

Mandate for Change

Dynamics of Electoral Politics in Manipur

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Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed
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The book is a well-documented and pioneering research work on various dynamics of election politics in Manipur. It provides a narrative as well as analytical profile of Assembly elections since 1952 with a special emphasis on the latest one held on 2007 which delivered a decisive mandate for a change; change for development and stability, which had been elusive for 40 years. It presents an eloquent assessment of the political economy of the state which has bearing on the political process in the state. *It outlines the important issues which needed adequate attention of the contestants and parties, highlights the alliances that some of the political parties forged, focuses on the nature of campaign, magnitude of pre- and post-violence and analyzes the poll results.* The conclusion chapter puts forward a philosophical interpretation of election politics in the state which could be relevant to any other insurgency-infested states in India.

Rs. 700/-

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ISBN 978-81-8370-173-0

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*Dynamics of Electoral Politics in
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CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

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AKANSHA PUBLISHING HOUSE
NEW DELHI-110002 (INDIA)

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4649-B/21, Ansari Road

Darya Ganj, New Delhi - 110 002

Ph.: 23263193 / 9811582579 / 09435116718

Fax: 011-23263193

Email: ektabooks@yahoo.com

www.akanshapublishinghouse.com

Mandate for Change: Dynamics of Electoral Politics in Manipur

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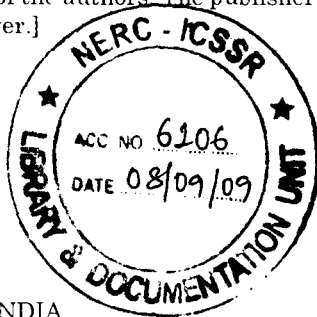
First Published 2009

ISBN 978-81-8370-173-0

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006106

PRINTED IN INDIA

Published by Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, and Printed at Aryan Enterprises, Delhi.

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1

INTRODUCTION

Elections attract not only political practitioners, grassroots workers of all political parties and the electorate but also social scientists for the thrill, sensation, stakes and values associated with the entire process. Elections at all levels, national, regional and local, register a series of processes and stages right from the announcement of the election dates to the poll verdict, each one of which is crucial and nerve-wrecking. There is an involvement of stakes for parties, their leaders and workers as also the future of a given political setting. Therefore, in all democracies, elections stand as the culmination of countless political activities pursued by the concerned individuals and parties for a considerable period of time, notwithstanding the difference in the magnitude of involvement and concern at various levels. Considering the importance of each and every election because of the involvement of various degrees and manifestations of power, various shades and sections of the society, including the print and the electronic media try to play their respective roles.¹ That is why academics, too, find every election interesting, of course, for reasons entirely different from others. The

dynamics of elections are varied and intriguing. The results, whether fractured or decisive, are suggestive of future political arrangements and alignments of forces that matter in the affairs of a nation.

Among the distinct and pronounced stages of an election process such as the announcement of date of the election, the nomination process, articulation of issues, nature of campaign, and finally the act of voting, three stages are considered to be most important – the articulation of issues, the campaign, and the act of voting. The answer to the question as to why the voters accord preference to a candidate or a party could be found in the mechanism that moulds the issues and carry them to the electorate through campaign. Two models provide tentative explanation as to how position-issues finally play a decisive role in any election. The directional model suggests that a successful campaigner carries strong message to the voters that eventually leads to convincing victory in the elections.² The alternative, called the 'proximity model' insists that political parties tend to support centrist policies to score electoral victory.³ In the context of India and other South Asian countries the first model appears to be more relevant. Issues and campaign constitute the core of all elections – whether national, state or local.

Surprises strike almost every Indian election – whether for the Lok Sabha or for Assembly. Despite speculations engineered by media and other agencies, election results reflect determined people's response to the current political situation in a given setting and signal the future trends in politics. While some of the elections in India were epoch-making, as in the case of the general elections of 1977, culminating the internal emergency and also the one-party domination in the

country. Contrary to the speculations made by political pundits and media establishments, the outcome of the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, which brought a Congress-led coalition to power, baffled everyone. The miscalculation of the psephologists suggests that they either failed to read voters' mind correctly or were carried away by falsification of current trend, engineered by the apparently focused and favoured parties in media's good book.

Manipur State Assembly elections held in 2007 too stood conspicuous by the unfolding of latent trends having far reaching consequences. Like other previous elections this election too was marred by pre and post election violence. Not everyone was stunned by the overwhelming turn out of the electorate on the days of the three-phased elections, for, high voting turnout has been a regular hallmark in the political process in Manipur. What stunned everyone was that the Congress returned to power, for the second consecutive term with an emphatic majority.

Panoramic View of Manipur

Manipur, also called "Switzerland of the East" is a land-locked state situated in the extreme corner of the North Eastern part of India. It is situated between 93.03°E-94.78°E longitude and 23.83°N-25.68°N latitude. It is somewhat rectangular in shape with two distinct areas, the Hills and the Plains. The geographical area of the state is 22,356 sq.km comprising only 0.68 per cent of the total land surface of the whole country. The oval shaped valley located in the center of Manipur accounts for 1,862 sq.km, which is 10 per cent only, while the hilly region constitutes 90 per cent of the total land area of the state.

The state has a long border of about 854 km, of which 425 km is international touching Upper Myanmar and its Chin Hills, and the rest 502 km touches Nagaland, Assam and Mizoram. The state is bounded in the South by Mizoram, in the North by Nagaland and in the West by the Cachar district of Assam.

