CHAPTER - VII

Conclusion

Today, ethnic conflict is one of the most serious social problems. It is politically very sensitive issue. Therefore, there is a lot of debate revolves around ethnic, ethnicity, ethnic conflict and its causes etc. Some attempt to define it as domestic politics, while others tend to consider it in international perspectives. The nature of the ethnic conflict is ranges from peaceful grievance to outright use of physical force or violence. Therefore ethnic conflict is multi-dimensional and it encompasses of social reality and contexts.

As explain in the previous chapters Manipur is also a state that has been facing issues of ethnic conflict contestation between different communities. After studying the whole issue of conflict in Manipur it can be rightly concluded that the ethnic conflict in this small state has its own uniqueness. Many of the features of ethnic conflict in the state are different from the conflict existing elsewhere. There are many academically interesting but socially quibble issues. This chapter titled ‘conclusion’ will highlight some of the important findings of the study.

It can be rightly said that though Manipur inhabits tens of communities, the recent ethnic conflicts are largely responsible by three major group viz. Meetei, Kuki and Naga in the state. There are arguments which stress the economic disparities and discrimination among these communities. This is also suggested by many scholars that ethnic conflict in Manipur began after India got her independence from colonial yolk.

After thoroughly studying the issue it comes to light that the conflict between the Meetei-Kuki and Naga in Manipur are also rooted in the events of the past. The pre-colonial structure of diversity ignites the issues of ethnic conflict. In the ancient times, Meetei King conquered all tribes as part of the ‘Nation State Formation’. But the tribes did not absorb completely in the process and remain independently out of the Meetei Nation State. The diplomatic or political relations with tribes were not clear-cut and mostly the relation was created through tribute (Loipot) to the king (a symbol of exploitation). The Kings belonging to different clans not only dominated the tribes but
also put pressure on them in the process of struggle for power and expansion of their territory. On other side, ‘Head Hunting’ or killed encroacher over the village territory by cutting head was a common culture for proving their clout over communities amongst the hill people.

The incidents of such past, ethnic group are never ready to forgive and forget present day. The historical evidence of using might over the weak and then weaker becomes a part of the King’s administration is profound in Manipur too. The homogenization process first started among the valley clans and then spread to the tribes of surrounding hills. So the seven clans were united under the Ningthoucha clan (or Meetei) who were more powerful than the other clans. The Meetei Kingdom had fully established their suzerainty over Manipur valley, Kabaw valley and surrounding hill areas. After completion of the assimilation of different clans into Meetei at the valley, the king started their campaign in the surrounding hill areas. But the campaign was incomplete because of the resistance of external forces (Hindu religion- Shanta das, Britishers and Christianity etc). This incomplete process at latter period becomes a factor for ethnic conflict.

Besides this incomplete campaign, the developmental projects taken by kings’ administration never reached the hill areas. The stability of food production with high surplus products the valley could establish itself into modern state. However, those kings’ activities to the hill areas were just a part of integration process instead of making any development for the welfare of tribal society. The awakening of tribal has begun with the coming of British in the beginning of 20th century. Though Hills and valley were interdependent, the hills people were mostly confined in their villages. The valley people participated in trade and commerce with insiders and outsiders of the kingdom. Besides the benefits of war captives and civilization remark of outsider contact were not extended to the tribes of hills areas. So hills and valley were differentiated level of civilization during the kings’ period.

It is also true that religion is one of the main factors for ethnic conflict in the world. When Hindu religion came in Manipur the valley people easily baptized the Hindu religion, the hill people were very hard to follow the principles of Hindu religion. Kings
gave not only punishment to those violate the Hindu religion rules but also declared them outcaste. Therefore, the tribes of hill areas decried not only the decree of the king but also kept distance from the valley administration and considered them as untouchable group or low caste. Such incidences are propagated by tribes in recent times to show that Meetei pressurized the tribes in many forms in ancient time. All these are interpreted as symbols of oppression and torture of the tribes of Manipur.

