

Chapter: VII

Self-Determination Movement in Manipur

Introduction:

An important and influential factor of self-determination is formed by the phenomenon of communities refusing to consent, or accept any longer, the exercise of power over them by the ruler or government or an “alien” people to determine their fate without consulting them. The people of Manipur have experienced foreign rule three times which subsequently led to the movement for self-determination in different forms. The first movement was marked by the annexation of Manipur by the Burmese (1819-1826), but the sovereignty of Manipur was restored with the help of British. It was the common interest for the Manipur and British to control the rising Burma. The relation between the British India and Manipur broke down in March 1891 which resulted in the Anglo-Manipur War. Thus Manipur lost her sovereignty for the second time. People protested in different form since 1904 led by the princes of Manipur which was backed by the women. The British gave up to the people’s demand which is also remembered as Women’s War I. This was followed by the Kuki rebellion (1817-19) and the Zelianrong Naga movements (1930-32) led by Haiphou Jadonang and continued by Rani Gaidinlui. Though the movements brought certain administrative changes, not visible change among the people was seen. The Nupilan (Women’s War II) of 1939 was the strongest protest for self-determination.

The second movement was a democratic movement for self-determination which followed the line of American President Woodrow Wilson. After the two year of Independent rule under the Manipur Constitution Act 1947, Manipur was forcefully merged to the new born India Union. The third phase of self-determination movement in Manipur dates back to 1948, when the Manipuri communists under the charismatic leadership of Hijam Irabot, took up the cause of the liberation of Manipur from the suffering in a state of semi-feudal and semi-colonialism. This was intensified after the

forceful merger of Manipur which continues even today. The three self-determination movements will be discussed but giving more importance to the third movement.

First Movement for Self-Determination: Burmese-Manipuri War

The early decades of the 19th century was a dark period in the history of Manipur. With the rise of the Burmese imperialism Manipur was facing great political instability which gave the opportunity for Burmese intervention in the internal affairs of Manipur during the reign of the sons and successors of Maharaja Bhagyachandra. When his third successor Chourjit Singh was ruling, another son prince Marjit Singh revolted and fled to Ava. And with the help of the great Burmese emperor Bawdawpaya, Marjit Singh invaded Manipur and defected Chourjit Singh who fled to Cachar. Marjit Singh ascended to the throne of Manipur with the Burmese help. After six years, Marjit Singh was driven out by the Burmese who inflicted a great defeat on him. Marjit fled to Cachar with a large population. Burma occupied Manipur in 1819 and ruled the Kingdom for seven years and let loose a reign of terror.

The activities of the Burmese occupations in Manipur were not merely oppressive and killing people but, an attempt to exterminate the entire Manipur race. A large portion of the population unable to bear the torture and harassment by the foreign invader fled to Cachar, marking as the darkest period in the history of Manipur. This ultimately led to the depopulation of the Kingdom. It is estimated that at the height of the Burmese reign of terror, the population was reduced to 2000/3000 souls only (Brown cited in Kamei 2009). Burma took away 30,000 Manipuri prisoners to Ava. Manipur was put under the rule of two Burmese commanders. The Burmese army also faced great tribulations as they did not get cooperation of the people and food supplies. The people of Manipur did not accept the Burmese rule. And a war of resistance was carried out under the help of several princes like Prince Herachandra, a son of Labanyachandra, Prince Yumjaotaba, Gambhir Singh and others (Kamei *ibid*).

The Burmese also threatened the territory of British India. Burma conquered Manipur, and then she conquered Assam and occupied the entire Brahmaputra valley. Burma had also conquered Arakan which was adjacent to Chittagong Hills of Bengal. The Burmese aggressive postures created threat to Bengal. Three division of Burmese army from Jaintias, Assam, and Manipur converged on Cachar in 1824. The Burmese army planned to invade British district of Sylhet which resulted in the declaration of war on Burma by the British on 5 May 1824. By April, 1824 David Scott-the Agent to the Governor General for the North Eastern Frontier and Gambhir Singh were closely involved in the operations against the Burmese. Assurance was given by David Scott that is the eventual liberation of Manipur Gambhir Singh was to be restored to the throne of the Kingdom of Manipur. A force of 500 soldiers was originally raised under the name of Raja Gambhir Singh Levy, which was subsequently increase to 2000, was placed under Gambhir Singh and army was placed under the command of Captain Grant. The recruitment was form amongst the Manipuri and some Kacharis. By July, 1824 recruitment was completed and military training was imparted to them at Badarpur which was supervised by on Col. Inns along with Gambhir Singh and Nara Singh (Kamei ibid).

Restoration of Sovereignty of Manipur:

The force was known as “Manipur Levy” which later became the “State Military Police” and present day “Manipur Rifles”. This force expelled the Burmese from Manipur and made Ningthee River Eastern boundary of Manipur. The people of Tamenglong supported the movement and resisted against the Burmese. The Burmese were finally defeated and Manipur’s lost sovereignty was restored and recognized by the both the British and Burma by the Treaty of Yandaboo signed on 24th February 1826.

Second Movement for Self-Determination: Anglo Manipur War 1891

The might of the Manipuris was at its highest peak at the times of great kings, Khagemba (Khagi for Chinese and Ngamba for victor) and Pamheiba (Gatibniwaz) during 17th and 18th centuries respectively. But it started waning after the death Ameba. After helping

Manipur in restoring her sovereignty, the British started sneaking into the state by establishing their 'friendship relations' through their political agents during the period of Maharajah Gambhir Singh in the 19th century. The friendship was continued mutually by opening Political Agents in each other territory. Manipur opened in the British Territory of Lakhimpur (Cachar) and Calcutta. Similar office was opened in Manipur for British Political Agent. There was also mutually protective Anglo-Manipuri arrangement between Manipur and British by holding summit meeting with Maharaja Chandrakirti of Manipur and British in 1874.

Manipur kingdom did not remain united and it witnessed a number of palace intrigues and coups. The British took advantage of this and gained control over the political power. Maharaja Surchandra succeeded Maharajah Chandrakirti after his death in 1886. There was a lot of 'political instability in the state because of his ineffectiveness in governing the State. In addition, the eight princes were divided into two parties animated by most hostile feelings towards one another for the post of the king. The hostilities between the two groups of princesses of Manipur culminated in a 'fratricidal war' which broke out on September 21st 1890, when the crown prince Kulachandra and his younger brothers, mainly backed by Tikendrajit, the Senapati revolted against the reigning Maharajah Surchandra. The Maharaja lodged a complaint to the then Viceroy, Lord Landsdown that he was dethroned by his step brothers, mainly backed and engineered by Senapati- Bir Tikendrajit. The Viceroy thus passed an order to capture Tikendrajit and exile him outside Manipur if Kulachandra wanted to remain as a king of Manipur (Singh 2008).

Viceroy Lord Landsdown sent Mr. JW Quinton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam with 400 Gorkha soldiers under Colonel Skene to carry out his orders. They reached Imphal on the 22nd March 1891. But Maharajah Kulachandra refused to hand over Tikendrajit. This led the British troops to launch a surprising and quite treacherous night attack on Kangla-the palace of Manipur on March 23rd, which resulted in the death of a large number of innocent people, including women and children. Subsequent events led to the death of the five British officers. So on March 31, 1891 the British Government in India 'declared war' against Manipur and sent very large columns of their Army from three

directions, one from the north through Kohima under the command of Major General H. Collet, who was also the overall Commander of the British Forces, advanced for operations in Manipur, another column advanced from the west from Silchar under the command of Colonel RHF Rennick and the third column came from the south from Tamu, Burma (now Myanmar) under the command of Brigadier General T. Graham. The British column that advanced from Tamu met the stiffest resistance from at Khongjom while the column that advanced from the west did not have much resistance and broke through to finally take possession of '*Kangla*', on 27th April 1891 and pulled down the native Royal flag embedded with the symbol of deitic "*Pakhangba*" and in its place hoisted the British Union's Jack Flag at the Fort (Singh *ibid*). The British appointed Churachand, a five year old as the King of Manipur and administered direct rule till 1907. During this period, H.St Maxwell, the Political Agent, ruled Manipur as the Superintendent of the State. During this period, many new socio-economic measures were introduced which were of interest to the imperial power and disappointment to the people of Manipur.

The occupation of Kangla on 27th April by the colonial forces and disarmament of the people resulting in the collection of 4,000 firearms further hurt the feeling and psyche of the war affected people. The prosecution of the participants of war including Thangal General and Senapati Tikendrajit by hanging had increasingly generated the anti-colonial feeling. Although there was no evidence of organized resistance for sometimes after the colonial takeover, there was a lot of tension and anxiety in the society. On the arrival of British troops in 1891, the majority of the villagers vacated and went hiding in the jungles for about six weeks. The state was disturbed by the spread of cholera and small pox that killed many people and also created a scarcity of food. The worsening economic conditions coupled with the defeat in the war created a deep anti British feeling among the people of Manipur (Lokendra 1998). Some of the significant organized resistance that could be seen since the beginning of the 21st century beginning are (a) I Women War (1904); (b) Manipuri Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919; Jadonang (1930-32); II Women War (1939-41); and Movement for responsible Government.

(a) I Nupi Lan (Women War) 1904:

The first three four years of colonial rule experienced numerous instances of fire in and around Imphal town. The British administrators considered the fire in 1891-92 as acts of incendiarism and as an expression of ‘national manner’ of showing ill-feeling and were further understood to be reactions to the British attempt to “bring under discipline and into order the evil disposed and sullen inhabitants of Imphal. In 1904, there were again numerous incidents of fire and burning in Imphal town and on 15th March, the state bungalow occupied by Captain Nuttal, tutor to the Raja and Mr Dunlop-Assistant political Agent was burnt down. The market was also burnt down on 6th July and after a month on 4th August; the new bungalow was also burnt down. In spite of declaring Rs 500 as a reward for providing any information to catch the culprit, the British could not get any information or arrest. It was because of the people support to the movement and anti-colonial feeling for destroying the sovereignty of Manipur.

As a symbol of collective punishment to the people of Imphal, the Political Agent issued an order on 12th September to temporarily resuscitate Lallup in the town of Imphal, with a view to rebuild the Bungalow. The inhabitants of the Leikeis (cluster of house) in Imphal were supposed to provide all the necessary, materials given in the Government list and build the house. The Cheirap court was to supervise the building operation. The petition and request to the Political Agent to cancel the order was not attended, instead an order was issued on 29th September, stating that unless the people carried out the order, a punitive Police Force would be posted at Imphal. The Princess took the leadership to mobilize the people to defy the order (Singh 1988). It was later supported by the women from the Ima market beginning with 1st October by resorting general strike. Although the movement eventually died out in the subsequent month, the British realized the people’s discontent. The women resorted to long marches and sit in sessions.