The state's river system flows from North to South. There are two main rivers, eight small rivers and numerous streamlets. The two main rivers are the Imphal river and the Barak river which play an important role in the economy of the state. The Imphal river irrigates the valley districts and flows into Myanmar through Chin Hills and finally flows into the Chindwin river of that country. The Barak river serves as the only means of communication for the inaccessible Tamenglong district and the Jiribam sub-division of Imphal East district. It passes through the western hill region of the state and then flows through the Cachar valley.

Manipur has nine revenue districts *viz.* Imphal West, Imphal East, Bishenpur, Thoubal, Senapati, Tamenglong, Ukhrul, Churachandpur and Chandel. Out of these nine districts, four are confined to valley areas and the rest are in the hill areas. When Manipur became a full fledged state on January 21, 1972 after its merger with India in September 1949, the Assembly constituencies were also delimited in the same year to 60 constituencies out of which 19 are reserved for Scheduled Tribes and one for Scheduled Caste. Imphal is the Capital of the state, the hub of all socio-political and economic activities.

The Demographic Profile

Manipur is a polyglot state. The question of the origin of the people of this land is still quite obscure. R.B. Pemberton opined that the Manipuris were the

descendants of a Tatar colony, which probably emigrated from the north-west border of China during the sanguinary conflicts for supremacy between the different members of the Chinese and the Tatar dynasties, in the 13th and 14th centuries.⁴ It is also believed that the Manipuris descended from an Indo-Chinese stock with some admixture of Aryan blood derived from successive waves of Aryan invaders that had passed along the Gangetic and the Brahmaputra valley in the pre-historic times.⁵ In the recent past, a couple of Manipur scholars of the Sanskritization persuasion identified her with the Manipura of *Mahabharata*, claiming the people of this land to be descendants of Babribhma and Chitrangada. But there is hardly any reliable Indological account of this claim.

At present, the population of Manipur is divided into (i) Meiteis (Hindu Vaishnavites) who constitute about 60 per cent of the population inhabiting the valley areas along with Pangals (Manipuri Muslims), constituting about 8 per cent of the population, and (ii) the different 29 tribes living in the hilly regions. The tribes of Manipur may be divided into two broad types - the Nagas and the Kukis. Besides, there are small communities such as Marwaris, Bengalis, Punjabis, Biharis, Sikhs, Tamils and Nepalese; they are late-comers to the state. Anyway, all these communities constitute a pluralistic Manipuri society.

According to the 2001 Census the total population of Manipur is 23,88,634. Out of this 12,07,338 are males and 11,81,296 females. The four valley districts accommodate 14,05,560 population while the hill districts have a population of 9,83,074. Table 1.1 indicates the trend of population growth in the state since 1901.

Table 1.1
Basic demographic statistics of Manipur
(1901-2001)

| Year | Total Population | | Variation Persons | Decadal percentage variation | Density of population per sq. km | Sex ratio female per 1000 males |
|------|------------------|---------|----------------------|------------------------------------|---|---|
| | Male | Female | | | | |
| 1901 | 139632 | 144833 | 28465 | - | 13 | 1037 |
| 1911 | 170666 | 175556 | 346222 | 21.71 | 16 | 1029 |
| 1921 | 188119 | 195879 | 384016 | 10.98 | 17 | 1041 |
| 1931 | 215815 | 229791 | 445606 | 16.04 | 20 | 065 |
| 1941 | 249183 | 262886 | 512069 | 14.92 | 23 | 1055 |
| 1951 | 283685 | 293950 | 577635 | 12.80 | 26 | 1036 |
| 1961 | 387058 | 392979 | 780037 | 35.04 | 40 | 1015 |
| 1971 | 541675 | 531078 | 1072753 | 37.53 | 48 | 980 |
| 1981 | 721006 | 699947 | 142953 | 32.46 | 64 | 971 |
| 1991 | 938359 | 898790 | 1837149 | 29.73 | 82 | 958 |
| 2001 | 1207338 | 1181296 | 2388634 | 30.02 | 107 | 978 |

Source: Directorate of Census Operation, Manipur

Table 1.2
Religion-wise percentage of population in North East (1991-2001)

| States | Hindus | | Muslims | | Christians | | Buddhists | |
|-------------------|--------|------|---------|------|------------|------|-----------|------|
| | 1991 | 2001 | 1991 | 2001 | 1991 | 2001 | 1991 | 2001 |
| Assam | 67.1 | 64.9 | 28.4 | 30.9 | 3.3 | 3.7 | - | 0.2 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 37.0 | 34.6 | - | 1.9 | - | 18.7 | 12.9 | 13.0 |
| Meghalaya | 14.7 | 13.3 | - | 4.3 | 64.6 | 70.3 | - | 0.2 |
| Manipur | 57.7 | 46.0 | 7.3 | 8.8 | 34.1 | 34.0 | - | 0.1 |
| Mizoram | 5.0 | 3.6 | - | 1.1 | 85.7 | 87.0 | 7.8 | 7.9 |
| Nagaland | 10.1 | 7.7 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 87.5 | 90.0 | - | 0.1 |
| Tripura | 86.5 | 85.6 | 7.1 | 8.0 | - | 3.2 | 4.7 | 3.1 |

Source: Census of India

Table 1.1 shows that since the decade of 1951-1961, the growth rate of population in Manipur has been higher than the all-India average. It is interesting to mention here that during the decade, 1991-2001, the growth of Hindu and Christian population has declined from 57.7 to 46 per cent and from 34.1 to 34.0 per cent respectively. On the other hand, the growth of Muslim population in the state has increased from 7.3 in 1991 to 8.8 per cent in 2001. The religion-wise comparison of population in the North-eastern States is shown below as Table 1.2.