Even during war preparations or war donation campaign (first and second world war), the king of Manipur and his advisor (Atombabu Sharma) imposed many kind of tax and collected on the basis of religion. Therefore, many people who are unable to give tax became untouchable and low caste. In this case, hill people have a different psyche towards the administration of valley. During the reign of King Bodhachandra, Brahma Sabha practiced pollution, purification and chandan shelkhai (sale of chandan) imposed as part of religion and culture. The Brahma Sabha declared many persons including tribes as ‘polluted and exile’ at far corner of the kingdom. The hills people and lois communities were out of the people of Meetei social comprehension. It later on became a factor of conflict between the hills people and the plain people in present day.

The coming of the Christianity had further widened cultural distance between the hills people and plain people and even among the hills people itself in Manipur. The missionary works were based on the ethnic groups, language and direction of the state instead of united identity of tribes. The Christianity ignites the competition against the dominant Hindu religion of the valley. But more particularly a competition between the Welsh Missionaries and the American Baptist Missionaries (started ego hunt in the beginning of British administration). The followers of Roberts (Walse Missionary) Thadou-Kuki groups concentrated on the south west challenged William Pettigrew (American Missionary) and their followers Naga tribes who concentrated on North East. Supreme authority attempted by William Pettigrew was criticized by south west people. Roberts landed on the southwest of Manipur and brought unification of language based nationalism antagonistic to Northeast Naga nationalism. This was responsible for Kuki and Naga uncompromised situation.
The colonial administration started with the occupation of Manipur in 1891 and continued up to 1947. This administration was largely responsible for conflict amongst communities in the state. It was visible that colonizer always wanted to maintain power in the colonial state but colonized people often revolted for freedom. This was quite true the history of Manipur too. British knew that the Kukis and the Nagas had water and oil relation, thus never be united. They wanted the relation between the Kuki and the Naga always in position of conflict situation and voluminous Therefore, British founded a policy to control the tribal, ‘let frontier troubles-settle-themselves’. As part of the policy, British used the Kuki warriors against the Naga, at the same time Naga warriors were also used against the Kuki. The policy was succeeded in the region because different ethnic groups had been fighting against each other. The tension between the warrior groups had the capability for sudden eruption of a war anytime in the hill area. British’s arrangement for the settlement of Kuki tribes who migrated into Manipur was also part of their policy. The Kukis and other kindred tribes had already settled in different parts of Northeast India. The settlement of Kuki tribes was used as military ploy against Naga and security of the boundary.

Then they also divided the administration of the state into the hill areas under the British rule and the valley area under the British appointed king. The hill areas were separated from the general administration of the state on the plea that the hill tribes were not Meetei or Manipuri and have entirely different in custom and language. However Britishers stationed rarely at hill areas and mostly confined at Imphal valley. Between the hill men and British officers, the intermediary person called Lambu intervened in the administration of hill areas. The officials themselves admitted this lacuna in their day-to-day dealings with the hills people. They were selfish and corrupt even that creates the conflict over British and Meetei at latter.

In the beginning of the British rule, the identification of tribes as Kuki and Naga was very loosely done. It became a controversy in present day. The term Kuki applied to the Naga sub-tribe, at the same time Naga also applied to Kuki sub-tribe or clan. The identification of the Naga and Kuki in linguistic terms was what Hutton has called arbitrary as much as useful. The way linguistic considerations were being planted was
notoriously wrong in its ethnographical applications. The disagreement on linguistic categorization or the rejection of it gave an attribute of *Refugees’ Landscape* rather than the relics of ‘our ancestors’. In Manipur, they marked that the small valley of Manipur sandwiched by these *unconquered tribes* and even identified into two categories of tribes as ‘northern tribes’ came to known as ‘Naga’ and ‘southern tribes’ known as ‘Kookie’. The Britishers ignored the *royal chronicle*, the important diary (history) of Manipur. Hence, they did not understand the relation and unity that was existing between the valley people and surrounding tribes. Of course, the classification of Kuki and Naga was followed by many agencies. These controversial findings of the Administrators, anthropologists and Linguists became a folder for ethnic cleansing and conflict in the recent time. It was an unfortunate injustice to some tribes that the classifications brought confusion on identity because of lack of history and scientific proof.