(b) Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919)

The Kukis with their more structured system of chieftaincy were the second to interrupt in protest against the British rule. The Kuki rebellion was largely confined to the Thadous in the southern part of the state. The immediate cause was the raising of the labour corps for the I World War. 2000 kukis and Nagas was sent to France to join enlist labourer for service with the Allied Force. Tension erupted when the news came to the second recruitment for the labour corp. The Thadou had from the very beginning taken the lead in opposing recruitment, and one chief had eventually threatened to destroy any villages which co-operated with the second recruitment. In December 1917 the smouldering resentment broke out openly and the Thadous raided the south of the valley. Initial attempt by the Assam Rifles to subdue them proved ineffective. The military of the mighty British Empire was kept at bay for full two years. A concrete campaign led by the General Officer Commanding Burma and the Higgin-President, Manipur State Durbar, aided by cooperation from the friendly Kukis chiefs, and finally quashed the uprising in 1919. It had a serious impact costing some Rs 28 Lakhs and many lives. It has also exposed the British Administration in the hills. After the rebellion, the colonial government reorganized the hills into three districts and stationed a Sub-Divisional Officer in each. Besides the government of British India reduced the annual tribute of Rs 50,000 to the king to Rs 5000, and ruled that the balance of Rs 45,000 should be spent on improvements of the hill districts (Parratt 2005).

(c) Jadonang Movement (1930-32)

The Jadonang Movement was also an anti-colonial struggle under the charismatic leadership of Jadonang and Gaidingliu. The Revolt aimed at the establishment of a 'Naga Raj', social solidarity, cultural resurgence, religious revival and economic upliftment of the Zeliangrong people (Kamei 1993). It was not a pan-Naga movement as it was confined to three clans which subsequently (and partly as a result of the movement) sought to give themselves a common political identity as Zelaingrong (Parratt op.cit).

After promoting the traditional religion and after successfully preached to the Zelaingrong people. Jadonang was extremely resentful to all the British burdens like the 'Pothang Bekari' - carrying the luggages and goods of the officials without any payment, 'Pothang Senkhai' - feeding them with best available edible things by common subscription of the village and building roads and bridges for them. Above all, people have to shut their opened umbrella and put down any head-wears or caps before the British as a show of respect and fear. The Kukis' ceaseless encroachment with brutality in their scared land made the Zelianrong intolerable. The Kuki rebellion also resulted in ethnic violence in which Kabui Nagas in particular suffered severely. With the people supporting Jadonang, he determined to prepare the plan of building his army of freedom fighters against the British dominion in 1927. Message was sent through his followers to different villages that Jadonang was the Messiah king of the Nagas who will overthrow the 'British Raj'. Fund was raised, recruitment was done and training was also conducted for the preparation of the fight. But unfortunately, some person among the Zelaingrong who were enemical or jealous of Jadonang informed the British Manipur Government in 1927 (Yunuo 1982).

By the end of 1927 the movement had become an irritation to the administration in Manipur that it was decided to apprehend Jadonang. On 28th November Duncan, the SDO in Tamenglong, issued a warrant against him and a certain Namdichug of Kekru village on the ground that they had spread claiming that British rule would soon come to an end and that he would become king. Probably the intention was to intimidate Jadonang (Parratt op.cit). But he was released on the third day (8 December) even though he was sentenced for rigorous imprisonment for seven days. His imprisonment and release instead of threatening him made him more popular in the eyes of his people and rather emboldened him to go ahead with preparation for the kingdom. According to one of his followers, about 30 muzzles loading guns were collected. During festivals, the youth carried guns and fired them in the sky. He also established blacksmiths at Kambiron. They produced dao, spear and some agricultural implements under instruction from Jadonang. They brought iron rods and wire from Cachar which were beaten into the weapons. He also purchased arms from cachar plains. People from North Cachar and

Naga hills district started visiting him and Gaiginliu at Nungkao. He collected mithuns and small gifts from the Kabuis and Kacha Naga villages. But in the beginning of 1930, Jadonang's movement had taken a semi-military, semi religious and political form. Jadonang's strategy was already formulated and the villages were aware of the political objectives of the movement. He directed the people should not obey the government orders and should not pay taxes. He encouraged all able people to fight with dao and spear and to maintain complete secrecy about the objectives. But the incident of killing four valley traders which was not related with the Jadonang movement was so momentous in consequence that it misfired the whole plan of Jadonang that proved to be the cause of his martyrdom (Kamei op.cit).

This incident was a golden opportunity to the British officials to eliminate Jadonang. He was arrested at Lakhipur by the Lahipur police on 19 February 1931 and transported to Manipur for trial. Jadonang was executed on 29 August 1931. The movement was continued by his follower especially Gaidinlui but she too was arrested on 17th October 1932 after continuing the movement for a year and brought to Imphal for trial. She was sentenced to transportation for life in 1933. Without the leader, the movement died a natural death but the ideas for fighting against the colonial British stuck to the mind of people of Manipur which was later taken up to establish the responsible government of Manipur- free from colonial yoke and king.

(c) Movement for Responsible Government:

When the administration of the State was handed over to the Maharaja and his Durbar, the British government deliberately encouraged the autocratic attitude of the rulers towards his population. Thus strongly backed up by the Imperial force, the Maharaja no longer desired for the good will of his subjects, on the contrary they were forced to submit humbly before his feet. The ancient administrative machineries of the ruling monarchs of Manipur were changed into oppressive forces by Maharaja Churachand (Singh 1989).

The resentment's against the king gradually turned volatile. People of many different hues took up the arm to wage battle against the British and the Puppet regime. Hijam Irabot, a leader with communist inclination came to the fore at the spur of the moment. He by taking advantage of the spontaneous grassroots reaction, have developed the people's voice into a concrete nationalist movement (Parratt op.cit). He started mobilizing people especially the peasants which formed the bulk of the population to fight against the oppression of the king. The king realized the position of Irabot and he was made vice president of the newly established state sponsored Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha on 30th May 1934 to counter his rebellious activities. But Irabot was on his own way have resisted the system. In 1936, he along with his like minded friends established a peasant organization called Kishan Sabha at Nambol to fight the injustice meted out to the peasants.

The people movement took a new turn after the fourth session of the Nikhil Hindi Manipuri Mahasabha (NHMM). The fourth session of the NHMM was held at Chinga on 29 & 30, 1938. Earlier session were held in Imphal, Manipur (1934), Silchar, Assam (1936), and Mandalay, Burma (1937). The fourth session marked a radical change not only in the organizational structure of the Mahasabha but in the colonial history of Manipur. The session allowed the people from the hills and also from outside the state but people of Manipur to join the Mahasabha. In order to accommodate the people of all faiths, the nomenclature "Hindu" was deleted. The Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha became Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha. After the session, it became a political party and was declared by the Darbar. Thus all the government employees resigned from the Mahasabha but Irabot resign from the Government service. Some of the most important resolutions passed by the Mahasabha were:-

- (i) A full responsible government should be established in Manipur
- (ii) Adult Franchise should be the basis of election
- (iii) The plough owner should be the land owner
- (iv) The administration of the hill and the valley should be amalgamated
- (v) Rani Gaidinglui should be released from jail

A civil disobedience movement was launched under the leadership of Irabot in 1938. He initiated in burning all the British made clothes in front of the Cheirap court. As part of the movement, the people cut down trees from the reserved forests, felled fire-wood, caught fish from the lakes and rivers with informing the government, Ferry tax was not paid, loading and boarding of peon was not supplied, Honey was collected and consumed by the people rather than offering to the king. This was the first time that the people were defying and disobeying the government orders. Simultaneously the volunteer of the Praja Mandal helped the poor peasants who come all the way to the Khwairamband Market to sell their paddy. The Praja Mandal forces the peasant to fix the amount of the paddy which was not the case earlier. The civil disobedience movement which spread far and wide in Manipur dealt a severe blow to the government. The government responded by taking up repressive measures and arresting important leaders of the movement (Kshetri 2006). In the midst of this civil disobedience movement, the II Nupi- Lan (Women's War) broke out in demand of a responsible government.

(d) II Nupi-Lan (Women War) 1939

The second women movement was one of the important movements in the history of Manipur. It was started as an agitation in 1939 against the economic exploitation and administrative policies under the Maharaja and the British Government, but later evolved into a movement for the constitutional and administrative reform in Manipur. The agitation began late in 1939 at the main market in the capital Imphal. This was situated at Khwairamband within the British reserve and technically under the control of the British rather than the Manipur State Durbar. There were two group of women in the market, one with permanent sheds having a strength of 2000 whereas a sufficiently large number of sat outside the sheds as occasional hawkers.

The export of rice from Manipur increased to a considerable amount after Manipur became a British protectorate. The Marwaris (outsiders or Mayang) encouraged by the British to control the economy of the state took full advantage of motor vehicles. The rice

exported per unit acre of cultivated land increased phenomenally from 1921-1938. A precarious situation was reached in 1939 when there was an all record of the highest export and excessive rain and the hail-storm affected the rice production. On 13th September, the State Durbar passed a resolution to ban export of rice by denying any license to an individual. However they still had to supply to Kohima Civil Station in Assam as per the agreement to supply for the battalion of the British Soldier. But soon the rice ban was resumed following the Maharaja order on 25 September (Longjan 1998). The order upset the people of Manipur especially the women.

The women intensified the movements by submitting a memorandum demanding an absolute ban on the export of rice. In continuation of the movement, on 12 December, several hundred of women marched to the State office to make their demand known to the Durbar. It was led by the women from the market. Despite the pressure the member of the Durbar could not take a decision. The issue was complicated by the absence of the Maharaja and Mr. Gimson. When the President told that the Maharaja was in Nabadip, the women forced him to go to telegraph office to communicate with the Maharaja about the demand and confined him till the reply from Maharaja. The Assam rifle was dispatched to control the situation but the women resisted by shouting slogans and remained on the road till they get a response from the Maharaja. In the confrontation, 21 women were injured by bayonet and gun butts. Out of the 21 women, 5 were seriously injured and later taken to the civil hospital for treatment. Mr. Grimson met the women in the market and informed about the Maharaja order to complete ban on export of rice. After the success of the banning of export, the women decided to close down the rice mills including own by the local people as mills were responsible for the heavy export of rice and consequently scarcity of food grain in the state (Singh op.cit).

