The Naga-Kuki Violent Ethnic Conflict of 1990s

The violent ethnic conflict is found in many nations of the world, India is no exception to this. The Northeast region of India is one of the worst parts of the country in respect to the violent ethnic conflict. Almost all the seven states of the region have been affected by this malady. For more than half a decade ago a horrendous and the worst violent ethnic conflict occurred between the Nagas and the Kukis in India’s northeast. The clash affected the states of Manipur, Nagaland and parts of Assam. But the main affected state was Manipur. The clash triggered of in May-June 1992. Unlike the Meitei-Pangal clash of May 1993 and the Kuki-Paite clash of 1997, the Naga-Kuki violent clash went on and on for nearly a decade. The Naga-Kuki violent conflict took away hundreds of human lives, many were mercilessly and inhumanly butchered. This conflict also left thousands as refugees, some uncared for and attended. Hundreds of children became orphan, many husbands became widowers and hundreds of young wives turned widows. Further, there are many maimed and injured permanently or are yet to recover. Many parents lived with the memories of their beloved children who were taken away by this clash. The material loss during this violent conflict could be estimated in terms of crores of rupees. There are no words befitting or adequate to express the loss and the sufferings of the masses.

The All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM) sent a letter to the Hon'ble Union Minister of State, in which it says, "Never before have we seen such madness before this crisis started at a Moreh town in May-June 1992." Indeed, it has never been seen before by the state of Manipur or Nagaland or Assam or concerned ethinies in a modern era. Since the time they came into contact with each other they co-

270 A Letter to the Hon’ble Union Minister of State, Ministry of Home (Internal Security) by All Naga Students’ Association Manipur (ANSAM), 10th August 1993.
exist and share relationships of both war and peace. Thus, one traces both the present violent conflicts and the peace in their relationship to the period they came into contact with each other. This study, in this chapter, will look at the definition of various terms employed for this clash such as 'ethnic cleansing', 'genocide', 'ethnic clash', and 'communal clash', etc. It will also give various views on this clash. Finally, the discussion will be on the causes of the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict.

Usage of the Terms: 'Ethnic Cleansing', 'Genocide', 'Communal Clash', 'Ethnic Conflict'

During the Naga-Kuki violence of 1990s, many terms, viz., 'ethnic cleansing', 'genocide', 'communal clash' and 'ethnic conflict', etc., were used by various people for the Naga-Kuki violent conflict. In order to use the term, in this study of the Naga-Kuki violent conflict, it will be adequate to look into the definitions of the above mentioned terms.

The Government of India in a document like "DOES VIOLENCE GET MANDATE" used the term "ethnic cleansing". It accused the Nagas for carrying out "ethnic cleansing" on the Kuki tribe. "Taking note of the clashes between Kukis and the Nagas in Manipur and between Bodos and non-tribals in Assam, the report of the NECC general Secretary said 'ethnic cleansing' had added a new dimension to the complexities created by the nexus between drug traders, arms smugglers and insurgents."271 This suggests that Naga-Kuki clash was label as ethnic cleansing. Further, some journalists or freelance also used this term, for instance, "Manipur is possibly the only place in south Asia where ethnic cleasing has reached an alarming scale."272 The Kukis' organizations like Kuki Peoples Forum for Human Rights, and other individuals also used in their writings. Interestingly, most of the Nagas encompassing individuals and

*NECC stands for North-East Congress Coordination Committee. In this, the State of Sikkim is included.
271 Prasun Sonwalkar, 'N-E Panels call to tackle Insurgency', *The Times of India*, 20th October 1993.
organizations neither use the term nor accused the Kukis of an ethnic cleansing in their writings.

