THEME - I

Introduction

Ethnic Conflict: Problem and Discourse

The issue of ethnic conflict is quite pervasive in the sense that there is hardly any country in the world that does not face the challenge of ethnic conflict. The forms and nature of conflict may vary from country to country or region to region. Nonetheless almost all the multi-ethnic states in world cannot escape from the issues of ethnic conflict. These socio-political reality throw challenges not only to the modern nation states with multiple ethnic identities within to develop adequate terms of negotiations between various groups, but also to scholars of social sciences to expedite the search for knowledge about the complex nature of ethnic conflict in different contexts. It is with this objective in mind that the thesis was being planned to systematically analyze and observe the unique nature of ethnic conflict in Northeast India by taking up particular case of inter-ethnic conflict between Nagas, Kukis and Meeteis in Manipur. Before, going deeper into this particular case, it is perhaps important to discuss here the conceptual framework of ethnic conflict at large.

1.1 Ethnicity

Ethnicity simply put refers to ideas pertaining to the word ethnic. Though the sense of kingship, group solidarity and common culture to which it refers is as old as the historical record, the term ‘ethnicity’ is first appeared in the 1950s in English language; recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1953. A variety of dictionary citations follow this, dating from the latter period (in 1960s and 1970s). Conceptually, though it is difficult to unearth a universally acceptable definition of the term ‘ethnic’, it generally refers to a group of people with a common, distinctive racial, national, religious, linguistic or cultural heritage. It is also used to describe a culture that is different from the dominant culture, in terms of language, race, religion, national origin and various combinations of these factors. Such ‘Ethnic Identification’ is referred to the individual level of the identification with a culturally defined collectivity, the sense on the part of the individual
that he or she belongs to a particular cultural community. Similarly, ‘Ethnic Origin’ refers to the sense of ancestry and nativity on the part of the individual through his or her parents and grand parent; although the concept may also have an even more problematic collective dimension, referring to cultural groups and migration origins of ethnics.

For a more clear understanding of the term, it is perhaps required to differentiate ethnicity from some other words which are frequently used and confused their meanings with that of ethnicity. For example, the term ethnicity is taken synonymously with the term ‘tribe’. However, while a tribe is defined as more or less a homogenous group of people having a closely-knit way of life, with relatively simpler means of production, to be somewhat falling under a close or communicable speech community, ethnic community is defined as politicized tribe with certain ideological construction as a goal.¹ Compared to tribe, it is more politicized ideological constructed with matured form of communication network.

Though there is a close relationship between the Ethnicity and Race, the concepts of ‘Race’ can also be differentiated from ethnicity. The term race has deliberately stressed that it has major divisions of mankind with distinct physical characteristic. Micheal Banton showed the obvious distinction between race and ethnicity.² In Banton’s view, race refers to the categorization of people, while ethnicity has to do with group identification. He argues that ethnicity is generally more concerned with the identification of ‘us’, while racism is more oriented to the categorization of ‘them’.

Further, it is necessary to distinguish clearly ‘Ethnicity’ and ‘Class’ which is referred to the system of social ranking and distribution of power within a society. Ethnicity does not necessarily refer to rank; ethnic relations may well be egalitarian in this regard. Still, many multi-ethnic societies are ranked according to ethnic membership.

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¹ Nameirakpam Bijen Meetei, Ethnic Diversity and Conflict in North-East India: A Comparative Study of Manipur and Meghalaya, unpublished thesis submitted to Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2010, p. 22.
The criteria for such ranking are nevertheless different from class ranking; they refer to imputed cultural differences or races, not to property or achieved status.