Table 1.3 for the religion-wise breakup of the population of Manipur in the 9 districts shows the overall picture of the state in demographic geography of the various religious communities. It clearly indicates that the Hill districts have a higher concentration of Christians, while the Hindus predominantly inhabit the valley. It is also noteworthy that the majority of the people of Manipur live in the plain districts of the valley, despite the fact that the valley constitutes only 9 per cent of the total land-area of the state. It also presents the hill-valley divide on religious count. The ongoing insurgency-related situation may, therefore, have a religious dimension, which however has not been so far examined.

One of the notable aspects in the distribution of population relates to density. The Census 2001 records that it is 107 persons in per sq. km. While the population density in the valley is 628 sq. km, it is 49 in the hill areas. The following table (Table 1.4) shows the district-wise population of Manipur.

Table 1.3
District-wise breakup of religious composition of the population of Manipur in %

| <i>Districts</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>Hindus</i> | <i>Muslims</i> | <i>Christians</i> | <i>Sikh</i> | <i>Buddhist</i> | <i>Jain</i> |
|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Senapati | 208406 | 15.11 | .03 | 83.23 | .007 | .34 | .01 |
| Tamenglong | 86278 | 1.81 | .17 | 97.49 | .01 | .55 | - |
| Churachandpur | 176184 | 5.61 | .70 | 93.34 | .10 | - | .002 |
| Chandel | 71014 | 10.55 | 1.99 | 86.16 | .28 | .09 | .03 |
| Ukhrul | 109275 | 5.99 | .26 | 93.67 | .02 | .06 | .02 |
| Hill Districts | 651157 | 8.76 | .49 | 98.92 | .067 | .08 | .01 |
| Imphal East | 330460 | 79.01 | 14.7 | 5.3 | .03 | .02 | * |
| Imphal West | 380801 | 91.75 | 3.56 | 2.55 | .02 | .02 | * |
| Bishnupur | 180773 | 88.04 | 6.10 | 5.37 | .02 | * | * |
| Thoubal | 293958 | 79.41 | 19.45 | .94 | .01 | * | * |
| Valley Districts | 1185992 | 84.52 | 10.99 | 3.46 | .08 | * | * |

Source : Statistical Abstract: Manipur 2005

*Nil or less than .01 per cent

Table 1.4
District-wise distribution of population of Manipur

| State / District | Total population | | Sex Ratio | | Density per sq.km | Decadal growth rate |
|---------------------|------------------|---------|-----------|---------|----------------------|------------------------|
| | Persons | Males | Females | Females | | |
| I. Valley Districts | 1405560 | 702767 | 702793 | 1000 | 628 | - |
| Imphal West | 439532 | 218941 | 220585 | 1007 | 847 | 15.42 |
| Imphal East | 393480 | 197710 | 196070 | 992 | 555 | 19.16 |
| Bishnupur | 205907 | 102772 | 103135 | 1004 | 415 | 13.90 |
| Thoubal | 366341 | 183338 | 183003 | 998 | 713 | 24.62 |
| II. Hill Districts | 983074 | 504571 | 478503 | 948 | 49 | - |
| Senapati | 379214 | 196646 | 182568 | 928 | 116 | 81.96 |
| Tamenglong | 111493 | 57994 | 53499 | 922 | 25 | 29.23 |
| Churachandpur | 228707 | 111740 | 113967 | 993 | 50 | 29.81 |
| Ukhrul | 140946 | 73413 | 675333 | 920 | 31 | 28.98 |
| Chandel | 122714 | 61778 | 60936 | 986 | 37 | 72.80 |
| Manipur | 2388634 | 1207338 | 1181296 | 978 | 107 | 30.02 |

Source: Census of India 2001.

From the above Table, one finds that Imphal West has the highest density of population among the districts, with 847 persons per sq.km, while Tamenglong district has the lowest, with 25 persons per sq. km. Census 2001 reveals that the population in the valley districts stands at 14,05,560 while the hill district has a population of 9,83,074. It may be mentioned here that there is no census data on the breakup of the tribal population of the state in 1991 and 2001 census.

The state's urban population stands at 570,410 as per 2001 Census against 505,645 in 1991 and the rural population stand at 1,818,224 as against 1,331,504 in 1991. It shows that out of the total population 76.12 per cent lives in the rural areas and only 23.88 per cent, in the urban areas.

Manipur is one of the low performing states of the country, if a few indicators such as percentage of population living below poverty line, per capita income, state GDP and other associated factors, infrastructure such as roads and communication network, power supply are taken into account. Chapter II devotes itself to a brief presentation of the relevant data on the economic scenario. It might help understand the difficult economic situation facing the state. What ails Manipur's economy has a relation with the political scenario of the state. Underdevelopment, stagnation in the economy, lack of industrial development and poor performance in all sectors create conditions for political instability and make the political landscape fertile for the rise of militancy.