The International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences describes ethnic cleansing as "the process of the forced deportation of peoples or nations from their homes and homeland." This implies that ethnic cleansing has an objective of driving out other ethnic group(s) from a particular territory to make it a homogeneous ethnic group's territory. In the process of doing this, "it is often accompanied by violence and murder." "The violence of 'ethnic cleansing' has a different character from that of war... In ethnic cleansing, it is usually an armed perpetrator who attacks unarmed civilians. Those who are conducting the 'cleansing' have complete power over the others producing a variety of brutal and sadistic practices that have little relationship to the normal rules of military engagement. They burn down homes, rape women and girls, beat helpless victims and rob indiscriminately in the process of dislodging peoples from their homes and their homelands. Every cruelty- maiming, branding, and tortures has been used. The violence of ethnic cleansing is therefore directed almost exclusively against civilians. This usually means women, children, and the elderly. The gendered quality of ethnic cleansing is notable... females are targeted both as the biological sources of the future of the ethnic groups, and as the bearers and teachers of national cultural values. They are often the primary victims of ethnic cleansing, as men are the major victims of the war. It is never sufficient in ethnic cleansing simply to expel people from the designated territory. Their physical and cultural monuments and artifacts are targets for destruction, as well. Further, the names of the peoples of their towns, and of their regions, were routinely chipped, removed completely from sight, chipped away from stone engravings, and even banned from speech. There should be no physical traces left of their precious existence. They are written out of history, or histories are written to denigrate their roles in the region they formally inhabited."
When one looks at the violence of the Naga-Kuki conflict and the above definition of the term ‘ethnic cleansing’, the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ seems inept for the Naga-Kuki violent conflict. The violence of the Naga-Kuki conflict was not conducted by one group alone, but it was from both sides. Further, if one ethnic group perpetrated violence on the other, the other also retaliated. “In fact the observers of the State point out the cycle of killings and reprisals.” 276 “Every other day members of one tribe are gunned down by the other. Entire hamlets are reduced to cinder and the vicious circle of killings and reprisals go on unabated.” 277

The objective of driving out the rival from the territory in totality was not the idea of both the groups. And also both used ‘Quit notices” to each other and it was not confined to one group alone, and also it was given to a few villages on a few instances. Here are some evidences: “The demonstrators (Kukis) publicly demanded that all Nagas should leave Moreh within 24 hours or face dire consequences.” 278 “They served the Nagas with ‘Quit Nagas’ notices with 30 May 1992 a deadline for it.” 279 “The Kuki-Naga ethnic clashes in Manipur have taken a turn for the worse with Kuki villagers inhabiting Tamenglong and Senapati districts fleeing to the state capital following quit notices served by the Naga insurgents.” 280 These are some incidences of quit notices used by both on each other.

The gender selectivity of ‘ethnic cleansing’ was on females but the numbers of male victims in this violence outnumbered female victims. Sometimes children, women and aged people were spared from being killed. In fact, peoples or families who had age-old ties continued to have an age-old relationship despite the occurrence of the violent conflict. Further, they also continued to co-exist after the conflict and even during the

278 “Quit Notice” is an order issue to the occupants of the land/village to vacate it, which implies that the real ownership belongs to them and not to the occupants.
280 ‘20,000 Kukis flee to Imphal’, The Times of India, 12th September 1993.
conflict. Thus, 'ethnic cleansing' term is inappropriate to apply for this Naga-Kuki violent conflict.

The term 'genocide' appeared in some of the news reports, letters, memoranda and in the writings of some organizations and individuals. According to the International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences, "it means intent to kill part of or all of a people."281 Further, it is an "organization efforts to destroy a whole cultural, religions or racial populations."282 As discussed earlier, the act of violence was perpetrated by both. During the conflict, killings of part or parcel of the village population occurred but both did not intend to kill the whole population of their rival. Even the deep hatred during the conflict might had led some of the members of the groups to think but it was impossible for both to do so. One reason is that the Naga population outnumbers the Kukis in the four hills Districts of Manipur State, at the same time, there are some Sub-divisions or Blocks or area where the Kukis outnumbers the Nagas. In this situation, any dominant group in any areas exercised their might. Thus, there was something like 'genocide' at a village level or micro-level but the term 'genocide' could not be applied to this violent ethnic conflict.