The movement took a new turn with the involvement of Hijam Irabot who was invited to lead the movement. Irabot formed a new party Manipur Praja Samelini- as most of the members of Mahasabha did not agree to support the women's movement. Large public meetings were held with Irabot as the principle speaker but on 9 January, 1940, he was arrested under section 124 of IPC on the ground of inflammatory speech.

The authorities reacted swiftly to Irabot's attempt to channel the popular discontent over the rice exploitation into an attack on the whole feudal system of administration in Manipur and thus he was arrested and jailed for three year. After his arrest the demonstration were continued by the Praja Sanmelson in the urban areas and in the rural by the peasants' party- The Kishak Sanmelson (Parrat op.cit).

(e) Continuation of the Movement for Responsible Government:

The incident of Nupilan was brought to the notice of the Governor of Assam and the Governor drew the attention of Maharaja of considering the question of administrative reforms in Manipur. On 22 April 1940, The Maharaja had submitted a draft proposal of reform to the Political Agent. The proposal was however, drafted in intimation of the provision under the provincial government in so far as the executive and Legislative functions were concerned. But the Maharaja had intentionally left out questions on the Cheirap court and Sadar Panchayet Court Panchayet. In-spite of the Governor's appeal to introduce the reform immediately, upto December, 1940, the Maharaja did not take up any action. But when the Maharaja was prepared to concede the constitutional reform, if not responsible form of government during the occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of his reign as a "parting gift" to his people, the Governor of Assam was only in favour of a few minor administrative changes which he tried to impose unceremoniously on the Maharaja through the Political Agent of Manipur. Dissatisfied with the development, the Maharaja left Imphal on 28 May 1941 for Shillong to plead his case personally before the Governor and then even to the Crown Representatives. But unfortunately he died at Nabadwip. Manipur was declared as "Operational Area" during the Second World War and thus the state reform was taken back seat (Singh op.cit).

While in Jail, Irabot and like minded people launched the jail reform movement. In the jail, Irabot met a number of activists of the CPI particularly the most prominent leaders like Brihesh Misra and Jotirmoy Nanda. Through them he was exposed to the vast literature of Marxism and his left wing convictions were strengthened (Singh op.cit).

After his release, he was denied entry to Manipur so he was residing in Cachar under the auspices of CPI. On a special invitation from P.C Joshi, he went to Bombay to attend the first party Congress of the Communist Party of India held on 23 May- 1st June 1943 as an observer. His involvement on behalf of the peasants was increasing and because of his association with the CPI, he was detained for several months by the order of the Assam Government in 1945. He even stood for election that took place between 9th and 12 January 1946 from Silchar constituency but was narrowly defeated. He was allowed to visit Manipur only after the death of his mother-in-law. But finally on March 1946, the ban was lifted (Parratt op.cit).

On his return to Manipur, he quickly established contact with his former political colleagues. The demand for “full responsible government”, “adult franchise” etc were again adopted and passed at the second conference of the Manipur Krishak Sabha held at Nambol on 16th May 1946. In the same year, The Manipur Praja Sammelan also reiterated the “necessity of the legislature in Manipur”. On 15 April, 1945, the Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha sent a memo to the British Cabinet Mission through Nehru, in which it demanded an elected legislature for Manipur and what it called ‘a united Kingdom of the whole of India’ with a central government which will take control over defense, finance, trade, communications, roads and transport, taxes, and foreign policy. Again in 1946 the Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha petitioned the Maharaja for an immediate declaration that there will be a responsible government and that to this end he would set up a constitutional committee and an interim government (Singh op.cit). The representatives of the Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha, Manipur Praja Sammelan, Krishak Sabha, together with the representatives from the hills requested the Maharaja to set up a committee to facilitate the election of the legislative Assembly. The Maharaja on 21st September 1946 wrote to the Political Agent asking for the Government approval to make a declaration which will lead to responsible government. On December 12th, he announced the composition of a committee which would draft a constitution (Parratt op.cit). On 15 May, 1947 Manipur Draft Constitution was ready and on 26th July 1947, Manipur Constitution was adopted.

Restoration of sovereignty of Manipur:

When the British prepared to depart, the Cabinet Mission on 12th May 1946 suggested that when India achieved independence, British paramountcy over other princely states would lapse. Thus Manipur regained her independence after a gap of 56 years when the British left. After the adoption of the Constitution, Manipur became an “Autonomous State”. Since the constitution was not provided by the British or the Dominion of India, Manipur did not come under their purview. The relation between Sovereign Manipur and the Dominion of India was guided by the Instrument of Accession and the Stand Still Agreement signed by Maharaja of Manipur on 11th August 1947 ceding Currency, Defense, External Affairs and Communication to Dominion of India. But Manipur remained as an “Associate State” with complete internal independence. Nobody knows whether the Governor General consented to the Agreement or not. On 28 August, 1947, King announced the sovereignty status of Manipur. Dominion of India agent admitted that Manipur is Sovereign (Sanajaoba 1995). The clauses of the Instrument of Accession clearly stated the sovereignty status of Manipur.

Clause 7, “Nothing in this Instrument shall be deemed to commit me in any way to acceptance of any future constitution of India or to fetter my discretion to enter into arrangements with Government of India under any such future condition”

Clause 8, “ Nothing in this Instrument affects the continuance of my sovereignty in and over this State, or save as provided by or under this Instrument, the exercise of any powers, authority and rights now enjoyed by me a Ruler of this State”.

The Constitution provides 53 members of which 18 were reserved for the hills. The remaining seats were for the valley. Elections were held on 11th and 30th June for the valley and 26th and 27th July, 1948 for the hills. It was based on adult franchise-the first of its kind in Asia. The first meeting of the first Manipur State Assembly was held on the 18th October, 1948 at the Durbar Hall. The popular Ministry also started functioning since then (Maipaksana 1995).

Table No 7.1: Transformation of Manipur State:

Period	Status of State
A.D 33- early 20 century	Sovereign State
1891-1946	International Protectorate
26 July, 1947	Autonomous State (Constitution adopted)
11 August, 1947	Associate State (Sovereign within Indian confederation)
14 August, 1947	Sovereign State
18 October, 1948	Sovereign State (Assembly functions)
15 October, 1949	Annexed State (continuous State with suspended sovereignty)
21 January, 1972	Constituent State of India (suspended sovereignty)

Political status of State during the inter-war period (1919-1945) had varied in the country of nations (Sanajaoba 2006).

Third Movement for Self-Determination: First Phase

The third phase of self-determination movement in Manipur dates back to 1948, when the Manipuri communists under the charismatic leadership of Hijam Irabot, took up the cause of the liberation of Manipur from the suffering in a state of semi-feudal and semi-colonialism by resorting to the Maoist line of armed struggle. It was earlier conceived as 'National democratic revolution'. But the first brick of ethnic structure of the self-determination movement was laid down by the Chinga session of Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha (1938). The Chinga session resolves to depute Hijam Irabot and Lalita Madhava Sharma to revive the ethnic links with Meiteis who settled in Burma, Dacca, Sylhet, Assam, Cachar and other areas.

The legitimacy of the armed struggle in Manipur and its adjacent areas like Burma or Assam or Tripura had been given by the resolutions of the 1948 Calcutta conference which was attended by the South-East Asian communist delegates and Indian delegates. The purpose of Irabot's deeper involvement in the insurgency-infested areas of Burma where the secessionist movement of Shan, Karen, Kachin, among other communist guerrilla outfits thrived, was partly a fulfillment of the 'Cominform' programmes. The movement in Manipur led by Hijam Irabot was a part of the movements in different part

of South Asia, given the separate political status of Manipur in the 1949 pre-merger period as an historical fact. The movements followed the Zhadnov line which stressed revolution with the tactical approval of the USSR, without which the struggle should not have been operationalised in Manipur (Sanajaoba 1988). The aim of the movement was to establish an “independent Peasant Republic” in Manipur.

Irabot went underground on 21st September 1948 during the protest meeting against the proposed ‘Purvanchal scheme’ at Manipur Dramatic Union Hall. While remaining underground he succeeded in engaging the peasants as well as the Communist Party. His weekly “Anouba Jug” appeared regularly with no interruption. Above all, he managed to distribute many leaflets, pamphlets, hold secret meetings with his underground colleagues and also issued political statements from time to time. One of such meeting was held on 29 October 1948 at Top under his chair and it decided to intensify the underground communist movement. In order to intensify the struggle, in March 1950, “Red Guard” was formed as an armed group with the aim to collect arms and ammunition with a view to harass and fight the police and overthrow the Government of India. Every volunteer of the Red Guard was supposed to take up arms and be well trained. The Red Guard had its camp at Kangmong, North Jiri, Bandiya (Near Nambol) etc. Any three communists in a village would constitute a cell in that village. He also kept on sending memoranda, resolutions to the government which was passed underground in secret closed door meeting. After the forceful merger with India, the intensity of the communist armed struggle in Manipur rose to great height and reached its apex and was therefore viewed its serious concerned by the Government of India particularly by the Home Ministry. Accordingly the movement took a violent form and succeeded in establishing some free pockets from where they continued harassing the police in rural areas down to 1951 (Kshtri op.cit).

The state tried all the available means to suppress the movement so by early 1951, most of the important leaders of the Red Guard were arrested and prosecuted. Nevertheless Irabot continued to give training to Red Guard volunteer and at the same time devise revolutionary plan. The lack of resources and manpower force him to look for external

support for the movement particularly Burma. Before he went to Burma to seek support, the last meeting in Manipur was held at North Jiri. In recognizing his contribution in forming a 'Unified Front Liberation Government of Burma' (UFLGB), between the three communist parties, an agreement was reached that UFLGB will give the Kabaw Valley and Ango-Ching to Manipur. Since then his headquarter is based at Kabaw Valley. Above this it is reported that Irabot recruited many locals Meiteis and built up a Red Guard and started regular administration over these areas. After more than three years of fighting underground, he died of typhoid at Tangbaw village, his headquarter Kabaw Valley on 26 September 1951 (Kashtri ibid). The underground movement could not last long as his over-ground comrades had given up the fight and were involved in the state politics. But the Red Guard's revolution in 1950-1951 left a profound, indelible impact on the informed Manipuri world view and onward progression of a composite, egalitarian history of the ancient Asian state.