The Political Scenario

Manipur had been ruled by monarchs, as *Royal Manipur Chronicle* records, since 33 AD. Nongda Lairen

Pakhangba of Ningthouja dynasty was the first king of Manipur. Since then 76 kings ruled till 1891, when the British finally took over Manipur under its direct control and put king Churachand as a titular monarch, who was then a minor, under the protection of the British Government. The British presence in the state was a sequel to the first Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-1826 which led to the conclusion of the Yandaboo treaty on February 24, 1826 (See Appendix II). The Treaty recognized the independence of the kingdom of the then ruler Gambhir Singh. With his death and succession of his eldest son Chandrakriti Singh in 1886, palace intrigues among the ten brothers destabilized the institution of monarchy and eventually led to the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891.⁶ The war virtually ended the independent status of Manipur. The king became a titular authority and the British officers exercised the real power. When the British left India in 1947, Manipur once again regained its sovereignty under its ruler Bodhchandra.⁷ Then followed certain nerve-wrecking developments, such as framing the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 and signing the Manipur Merger Agreement (See Appendix III) on September 21, 1949 at Shillong, which were destined to have far reaching consequences including the current insurgency situation in the state. The merger was followed by dissolution of the state Assembly, which had 53 seats. Manipur became a Part C State, to be administered by the President of India through a Chief Commissioner or a Lieutenant Governor. On November 1, 1956 it ceased to be a Part C State and became a Union Territory with a Territorial Council comprising 30 elected members and 2 nominated Members. It was a prelude to Manipur's statehood in 1972. The Territorial Council was converted into the Territorial Legislative

Assembly with the same composition fixed in June 1963. With the enactment of the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation Act, 1971), Manipur was granted the status of full statehood on January 21, 1972 with a 60 member Legislative Assembly.

It is widely believed that had the Government of India conferred on Manipur the status of statehood, latest by 1963 instead of converting the Territorial Council into a Territorial Legislative Assembly, the state would have experienced a healthy parliamentary culture and gained the benefit of political empowerment. This could have resulted in the political development on a positive line. As B.G. Verghese writes succinctly:

There was a deep sense of hurt that, despite its long and unbroken history as a distinctive if not always independent political entity, Manipur was not only denied the autonomy it sought, with maybe a Kashmir-like Article 370 status, but had to agonise for a full 23 years before it was granted statehood within the Indian Union, a status accorded to Nagaland, Meghalaya and Himachal.⁸

Political instability surfaced as early as March 1967 when M. Koireng Singh took over as the Chief Minister for the second term. Thereafter, the afflictions of floor-crossing, horse-trading, frequent change of Chief Ministers and dissolution of Assembly became the order of the day in the political process in Manipur.⁹

Politics of Defection in Manipur: The hallmark of instability

The chequered political history of Manipur marked by endemic problems of instability started in 1963 when the Territorial Council was upgraded to the status of a Territorial Assembly and M. Koireng Singh was appointed as the Chief Minister. However, the internal

feud within the Congress party did not surface until 1967, when the Fourth General Election held. It is a reflection of the national scene soon after the fourth general elections when intra-party conflicts surfaced and the political landscape was radically changed leading eventually to the split of the Congress.¹⁰ Though Congress was able to form the government by being the majority party with 16 members and with the support of 7 Independents, the politics of defection hung as the Damocles Sword on the M. Koireng Singh ministry. In seven months since he became the Chief Minister for the second time, 9 of his party colleagues deserted him, staging a defection. The ministry was reduced to a minority and it had no option but to resign in October 1967. From this political turnabout the process of ministry-making and ministry-breaking continued unabated with occasional punctuation by President's Rule. With no political formation winning a clear majority in the House in subsequent years, the government formation process in Manipur hinged on defections and splits.¹¹

In a span of 35 years, 1967-2002, Manipur has seen eight Chief Ministers (Appendix I) but none of them completed a full term. Manipur had earned a dubious record of as many as 25 ministries within this period of time due mainly to the politics of defection and floor crossing. Chief Ministers and governments have changed no less than 16 times. Two Chief Ministers changed their party affiliations three times within a short span of time. Some coalition partners changed their parties three times in 48 hours.¹² Added to this, the picture of political instability is complete with the imposition of six spells of President's Rule. On two occasions, President's Rule was imposed after dissolving

the Assembly. The Assembly was kept in suspended animation on four other occasions.¹³ "Perhaps," it is argued, "no other state in the country has ever witnessed such an unstable political climate as that of Manipur. Changes of party loyalty, shifting alliances, both in the individual and collective levels are so frequent and ruthless that the state has witnessed ever since it became a full-fledged state in 1972 as many as eight Chief Ministers with frequent change of guards on 18 occasions."¹⁴

Defection, horse-trading and shifting of loyalties, which became an integral part of party politics in Manipur, have been the bane to the state's politics. Several legislators have been suspended for violating the anti-defection law, but that has not deterred others from switching allegiance during a political crisis. In 1997, a group of Ministers and MLAs led by former Speaker, Nipamacha Singh broke away from the ruling Congress headed by Rishang Keishing and floated the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), which subsequently formed the government. It was a direct challenge to the anti-defection legislation. Defection was rampant till 2002, when some semblance of stability was instilled resulting in the completion of the full term of the ministry headed by Okram Ibobi Singh.

Pattern in the Fall of Governments through Defections in Manipur from 1967

- 1) In October 1967, 9 Congress members defected from M. Koireng Singh ministry reducing the strength from 23 to 14. As a result, ministry had to resign. L. Thambou Singh became the Chief Minister for 12 days only. M. Koireng engineered another defection to topple his denigrators from

the seat of power in less than two weeks. President's rule was imposed, as no party was able to form a stable government.