Thirdly, the term 'communal clash' was used by some for the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict. The term communal clash was used in two senses- some people used it for the Naga-Kuki violent clash in the sense of the Meitei-Pangal clash of May 1993 and the other meaning was in the sense of communal or community clash. The application of the first sense is a fallacy in the sense that the Nagas and the Kukis are Christians and there was no religious issue leading to the violent clash whereas the Meiteis-Pangals clash had some religious issues at the backdrop. And the second meaning that takes the total communities as involved in the violent conflict is also wrong. The violence clash between the Nagas and the Kukis began with their militants, that is, between the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) and the Kuki National Army (KNA) and other Kuki militants, gradually it affected the civilians of each group. The members of each

282 Ibid., p.4807.
group formed a group of volunteers for defense purpose but they also attacked and retaliated each other. This again does not mean that the entire civilian population of the Nagas and the Kukis came out to participate in this violent conflict. There were some who participated in it but there were also many who were spectators, aloof, condemned the violence, struggled to bring normalcy, though they were also affected by it due to their affiliation with these ethnic identities. Thus, the application of 'Communal Clash' as community clash to this conflict needs an in-depth study keeping in mind those who were not involved.

Lastly, the term ‘ethnic conflict’ was widely employed in the newspapers and other writings, etc. *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences* defines it as a “two or more distinctive ethnies are fighting to control scarce resources (oil, gold, timber, diamonds, land fishing grounds). The contenders are ethnic but the stakes are not.”283 Cora Govers and Hans Vermuelen say that “conflict is ethnic is not to state its causes are cultural but it become ethnic conflict, when majority of the people involved interpret or have come to interpret the conflict in question in terms of ethnic. Moreover, most of ethnic conflicts are not only ethnic conflict it also involves other dimension such as religion, clan feud etc., which may reinforce or even be used to reinforce ethnic boundaries. Secondly, a conflict is ethnic is not to imply (though it is often suggested particularly by ethnic leaders) that it involves all members of the groups concerned.”284

The first definition of ethnic conflict noted above emphasizes that the stakes for the ethnic conflicts are not the ethnic but the contenders are. The second definition says that a conflict is ethnic conflict when the causes are not only cultural but also other dimensions like religion or any other. It further says, it is ethnic conflict when majority of the people involved came to interpret it as ethnic and also ethnic conflict does not mean all the members of the groups of the concerned ethnies are involved.

In the case of the Naga-Kuki violence of 1990s, Cora Govers and Hans Vermuelen definition of ethnic conflict seems befitting: firstly, all the members of the

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283 Ibid., p.4806.
Naga-Kuki did not involve in the conflict though they were directly or indirectly affected by it. "Not all the Nagas and Kukis tribes, however, are involved in the mayhem that has engulf the State. It is only a section of the Nagas and the Kukis who are engaged in the blood-letting, although the violence has left scars among the other Naga and Kuki tribes as well." Secondly, the Nagas and the Kukis looked at themselves as a separate ethnic group, distinctive from one another. The attacked on one village(s) or man or men was considered as an attack on an ethnic group. Thirdly, the causes of this violent conflict were not cultural alone but also involved other dimensions.

*International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences* notes, "Violence takes place at the extreme, though a significant amount of ethnic conflict is characterized by non-violent behaviour." This implies that ethnic conflict has both violence and non-violence forms. Sometimes, long-run non-violent ethnic conflicts also erupt into bloody ethnic conflicts. The ethnic conflict of the Naga-Kuki is characterized by both violence and non-violence ethnic conflict. The Naga-Kuki ethnic conflict of 1990s was characterized by violence. Thus, looking at this the term violent ethnic conflict for the Naga-Kuki clash of 1990s as appropriate.

**Views on the Naga-Kuki Violent Ethnic Conflict**

There are various views on the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict. This study notes five different views, viz., the government of India both the centre and the state, the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis.