Third Movement for Self-Determination: Second Phase

Revolutionary leader Hijam Irabot died without realizing his dream of an "Independent Socialist Republic of Manipur" but the movement was taken up by many educated youth. The movement that has been dormant after the Irabot movement was revived in early 60s with the formation of the United National Liberation Front in 1964. In 50s also, the Manipur National Union proclaimed Manipur's independence in 1953 but was nipped in the bud and followed by the Meitei State Committee; In 1968, Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM) which dissolved to form the PLA was formed; People Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) was formed on October 9 1977; In September 1978, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), with a leftist ideology and alleged training in guerrilla warfare in China, was formed; and Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) was formed on April 13, 1980. Subsequently Manipur also witnessed the growth of a number of other organizations since 1980 but they remained dormant because of the loss of fighter, infighting or splits in their organizations. The organizations have different approaches for getting the objectives from different platforms and perspectives but shared one common objective "restoration of sovereignty of Manipur". In this chapter two

organizations will be analyzed which have survived the suppression of the state for nearly half a decade and remain very active and organized with a strong manpower in both army and political wing. The armed groups have boycotted the Independence Day and Republic Day for the last many decades stating that this day reminds subjugation and suspension of our sovereign status.

United National Liberation Front / Manipur People's Army

The issue of external self-determination of Manipur was again raised by the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in 1964 under the leadership of (i). President: Kalalung Kamei of Tameglong; (ii) Vice-President: Khangsopao Singshit of Karong; and (iii) General Secretary: Arambam Somorendra of Imphal. Some veterans of the Red Guard also joined the movement to lend their experiences to the organization and to complete what they left was their unfinished task. It was purely a clandestine organization brought about by the individual's efforts of some like minded persons. There was no formal announcement or declaration to the public regarding its formation (Ksehtri op.cit). The aim and objectives of the UNLF as reported (cited in Singh 1996), are as follows:

- (i) To Liberate Manipur and its neighbours from the alleged domination of India and neo-colonialists.
- (ii) To restore the lost political sovereignty of Manipur and her neighbour
- (iii) To establish an independent sovereign republic comprising Manipur and her neighbours
- (iv) To regain the lost territories of Manipur
- (v) To unite the people of the Mongoloids origin in the geographically contiguous areas of the "south Middle Asia" into one nation.
- (vi) To make a pan- Mongoloids movement in order to bring and awareness among the Mongoloids people and accomplish the great enterprise of the national liberation.

One of the most important objectives of UNLF was to preserve a distinct national identity and to create a free and wholesome human existence for the people of Manipur. In this respect they have strongly deplored the policy of the Indian government. They asserted that the decadence in the Manipuri society, the meaningless existence of the people particularly the youth floating in a vacuum, the erosion in the distinctive national identity and the parasitic thinking that they cannot survive without depending on India were all creation of the policy of the Indian government. so they called the present administrative system as “Indian colonial rule” in this regard they had pointed out two points as the main features of the Indian colonial rule i.e., (i) the erosion of the distinctive national identity of the Manipuri, and (ii) suppression of their economy as a captive (that is, not allowing Manipur to develop its productive forces) thereby making Manipur permanently dependent on Indian capital (in money form). They concluded that to uproot and to overthrow Indian colonial rule was the only way to the restoration of their national independence. They believe that the only path to achieve this objectives was to carry out a “National People’s Democratic Revolution” (statement of central committee of UNLF issued on 24 November on the occasion of 28 anniversary, cited in Singh 2005).

The UNLF never came into conflict openly with the establishment. This was primarily because it never set out its aims beyond giving political classes and a little bit of arm training to its members in the initial stage. In October 1965, the UNLF organized an arms and military training camp for its members on a hillock near Khoubam. This training camp lasted for 15 days and was led by the UNLF chief himself. A United Youth Front was also established to work as an over-ground wing under the guidance of the elders. Around the same time, at the behest of the UNLF chief, a student association was formed in Calcutta by R.K Meghen who is said to be closest lieutenant of the chief for the sole purpose of spreading nationalist ideas among the Manipuri students in Calcutta (Kshetri op.cit). A Pan Manipuri Youth League was formed in December 1968, which functioned as an over ground body for the UNLF (satp.org). The UNLF had a council comprising seven members. According to its constitution, the General Secretary was the Supreme Commander of the UNLF; Arambam Somorendro was the General Secretary of the UNLF. Next to the Council was a Co-ordination Committee which was the executive

body of the UNLF. Political classes were held for workers of the organization in the house of the Somorendro in 1967. The topic covered by the classes included nationalism, political situation of Manipur, her political history, political philosophies of social change, failure of parliamentary democracy in India, future of Manipur etc (cited in Singh op.cit).

The first effort to established contact with the foreign country was undertaken in 1965 when it sent its publicity and propaganda minister to hand over a paper to some person in East Pakistan. Again in the later part of 1965, they made another trip to East Pakistan along with Sudhir Kumar. In 1967, there was serious thought amongst the leaders of the UNLF to established relationship with foreign countries and seek possible assistance from them. Thus a UNLF contingent along with the Chief himself and some 17 members undertook trip another trip to the same country. In the first as well as the second trip the UNLF members met officials of the Chinese Consulate there and requested for help in establishing relation with the Chinese Government. However the Chinese officials refused to give any commitment (Singh op.cit & Ksshetri op.cit).

Difference in UNLF approach:

In the beginning of 1968, the UNLF was vertically divided into two groups particularly the youth group who favoured immediate armed struggle and those who preferred to build up the mass base first and then start armed revolution. It led to the formation of Revolutionary Government of Manipur which was dissolved to form the People's Liberation Army in 1978. The transition before the formation of the RGM was filled by a committee to bring together between the groups called Consolidated Committee (CONSOCOM). In 1969, the CONSOCOM planned a trip to East Pakistan for the sole purpose of unifying all the organization existing in Imphal in a foreign soil under one fold. As one hard core member who himself went for this purpose stated "At that time so many different organizations were there. No serious attempt was made to bring them together. Whatever attempt, if any, in this direction met a resounding failure. So, we thought since we failed to achieve this in Manipur, we could perhaps bringing the

organizations under one fold in a foreign soil. For this we chose East Pakistan as the meeting place". The whole idea, according to him, was to send all the leaders of different organizations to the meeting place one after another to enable them to sort out whatever differences there were amongst them and to come to an understanding so that they all unite. Another reason for the trip was to internationalize the cause. CONSOCOM leader sent Bisheshwar to arrange for the meeting at East Pakistan. In order to meet the expenses of the meeting, the cashier of Imphal college was robbed Rs 10,000 on 15 May 1969. The entire 53 activists reached Bhanuvi village, East Pakistan by the beginning of July but were later arrested and expelled out of East Pakistan except Sudhir Kumar who was allowed to stay. Later, he announced the formation of the Revolutionary Government of Manipur in 1968 (Kshetri *ibid*).

By 1976, Meghen- the present chief of UNLF, managed to establish contact with the top underground Naga leaders and left in December of that year for Myanmar to arrange for arms training of the UNLF members. In mid 1977, Meghen returned to Manipur and was engaged in organizational work for six years. In April 1985, the UNLF leader proceeded to the headquarters of the NSCN in upper Myanmar with about 12 newly recruits volunteers (Tarapot 1994). Meghen became the chief of UNLF after Somorendro gave up underground life when the amnesty was granted in 1972 after granting statehood of Manipur. He gave up underground life physically but not mentally.

As part of the general amnesty all cases registered against anyone involved in political offences were withdrawn and all political offenders in jail custody were released. Most of the leaders including the UNLF and RGM left their underground lives by sharing the responsibilities with the young one. Serious differences arose between the RGM leaders whether to come over-ground and lead a normal life or continue fighting. The latter was led by N Bisheshwar who later formed the People's Liberation Army on 25th September 1978. Around 1980, the UNLF went into oblivion even though the Government would detect the activities once in a while. Yet the organization was not totally defunct even then. It was reported that an agreement between the NSCM and the UNLF was signed on 21st August 1981. The agreement had seven articles and the signatories were Angelus on

behalf of the NSCN and Sanayaima on behalf of UNLF to support each other (Singh op.cit).

In the seventies and eighties, the UNLF concentrated mainly on mobilization and recruitment. In 1990, it decided to launch an armed struggle for the “Liberation” of Manipur by forming an armed wing called Manipur People’s Army (MPA) on 24 November 1991. The first strike after the formation of MPA to the security patrol was on 15 December 1991 at Loktak Project Area, about some 40 Kms south of Imphal killing five CRPF on the spot (Tarapot op.cit). Since then it continue even today. In order to fight together for the common cause of independence, a joint front (UNLF, ULFA, NSCN-K) under the banner of Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF) was formed on 21 May 1990 (Hemanta 2008). After the KYKL (O) faction of the KYKL was formed by the break up faction of the UNLF. They had been locked in a deadly factional fight with the UNLF for many years mutually destroying and killing each other till the intervention of the PREPAK on 12 June 2001.

The Chief of UNLF has addressed the United Nations working group on Indigenous people on 25 July 1995. UNLF has attended Unrepresented Nations People’s Organization (UNPO) and the United Nations Group on Human Rights (UNWGIP). In the same year, the UNLF chief and the Home Affairs in charge briefed the Parliamentarian of the European Union in Brussel (Hemanta ibid). Again in July 1996, UNLF have circulated a pamphlets “**Why Manipuris Demand Right of Self-Determination**”. It says that the organizations as the vanguard of the struggle for national liberation demands for their respective peoples right to self-determination (cited in Sanajaoba 2006). On November 26, 2000, the UNLF, chairperson, R.K. Meghen, put forward three conditions for talks with the Centre. Again on January 31, 2005, UNLF had come up with a four-point formula to resolve the armed conflict in Manipur. They claim that they will honour the wish of the people. There was no positive response from the government.

Revolutionary People's Front/People's Liberation Army:

Around 1974, two groups of insurgents crossed the border and entered from different routes to Lhasa. While one group led by Bisheshwar headed from Dibugarh to cross the border, the other group through the Nepal border. Both the groups could not succeed in their earlier attempt and had come back to Imphal. In their second attempt to go to Lhasa-capital of Tibet, they decided to take a safer route to China via Nepal. Security forces were aware of the underground activities and tightened the security measures throughout the region. This restricted the movement of the youth but on 14 June 1975, about 16 youths under the leadership of Bisheshwar left Imphal for Lhasa. It is believed that it takes about 15 days to reach Kathmandu because of the security forces. After reaching at the Nepal-China border, they could not make any contact with the Chinese officials. Fortunately to their mission, they were arrested by the Chinese authorities thinking as Indian spies (Tarapot op.cit).