After India gained her freedom from British Raj, Indian Nationalist leaders took an uncompromising stand on the unification of the country with the hope of making India a strong and powerful state. This stand could be necessitated by many pre-independent as well as post independent political events. However it had a lot of political ramification in the newly freed small kingdoms in the region. With the same idea of unification and making India strong many of the princely states were incorporated into India Union by force or otherwise. The fate of Manipur was also the same. The important argument here is that though some political elites for their political opportunism agree to access into Indian Union, the larger population and the public were against any such move. The king after reading the mind of the people refused to sign the merger agreement. When the Maharaja of Manipur signed the controversial merger agreement on September 21, 1949, Manipur already adopted and enacted a democratic government. Without the consent of the government and people, any agreement entered by the king was considered void and invalid. Alas! He was forced to sign the merger agreement. This historical event is still fresh in the minds of the people. Many of the issue occurred in the state concern with the “forced merger”. Therefore as suggested earlier this has contributed enormously in developing armed struggle against “Indian domination”. This, interestingly, has not only bred a conflict between people of Manipur represented by armed organization and the
State represented by the government of India, it also creates some kind of situation of animosity between different communities in the state.

This agreement of merger into Indian Union had created a political vacuum in the hill areas of Manipur. The Delhi rule (Chief Commissioner Rule) did not installed any democratic base institution in the hill areas. The hill areas were stated without ruler like lawless state. This vacuum was gradually filled up by the Naga Hills (presently Nagaland) based Naga National Council (NNC) movement. On other side many youths of Manipur were take up the path of armed struggle to restore the loss sovereignty. So the merger was largely responsible for setting up the Meeteis and the Nagas towards divergent historical trajectories. Again the grouping of tribes as any Kuki or any Naga propounded by British was followed by the Government of India. This policy diversified the tribes’ unity and crates different political motto amongst the ethnic tribes.

However it should be understood that historical mistakes and maladministration especially during the colonial period were not the sole factor responsible for recent ethnic conflict and contestation in the North-East in general and Manipur at particular. The in-depth analysis in chapter 5 clearly shows that contemporary issues are equally responsible for ethnic conflict especially between Meeteis-Nagas and Kukis. Naga, Kuki and Meetei all demand complete sovereign status as the final option for their future. As part of this demand, they all push for implementation of fifth schedule, sixth schedule, full-fledged district and state, homeland, in different form. The demands really aim at getting sovereign state ultimately. Therefore many ethnic groups are attempting to occupy specific area as their ‘inherent and legitimate’ ownership. But the demand for remapping land and territory by the Nagas, Kukis and Meeteis often overlaps. Their demand includes administration over the resource which is available inside the definite area which is often overlapped too. This led to competition and conflict between the groups in present time.

The exploitation of available resources is the only hope and prospects for the next generation. For this hope and aspiration, the Kuki or the Naga or the Meetei resist state’s attempt to exploit natural resources in their respective claimed areas. The development
projects that have been carried out by state or central government are often contradicted to the ethnic interest and blamed that such project affected the identity and culture of the indigenous people. Most of the time, it is claimed that such development activities of the state to be in favor of the major community. The people’s determination to resist such attempt articulated as struggle to preserve and protect their nationality, identity and ethnicity. By providing this reason, the Naga or Kuki collected huge amount of ‘tax’ from buses and trucks plying on the National High ways. But it affected to all the people of Manipur and became a cause for conflict among groups in Manipur.

The house tax imposed by insurgents has become an important factor for the recent ethnic conflict. House tax forms an important income for the insurgent groups in present day. But in Manipur, not a single district is settled entirely by a single ethnic group. All insurgent groups try to occupy a large area of territory and people, on the logic that if there is large number of houses then they have huge amount of income. But such collection of house tax is objected by other ethnic groups who also have their own ethnic army. Therefore the insurgent attempt to impose their authority over the land and people is creating the hostile situation in Manipur.

The civil society groups or elites from plains as well as hills demanded to implement single land law across the state for inculcating the feeling of the fraternity among the ethnic groups of Manipur. This will also lead to development of all regions in the state. However the demand for uniform land laws across the hills and valley create an insecure particularly among tribes of the hill areas. The people of hills oppose any policy that treats the hills and valley to be homogeneous. Thus they are against the enactment of uniform land law to be applied to both the valley and hills. Assimilation and integration are seen as attempts to undermine their historical and customary rights over territory and natural resources. Any government step and civil societies demand on uniform land law is seen as a prelude of suicide and homicide of their distinct identity.