Above distinctions show that ethnicity is a group of people having certain common characteristics. However, the concept of ethnicity has been explained by De Vos in the sense of ethnic identity which consists of the subjective, symbolic or emblematic used by a group of people of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other group. This indicates that ethnic identity also involves, in addition to subjective self-consciousness, a claim to status and recognition, either as a superior group or as a group at least equal to other groups. The process of creating self consciousness through the instrumentality of a particular region or dialect or even style of dress is also defined as ethnicity. An ethnic group that uses cultural symbols in this way is a self-conscious community that establishes criteria for inclusion and exclusion from the group. At this point, matters of decent, birth and a sense of kinships may become important to ethnic group members, for the methods of inclusion and exclusion into the group often involve the explicit or tacit adoption of rules of endogamy and exogamy.

Thus, Antony Gidden remarks “Ethnicity refers to the cultural practices and outlooks of a given community of people that set them apart from others. Members of ethnic group see themselves as culturally distinct from other groups in a society and seen by those other groups to be so in return”. After the cold war, ethnicisation is became fast political mobilization for political gaining or economic equality, civil rights, status, educational opportunity etc. Therefore, Karl Deutsch, in his communication theory suggests “Ethnicity is an alternative form of social organization and identification to class, but it is a contingent and changeable status that, like class, may or may not be articulated in particular contexts or particular times.” There are two dominant schools of thought on the idea of ethnic and ethnicity: the primordial school and the constructivist school. The remaining argument put forwarded by the former is that ethnic identity is a

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“subjectivity held sense of shared identity based on objective cultural or regional criteria”

Anthony Smith exemplifies this approach best when referring to six ‘bases’ or foundations of ethnic identity: A distinct group name in order to be recognized as distinct community by both group members and outsiders; a shared belief by group members in the myth of common ancestry and decent; the presence of historical memories among the group members (as interpreted and diffused over the generations, often verbally); a shared culture (including dress, food, music, craft and architecture, laws, custom and institutions, religion and language); an attachment to a specific territory or ‘homeland’; and a sense of common solidarity.

Constructivists, on the other hand contended that ethnic or national identity is socially constructed; that is, it is ‘the product of processes which are embedded in human actions and choices rather than biologically given ideas whose meaning is dictated by nature’.

There are tens of definitions and different formations on the meaning of ethnic and ethnicity. Why we cannot have a stable, universally acceptable definition on the concept is perhaps because such definitions are contingent upon the way ethnic identities are being promoted and therefore it is context specific. However, for the purpose in hand ethnicity can be defined in terms of socio-political dynamics manifested in the actions of groups which have distinct cultural characters including language, customary practices, traditions that are shared among the members. An ethnic group, thus, is a group of people having a common culture, language, history and other traditions different from other groups.

1.2 Conflict: The Meaning

What is palpably important is that every ethnic group tries to preserve and promote its identity and interest vis-à-vis identity and interest of other. Ethnic groups that use

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7 Ibid, pp. 23-24.
8 Ibid. p. 24.
ethnicity to make demands in the political arena for alteration in their status, in their economic well-being, in their civil rights, or in their educational opportunities are engaged in a form of interest group politics which became prominent in Northeast India and which sought to improve the well being of group members as individuals\(^9\) and at later, a conflict situation tends to arise. Under the campaign for protection and promote of identity, there are several problems (ethnic demands, ethnic competition or particularly ethnic conflict) take places.\(^{10}\)

It is perhaps important at this juncture to briefly discuss the concept of conflict. It is not easy to define the term ‘conflict’ as it denotes a variety of meanings. According to Advance English Dictionary, conflict means a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes. It also connotes a situation in which people or groups or countries involved in a serious disagreements or arguments. It is also referred to a contestation between the two or more opposing ethnic groups. Sometimes, it involves more collective violent action of an ethnic group against some other ethnic groups to highlight its discontent. Therefore, ethnic conflict refers to dispute between contending groups who identify themselves primarily on the basis of their collective rights.\(^{11}\)

Ethnic diversity can greatly enrich in societies. Multiethnic states are often vibrant and dynamic places that are strengthened by the varied contributions of their inhabitants. But such states can also be fragile, especially in the face of internal upheaval or external threat. Differing linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds can become fault lines that result in open antagonism between the ethnic groups. Sometimes societies with long histories of ethnic tolerance and integration can rapidly become engulf in ethnic conflict – hostilities between different ethnic groups or communities.