After their arrest, they were received by the Chairman of the local committee of the Communist Party. Thus the training was started. Initially they were trained with the lesson on communism and teaching of Mao-Tse-Tung. After a few months, some of them departed for Imphal to collect funds to meet the cost of the training programme. The training was between April 1976 and February 1978. In the morning, they were taught the political history of China, and it covered among many other aspects how to organize the masses. The military class and mobile warfare were conducted in the evening and night. The training, however did not satisfy some of the youth but Bisheshwor and some of his trusted associates took the training so seriously that they learnt every tactics of guerilla warfare with ideological background. After returning from Lhasa, in order to launched the armed struggle and intensified the movement for exercising right to self-determination of Manipur, the People's Liberation Army (Eastern Region) was formed with Bishewor as its first chairperson (Tarapot ibid). It is called Eastern Region as it plans to organize the entire North East and Manipur is the eastern most of the entire region.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) was established on 25 September, 1978. It is a military organization based on Marxism, Leninism and Maoism. PLA is the armed wing of the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) which was established on 25 February 1979. It was formed after dissolving the Revolutionary Government of Manipur that took general amnesty from the Manipur State Government of India in the year 1971. RPF takes up arms and fights for all the dependent and colonized people of Manipur representing the ethnic and indigenous people, namely, the Meiteis, the Nagas, the Kukis-chins for granting and restoration of independence and de-colonization of the State of Manipur – that continues to exist since the Christian era, despite unlawful political and military occupation – from the present colonial and hegemonic Administrative Power-the Government of India (RPF Broucher 1998).

The RPF leader Bishewhor in its first plenary session stated that, the sole objective of this organization was to launch a movement of the similar type of “Nanchang Uprising”, a famous historic revolutionary uprising in the Chinese revolution led by Chou-En-Lai in the region. He stated that the RPF/PLA movement as the “second Nanchang Uprising” (cited in Singh op.cit).

RPF's armed wing - *People's Liberation Army* (PLA) was reorganized on the lines of a disciplined army. It has three bureaus - Central, Western and Eastern. All the decisions of the party are taken by the Central bureau. The RPF has divided the entire state of Manipur for administrative purposes into six divisions (presently only four divisions are operational as the party cannot operate in some hilly regions of the state). Each division is led by a commander. A division is further divided into tracts. Each track is headed by a corporal/ lance corporal and they are assisted by five lower rank members. (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/rpf.htm>). RPF established two armed wings (i) the PLA and (ii) the Militias. While the PLA consist of hardcore regularized armies, the Militias comprised guerrillas. Both of them are guided and controlled by the Front and they called it a case of the gun guided by politics and not politics guided being guided by the gun. The PLA regards itself as an organization of those who are exploited, oppressed and enslaved by the imperialist and want to free them (Singh op.cit). The

militant wing now comprises four division- Sadar Hill west areas of the valley of Manipur, Sadar Hills areas in the eastern valley, the entire hill areas in Manipur and the entire Imphal areas. Each division has a commander, lieutenant, sergeant and lance corporals in its rank (satp.org).

In the period of 1979-81, when the PLA propaganda activities were at its height, taped cassettes and recorded speech songs were used to propagate their aims, action and principles and also to counter-propagates their action of the government and the counter-revolutionaries. PLA did this in the public gathering especially during the 'thabal chongba' - a cultural celebration of the Meitei of Manipur, days in the valley. During the Thabal Chongba session, some PLA members would, all of a sudden but politely and courteously, ask the organizers to stop the dance for some minutes and then would switch on their recorded cassettes containing the speech and songs of PLA. The PLA in its attempts to convey their political and ideological messages and activities also adopted the method of wall postering and publishing/distributing clandestine leaflets. All the streets and roads and educational institutional institutions of the Imphal valley were plastered with slogans in the name of PLA units, Eastern Region: "Down with Delhi Gangs"; "PLA serves our people"; "we support People's Liberation Army"; "We want Independence"; "we want liberation"; "PLA learns from the people"; "we want revolution"; "join PLA"; "victory to PLA"; etc. PLA's ramifications reached as far as Delhi and at one time PLA graffiti were openly seen in the Delhi University and JNU campuses and its ideological bulletins openly distributed among the students (Kshetri op.cit).

Simultaneously along with the propaganda activities, Imphal valley witnessed killings, lootings, encounter with security forces. The PLA activists unleashed a series of violent activities throughout the valley and this also resulted in the intensification of counter insurgency operation. PLA armed propaganda had intended to produce two results- one to popularize the "revolution" among the people and second to obtain for the organization. After their training at Lhasa, they have not carried any weapon with the belief that they have to begin their revolution with their own efforts and with all available means. The Chinese trainers also wanted to test their commitment for the revolution. The methods of

snatching weapon was well plan, for instance, ten well trained PLA members would cover the area where the police personnel were patrolling. The first batch would strike or shoot at the security forces, the second groups would keep a ring around the security forces and collect the arms while the third and the fourth groups would cover and help them escape from the scene. This was how the PLA commenced their armed struggle. It is at this time that the PLA leaders try to contact representatives of other guerrilla outfits including KIA of Myanmar for joint operation of the region. Temba- a Lhasa trained went to Kachin in upper Myanmar along with 27 people including 11 girls from Manipur and established camp there (Taraport op.cit).

As the law and order was deteriorating following intensified underground movement, roving security patrolling was steeped up to detect the moment of the ultras throughout Manipur, And on 26 October, 1981, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a notification declaring PLA as unlawful association under provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967 (37 of 1967). The notification also includes PREPAK and KCP. After some successful strikes, PLA suffered a set back in the early after the incident of Teckcham on 6 July 1981 which killed many of the top leaders and also the arrest of Bisheshwor – the PLA chief. It was closely followed by the incident of Kodompokpi on 13 April 1982, where nine of the hardcore PLA was killed (Tarapot ibid). This incident is today remembered as the “Matryr Day” by the RPF/PLA.

The Martyrs' Day has been observed by the RPF/PLA annually for the past so many years after nine hardcore cadres including a leader of PLA were killed in a historic gun battle with the security forces at Kodompokpi village, about 12 kms south of here on April 13 of 1982. The observance of April 13 also reminds of another incident in which seven other cadres of PLA were killed in a gun battle with security forces at Tekcham village in Thoubal district on July 6 of 1981. Hordes of people took part in offering floral tributes at the martyrs' memorial located at the flat site on the Cheirao Ching, Imphal. Earlier State authority tries to restrict participation of general public in the floral tribute ceremony. Even Deputy Secretary (Home) Th Amalkumar Singh in an official order permitted only 112 people to pay homage to the departed souls. However a single Bench of Gauhati

High gave a ruling allowing all interested persons to participate in the ceremony following a petition by one Kh Rebita and others seek permission for all intending to pay the tribute. According to AK Ibotombi, Chairman of the April 13 Observation Committee; people have been paying tributes to the 'martyrs' (<http://www.e-pao.net/epRelatedNews.asp?heading=22&src=140409>).

After the two major incidents where the RPF/PLA as an organization suffered the most, the internal crisis erupted for the leadership of the organization. Finally Temba took the charge of New PLA Chairperson on June 8, 1982. By the end of 1982 and the beginning of 1983, about 50 PLA guerillas including girls had taken a 'long march' to China. It was reported that the PLA long marchers were seen in the third week of February in Kachin woodlands in Northern Burma. The long march was undertaken with a view to reinforce the fading and fast eroding image and popularity of PLA besides collecting arms and getting training, at the behest of Temba who wanted to consolidate his position through new recruits and exploits. The movement took a different turn when the PLA founder leader and three of his underground colleagues participated in the Assembly elections held on December 27, 1984. Indeed PLA and Manipur watchers were optimistic about the outcome of an end of insurgency. Telegraph on 6 January 1985, observed that, Bisheshwar coming over to constitutional politics "can contribute substantially to the process of neutralizing the guerilla thereby mediating between New Delhi and PLA leadership across the border in Burma. Amrita Bazar Patrika on 9 January 1985 shared the same view. A more realistic and down to earth assessment of the incident was provided by the local analyst when he observed "the government will be living in a fools paradise to imagine that insurgency is fizzing out simply because some hardcore leaders have joined the national politics. Many sympathizers who gave intellectual support to its cause then maintained that Bisheshwar's transformation was only a temporary setback to the movement. To them, PLA, with or without Bisheshwar, would go on (Kshetri op.cit). In August 1995, former RPF chief Bisheshwar was gunned down by PLA militants for contesting in the State Assembly elections and accepting the Indian Constitution which was against the fight for exercising right to self-determination.

After the set back of RPF/PLA, the first Congress of RPF was held in May - July 1990. For the first time in the history of the RPF, Constitution of the RPF, Organizational Structure, Rank and Files, and, Rules and Regulation of the PLA were adopted in the Congress. PLA activists are equipped with modern sophisticated arms and considered as one of the most powerful militant groups in the state. Sources put the total strength of RPF at around 1,500 cadres. From 1991, RPF started observing October 15 (the day Manipur merged with the Union of India) as Black Day. The party has been observing 25 February as Independence Demand Day since 1995. Recently on 2nd July 2004, the People's Liberation opened its 3rd battalion called battalion 253 at its General headquarters (GHQs) in Chandel district. (Bobby Sarenthem cited in <http://indianarmy.nic.in/ec/rpf.html>). In 1995, a pamphlet of RPF addressing the United Nation with a writing on- "a brief account for demanding sovereignty of Manipur was widely circulated (Sanajaoba op.cit). RPF/PLA has stopped collection of taxes since MPLF (an amalgamation of UNLF, RPF and PREPAK) declared in early January 2002 that MPLF would stop collection of taxes from government employees from 15 January 2002 (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/rpf.htm>)

The Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) and its military wing, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have signed the Common Article 3rd of the Fourth Geneva Convention in 1997 and also have submitted a memorandum to the UN Decolonization Committee (Committee of 24). The party is the fourth revolutionary group, which claimed to abide by the Common Article 3 of the Geneva Convention. The memorandum was submitted on behalf of all the dependent and colonized people of Manipur representing the Meitei and the Meitei cognate's viz., the Nagas, the Kuki-Chins for granting and restoration of independence and de-colonization of the State of Manipur from the present colonial Administering Power of India, which has occupied Manipur since 15 October, 1949, till today. The memorandum has six prayers with historical facts, political, socio-economic materials as well as legal and constitutional materials. They are as follows:-

1. For supervising and examining historical materials/records relating to the **illegal annexation and colonization of Manipur by India;**

2. For terminating the foreign and colonial regime of India over Manipur;
3. For international appraisal of the illegal and unjustified annexation of the Nation-State of Manipur in 1949 AD;
4. For giving international recognition to the **National Liberation Movement of Manipur**, which continues since the time of annexation in 1949 till today, and **allowing the people of Manipur to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination in conformity with the UN General Assembly Resolution 1514(XV) of 1960 and other subsequent resolutions;**
5. For all necessary and elaborate steps, appropriate measures towards **complete decolonization of Manipur** and cessation of subjugation of her people to the earliest, and lastly, for holding emergent as well as periodic sessions of the Decolonization Committee in Imphal city in 1999; and,
6. **For enlisting Manipur in the list of the non-self-governing territories of the UN by enlarging the existing Mandate.**

RPF and its armed wing PLA have reaffirmed its stand not to have a political dialogue with the GOI except on the issue of independence and sovereignty of Manipur after their second congress (July 14 to December 4, 2008) resolution.