- 2) Within three months after the imposition of President's Rule, M. Koireng Singh could regroup the Congress MLAs and stage a come back to form the government on February 19, 1968. But on September 10, 1969, 12 Congressmen resigned from the party and formed a United Legislature Party (ULP) under the leadership of Md. Alimuddin, with the support of 4 Sanghata Socialist Party (SSP) members and one from the Communist Party of India (CPI) and 3 Independents. But the constant defections from the Congress and the Independents made it impossible to have a viable coalition government. As a result, the Central Government again imposed President's Rule in the state from October 1969 till the Fifth General Elections in March 1972.¹⁵
- 3) In the Fifth Assembly elections, the Manipur People's Party (MPP) with 15 members along with 3 Socialists, 3 Congress (O) members, 10 Independents and a Congress defector formed the government under the leadership of Md. Alimuddin on March 20, 1972. Later on, in November 1972 the ULP increased its strength to 36 members, by masterminding defections. However, on March 15, 1973, as many as 9 UPL members crossed the floor and joined the Opposition to constitute the Progressive Democratic Alliance (PDA) under the leadership of Atikho Daiho of the Congress. The Alimuddin government with 26 members was reduced to minority.

In his report to the Governor, the Chief Minister observed that “two defectors had the record of changing sides four times each and both of them were Congressmen, while some Congress members defected thrice”. He concluded: “In the counter-defections the support by some defectors to any ministry is bound to be extremely fake and unreal”. Subsequently, Alimuddin had to resign along with his ministry on March 26, 1973, following an acrimonious debate on a no-confidence motion in the Assembly. The Governor, while forwarding the note of the Chief Minister, observed in his report: “It is true that in a legislature in which 18 members have changed sides within a period of one year there is no certainty that any government will be stable”. The end result was that President’s Rule was imposed for the third time in Manipur and the Legislative Assembly was dissolved on March 28, 1973.¹⁶

- 4) In the Assembly Elections of January 1980 no party could get a majority and a coalition government of the Congress (I), the Congress (U), the MPP and Independents under the leadership of R.K. Dorendra Singh was sworn in on January 17, 1980. But, sometime later, the Manipur National Democratic Party (MNDP) was formed by some members who had defected from their respective parties, merged with the MPP bringing instability to the ministry of Dorendra Singh. He too could not complete the full term of his ministry.

- 5) In a game of defection, floor-crossing and horse trading, Rishang Keishing became the Chief Minister for a record of fifth time, notwithstanding the fact that he could never ever complete a full term. Dorendra Singh too had been the Chief Minister for four times and like Keishing he, too, could not complete a full term.

Besides, the defections mentioned above that perpetuated instability in the government formation in Manipur, splits, internal bickering, switching alliance and passing no-confidence motion became regular and routine affairs in state politics in Manipur especially after the Assembly elections of 1990. The situation did not change till 2002. After the elections held in 2000 no party was able to get a simple majority. A coalition government led by W. Nipamacha Singh was formed in which the BJP and the Samata Party were the main players. Internal bickering, defections and political gimmicks crippled the coalition. Finally, the BJP, a partner in the Nipamacha ministry, pulled out of the government and allowed it to fall like a house of cards. The ministry formed with divergent groups could not complete its term. As a result, the mid-term poll was held in February 2002. The murky politics of Manipur as aptly described by a retired politician: "Power - the first love of every politician is a treacherous beloved. Like those of pretty women of little virtues, her wooers are many and her loyalties shifting" remained the same for four decades.

Manipur is one of the most trouble-torn states in North East India. It is believed that political instability in the state has a direct relationship with insurgency situation. A fractured Assembly and a Government

always haunted by the spectre of surgical dismissal, could hardly handle the situation, plagued by perennial problems arising out of secessionist and other inter-ethnic armed movements. Political situation in Manipur, over the years, has drifted from bad to worse. However, the Assembly elections in 2007 had thrown a ray of hope for the state. The present Government does not suffer from an instability syndrome, indicating thereby that stability might give peace a chance and that insurgency could prove to be a matter of the past, provided, of course, that the Government proves to be a performing and responsible one. That is why the Assembly elections of 2007 became so important, besides other issues, which figured during the electioneering; the huge turnout of the electorate added significance.

Insurgency Situation

North East India has been experiencing a steady increase in the number of militant groups and their activities since the early 1950s when Angami Zapu Phizo fired the first salvo for armed secession in the present state of Nagaland. Gradually Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura became the victims of insurgency of grave import. Manipur's insurgency and armed movements have a long history. The political profile of Manipur cannot be outlined and understood without discussing the insurgency situation in the state. The following section devotes itself to a brief presentation.

