many ministers were not satisfied with the portfolios given to them. Some MLA’s also felt a letdown for not giving ministerial berths. So, the ministry during the period 1992-1993 was a crisis ridden one. In the past also ever since Manipur attain Statehood there never has been any Chief Minister who could complete the full five year term. Some read the Kuki-Naga clash as a consequent fall-out of the inter-ministerial rivalry. R.K. Dorendra, the Chief Minister of Manipur when the trouble started brewing up between the Kukis and the Nagas, himself admitted that there were a lot of pent up feelings amongst both the Naga and Kuki Ministers. He afterwards alleged his ministerial colleagues, Rishang Keishing (Deputy CM), C. Doungel (Finance Minister), Holkhomang Haokip (Power Minister), and Morung Makunga (Minister for Tribal Development), that they were “involved in the ongoing ethnic violence” in the hills. He also stated that he brought it to the knowledge of the then Prime Minister, Narashima Rao. But the latter did not give consent when he expressed his desire of dropping them from the Ministry. As recommended by the Governor the Presidents’ Rule (PR) was imposed on 1 January 1994 by placing the Assembly under animated suspension on the ground that the continuation of the existing Congress - I led Dorendro Ministry would provide an impetus to the extremist activities, fuelling the Kuki-Naga clash


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and further incapacitating the administration and law enforcement agencies. But situation didn’t improve even after the proclamation of PR. Some Kukis even alleged that law and order problem got further worsened during the PR. They alleged that that PR was unable to contain the Kuki-Naga ethnic problem despite the fact that security forces were doubled than before during the time of the popular ministry.

The GoI on its part seems more interested in using the NSCN-IM led Naga’s atrocities against Kukis to discredit the NSCN-IM in the eyes of international community. It led the Kukis to allege that the GoI at that point of time had a purposive interest in continuing the clash as it discredits the ideology of Naga independence.

The state government’s abysmal failure was pronounced not only in containing the clash, but also in redressing the grievances of the affected people. It generated large-scale displacement. Displacement and resettlement pattern shows that it took the form of population exchange as the Kukis, after getting evicted from Naga dominated areas were resettled in Kuki dominated areas and vice versa by the Naga as well. The influx of such displaced population following eviction from their respective villages acted as a catalyst in escalating the tension of the already grave imbroglio.

Those displaced brought with them the stories of inhuman atrocities and brutalities meted out to them by the contesting tribal groups. They afterwards, together with the locals (fellow ethnic group) directed their vengeance to the residents of the area who share the same ethnic affiliation with those who have evicted them. In fact, the potent threat of escalating inter-ethnic tension in relocating displaced persons proved to be fatal in a fragile atmosphere already.

The Kuki-Naga clashes is an extension of the conflict due to claims over a territory as one’s own exclusive homeland by the ethnic armies and resistance to it. The initiatives and efforts by the church leadership to sort out the differences started as early as 1992. But most often, these efforts proved futile and ineffective having no significance as tribal fraternity has a stronger hold than Christian fraternity amongst both the warring groups. In fact, the collateral damage during the clashes includes significant number of churches (in the villages) burnt down by the protagonists of both the involved parties despite their flaunting allegiance to Christianity. The Kukis even found their antagonism with the Nagas reason enough for not taking part in the Christian Centenary Celebration in Manipur in 1996. Initiatives for restoring peace and normalcy by the government and the politicians also could not make much headway and it failed to contribute much towards harmonizing inter-ethnic relations of the warring groups.

The ethnic armies of both the groups involved also have put forward their suggestions to solve the problem. But each point of such suggestions appears sounds very capitulating that it is unacceptable to each other. They discourage the village chiefs and members of their ethnic groups concerned from participating in any of the meetings and organizations aimed at restoring peace. The violation invites punishment even to the extent of death.

CRN formed by coming together of the apex bodies of both the Kukis and Nagas never had a smooth sailing right from its inception. In fact it came to an abrupt end as KIM withdrew itself from the CRN following the passing of a resolution by the UNC demanding inclusion of Manipur in the Indo-Naga Cease-Fire in the later part of 1997. The ethnic armies, though they are micro-level actors, have shown their capacity to influence macro level phenomena as their actions continue to determine certain collective praxis.