Besides RPF/PLA and UNLF/MPA, there are other organizations whose demand is to restore the sovereignty of Manipur. As per the government report, KCP has 10 factions and one faction of PREPAK have formed itself into a new organization called UPPK. They are now considered as inactive.

Table No 7.2: Resistance groups Supporting Sovereignty of Manipur.

Sl. No	Organization	Year of establishment
1	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)	9 th October 1977
2	Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)	13 April 1980
3	Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL)	25 th May 1994
4	United People's Party of Kangleipak (UPPK)	6 th November 2008
5	United Naga People's Council (UNPC)	19 th May 2008
6	Manipur Naga Revolutionary Front (MNRF)	May 2008

Conflicting Claims:

With the restoration of sovereignty of Manipur from the British, the tribals were for the first time inducted into the newly formed Manipur State Assembly under the Manipur Constitution Act 1948. There was incident of Mao Naga uprising but it was negotiated and their leader Mr. A Daiho was appointed as advisor to the Government of Manipur. During the height of forceful merger, the Kuki Chiefs sent 250 warriors to guard the palace gates to keep away Maharaja Buddhachandra from signing the merger agreement. The Tangkhul leader Yangmaso Shaiza was leading the movement of the independence of Manipur under the Manipur National Union in the early 50s. The Nagas of Manipur have ignored the movement in the Naga Hills (Kamei op.cit). But the forceful merger of Manipur brought a sea change in the political horizons of Manipur. The tribals of Manipur who were supporting the sovereignty of Manipur have started mobilizing themselves demanding for territory rights. It was mainly because of destroying the people's government and imposing central rule in Manipur (1949-72). The movement of Nagas and Kuki-Chin-Mizo groups will be discussed here. The Naga Integration movement or Greater Nagaland/Lim was rising as well as the issue of Greater Mizoram of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group.

Greater Nagaland/Lim:

The movement in the Naga Hills has influenced the Nagas in Manipur and few of them even joined the movement in the late 50s. Simultaneously, few sections of Nagas of Manipur formed the Manipur Naga Council in 1960 to support the movement. But the aspirations of the Nagas of Manipur were ignored with the creation of Nagaland State in 1963. They were not considered during the negotiation as the movement was concentrated in the Naga Hills and there was no significant involvement from the Nagas of Manipur. However, in 1964, the cease-fire extension to the three sub-division of Manipur encouraged them again. But the cease-fire was unilaterally evoked by the government of India in 1967. But interestingly the Nagas of Manipur stuck to the stand of

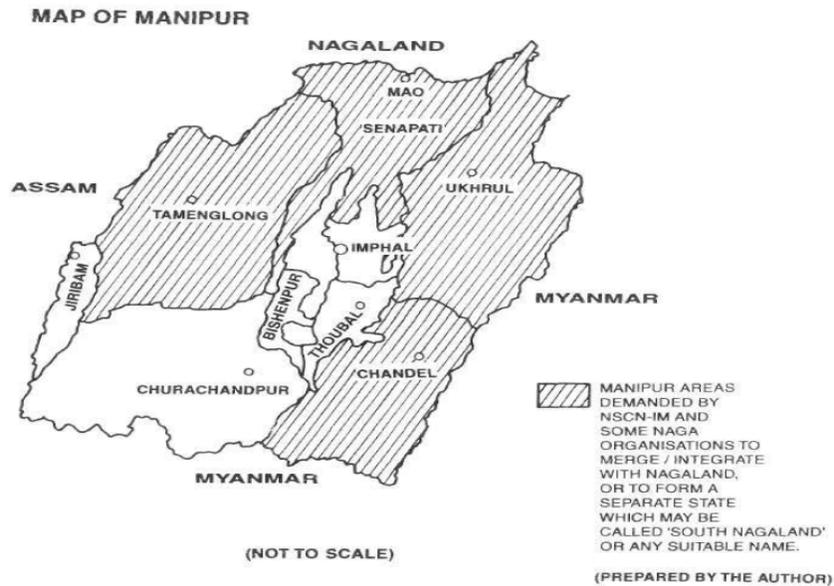
remaining with Manipur instead of acceding with Nagaland. The All-Tribal delegations went to Delhi in May 1970, demanding statehood of Manipur (Koireng 2007). This was quickly followed by the Lok Sabha election.

The Lok-Sabha election of 1971 was fought on three crucial issues; all three forces were contradictory to each other. They are (i) Statehood and Integrity of Manipur; (ii) Demand for Mizo Integration or Greater Mizoram; (iii) Naga Integration or Greater Nagaland/Lim. But the people of Manipur stuck by and large with the integrity and statehood of Manipur. The candidate of the Naga Integration Council as well as the Mizo Integration Council was defeated. It was followed by the Shillong Accord which split the Naga movement into NNC and NSCN. The Nagas of Manipur was accommodated in the peace camp at Khongjaron in Tamenglong, Sajouba in Senapati. Peace camp was not established in Tangkhul area though the protagonist of the Accord Mr. Z. Ramyo was from Tolloi, Ukhrul (Kamei op.cit). The NSCN was further split into NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K). The idea of greater Nagaland/Lim was remerged again with the formation of the NSCN (IM) in 1988. Since it was formed under the leadership of Mr. Muivah- a Tangkhul of Manipur, the efforts of creating Nagas inhabitant to Naga dominant areas and to Nagaland/Lim was given the top priority. It was under a bigger project of Nagalim. The objectives of NSCN (IM) are to establish a “Greater Nagaland”. The ethnic cleansing of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group in the hills districts of Manipur which led to the infamous ethnic conflict in the early 1990s was a classic example. The armed Kuki-Chin-Mizo groups were born out of the ethic conflict.

The Nagalim project covers a huge area in Indo-Burma region. The so-called Naga areas in Burma are almost twice the size of present day Manipur. The Naga areas in Arunachal Pradesh is also twice the size of present day Manipur and the Naga areas in Assam is almost the size of present day Manipur. All these areas mentioned here are supposed to be part of Nagalim. But the main obstacle for the project is coming from Manipur (Meitei No Date). It is quite obvious that NSCM (IM) do not have any influence to these areas like they have in few districts of Nagaland and Manipur. So the concerned governments are less bothered about the ambition of the NSCN (IM). The Naga sovereignty issue has

taken a back seat and the integration movement is gaining momentum, if possible within the Indian Union.

Figure No 7.1: Manipur areas demanded by NSCN (IM) to merger/Integrate with Nagaland



Source: Tarapot 2003

But after the Manipur Nagas aspiration was betrayed on many occasions, the people in the hills are skeptical about the integration movement. The invisible voice of the people of the hills was visible in the early 21 century particularly in the last Manipur Assembly election and the Lok-Sabha election of 2009. In 1971, the idea of greater Nagaland/Lim and Greater Mizoram was rejected by the people in the hills districts. Similarly, the NSCN (IM) selected candidates were defeated in the State Assembly as well as the Lok Sabha election in 2009. Again, the Tangkhul Naga Long- the highest socio-political body of the Tangkhul-Muivah tribe also presented a memorandum to make Ukhrul as a summer capital of Manipur to the Cabinet Secretary Mr Pillai on his recent visit to Manipur (Thohe Pou 2009). The land encroachment issue in Senapati as well as Ukhrul by the Nagaland was protested by the respective people of the districts. If the people of this district prefer to be in greater Nagaland then there should be no issue on land encroachment. This in fact reveals that the issue of greater Nagaland in Manipur is

superficial and limited to few sections. The formation of Manipur Naga Revolutionary Front (MNRF) in Ukhrul and United Naga People's Council (UNPC) in Senapati by the splinter group of NSCN (IM) for restoring peaceful co-existence and territorial integrity of Manipur indicate the losing people support for the Greater Nagaland/Lim project.

It is not only that the people in the hills district of Manipur do not welcome the integration movement but also the Nagas of Nagaland. There were many instances of 'quite notice' to the Nagas of Manipur. The formation of NSCN (unification group) on November 23 near Dimapur, Nagaland was a significant signal. The aim of the group was for the Unification of the militant group of Nagaland for an acceptable solution which confined in the state of Nagaland. It was hosted by the Western Sumi (Sema tribe) Hoho and other civil bodies in Nagaland particularly the Sema tribes. It was also supported by the NSCN (K) which talks for the sovereignty of Nagaland not greater Nagaland. Thus the idea of Greater Nagaland is not welcome in Manipur and Nagaland. It only delays peace in both the states but NSCN (IM) under Muivah is pushing for it, with the last hope, not to repeat the history of betrayal of Manipur Nagas aspiration as earlier. The NNC which moulded the Naga movement is today termed and attacked as traiters by the NSCN (IM). The NSCN (IM) and K are fighting each other, so which organization solely represents the Naga people is a big question.