Soon after the Independence, the Imphal valley was rocked by a communist movement led by Hijam Irabat Singh.¹⁷ It was a short-lived armed struggle (1948-51), which failed to make a mark in the political history of Manipur. There was a spillover impact of the secessionist movement initiated spearheaded by Phizo in Nagaland

and continued by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), Isak-Muivah faction in the Naga dominated areas of Manipur; it was followed by the Kukis in some of the hill districts and by the Meiteis in the Imphal Valley. It is argued that the deep sense of dissatisfaction in the mind of the Meiteis owing to the circumstances leading to the signing of the merger document by the Maharaja of Manipur under alleged duress, on September 21, 1949, was one of the principal reasons behind the insurgency upsurge in the Imphal Valley.¹⁸

Manipur has seen some major secessionist movements, launched by various ethnic communities residing in the state. The major ones are the Meitei, the Naga and the Kuki insurgencies. The Naga insurgent groups – the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) (NSCN-K) are also active in the Naga inhabited areas in four of Manipur's five hill districts, namely, Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Chandel. The NSCN-IM used Ukhrul district particularly, where its leader T. Muivah was born, as a base for collecting funds and its recruiting cadres. It carried out several terrorist activities in the state in the 1990s. Similarly, a number of Kuki outfits are also active in the Churachandpur district. The Kuki National Army (KNA) has been fighting for a sovereign 'Kukiland', comprising some parts of India and Myanmar through an armed struggle, while the Kuki National Front (KNF) and a number of other similar groups have launched armed struggle for a separate state within the Indian Union. The armed conflict between the Nagas and the Kukis beginning in 1992 had an added dimension, since it was also a bitter struggle to control land and drug

trafficking through the border town of Moreh, in the Chandel district of Manipur.¹⁹ Besides, three other ethnic groups and some others too, such as the Paite, the Hmar, the Vaiphei, and the Muslims, have launched their own insurgent outfits in recent years. As a result, the Imphal Valley has become a hub of militant activities for many insurgent groups.²⁰

Imphal valley, comprising four districts - Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur and Thoubal, is the very pulse of Manipur, and the meeting point of diverse socio-cultural and ethnic identities. It spreads over an area of about 2,238 sq.kms, roughly about ten per cent of the State's land area which is 22,356 sq.km.²¹ The valley has been experiencing tumultuous violence for the last five decades. The majority of the 20 odd insurgent outfits of Manipur are active in the valley. Besides the aforementioned insurgent groups, some others which are considerably active in the valley are, the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) and its armed wing the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), and the People's United Liberation Front (PULF), which is an essentially Muslim militant organization. It is estimated that about 9,070 insurgents operate in the valley area.²²

The Upsurge: Causes

The rise of secessionist movements and other forms of insurgency especially in the lush-green and fertile valley is due to some historical factors, besides a perceived sense of deprivation and neglect by the Indian state in the post independence era. From a small

beginning in the early 1940s, the Communists under Hijam Irabot Singh launched a full-blown revolutionary movement in 1948 to liberate Manipur from the feudalism and semi-colonialism of the Manipur Kings and as also from the Indian state. Their objectives were to install a popular responsible people's government, to implement land reform in order to ensure land entitlement to the landless peasants and to revise land revenue policy, and ensure the right to self-determination. Though Irabot Singh's cause to fight for an independent socialist republic of Manipur, could not advance further due to his death in 1951, the revolutionary seeds sown by him had not fallen on barren ground.²³ He left behind a legacy for future revolutionaries, for mobilizing indigenous people to secure a space in the insurgency-afflicted history of Manipur. The dissident armed elements amongst Irabot's comrades retained their weapons of World War II vintage. That provided an emotional, military and psychological strength to pursue their armed struggle against their targets associated with Indian Union.²⁴ Therefore, the rise of political consciousness with a secessionist ideology, the controversial merger agreement, in addition to the latent feeling of relative deprivation laid the foundation for the emergence of a number of insurgent groups, and provided the ostensible 'logic' to justify their armed struggle against the Indian state.

As already stated, the merger of Manipur in a controversial manner with the Indian Union left a deep sense of hurt, as Manipur has a long and unbroken history as a distinctive political entity. It appears that insurgency in the valley started with a curious chemistry of leftist ideals and a nationalistic fervor against the attitude of the Indian Government, which,

in common perception, was seen to have forcibly taken over Manipur, through signing the merger document under alleged duress. Compounded with the feeling of dissatisfaction among the Meiteis, who constitute around 50 per cent of the total population, at the forced merger, a deep-rooted sense of alienation could be found among them, when compared with the caste Hindus in other parts of India. The belief in the rest of India that all Mongoloid looking people or with Mongoloid descent are tribal people, as allegedly evident in the Indian metropolis in the attitude and behaviour shown to these Northeasterners, often hurt the sentiments of the Meiteis. It goes without underscoring that the Meiteis are plain settlers and mostly Gauriya Vaishnavite Hindus. Yet, the difference in treatment with other caste Hindus of India, compared to the Meitei Vaishnavite Hindus appears to be humiliation to the latter. The putative impression that the Meiteis are looked down upon by the rest of the Hindus in India ignited the secessionist sentiments that started growing in the 1960s and 1970s among the youth of the Manipuri society. This forced them to take guns against the Indian Union and work for a sovereign independent Manipur. In the 1960s, when the Naga insurgency in the Hills of Manipur was at its peak, the Meiteis realized that they had become a target of Naga attack, as they, along with the Hindus of the rest of India, were being identified as symbol of the Central government and of exploitation. This was somewhat an uncomfortable conjecture which compounded the worries and distress of the Meitei youths, who felt that the sharing of the common identity symbol, that of being Hindu, with the rest of the country, did not bring any visible economic gains to them. The Union Government, in its bid to win over the

underground elements, is alleged to have shown preferential treatment to the people in the hill areas of the state, at the cost of the Imphal valley. This approach generated a sense of relative deprivation among the Meitei youth. A strong political consciousness, with a tinge of cultural nationalism started developing in the minds of the educated Meitei youth, who got themselves emotionally involved in the movement for Meitei identity. Such a feeling led to the formation of the now proscribed the UNLF in 1964. Also, the armed strike by the PLA in 1978, under N. Bisheswar, as a subsequent development of this trend of political action created a huge problem of insurgency in Manipur.