There is another aspect of conflict in the state. It concerns the control of market. The outsiders’ control over the markets and exploitation of the state’s resources especially the forest wealth is also creating a conflict situation in Manipur. The people’s determination to resist outsiders’ control has articulated to preserve and protect their
nationality, identity and ethnicity. The insurgent groups attempt to control the border trade (lucrative smuggling, small arms and drug traffic) along the Indo-Myanmar international border is not only for land control but also for security strategic. But this attempt to resist the outsider control has its own ramification towards relationship among the indigenous people also. The Naga-Kuki conflict of 1992 that took place in the Moreh-Tamu area is due to this very issue of control of land, resources, and security reason. Since the emergence of ethnic insurgents, their demanding maps which sketch covering Moreh town is objected by each other and bring endless struggle among Meetei, Kuki and Naga.

Again the political representation is essential for parliamentary democracy like India. However, the existing representation system has certain limitations. These limitations, needless to say, contribute in the persisting conflict between different communities in the state. The administrative (political) history of the state shows that the due political representation of different ethnic groups was ensured and respected before 1949. But the existing system is not satisfied by the bigger tribes generally and particularly by the smaller or intermediates tribes in the post-independence. When Manipur become a full-fledged state, the number of seat was increased not only in the State Assembly but also in the Union Parliament. But in this system, the intermediate tribes who are smaller in population and remain mainly outside the fold of the Naga and the Kuki are not given opportunities to represent at political platform. Many scholars pointed out that the intermediate tribes are very insecure about their identities, cultures, language, jobs and future prospects etc. The intermediate tribes, therefore, have been looking for any means that can bring them in the centre stage of politics. So the minor tribes are trying to capture their ‘Right to be Represent’ in various ways including armed struggle. But the approach was objected by those who wanted to have single identity like Naga and Kuki etc.

However, the strongest forms of armed struggle are launched with the aim to establish right to self determination. Insurgency movement in the state had started before its merger to Indian Union. The ‘October Revolution of 1950’ was a reaction against political parties like the ‘Manipur State Congress’. The present insurgency movement and
its political violence are at the benthic stage. This insurgency movement is referred to as ‘Indo-Manipur Conflict’. Red Guard revolution of Manipur Communist Party (MCP) under the Supremo Hijam Irabot was the first movement against the Govt. of India. It was followed as second wave in 1960s by the dissatisfied cadre of MCP in the name of Meetei State Committee (MSC). And then, United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People Liberation Army (PLA), Peoples’ Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) and Kanglei Yawol Kanba Lup (KYKL) etc emerged with the motto of Right to self determination against Indian Rule.

Counter insurgency is a response of the government of India to control the insurgents since they emerged. As part of counter insurgency, Government of India grouped the villages so that people’s support for the insurgent limited. From time to time, re-grouping and recognition the ethnic tribes and their organization is legitimized through procedure granted by the Constitution of India. The signers on the SoO are another latest canvassing for Chikim identification which is accepted by both state and central government. Some of them are partner of NSCN-IM in earlier and sometimes against the Kuki campaign for Homeland or Zalen’gam. Even Khulmi National Union (KNU) was also recognized and their movement was directly opposed to the Thadou Kuki campaign. This recognition is portrayed internal chaos against each other. The people of hill areas, therefore, loss their confidence towards campaigner (insurgents) and finally stop their support to the insurgents including the groups who demands the right to self determination particularly from valley in present day. So on counter insurgency creates disunity and conflict situation amongst the ethnic peoples.

Now most of the insurgencies in Northeast India are partly to peace process formally or informally. Kukis and Nagas insurgents changed their motto from the sovereignty to autonomy. In the peace process Government of India faced a difficulty to find out ‘the path’ accepted by the communities of Manipur. In the issue of cease fire and SoO, Government of India has been playing ‘Double-Standard’. For example they accepted the ‘unique history of Naga’ in front of the Naga but proclaim ‘can’t change the boundary of neighboring state’. On the other hand, Muivah warns that if Government of
India sidelines the unique history of Naga they will go for war. This kind of short term solution or response of government creates enter-ethnic conflict in the state.