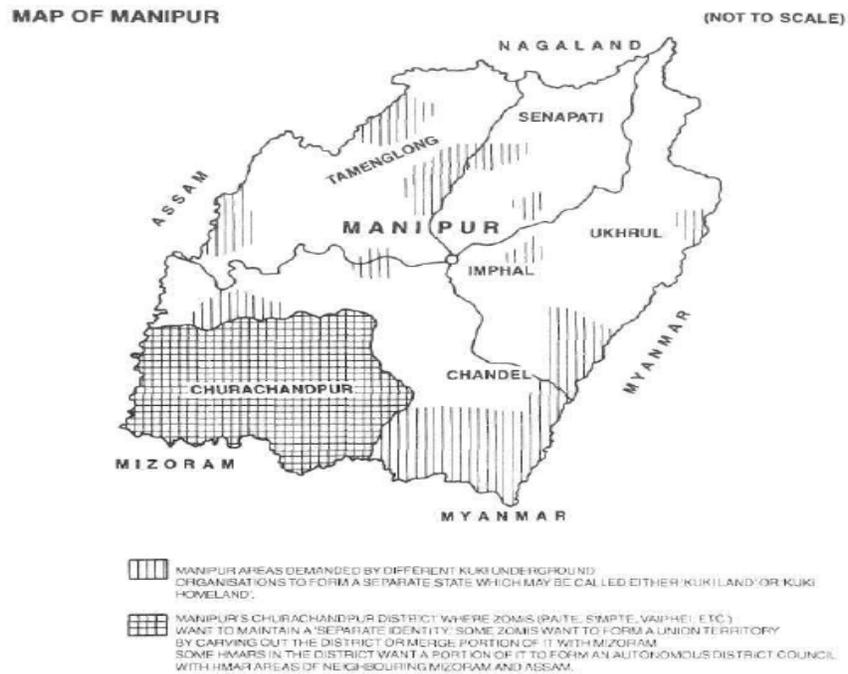
Greater Mizoram:

The Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of Manipur under Mizo National Front (MNF) demanded integration of Kuki-Chim-Mizos inhabitant areas to form the Greater Mizoram. It was an immediate outcome of the Mizo rebellion under MNF of Laldenga. People of the area have fallible impression that the armed movement was a joint Chin-Kuki-Mizo (CHIKIMS) affair encompassing the territories of Manipur, Assam, Tripura and border areas of Burma. The 1963 conference at Churachandpur, Manipur resolved MNF to integrate all the Mizos areas of Northeast into one administrative unit. Churachandpur was one of the base camps for the MNF movement. By the late seventies, the MNF's had weakened and spate of surrenders from its rank had been engineered by Mizoram Chief

Minister, Thengpunga Sailo. He formed the People's Conference party that went on to win the elections. The MNF started negotiating with the government of Assam/India. When Rajiv Gandhi became the PM, he worked out an agreement schema amendable to the Mizo peoples and the MNF. The Mizo Hill was granted statehood and MNF was accommodated in an interim power sharing with the congress that was ruling at that time (Bhaumik 2007). The settlement between the government of India and MNF has missed the greater Mizoram issue and those who are involved in the movement particularly from Manipur were ignored.

The non-Mizo CHIKMIS observed that, it was a down-right betrayal literally to their nations who sacrificed their lives, limbs and resources for the Promised Land. The aspiration of the CHIKMIS was not considered when the MNF and the Government of India's (GOI) swiftly drafted the peace agreement in 1986. The pompous promise of Greater Mizoram was simply crossed-out with one brazen stroke of a pen. The day of reckoning for the Kukis did come not too long when Nehlun Kipgen raised the Kuki National Front (KNF) on the 18th of May, 1988 at Molnoi village of Burma, whereas his revolutionary partner Thongkholun Haokip took hold of the Kuki National Army (KNA) due to ideological and geo-political differences. The KNF was formed to carve out an autonomous Kukiland under the Constitution of India by incorporating all the Kuki settled areas of Manipur whereas the KNA has been fighting for an independent 'Zalengam' which would include all Kuki inhabited areas of Burma, some portion of Ukhrul, Thoubal and Chandel District of Manipur (Kipgen 2006). They want to form two states: one within Myanmar which they called 'Eastern Zale'n-gam' and other within India 'Western Zale'n-gam'. But they have however tried to fulfill its objectives under the Indian Constitution.

Figure No 7.2: Manipur areas demanded by Kuki-Chin-Mizo underground groups to form Kuknalim or Zalengam.



Source: Tarapot 2003

There are officially 18 kuki-chin-mizo groups in Manipur but only Kuki Revolutionary Army and Kuki National Army are active. The bond between the two potent Kuki outfits turned sour after the Kuki-Naga conflict. The Kuki Defense Force was absorbed by both the KNF and KNA in area-wise process. Most of them are formed after the infamous Kuki-Naga conflict in the early 90s in order to protect their ethnic group from the NSCN (IM). Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) was formed in December 2000 at Saikul of Senapati district, Manipur by a group disgruntled cadres of the Kuki National Front (KNF)'s Military Council faction. Their objective is to secure a "separate State" for the Kuki tribe within the Indian Union. Because of the chaotic reorganization and lack of leadership quality, Kuki factional and new UG outfits were proliferating (Kipgen op.cit). Few of them are created by the politician in order to maintain their power in their respective constituency for the purpose of election.

The Kuki- Chin-Mizo groups have signed Suspension of Operation (SOO) with the Government of Manipur/ India under the banner of United Peoples' Front (UPF) and Kuki National Organization (KNO) since 2007. The agreement is extended up to August 22, 2010. It was agreed that the respectable settlement will be within the Indian Constitution and also with Manipur boundary. The parties to the agreement are:-

Table No 7.3: Kuki-Chin-Mizo underground group who have signed Suspension of Operation with the Government of Manipur/ India

Sl No	Organization
Under Kuki National Organisation (KNO)	
1	Kuki National Front (Military Council) (NNF-MC)
2	Kuki National Front (Zogam) (KNF-Z)
3	United Socialist Revolutionary Army (old Kuki)
4	United Komrem Revolutionary Army (UKRA)
5	Zou Defence Volunteer (ZDV-KNO)
6	Zomi Reunification Front (ZRF)
7	Hmar National Army (HNA)
8	Kuki Revolutionary Army- Unification (KRA-U)
9	Kuki Liberation Army (KLA-KNO)
10	Kuki Nationa Army (KNA)
Under United Peoples' Front (UPF)	
11	Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA)
12	Kuki National Front (KNF)
13	United Kuki Liberation front (UKLF)
14	Kuki Liberation Army (KLA-UPF)
15	Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA)
16	Kuki National Front (KNF-S)
17	Hmar Peoples' Conference-Democratic (HPC-D)
18	Zou Defence Volunteers (ZDV-UPF)

The conflicting claims either in the form of greater Nagaland or Kuki-land by the tribal resistance group based within and outside Manipur were abandoned by the majority of their respective people which they claim to represent. The Kuki-Chin-Mizo groups are now into negotiation with the Government of Manipur/India without affecting the boundary of Manipur. The mobilization through the Greater Nagaland project during the recent elections seems to have few takers as NSCN (IM) lost their sponsored candidates.

The people of Ukhrul who were the main force behind the NSCN (IM) movement wanted Ukhrul to be a summer capital of Manipur. Surprisingly, it was expressed through the Tangkhul Naga Long. Resistances against the NSCN (IM) movement were seen in Senapati with the formation of UNPC and MNRF in Ukhrul. The claim between the Naga and Kuki are also conflicting.

People of Manipur voice to Right to Self-Determination:

Revolutionary leader Hijam Irabot idea of an independent Manipur was endorsed by the people of Manipur through a public meeting on 3rd August 1949 under the joint presidenship of Solet Haokip Kuki, Habi Dewan Mohammed and Nandalal Sharma. The students under the banner Manipur Students' Federation also protested by hoisting 'Black Flag' and holding a meeting at Porompat, Imphal-East Manipur on 15 August 1949. All political parties except a faction of the Manipur Congress resolved against the merger. The Manipur daily particularly Bhagyabati Patrica was reporting against the merger and its possible ill consequences (Singh op.cit and Nag op.cit). The Manipur Socialist party had demanded for a plebiscite to resolve the conflict in Manipur in the early 50s. The following resolutions were adopted at the public meeting on 3rd August 1949:

1. The big gathering of today's protest public unanimously passes the resolution that the 'gaddi' cannot be abolished and the State cannot be integrated or merged.
2. This meeting unanimously resolves that the Manipur State Congress is a deceitful one.
3. This meeting condemns the Manipur State Congress in their act of selling the Manipur prajas to India without taking public opinion and by falsely alleging that they had the support of the people. This meeting further expresses its utter denial of the deceitful plan for a public meeting on their return from Delhi. The Praja Shanti Sabha shall be request to perform the function of informing the Manipuri public and all the authorities' concerned clearly explaining all these faults and cheatings of the Manipur State Congress.

Similarly, Haokip (1995) observed that the Kuki Chiefs particularly Haokip Chiefs were determined to help Maharajah to resist the merger. It was led by the Chief of Chassad and supported by Chief of Aihang, Chief of Nabil, Chief of Longpi and many Haokip villages. These Chief went to the extent that about 200-300 volunteers with muzzle loading guns were kept at the gate of the Palace to protect the Maharajah and his Kingdom.

Beginning with the early 60s the student groups support the movement of right to self-determination. All Manipur Students Union (AMSU) was formed in 1965 as a reaction to the artificial created famine in Manipur under New Delhi rule. Initially the idea of self-determination was not much penetrated but by 1968, the students started campaigning for self-governance. The idea of the self-determination was supported by the Union as many of them have seen the independence status of Manipur in their own eye before the forceful merger with India. It was hardly 15-20 years away. In the year 1994-95, AMSU developed a platform for the discussion on right to self-determination in Manipur. The leader of AMSU was pulled up by the government but release after the clarification on why the AMSU organized the platform for right to self-determination.

The people of Manipur particularly the Meiteis contested the identities brought by the adoption of Hinduism to the Kingdom. This contestation is a part of a general Meitei renaissance, a movement to resist the political, religious and cultural dominance of India in Manipur (Singh op.cit). The highly developed Manipur language was denied recognition by the government of India. The movement for recognition for the Meitei language was initiated since the late 60s. The non-violent aspects of the agenda of these groups have been adopted by several grassroots Meitei organizations such as the Pan Manipur Youth League which was established in 1968. Their activities include efforts to reestablished pre-Hindu temples and religious and religious ceremonies. The effects of the revival movement can be seen in the increase in the number of native priests and story tellers who performed at major ceremonies and in the resurrection of native games, folk songs, and martial arts. A yearly celebration of the burning of pre-Hindu scriptures by Pamheiba (Garibniwaz) has also been instituted. The ceremony includes the burning of

Bengali translation of Hindu scriptures and the burning of the effigy king Pamheiba. The increase in the number of participants at this ceremony indicates a growing support for the revivalist movement: while two to three thousands people participated in 1979, more than eight thousands participants in 1990 (Devi 1991). The general interest in the early Meitei literature is evidenced by the many study groups, workshops in various platforms and degrees at Manipur University that specialize in the study of pre-twentieth-century Meitei manuscripts.