**The Government's View**

According to Samir Kumar Das, the officialdom and the nationalist historians who act in close league with each other, the data related to insurgencies are stamped with

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'the outlook of their enemies'. The Government reports and evidences (they have) as well as nationalist writings tends to be dismissive of them and feed a negative attitude towards them.\footnote{287} The Enquiry Report of the Officer on the Special Duty (Law and Orders) states that "after studying the situation and going through the report it may be assumed that the existing problem has arisen not really out of any communal feeling as such but mainly due to the heavy extortion of money by the alleged organizations (NSCN, KNO, KNF, CKR, and KFC), which could not be tolerated by them and retaliation in some cases. As it is now a matter of security towards the lives of the affected families or those likely to be affected families, it is urgently necessary for tightening security in Moreh town especially in the area bordering Burma where the majority inhabitants are Nagas and Kukis."\footnote{288} The implication of the Report is that the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict is due to the insurgents' activities like heavy extortion of money. The Government documentation titled "DOES VIOLENCE GET MANDATE" shows that the government blame the Nagas particularly NSCN-IM for this clash. This violent ethnic conflict between the Nagas and the Kukis, according to the Government, is 'ethnic cleansing' act of NSCN-IM of the Kukis.

The Naga movement is considered as "one of the longest movement and least known in the world".\footnote{289} The objective of this movement is to achieve Sovereignty. On the other hand, the Kuki tribe is a tribe co-existing together with the Nagas, and is demanding sovereignty for Kukiland, Statehood and full-fledged Revenue District of Sadar Hills.

The Government has been trying to uproot or destroy the Naga movement, particularly NSCN-IM, from the beginning but failed so far. Despite such Government attempt, the Naga movement particularly NSCN-IM survives, nay, gaining momentum: NSCN-IM got a membership of international organization- Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) in January 1993 and its base became wider at home and

\footnote{287} B. Pakem, ed., Insurgency in North-East India, Omsons publications, New Delhi, 1997, P.46.
\footnote{288} Enquiry Report of the officer on Special Duty (Law and Orders), Government of Manipur, 1st August 1991.
externally. On the part of the Government there was certain helplessness seeing all these progress of Naga movement particularly NSCN-IM both at home and abroad. The old methods applied were unfruitful and has to devise a new one against the Nagas’ movement.

There were allegations that the Government and some Kuki militants made collusion against the Nagas, particularly NSCN-IM. These emerge not only from the Newspapers, All India Radio news, Investigation carried out by Civil Organizations but also by Kuki militants who are in Kuki National Council (KNC) and some Kukis. To show this here are some excerpts from newspaper clippings: “Unconfirmed reports that the Kuki National Army is being aided by the Manipur Government as well as the Army to help to fight the NSCN (Muivah) has raised the hackles of not only the NSCN-M but also the common Nagas. The Nagas also view with great consternation recent reports that the Army has been allowed a free hand in the operations to flush out the NSCN-M from the State.”

The cry is heard that the Kukis are being backed by the leaders of Manipur who are out to slaughter innocent Nagas. “The Indian government often used Kukis to counter Naga insurgent...in the period since the outbreak of clashes between Nagas and Kukis, there have been reports of official patronage to Kuki groups. The KNO president, Mr Honglen, has been in constant touch with army officials after this meeting in December 1992 with the then army chief, General S.F.Rodrigues. The former chief minister of Manipur, Mr.R.K Dorendro Singh, and his Finance Minister, Mr Doungel, are also reported to have given financial support to various Kukis groups.”

The government blames, despite the existence of the Kukis’ militants since 1987-8, solely on the Nagas, particularly NSCN-IM, for this clash needs a serious examination. Moreover, the government used the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ in a series of documentation title Does Violence Get Mandate for the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict to describe this as an ethnic cleansing act of the Nagas particularly, NSCN-IM, of the minority Kukis though the clash affected both the groups. This needs a serious examination.

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The Kukis suffered as much as or more than the Nagas in this violent conflict but no sufficient help was extended either to ameliorate their condition. A newspaper report says, "In fact the ethnic clashes took an ugly turn in the last few weeks and if it was the Kuki element that had the upper hand in the beginning, it was now the turn of the Naga to take revenge."\(^{293}\) "The Kukis are apparently at the receiving end as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) is by far the most heavily armed extremist group in the northeast."\(^{294}\) This is somehow it has to happen and will happened if any violent conflict occurred between them. Some more reasons being- the Naga population is far more than the Kukis, the Kuki settlements are scattered where as the Naga settlements are compact and contiguous. Unity and cohesiveness of the Naga far surpass the Kukis. H.Khogen Singh writes, "One peculiar trait of the Kukis is that they are not overawed by jungle life. Quite often, only about five or 10 families settles in the hills and practice Jhum or Shifting cultivation. The Nagas, on the other hand, settles in large number. It is perhaps because of the scattered natured of the Kukis settlements that they have been more at the receiving end of the violence sweeping the State"\(^{295}\)