This has recently been the case in the former Yugoslavia, a region renowned for its rich multiethnic heritage. The Balkans has long been the crossroads in Europe.

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Countries migration and the rule of successive empires have produced a diverse, intermixed population composed predominantly of slaves (such as the Eastern Orthodox Serbs), Croats (Catholic), Muslims and Jews. Since 1991, alongside major political and social transformations following the fall of communism, deadly conflicts have broken out between ethnic groups in several areas of former Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{12} Other examples include conflict between the White and the people of color in United State of America, between the Hutus and Tutsis, between the Burundi and Rwanda, the Turks and Greeks on Cyprus. In south East Asia the Hmong and the Laos conflict In Cambodia is the biggest, besides those between the Akhai and Thai in Thailand. The conflict between the Inner Mongolia and the Chinese in China, between the Tamil and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka are also examples of ethnic conflict.

Brass suggests that ethnic conflict can occur only if there are some conflicts either between indigenous and external elites and authorities or between indigenous elites. Four sources of elite conflict that may spur the development of ethnic communalism or separatism in pre-industrial or early modernizing societies are those (a) between a local aristocracy attempting to maintain its privileges against an alien conqueror; (b) between competing religious elites from different ethnic groups; (c) between religious elites and the native aristocracy within an ethnic group: and (d) between native religious elite and an alien aristocracy.

Thus, Ethnic conflict has been discussed under various labels: ‘the politics of difference’, ‘identity politics’, or ‘politics of recognition’.\textsuperscript{13} While each term carries slightly different connotation, the underlying idea is the same. Whatever shape it may take, the fact is that there are conflicts that are rooted on such ideas of ethnicity.

1.3 The Ethnic Haze: The Indian Case

In India too, there are states hunted by the ghost of ethnic conflict. In the Indian Political parlance, decorating as the Hindu-Muslim conflict in the northwest and southwest, the

\textsuperscript{12} Giddens, opt cit. p. 257.
very term ‘Northeast’ come to denote a region characterized by such ethnic conflicts.\textsuperscript{14} Since the advent and extension of colonial rule in the region, the region has been experiencing political, social and economic upheaval. After independence, the region has barely experienced a single decade of calm political atmosphere. Instead, each decade witnessed new movements for political and social recognition, some of which have often turned violent. One need not make a substantive argument to show that these movements have their origin in the ethno-national understanding of ethnic identities. We have seen the ethnic conflict over the whole region e.g. between the Naga and the Mizo and Riang in Mizoram, between the Arunachali and Chakma in Arunachal Pradesh etc. Insurgency, which can be taken as extreme form of political upsurge, has rocked almost all the states of North-East at one time or another. Armed insurrections took roots in Nagaland and Manipur in Between the 1950s and 1960s. The armed movements intensified in Mizoram in the sixties, in Tripura in the seventies, while in the case of Assam, it was in the eighties. Militancy also affected Arunachal Pradesh if not a menacingly as the other neighboring states. Thus, the biggest challenge to us is unfold the objective or subjective rational behind ethnic conflicts in the region so as to find out possible corrective interventions.

In the Northeast, the whole problem of ethnicity has become quite a complicated issue. Though there are contextual differences in terms of the nature of conflicts, there is no state amongst the seven sisters that does not face the problems of ethnic conflict. This region has often been described as a boiling cauldron by many academicians and journalists because of various problems inflicting the region. There is more than one factor that led to such a phenomenon. However, the factors responsible for ethnic conflict are yet to be explained satisfactorily. Apart from the issues of cultural injustices meted out to the minority communities, ethnicity is also being used instrumentally by political elites. The leadership mobilizes groups by the select used of ethnic symbols for their politico-economic purpose is best suitable for self consciousness and specific political gain in the region.