The people's movement for right to life which is suspended by Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1958 began in 1974 during the elections to the Manipur State Legislative Assembly. It was raised by the regional political party called the Kanglei League which was formed by activists of the Pan Manipuri Youth League. Later the League merged with the Manipur People's Party. In the early part of the 1980, Amnesty International noticed about the Act and a letter was sent to Mr Yamben Laba- a human right activist of Manipur. A month later after the imposition of AFSPA to whole of Manipur on October 10, 1980, Manipur Human Rights group led by Mr Laba moved the Supreme Court of India contending that the Armed Forces Special Powers Act is ultra vires to the provisions of the Constitution of India. In 1982, a letter from the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights addressed to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India was also converted into a writ petition challenging the AFSPA. In 1984 the Delhi based Peoples Union for Democratic Rights also filed a writ petition contending that Parliament lacks the legitimacy to pass such draconian laws. In 1988, the student organizations of Manipur and Nagaland and political parties joined hands to fight for the cause of human rights. National Human Rights Commission visited Manipur in 1996 and it was followed by the Supreme Court judgment on upholding the Act (Laba No Date). The Meira Paibis movement was born out of the movement against AFSPA in the late 80s. The movement is now institutionalized and continues even today. Mention can be made of Irom Sharmila's fast-unto-death agitation since November 2, 2000 and the violent incident of the Killing and rape of Ms Manorama Thangjam that led to the a historic self-immolation of Manipur Students Federation leader Chittaranjan and a nude

protest by the women of Manipur in 2004. The 'right to life' which cannot be denied during emergency is still deprived under this Act.

The civil society responded very actively since the early 1990s. The first issue raised by the people of Manipur was the Manipur Merger Agreement so in order to discuss upon the issue a National Convention was held at Imphal. The convention was held on 28-29 October 1993 at Imphal which deliberated upon the issue and resolved

“That the Manipur Merger Agreement signed by and between the Maharajah of Manipur and the representatives of the Dominion of India on 21st September, 1949 did not have any legality and constitutional validity”.

It was closely followed by the National Seminar on Human Rights held on 8-9 December 1994 at Imphal which resolved the five point declarations. The declaration was endorsed and approved by the people of Manipur at Mapal Kangjeibung (Polo Ground), Imphal on 10th December, 1994. The declarations are:-

- (i) The Union Government of India and its allied authority concerned be strongly urged upon to immediately repeal and revoke "The Armed Forces(Special Powers) Act. 1958", 'the Punjab Security of State Act, 1953', 'The Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987' to start with, from amongst the draconian laws,
- (ii) The Union Home Ministry of India be requested to issue necessary directions to all classifications off law enforcement machineries and the Security forces, to urgently discontinue and halt the different forms of State repression, let loose on the people of Manipur State.
- (iii) The Union and State Governments be prayed to rehabilitate the Human Rights victims of State repression, and immediately remove the Security Forces and Para-Military Forces from the area of Settlement by civilian population and pay compensation to the victims and their surviving family members and

punish the official/individuals used by the forces who had committed heinous Human Rights violations in this State.

- (iv) The State Government be asked to take urgent steps so as to install a State Human Rights Commission and State Human Rights Court, under the provisions of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.
- (v) The Union Government of India be strongly urged upon to allow the 'people of Manipur to exercise their legitimate Right to Self-Determination'.

Similarly the Seminar organized by the Committee on Advancement of the Fourth World People held at Imphal on 12 August 1998 declared,

- (i) “That the people of Manipur, who have been subjected to Neo-Colonialism, internal colonialism and different forms of colonialism under the Indian state for the last half a century should be lawfully empowered to freely determine their own political destiny and to use their natural and human resources by their own free will”.
- (ii) And that “The uncompleted de-colonization process, which occurs in the state of Manipur, would have to be completed with the humanitarian co-operation of all state in the Comity of Nations in order to maintain permanent peace and security in the world”.

The People of Manipur while celebrating the United Nations Day on 24th October 1999 at Imphal reaffirm its solidarity to the United Nations and two important declarations were made:

- (i) That the UN and its organs be urged upon to enlist Manipur as after-acquired Non-Self-Governing-Territory in regard to Chapter XI of the UN Charter and,

- (ii) That the Union Government of India, in the capacity of Administering Power be entrusted with the international responsibility of fulfilling her obligations in regard to Manipur as Non-Self-Governing -Territory.

Beginning the 21st century the civil societies in Manipur has been campaigning to resolve the Manipur issue through a plebiscite since 1949. The United Committee Manipur (UCM) one of the powerful civil society group of Manipur has submitted a memorandum to the President of India to resolve the issue of Manipur by granting “Greater Autonomy of Manipur”. The document focuses on the pre-merger status of Manipur. It is interesting to note that the current campaign in Manipur for a plebiscite on the issue of Manipur's independence by the civil society organizations was initially proposed by the RPF in the 90s and UNLF in 2005. Among those who addressed such a plebiscite meeting in Imphal on June 6 was the titular king of Manipur, apart from other dignitaries such as a former Lok Sabha member, a former Human Rights Commissioner, University Professors, the president of the Manipur Working Journalists' Union, leaders of political parties and several women leaders - always a potent force in Manipur (Prabhakara 2006). It is to be noted that the discussions of self-governance include those who have served the government of India.

On 15th October 2009, four Meira Paibi activists were detained under the National Security Act for openly burning copies of Manipur Merger Agreement at Imphal, in protest against the forceful merger of Manipur on 15 October 1949. It is also observed as a ‘black day’ by the resistance group of Manipur. The Meira Paibis are very vocal for exercising the right to self-determination. They believe that the atrocities of the central forces are because of the resistance to the forceful merger of Manipur. Their movement has gained immense popularity because of its staunch resistance against the dastardly acts of the Indian security forces which has been operating against the popular upsurges. Though the movement emerged first at Patsoi a small township, it has spread to almost all over the Imphal valley. Meira Paibi as a group and /or a social institution is an exclusive group of women characterized by its voluntary nature of association. The membership to Meira Paibi is automatic and all Meitei women by birth become members (of course non

Meiteis women married to Meiteis men can also become members). The Meira Paibi movement is by and large peaceful and operates by resorting to strikes, agitations and making representations. They are organizing into i) State Level Meira Paibi groups, ii) Regional Level Meira Paibi groups, iii) Local Level Meira Paibi groups. Thus Meira Paibi has a grassroots base and any movements supported by the Meira Paibis would mean a mass support. Presently, the movement for Meira Paibis of Manipur is headed under the 'Working Group of Meira Paibi Movement'. The above discussions reflect the strong national will to govern their territory through their people.

Conclusion:

The third phase of self-determination movement in Manipur was because of the strong wave of decolonization movements through out the world after the II World War and end of imperialism. The wave has affected Asia and the third world including Manipur. Hence the movements in the late 40s were seen in Manipur and Naga Hills. After the forceful merger of Manipur to Indian Union on 15 October 1949, the anti-merger feeling among the people of Manipur has percolated to the young mind, youth and students. This was supported by the public meeting, rallies by the student groups, civil societies, Media publications, and politicians against the merger in the form of democratic movement, followed by armed struggle. The Manipur Communist Party inaugurated the first armed struggle in Manipur that was suppressed by the state. This has left legacy of armed struggle even today.

In the mid 60s, the Meitei State Committee revived the armed struggle in collaboration with the Naga leaders from Nagaland. In 1971, Revolutionary Government of Manipur continues the struggle but it was foiled and crushed. In a new face in 78-79, PLA has inaugurated direct assault and military strike at the state force and it continues even today. The PLA and UNLF is/are the two most powerful groups leading the self-determination movement in Manipur that continues the armed struggle. On 1 March 1999, PLA, UNLF along with PREPAK have come under the joint banner of **Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF)** to continue the fight for self-determination. The

conflicting claim to the sovereignty of Manipur by the section of the tribal of Manipur were losing ground as shown by the subsequent events like the election, cease-fire, memorandum, formation of new armed groups etc among the people who were supporting the idea earlier.

UNLF in 2005 commented that the issue of sovereignty of Manipur can be settled by the most democratic means which is accepted all over the world that is, by holding plebiscite. There was no positive response from the government as of now. Besides, RPF and its armed wing PLA have reaffirmed its stand not to have a political dialogue with the Government of India except on the issue of independence and sovereignty of Manipur as per second congress (July 14 to December 4, 2008) resolution. After putting up their memorandum at the United Nations Decolonization Committee (Committee of 24) in 1996, the committee has invited RPF/PLA to present their case in early 2001. This is one of the greatest recognition that the self-determination in Manipur achieved. The Committee of 24 does not invite anyone or whoever who have submitted memorandum to their committee. It is after due consideration of the historical facts, consultations, people's aspirations etc, that they consider self-determination movement group to consider their case.

Since 1949 till date, the people of Manipur in the form of democratic and armed struggle had been demanding plebiscite in restoration of the independence of Manipur to avoid armed struggle imposed by the government of India. Extensive primary investigation revealed that the right to self-determination movement in Manipur is not just confined to one section of the people. But it is stronger among the Meiteis inhabiting the Imphal valley. The popularity of underground outfits is more to be seen among the youth. They are the one directly involved in the armed onslaughts or guerilla warfare. Although women all over are active sympathizers, their direct involvement in the ambushes is far and few. By and large there is a tacit support of the large number of Manipur towards the movements. But of late the urban middle class appear to have turned restive because of the reign of terror adopted by the underground elements as well. Prolonged close down of educational institutes has only ended up in alienating a large section of the urban-middle

and lower middle class as the rich are not affected so much since they can afford to send their wards to study in good educational institute outside Manipur. Besides, fatigue factors too seem to be catching up.

Global support plays an important in sustaining external self-determination movements. With India now sharing the interest of the western capital, there is little chance of a major international support to the Manipuri upsurge. It may be of interest that the US Army has already been sending its troops to undergo counter-insurgency training at the Vairengte Army Counter Insurgency School in Mizoram. Similarly the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and a few other large international financial institutions have committed to invest heavily on production based industries in the context of LEP. Keeping this in view, it does not appear that right to self-determination in Manipur will thrive so much on the secessionist planks, though there will be sustained drive for autonomy and self-management. The world is turning into a global village and market connectivity has become ubiquitous. In the light of that it is well high impossible for Manipur to remain globally isolated.

Even if it secedes, the links with India will remain indispensable for trade, commerce and consumer products. Without opening out of the eastern frontiers it is doubtful that any large scale industry will be viable in the state. Also mindless violence will keep off potential investors off the scene. It is a catch 22 situation and self-determination movement in the state of Manipur is in the cross-roads. A large section of the peoples in the state have become disenchanted with violence and it is doubtful whether the turbulence will continue for long. Even the NSCN (IM) movement is frittering away.