Adding woes to the wounds, the economic scenario of the state has been pathetic all along as outlined in Chapter II, with large-scale unemployment, rural poverty and almost total absence of industrialization in the state. The Fifth Five Year Plan, 1974-79 of Manipur, makes the candid confession that "unlike many other advanced states of the Indian Union, Manipur has achieved the statehood 25 years behind others and, therefore, she has to take the course of speedy development which many other states made in 1947".²⁵ Under the circumstances, a mindset has developed among the youths that Manipur is a small state, neglected and easily oppressed by a dominating Indian nation.

By the late 1970s and early 80s insurgency was at its height. It was in those days that Chinese red paper balloons called 'chebons' were being distributed in Manipur to communicate the message of a deep-rooted sense of deprivation and dissatisfaction among the common masses, along with a call for defiance against

the Union Government. Around the same time the PLA started its urban insurgency counted amongst highly organized and effective ones in South Asia. In 1980-81, large areas of Imphal Valley were under their indirect control. They acclaimed to be the perfect examples of Maoist guerrilla fighters, in fact, ushered in India's first spell of urban insurgency and Asia's second, after Saigon.²⁶

Consequences

The response of the Indian state to the perceived notion of negligence, however, has not been very encouraging. India's delayed response to insurgency related incidents, least concern for the economic development of the state, inconclusive decision-making and evasion of responsibility in negotiations multiplied problems. All this reinforced people's mistrust of the policy makers at the Centre. In fact, the insurgency movements have posed an enormity of challenge to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Indian nation. The intensity and duration of these movements indicate the Manipuri insurgent's ability and endurance. The seriousness in the commitment of the Union Government towards conflict management and conflict transformation as also the methodology adopted are put under the scanner.

The protracted conflict has resulted in the horizontal proliferation of insurgent groups and vertical increase in their armed and violent activities. It has resulted in fragmentation and fractionalization within and amongst the insurgents. In fact, a vicious cycle of insurgency, military response, lack of investment, collapse of basic services and opportunities serves for regeneration of insurgency. In fact, it has become worse than a vicious

cycle, more of a vicious spiral encompassing a syndrome of unmitigated tragedy, and becoming more intractable and complex with each unfortunate turn. As Binalakshmi Nepram writes: "The growing unemployment and corruption, and the deteriorating socio, economic and political situation and the abject lack of development further led to the rise and small arming of other militant outfits".²⁷

In the valley areas of Manipur since the days of Hijam Irabot Singh and his Red Guards in 1950 till date, as many as 20 insurgent groups have been operating in Manipur.²⁸ The chronology of the proliferation of insurgent groups after the formation of UNLF in 1964 goes like this:

- Oinam Sudhir formed the Consolidation Committee of Manipur (CONSCOM) and established the Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM) in 1970
- R.K.Tulachandra established the PREPAK in 1977
- The PLA was launched by N.Bisheshwar in 1978
- S. Maipak formed the KCP in 1980
- The KYKL came into being in 1994 by a combination of breakaway groups of the UNLF, the PREPAK and the KCP
- The PULF, the North East Minority Front (NEMF), the Islamic National Front (INF) and the Islamic Liberation Front-Kanglei (ILF-K), known as Manipuri Muslim based outfits, emerged after the Meitei-Pangal clash in 1993.

Chronology of the formation of Hill based insurgent groups:

- The NSCN was established in 1980, which later broke into two factions, one led by Isak Chishi Swu and T.Muivah (NSCN-IM) and the other by S.S.Khaplang (NSCN-K).
- The Kuki National Front (KNF) was formed in 1988 which later broke into two factions KNF-President and KNF-Military Council.
- The Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA) with its political wing Zomi Reunification Organisation (ZRO) came into existence in 1993.
- The Kuki National Army with its political wing Kuki National Organization (KNO) appeared in 1998.
- The Hmar People's convention-Democratic (HPC-D), the Kuki Liberation Army (KLA) and the United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF) are other groups presently operating in the hill areas of the state.

The impact of insurgency in the state has, however, been felt intensely by the people, almost in every aspect of life. The existence of so many militant groups operating in the Imphal valley and the hill areas, has increasingly imperiled the society as a whole. The situation had drifted from bad to worse, during a long period of four decades, owing to installation of governments that were destined to be ineffective and short lived. The situation used to deteriorate when there was no representative government. Manipur has a record of experiencing Presidential rule following political instability, quite often till 2002. In such a situation, the insurgent groups enjoy the privilege of running a parallel administration in the state. More disturbingly,

people have also started accepting their *de facto* authority either out of fear or out of a growing distrust in the administration, or for both. Along with this, the development process has invariably been hampered, as the insurgent groups often siphon off a large chunk of the development fund for procuring arms. And here lies the importance of assessing the economy of insurgency in Manipur, as economy perhaps plays a more important role compared to politics. It is believed that the progressive 'withdrawal' of civil governance and the emergence of a network of collusive arrangements with insurgent outfits, had propelled the growth of a widespread pattern of illegal economic activities that came to be the mainstay and motive for all the insurgencies. A thriving economy of extortion, smuggling, gun-running and an oligo-politic control over government contracts ruled the roost. Indeed, the various 'ideological' factions and rivalries within insurgent movements in the states of North East in general, and Manipur in particular, are often thinly disguised 'turf wars' to retain or gain control over lucrative 'areas of influence', especially the important routes of (illegal) cross border trade, including arms and drug trafficking.