Thus, the Government view on the Naga-Kuki violent conflict is a part of their 'divide and rule policy'. The government policy of 'divide and rule' is shown by its accusation on the Nagas, especially NSCN-IM, but clearly sided with the Kukis who are also having armed militants of their own, at the same time, the government did not do to ameliorate the condition of suffering innocent Kukis. Further, both the ethnic groups are carrying ethnic movements to achieve their ultimate goals: the Nagas and Kukis demand for sovereignty is beyond the purview of the Indian Constitution whereas Naga demand for Greater Nagaland and the Kukis demands for separate State and full-fledged Revenue District are within the Constitution of India.

\(^{293}\) 'New Ministry in Manipur', *The Hindu*, 17th October 1994.
\(^{294}\) 'Manipur killings', *The Hindustan Times*, 23rd May 1994.
Another view is the Meiteis of the Manipur Valley. Manipur state is divided into two - the Valley and the Hills. Before and during the British ruled the administration between these two differed. On the eve of India's independence, there was a problem that the Hills’ peoples did not want to be clubbed with the valley, an abode of the Meiteis ruled by the Raja. The Hill peoples demanded a merger with the neighbouring Hills occupied by their counterparts. This continues even today, particularly the Nagas who wants to merge with the Nagas who are in different states of northeast India to form 'Greater Nagaland' or 'Unification of Ancestral Naga Homeland'. "The Meitei, for instance, who account for 1.3 million of the State population of 1.8 million, fear that the increasing strength of the various Naga outfits will eventually results in the dismemberment of Manipur. That their fear is genuine can be gleaned from the fact that the avowed goal of the Nagas is to carve out the four Naga dominated hill districts of Manipur - Chandel, Tamenglong, Ukhrul and Senapati- to create southern Nagaland... The Kukis, who estimated to be around 2 lakhs, have also raised a demand for a separate homeland, even though this aspiration has not snowballed into a movement."296 The Meiteis of the Manipur valley are against it. Owing to all these historical opposing forces, if anything occurs, there is suspicion and fear between the hillmen and the valley peoples- the Meiteis. In the words of Tarapot Phanjoubam, “attempt to divide Manipur along the ethnic lines was considered the main reason of the decade old Kuki-Naga clash which broke out in the early 1990s and involved large scale violence of mass killings, executive, forced expulsion etc.”297 “They (Nagas) wanted four hill districts-Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Chandel either to merge with Nagaland or form a state. The ‘separate state’ they said may be called south Nagaland or any other better name.”298 For the Kukis, he says “the demand for formation of Kukiland by incorporating Kuki settled areas of neighboring Burma and some parts of Manipur where there joint settlement by both Kukis and Nagas.”299 “The so called ‘Kukiland’ according to underground KNF,
was to be formed by carving out the district of Churachandpur, Chandel, Sadar Hills area in Senapati and Jiribam in Imphal East-District respectively and some parts of Nagaland, Mizoram and Assam.\textsuperscript{300} Thus, to many Meiteis, the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict was an attempt to divide the State of Manipur.