1.4 Manipur: A Haunted Land

Manipur, in the last decade of the twentieth century was marked by violent ethnic clashes. While commenting on such catastrophic ethnic clashes, some even described Manipur as ‘India’s Bosnia’. First, there was the Kuki-Naga clash which started in 1992 and continued unabated till the end of 1998. It was followed by many other clashes including the one between the Meeteis and the Muslims in May 1993. In June 1995 again, there was a sudden eruption of Kuki-Tamil clashes in Moreh. In 1997-98 the peace of the state was shaken by Kuki-Paite clash, and since then Manipur continues to be one of the most conflict state in the entire country. But the question, what are the social forces that led to such ethnic conflicts in the state, is still not satisfactorily addressed? The present study is an attempt to find an answer to the question in relation to the Meetei-Kuki-Naga conflicts in the state of Manipur.

While many scholars argue that ethnic conflict in Manipur began after the post-independence era. More overtly, the direct confrontational of conflict was started mainly after the formation of NSCN (I-M). Like the NSCM (I-M) of Nagas and KNF of Kukis, Meetei also have insurgent groups with sophisticate arms since 1947 that led to the conflict situation in the state. Though there was conflict among the insurgents but ethnic conflict between the Meeteis, the Nagas and the Kukis emerged since 1990s. Even some propounded that the Kuki-Naga conflict in 1992 was not between the Nagas and the Kukis, it was just between the NSCN (IM) and KNA.

In some of the conflict situation (ethnic conflict situation) economic factor is largely considered as responsible. Kuki-Tamil clash of 1995 at Moreh was the result of Kukis attempt to capture the trade and commerce from Tamil people who are running business in Moreh. Besides, the sudden large-scale migration of Kuki refugees from different places to the south Manipur, due to Naga-Kuki clash in 1992, increased a lot of social problem. Where unemployment was rampant and many anti-social elements came to thrive. It also resulted to the Kuki-Paite clash in 1997.
The involvement of insurgent groups in the conflict had been threatening to the less population tribes (intermediate tribes) whose are neither the Naga nor the Kuki. In such situation intermediate tribes had confused for their future identity. There are numbers of the old-Kuki tribes who later joined the Naga fold (or Naga identity) just for survival. So the identity issue has become a core issue in the conflict situation particularly in the Kuki-Naga relations. The main factors of 2007 Kuki- Paite clash is due to the sudden inclusion of Paite in the list of Naga fold. Earlier the Paite was a part of the Kuki fold. Culturally i.e. in terms of language, culture and custom they are more similar with the Kuki tribes.

1.5 Conflict Structure

The conflict in Manipur is multi-dimensional in the sense that there are different categories of ethnic conflict in the state. Thus the structure of existing conflict is quite complicated and even difficult to decode the causes of these conflicts. The conflict in the state is not simply between only two ethnic groups. Sometimes, three ethnic groups viz. Meetei, Kuki and Naga who are often presented as main groups, involve simultaneously in ethnic conflict. We have seen ethnic clashes between the Meetei and the Naga, between the Meetei and the Kuki, between the Kuki and the Naga and amongst the Kuki and the Naga on the one hand and the Meetei on the other. Thus, I will argue in the main chapter that many ethnic groups involve in conflict and therefore, a single line of narration will hardly answer many of the important questions on ethnic conflict. There are arguments which stress the problems of economic disparities and discrimination as possible cause of such conflicts. There are also hints on the social inequalities being the main source of conflict in the state. Again, demographic distribution of ethnic tribes is also considered as a possible source of conflicts involving a number of ethnic groups. In the following paragraphs the nature of conflicts would be briefly explained.