However reason for conflict is not limited to demand for self determination. Issues of migration also create ethnic conflict in the contemporary times. Many tribal communities are very small in term of their population. When tribal group comes into contact with these migrants, they become a minority in all respect. Hence they are losers in any kind of competition – jobs, livelihood, etc. - in their own homeland. The result is that the migrants have the upper hand in all respect. Sociologically, survival of the ethnic groups means the interaction of the members among themselves and behaving in the patterns prescribed by the norms of the culture. When one is interacting and behaving in some other patterns that is prescribed by the culture of another rather than one’s own, that existence does not make any meaning. This is the immediate and outright threat to the Manipuri national sub-groups. Even the larger community-Meetei is also under great threat from the element of the cultural patterns of these communities. If definite measure not taken up, only a miracle can save the Manipuri national sub-groups from the extinction through ethnocide or cultural genocide.

Thus, the ethnic conflict in the state cannot be attributed to a single factor. It is also the result of various issues emerged in the contemporary. It is evident that not only historical roots but also contemporary issues- land and resource ownership tendency, border trade, political representative and their political stand points, political violence of the State, counter insurgency, the issue of merger agreement and impacts of the migration etc. are largely responsible. All these contribute to the tensions and competition amongst ethnic groups.

It may be interesting to mention here that ethnic conflict passes through various phases. Most of the times, insurgents are generalized as actor. The role of insurgents is quite imperative in the dynamic of ethnic conflict in the state. Even insurgency is the product of various factors. The multifarious and multi-disciplinary approaches along with understanding the geo-political situation is needed to study the insurgency in Manipur. The armed revolution of South East Asia region and the ethno-historical background of
the state contributed to emerge the present insurgent movement. The people of Manipur have experienced many intrusions on their culture and administration in the history. All the three structures of religion, colonialism and sympathetically Indian political system were imposed on people who have a long history of independence and cultural heritage. And hence, all three structures fail to get assimilated with the desired of the people of Manipur. The Kangla is significant as ‘Cultural and the Traditional Capital’ of the Meeteis. Since independence the place is occupied by Indian Army. Hence, the psychological effect is that “occupied Kangla is occupied Manipur” and their lost Kingdom always loom large over the mind of the people of Manipur. The Maharaja of Manipur who tried to adhere to the status quo when the question of merger of the state with the dominion of the Indian came up. The manner in which Manipur was merged into the Indian Union becomes one of the main factors of the insurgency movement. In the developmental planning processes, the state still remains backward from the rest of the country. Demographic imbalances have occurred at an adverse situation. As a result, out of the total population the number of the people who speak Manipuri (Meeteiron) as their mother tongue has been reduced to 45 percent only while 55 percent who speak other languages are dominating. Educated unemployed youth will exceed more than 14 lakhs.

However the insurgents of Manipur are classified in various ways in present day. Such categorization of insurgent is on the basis of geographical areas viz. valley insurgency and hill insurgency. In 1980s the classification was very clear that the Meetei staff led at the valley and Naga and Kuki led at the hill areas of Manipur. When classifying insurgency their aim and objective also clearly opposed each other. The concept of ‘United Manipur’ mostly comes from the Meetei. Restoration of loss sovereignty is the uncompromised aim and object of the insurgency of valley base groups. The emergence of ethnic nationalism (emergence of NNC, NSCN) aspiring for Naga sovereignty, greater Nagaland, alternative arrangement within Manipur or six schedule etc., KNA (Kuki National Army) which is largely based in Myanmar, (now outlawed by Myanmar Government) is also becoming active in Manipur and Mizoram. Their aim and object are no more then around ethnic interest in a specific area. The ethnic
interest which contradicts to another ethnic interest is largely responsible for competition or conflict environment.

Since 1990s there are fives violent clash in Manipur among them only three clashes considering as serious ethnic clash. They are Naga-Kuki of 1992, Meetei-Meetei Pangal of 1993 and Thadou Kuki-Paite of 1997. Many scholars suggest that the clashes are due to rumor and misunderstanding among the Meetei Kuki and Naga. Meetei-Meetei Pangal conflict, Meetei-Kuki conflict and Kuki-Tamil conflict lasted no more then one week each. After the infamous Naga-Kuki war of 1992, there are number of Kuki insurgents emerged. Such large numbers of insurgents are set up accordance to the local connivance. Suspensions of Operation (SoO) signer insurgencies are set up mostly after the above said conflict.