Ethnic based civil organizations more or less echo the same voice of their ethnic armies. The process of militarizing civil society by the ethnic army is still an ongoing phenomenon. Even the human rights groups active in the hills took wings on ethnic lines. A feature commonly shared in all such peace initiatives and efforts is that the potential peace-makers are never in peace with each other. During the year 1992 - 1999, 900 people inclusive of 534 Kukis and 266 Nagas were killed while 480 others (257 Kukis and 223 Nagas) sustained serious injuries, and 5724 houses of which 3110 belonged to the Kukis and 2614 to the Nagas were set ablaze.28

Meitei-Meitei Pangal Clash May 1993:

Violent inter-community conflict was also witnessed between the Meiteis and the Meitei-Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) in May 1993. It broke out over a fracas arising out of an arms deal between a newly formed proscribed armed outfit and Muslim arm traffickers.29 It led to the killings of about 100 innocent persons including men, women and children, within a short span of three to four days.30

Kuki-Tamil Clashes June 1995:

It occurred at Moreh in the early part of June, as a fall-out of the rivalry between NSCN-IM and KNF. On 2 June 1995, Naga ethnic armies carried out a raid at Maltunga Kuki village and Malkai Kuki village in which four persons were injured and almost all the houses in both the villages were burned down. As a follow-up action, Kuki ethnic armies abducted a 15-year-old Tamil boy, suspecting him to be an NSCN-IM informer. Tension began when Kuki ethnic armies opened fire on military personnel trying to control a mob of about 500 demonstrators comprising Tamils and Punjabis. In the cross fire that ensued, 13 civilians were killed, of which seven were Tamil and another four were Kukis. 25 others were also seriously injured. The Tamils and the Kuki then went on a burning spree while the fierce encounter continued. The Tamils torched eleven houses of Kuki and the Kuki retaliated by storming the Tamil dominated areas of Moreh Dalpati and set on fire all the houses.\footnote{Kuki-Paite Clashes (1997-1998):}  

Kuki-Paite clashes in the year 1997-1998.\footnote{Kuki-Paite Clashes (1997-1998):} It resulted in the loss of 352 lives, 136 casualties and the burning down of 4670 houses.\footnote{The appropriation of civil spaces and marginalization of mainstream politics by the underground agenda also created a situation of latent conflict as evidenced in the recent fracas arising out of proposed visit of NSCN-IM leader, Muivah in Manipur in the year 2009. Many felt that the prime motive of his visit was to sabotage the process of strengthening grass root democracy in the hills by sabotaging the upcoming Autonomous District Council (ADC) elections in the hills of Manipur. With the major Naga outfits and 18 Chin Kuki Mizo outfits either already in peace talk or the ceasefire, it is mostly the Meitei outfits (espousing the objective of united ‘Sovereign’ Manipur as opposed to the idea of fragmenting the age-old state’s boundary for ‘Naga nation’, Kukiland, Zomiland or for any other exclusive ethnic homeland which is still eluding the offer for peace talks and ceasefire. Thus, the conflict situation in which Manipur has been caught in is not just one clear cut conflict but conflicts of different kinds and in its multiple. The conflict between the state and the non state armed opposition groups, ethnic conflict between and among different communities and fratricidal factional infighting between different armed groups are the specificities that gives Manipur a stamp of being in conflict situation.}  

\section*{Notes & References}


22. KNO is the political wing of the armed Kuki outfit, Kuki National army (NA)

23. Isak and Muivah is respectively the Chairman and the General Secretary of one of the NSCN faction and the other faction known as the NSCN-K being led by Khaplang.
24. **KNO’s Rejoinder** to NSCN-IM’s Article, Isak and Muivah, ‘Kuki and the Naga Public Clash’, appeared at the website [www.NSCNonline.org](http://www.NSCNonline.org).


26. Moreh is a border town of Manipur in the Indo-Myanmar territory of Manipur known for the illegal resources borne out of illegal trade.


32. *Ibid*.