1.6 Meetei and Naga

Meeteis and Nagas are the largest communities in Manipur. There are many theories that traced the origin of the two communities to same parentage. However, in the recent past there have been tensions and disagreement between the two on a number of issues.
Fortunately so far there has not been any overt violent clash between the Meeteis and the Nagas. Even the ethnic clashes that appeared in 1992, 1993, 1997, 2004 and 2007 were not directly linked to conflict between these two biggest communities in Manipur. However, that does not mean that there is no tension between the two. There are covert conflicts between the Meeteis and the Nagas. This kind of tension has been aroused particularly since the formation of NSCN (National Socialist Council of Naga). Dismembering movement of the Naga from Manipur has come down against the interest of both people in the hills in general and Meetei in particular. And this kind of movement is thought to be the main cause of conflict between Meetei and Naga.

For instance, the Bangkok Agreement (Bangkok Declaration), which was signed between NSCN (IM) and Government of India on 14 June 2001, was looked at with suspicion by the Meeteis. Under this declaration the Cease-fire between NSCN (IM) and Government of India was extended without ‘territorial limit’. The significance of the agreement lies in the fact that earlier the cease-fire was applied only within the territory of Nagaland which is the main operational areas of NSCN (IM). The new agreement suggests that the cease-fire will also be applied to Manipur where they have been operating for quite some time. Therefore, the people of Manipur thought that under a hidden agenda (as a part of this agreement) GOI has accepted the demand of NSCN (IM) for merging a large part of Manipur to what has been called ‘Greater Nagaland’. This has caused severe tensions between the two communities.

Frequent economic blockades as a means to achieve their demand by the Naga civil organizations is another reason for conflict between the two communities. The Nagas often launched economic blockades in order to push through their demands. The recent most example of such a tactics was the fifty-two days economic blockade on National Highways in 2005 launched by All Naga Student Association, Manipur (ANSAM). In May 2011 another National Highways blockade was carried out against Manipur government’s decision to oppose Mr. Muivah’s (General Secretary, NSCN-IM) visit to Manipur. This blockade started from 3 May 2011. This lasted for 68 days and

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15 NSCN (IM) is a faction group lead by Ishak and Muivah from NSCN (National Socialist Council of Naga). Another main faction group is NSCN-K lead by Khaplang.
became the longest economic blockade in the history of Manipur so far. All these economic blocked were conducted by Naga civil organizations and this has become a problem in the ethnic relationship in the state.

Again the ‘Senapati Declaration’ threatens that the Nagas will no longer continue political relation with the Government of Manipur. Accordingly, they asserted a demand to the central government for providing an alternative arrangement for the Nagas in Manipur. The Union Government clearly states that demand for alternative arrangement is not acceptable. However, the people of Manipur still suspect Government of India as well as Naga organizations on a possibility of having a backdoor agreement between the two affecting the territorial integrity of the state.

1.7 Meetei and Kuki

Kukis are another important ethnic group in Manipur. It is often said that they had a close social-cultural and political relationship with the Meeteis. Cheitharol Kumpaba, indicates that there were even many Meetei kings who were named in Kuki dialect. For example, the name Taothingmang of king Taothingmang was a typical Kuki name. This indicates the kind of prevailing socio-political relationship between these two communities in the past. Moreover, whenever there was a threat from any outside force Meetei kings often sought help from the Kukis in her fight for defending the territory and sovereignty. For instance, in 1810, during the ‘Ava war’ the Meetei king Chourjit was supported by Kukis. In 1820, the Kukis pitched in their might to help king Herachandra in preventing the Ava incursions into Manipur. Five hundred Kuki warriors volunteer to serve as part of the king’s military troop. However, in the recent past the relationship between these two communities is not so cordial. Especially, after the Kuki National

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16 United Naga Council (UNC) organized Naga people convention at Senapati district of Manipur where Nagas declared decisions of the convention. This decision is called ‘Senapati Declaration’ by many Naga scholars. The main provision of the declaration was that the Nagas will not corporate with government of Manipur.