Insurgents are trying to unite and consolidate into one platform for the joint struggle against the common enemy. On other side, the aim and principle of insurgents directly confronted to each other. And then sometimes their activities victimized the uninvolved innocent people. The aim and object of insurgents are almost similar in nature. Some of them come together on the common platform. The Indo Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF) which was formed in 1990 by three big insurgent group of northeast India. The members are UNLF of Manipur, ULFA of Assam and NSCN-K of Nagaland. Though the common platform has no unified command, it shows that there is a campaign for unity for freedom loving groups in the region. IBRF, SDUFSEAHR, RJC, CORCOM etc are the common platforms of freedom loving groups create recently.

One more important and interesting finding of study on ethnic conflict in Manipur is the link between conflict as such and civil society organizations. In other words, the civil society has its own contradiction in the ensuing conflict in the state. In the whole process of insurgency movement, the civil society groups have taking a pro-active role. Though Manipur has her own history of civil society movement against encroachers but direct confrontation against the state aiming to promote the right to self determination was started only with the voice of student organization in 1965. But one can trace the civil society of Manipur from Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha establish during the
British period. Operating civil groups increase with the rise of insurgency in Manipur. The history of civil society in Manipur was mostly led and staffed by Meetei confined at the Imphal valley in the post independence. As ethnic group classified as Naga, Kuki and Meetei among the indigenous people of Manipur, the civil society groups are also classified and affiliated to their ethnic groups. The civil societies based at valley stand for united nation of various communities (in broader sense) and they have staffed from various ethnic groups. They have been also standing for peaceful co-existence of different ethnic groups and territorial integrity of Manipur. The ethnic tribes’ civil groups at hill areas are standing for promoting the ethic group itself. Each and every civil organization is related to one or more insurgent groups in the line of their ethnic affiliations. Therefore, the civil organizations are working for a particular ethnic group or Manipur as a whole under the finger/banner of insurgents. It is easily perceivable that all the civil bodies have connection with one or other insurgent group operating in the state. But interestingly, all the civil groups endeavor to bring communal harmony in Manipur which are dynamic in nature. Most of the time, civil groups take forward role to control any situation that has capacity to produce communal clash or conflict.

As part of the strategy for communal harmony, many effective cultural reforms and exchange programmes had been undertaken by many civil organizations. Ningol Chakouba, one of the biggest festivals of Manipur, becomes inter-cultural festival day by day. Earlier, it was confined to Meetei community in the valley area only. Piba Chakouba and Mera Hou Chongba are also celebrating by both tribes and Meetei at Imphal valley. Non-Christians of valley are also joining the Christmas increasing especially at those organized by civil groups at hill area. Traditional festival of tribes like Gang-ngai of Kabui tribe, Lungaini of Naga tribe and Kut festival of the Kuki Chin Mizo group are participating by the valley non-tribe. This inter cultural participation at such festival provoked the feeling of brotherhood which for many years been forgotten.

Finally, the whole study on conflict in Manipur can be concluded by saying that the present ethnic conflicts existing in Manipur are product of various factors. It is not only the contemporary issues that brought about conflict situation amongst various communities in Manipur. There are historical factors that hugely contributed in the
making of ‘conflict situation’. Especially the colonial administration and ethnography deconstructed the once united tribal identities. This deconstruction of tribal identities led to confusion as well as contest between various groups which ultimately lead to conflict between them. Even attitude of the Meeteis towards the hill people especially after Hinduism became state religion also contributed enormously in the development of the conflict situation in the present days. Needless to say, in addition to these historical problems, many of the contemporary issues become catalyst of the ethnic conflict.

Simply put, ethnic conflict in Manipur is quite dynamic and its causes multifarious. Therefore, treatment to this issue should also be multidimensional. Proper institution which can generates the tribal their economic sustainability, institution which can guarantee the protection of their land and resources should be created. At the same time the culture of peaceful coexistence should also be inculcated for lasting solution to the problem