The economic slowdown in Manipur has reduced opportunities for employment, as also the funds for public services, such as health, sanitation, pure drinking water supply and education. Most of its hill districts which are strongholds of insurgents, are reeling under acute poverty, mainly because of under-utilization of natural resources and for want of adequate infrastructure. In Chandel district, over 64 per cent of the people live below poverty line, while in Churachandpur, Ukhrul and Tamenglong districts, it is between 51 and 55 per cent.²⁹

Many young men, already frustrated and without employment, are under pressure from insurgent groups to join them, and hence, under suspicion from the security forces. As such, they are highly vulnerable to the risk of arrest and abuse, and consequently, suffer from extreme tension and anxiety. Other family members, including young women, face similar pressures, at risk of harassment and abuse from either side. They suffer from the traumas of losing loved ones in incidents of arrest, encounter, violence and disappearance. With limited employment prospects, educated youths stare at an uncertain future, compounded by fear of violence and excesses resorted to by both the sides; besides, they could be easily lured to join any of the 20+ insurgent outfits. In this process, being frustrated some of them become the victims of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS.

The state is still under a spell of worsened law and order situation with unprecedented insecurity prevailing everywhere. Incidents of failure by state machinery to handle extortion on the Imphal-Moreh national highway, continued terror tactics used by masked gunmen on innocent public, unexplained killings of innocent civilians by security forces, continued kneecapping of erring teachers and principals of school and colleges by insurgent groups like the KYKL, storming of police stations by angry mobs for failure to protect the people, agitations by different associations and organizations etc. have become a part of the social system. The state witnessed over 100 bandhs in 2000 and it cost the state domestic product about Rs. 4, 479 lakhs daily. According to the KYKL, which once banned bandhs and strikes in Manipur in 2003, a single day's bandh in the state leads to a loss of over Rs. 9 crore; and

with 72 bandhs in 2001-2002 the cost to the state exchequer was of a mind-boggling Rs. 676.48 crores.³⁰

Meanwhile, insurgent outfits like the KYKL, the RPF have also started various populist measures for gaining the support of the people and legitimisation of its organisation. For instance, such groups have started certain anti-corruption measures, including penalizing the people involved in corrupt practices and drugs trafficking.

Questions of human security

Kofi Annan stated "Human security, in its broadest sense, embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potential. Every step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict. Freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment — these are the interrelated building blocks of human — and therefore national — security."³¹ Human security can no longer be understood in purely military terms. Rather, it must encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament, and respect for human rights and the rule of law. Looking at the overall insurgency scenario in Manipur, which has been reeling under protracted armed conflict of almost five decades, deteriorating law and order situation, killing spree by various insurgent groups against their fellow insurgents and innocent civilians, gross human rights violations committed by the insurgents as well as the security forces, arbitrary

arrests under certain draconian laws like Armed Forces Special Power's Act, (AFSPA) 1958 and National Security Act (NSA), instances of custodial deaths, one could be tempted to crisply describe the state as a "killing field". Violence begets violence seems to be the working solution in the present mayhem. Whoever yields the gun power, in the dictum of Mao Zedong, rules the roost in Manipur.

In today's anomic conditions obtaining in Manipur, with increased fractionalization within the society, endless fratricidal factional clashes among insurgent groups have taken a heavy toll of many youths. In order to tackle this unending violence committed by the armed insurgent groups, the state responded to it by declaring Manipur as a Disturbed State in 1980 and use of the provisions of the AFSPA , 1958 (See Appendix III). The Imphal valley was the immediate victim of the proclamation as Disturbed Area and with enforcement of AFSPA, under which many young boys were picked up on mere suspicion - many of them never returned home. This 'historic' step propelled a saga of violence and counter-violence in the state. Enforced disappearance, arbitrary executions, torture, rape, house breaking, looting, arbitrary detention etc. have become a part of day-to-day life. Soon after the enforcement of the AFSPA, about 264 man and women were done to death, 208 were injured. 131 known incidents of Extra Judicial Killings took place in the state.³² From 1974 to 2004, there were 14 incidents of disappearance of civilians, after by being arrested or picked up by the security forces.³³ Caught between army excesses and violent activities of the ever-proliferating militant outfits, human rights have become an alien category. To many in the state, to be alive itself is great;

for anybody could fall in seconds by a bullet. While army rules in the day time, it is the insurgents who rule at night. In the last 10 years over 5000 people were killed in violence of various types. More than 10 cases of disappearance have been recorded during 1997-1998 alone.³⁴

In an atmosphere of recurring political instability, insurgency and anti-insurgency operations, when general elections, either for the Assembly or the Lok Sabha are held, these issues along with others, such as, economic backwardness and unemployment become the most touted ones on the political plank of each and every political party, making the election scenario pretty surcharged with claims and counter-claims. The insurgents' customary call to boycott the national parties seems to be too strong a message to be ignored. Yet, the history of Manipur elections shows emphatically that it is the democratic spirit of the common citizens that overwhelms such threats.

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