17 The Cheitharon Kumpapa is the court chronicle of the kings of Manipur, a small formerly independent state situated on the Indian border with Myanmar. The Cheitharon Kumpapa is a court account of the state, which claims to record events from the founding of the ruling dynasty in 33 AD. This dynasty continued until the abolition of the monarchy after the merger of the state with India in 1949. (See Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt, The Court Chronicle Of The Kings Of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa, Original text, translation and notes Vol. 1, 33–1763 CE, Routledge Publication, London and New York, 2005, p. 19)

Organization (KNO) started demanding a separate Kuki homeland. Even before they pushed for a demand for a separate exclusive homeland, they were part of the movement for ‘Greater Mizoram’ comprising areas of N.C. Hills, parts of Manipur, entire Mizoram and some part of Tripura. They even responded positively to the call of Mizo National Front (MNF) leader Zoram Thanga that Kuki should also be a part to the Greater Mizoram. Since then they have been undertaking separatist movement in and around Manipur. It is only after MNF movement was restricted only to Mizoram that the Kukis of Manipur started looking for a new homeland within Manipur. Thus, they have been demanding a separate territory. This has been a bond of contention between the Meeteis and the Kukis for quite a long time.

Putting fuel to the fire, the Kuki insurgents (KNO-KNF) have been taking an unprecedented step to unite all the non-Naga tribes and push through a demand for a common territory to be named Zale’n-gam. The Nagas and the Meeteis strongly reacted to such a demand. And therefore, such a move heightened the conflict between communities in the state.

The intensity of the conflict is illustrated by the recent Meetei-Kuki ethnic clash that came about in Moreh in 2007. Moreh is a small commercial town located in the Indo-Myanmar border. Though small in size, commercially it is one of the most important towns in Manipur as it has been a seed of international trade since quite a long time. It was formally open between Government of India and Myanmar (Burma) in 1994-95. Thus, this Moreh incident of 2007 can be taken as the finest testimony to the ruptured relationship between the Kukis and the Meeteis. In this clash the two ethnic communities who shared an age old history of friendship and amity were locked, for the first time, in armed violence. Eleven people were killed during this clash. The incident at Moreh which nearly sparked off a communal bloodbath between the Meetei and Kuki communities has been assuaged temporarily through the combined efforts of various civil

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19 Zale’n-gam is a name of Kuki homeland which is demanded by KNO and KNF since they came into praxis. It is more reality when Kuki insurgents signed Suspension of Operation on 2005 and after that in peace process the demand of Zale’n-gam was main issue.

organizations and government. But the enmity between these two communities continues to simmer in the backdrop.

1.8 Kuki and Naga

The Nagas and the Kukis are two distinct ethnic groups who have co-existed for centuries in the North-East India and Burma. There are many opinions about the genesis of the Kuki-Naga conflict. According to the Kuki National Council, Manipur the cause of this conflict is the claim of the Nagas for a greater Nagaland to be made by combining the present state of Nagaland with other Naga inhabited areas in the Northeast including four districts of Manipur viz. Ukhrul district, Tamenglong district, Senapati district. However the Nagas presented a different viewpoint on it. According to them the Kuki-Naga ethnic conflict is a result of the Kukis’ dream for the Kuki homeland. The demand for creation of Kuki homeland has been presented to the Government of India in various forms such as Kuki refugee settlement and creation of new district, etc. The Kuki underground organizations on the heir part laid claims on the district of Churchanpur, Chandel and major parts of Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong as the Kuki homeland”.

The biggest ethnic conflict in the entire Northeast was highlighted in the enmity between the Kuki and the Naga. These two communities are at the loggerhead for quite some time. Both the communities have different demands and expectations from both the state government and the central government. They have launched armed movements demanding separate territories particularly in Manipur. In 1992 these ethnic communities came into violent clash which went on for nearly a decade. Thousands were killed; hundreds have been orphaned and widowed, and many were left homeless. Properties worth millions have been damaged during this conflict. Till date the damage due to this conflict is irreparable. The two communities, however, have restored their normal relations through the efforts of NGOs and the State Government. More

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importantly, the clash was not confined to the state Manipur only. It spreads to the neighboring state like Nagaland and too many parts of Assam.

1.9 Multi-Community Dimension of Conflict

Besides the conflicts specified above which are more or less one-to-one conflict, there are also conflicts involving many groups. For example there are conflicts between the Nagas and the Kukis on the one side and the Meeteis on the other. In such a situation even the conflict that has been swelling between Kuki and Naga was sidelined. For example in the issue of quotas or reservation (both for admission in institutions and jobs) these two communities often come together as a single force against the Meeteis. All Tribal Students’ Union, Manipur (ATSUM) is the apex organization that spearheading the combined movements of the Kukis and the Nagas. In a statement published by ATSUM on 31st May 2007, it says regarding the quota issues that “ATSUM in particular and the whole tribal communities of Manipur in general have every reason to be hurt, displeased and annoyed with the state government of Manipur for its failure to fulfill our hope and aspiration; its promises and commitments- both written and unwritten”. They had launched agitation of all sorts including Economic Blockade for more than 10 times. Even within the campus of Manipur University the private vehicle of faculty members of different department were ransacked by Manipur University Tribal Students Union (MUTSU), another common student union of the Kukis and the Nagas. In the incident the buildings of Manipur University were destroyed during the same movement.

The 1990s show the development of language movement in the state. This development had its own effect on the ethnic politics. Books written in Bengali script were burnt down by pressure groups and the Meetei Mayek (or Script) is imposed upon all the people across the state. This inflicted a strong sense of alienation to the tribal people. The people in the hills today refused to accept the Meetei Mayek (Manipuri Script). They prefer to follow the Roman script. This has created a lot of problem in inter-ethnic relationship in the state. The problem lies in the fact that this script, Meetei Mayek,

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24 Ibid.
represents only a section of the people in the state that is the Meetei. It is identified with the Meetei and their cognates groups or clans.

1.10 Objectives of the Study

To the best of my knowledge no known work has so far been undertaken to study the multi-community dimension of the Meetei-Kuki-Naga conflict in the state of Manipur. It is more a triangular relation in the nature. Therefore, the present study attempts to understand the genesis of conflict, factors responsible for generating conflict between the Kuki, Naga and Meetei. It also aims at analyzing the role of insurgency groups in these conflicts.

1.11 Research Questions

Instead of proposing any hypothesis, the study is addressed to seek answer to the following question:

1. What is the nature and genesis of the conflict between Meitei Naga and Kuki
2. What are the factors responsible for conflicts and
3. What is the role of the insurgent outfits in the conflict between these three major communities in Manipur?

1.12 Methodology

The propose study is a descriptive, explorative and analytical one. Data required for the study are collected from various sources including apex organizations of different ethnic groups. Moreover, since it is a matter of ethnicity and conflict between three major groups in the state, I also accessed the Government documents on policies and programs, and the documents that incorporate various demands put up by ethnic civil societies and other civil societies and insurgents groups. I have had interaction with various personalities who have knowledge of ethnic conflict in the state. This includes scholars working in the field and leaders of various tribal organizations. I have used both structured and unstructured interviews. Thus, observation techniques were also employed for collecting data. Various secondary sources including books written on the subject were consulted. It was supplemented with archival records. Historical records left by
British administrators; gazetteers, ethnographic profiles and other official records in the state archive were also used. This has helped in establishing the traditional relationship between the major groups involved in the state. Information collected from current and contemporary materials such as newspapers, Magazines, documentary films etc. were reviewed and data were organized and assembled for mapping propaganda campaigns by employing content analysis technique.

Specific field work were carried out in the conflict affected areas mostly in hill areas and economy and cultural zone- Moreh, Churchanpur, Ema Keithel (Ema Market), Andro (cultural complex), Jiribam, Saikul, Kangpokpi, Tipaimukh, Litan, Kamsong, Motbung, Mao gate, Keimai, Awang Khul of Tamenglong, Makhal (origin of Naga or sacred place) at Senapati district. I even volunteered to participate as civil society group efforts to distribute rice, water, cloth, medicine and other things at conflict affected areas particularly at Kangchup and Moreh areas. I even stayed at the affected areas for first hand information and documentation during the economic blockade conducted by civil groups of Naga and Kuki.

Finally, it may be mentioned here that the presence of the communities viz. Nagas, Kukis and Meeteis are found in various parts of Northeast India, the study is limited to the state of Manipur. Thus, the thesis is an attempt to study adequately the different aspect of conflict between three major communities in Manipur. Manipur has been chosen purposively as it has been the most affected state in the region.

1.13 Organization of the Thesis

The study is organized into seven (7) chapters including current introductory chapter title ‘Ethnic Conflict: Problem and Discourse’ where I had just enumerated the existing problems of conflict in the state. The conceptual framework of ethnic conflict along with a brief identification of the nature of ethnic conflict existing in Manipur was also attempted in this part/chapter.

The second chapter ‘Review of Literature’ is devoted for studying various pervious writing on the issues related with ethnic identity and conflict. These are collections of books which deal not only with ethnicity and conflict in the North East
India but also discuss works on theoretical narratives diversity and ethnicity. The main purpose of this chapter is to highlight the existing plethora of literature on the issues of ethnicity, conflict and crisis in the North East. Though hundreds of books are written on the issue, I have taken up few commendable works which are after referred to in the discussion of issues of conflict and diversity.

The third chapter which is titled as ‘**Manipur: Socio-Political Profile**’ tries to put proper perspective the socio-political and demographic character of the state. The significance of the chapter lies in the fact that without understanding the general profile of the state it will be difficult to grapes the aspects of the conflict in the state. Therefore, the chapter attempts to discuss in detects the primarily and important socio-political profile of the state. It starts with the geographical profile and finally discusses about the nature of the ethnic diversity in the state.

Then the thesis comes to the issue of conflict first by taking up the historical aspect of the conflict in the state. It attempts to analyse the historical factors that contributed the existing conflict in the state. This is exactly what chapter 4 tries to address. The chapter is title ‘**Historical Factor of the Ethnic Conflict: The Genesis**’. This chapter broadly divided into three parts. The first part deals about the pre-colonial state administration and issues of ethnic relationship. The second part focuses on Religion as factor for ethnic conflict and the third and final part of the chapter deals with administration of the State during the colonial period.

After discussing the historical factors of ethnic conflict the thesis proceeds to study the contemporary issues. Thus the fifth chapter studies the contemporary issues that spark ethnic conflict in the state. The chapter is title ‘**Factors Responsible for Ethnic Conflict: Contemporary Issue**’. This chapter divided into four parts. The first one deals with resource ownership tendency which creates condition of ethnic conflict. The second one deals with politics of representation as genesis of the ethnic conflict. The third one studies the political violation as factor for ethnic conflict. The final sub-chapter focuses on the Migration issue as factor for ethnic conflict.
In the North East insurgency has been part and parcel of ethnic conflict. Almost all the ethnic communities have insurgent groups either promoted for fighting on their behalf or created by few in the name of fighting for particular ethnic community. Therefore insurgency and ethnic conflict are link issues. It is with this basic understanding that the sixth chapter is set to study the relationship between insurgency and ethnic conflict in Manipur. The chapter is titled ‘Conflict and Insurgent groups’. This chapter will deal the factor of insurgent emerged, differentiate between the hills and valley’s insurgents, major ethnic clash and it impact on their relation. The chapter also will deal the role of civil society in peace process and communal harmony in Manipur.

The final chapter ‘Conclusion’ encompasses the whole issues of ethnic conflict and put forward the finding of the study and some observation on the subject.