\textit{The All Tribal Students’ Union Manipur (ATSUM)}

"It is an unfortunate fact that most tribal community leaders in Manipur are befuddled and could not see the reasons why inter-tribal clashes are so frequent and deep-rooted in Manipur. Each and every community is getting tired of these ethnic crises but could not shun them totally in which thousands of home, properties worth millions were burnt down, rendering them homeless and tens of hundreds of innocent lives were lost. No word can express its actual horrible state and its dreadful consequences. It seems there is no Government to protect and shield them in this civilized age. Very few of the victims were paid meager ex-gratia after a great pressure. Manipur State is solely responsible for these primitive ethnic clashes. We are aware enough to remember that the communal tension that broke out between the Manipuris and Muslims in 1994 in which the State Government took immediate action and succeeded in controlling the situation in short span of 7 (seven) days. But the tension that flared up between the tribals for the last many years has not receded, all still does not invite the attention of the State Government. Therefore, these ethnic clashes will not return to normalcy so long as the tribals remain in Manipur. The only alternative to avoid this problem is to have a State of our own. The root cause of the internecine tribal feuds is the Meiteis (Manipuri) who are instigating the tribals to fight each other so that they can prevent tribal unity and rule and dominate over them easily. The Meitei people, and the Manipur Government itself, are actively involved in the tribal feuds by supporting one group against another, as they started doing this practice during the times of our forefathers."\textsuperscript{301} The above quote assumes that the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict was due to an instigation of the Meiteis. According to this

\textsuperscript{300} Ibid., p.192.
\textsuperscript{301} Memorandum to His Excellency President of the Republic of India by All Tribal Students’ Union Manipur, New Delhi, dated: 14\textsuperscript{th} July 1999, pp.9-11.
view the Manipur Government dominated by the Meiteis actively supported and involved in it. They did it so that they can prevent tribal unity and rule and dominate over them easily. Thus, ATSUM view on the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict is due the Meiteis and the Manipur State Government.

The Nagas’ View

The Nagas’ view on the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict is analyzed from their writings. “The political agenda at the core of the present spurt of violence seems to be 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 their part laid claims on the district of Churachandpur, Chandel and major parts of Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong as the Kuki homeland. The basis of this claim can be traced to the British imperialist in the later part of nineteenth century. The British requisitioned of the services of the bands of Kukis wandering in the vicinity of Assam and Manipur for desolation of the Naga villagers who were resisting the British stoutly. The Kukis were armed and supplied with rations and let loose in the Naga Hills by Colonel Mc Culloch in what he called ‘the Policy of planting Kuki settlements on exposed frontier’. Thus, the Kukis were able to plunder life and property of the Nagas from the later parts of the nineteenth century till nineteenth hundred and eighteen.”302 In another letter to Prime Minister, it further says that “The Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) are constrained to come to you once again with the fast emergence of an extra-ordinary situation in the state of Manipur, North-East India due the open league of the Indian armed forces especially the Assam Rifles and Assam Regiment with the Kukis underground.”303 In the statements of Th.Muivah:

• Th.Muivah is the General Secretary of Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland – Issak Muivah (NSCN-IM)
"The treacherous use of the Kuki terrorists in butchering the innocent Nagas is in their attempt to exterminate the Naga nation, to complicate Indo-Naga issue and an attempt to deceive the world. The chief reason, frustrated by repeated failure in their all out attempt at total subjugation of the Nagas since 1947, the policy makers of India at last have turned to catch at any straw to help themselves out from the predicament. On a secret promise to create a "homeland for the Kukis" in the territory of the Nagas in return for their unholy services, the nomadic Kukis were exploited to fight a proxy -war for India against the steadfast freedom -loving Nagas in general and the NSCN in particular. The nomadic Kuki tribe from the Chin Hills of Burma, who were used by the British imperialists in killing the free Nagas and who were also planted by the same in Nagalim, were whipped up again to fight for India against the indigenous Nagas. The ‘Kuki Army’ as they called themselves, at once rushes headlong and provided horrors of hill by indiscriminately killing the innocent Nagas, who had lived together with them in peace and harmony around a century, in the most brutal manner. They served the Naga with “Quit Nagas” notices with 30 May 1992 a deadline for it. The Nagas protested against such a wicked policy of the Indians time and again, reaching Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, but all to no avail. Having been to coerce into such a helpless situation and it already was a question of survival. No doubt, they reached in the same cruel fashion against the India troops and the Kukis. To the astonishment of their India masters, the Kukis have suffered the worse of the conflict, for which the Indian Government and India media raised an endless hue and cry against the NSCN viciously aiming at discrediting it in the eyes of the world they are projecting us as terrorist. The Indian government after denied being in collusion with the Kukis. How come then that the India soldiers and the Kuki Army suffered hang casualties together in the incidents took place on 2-9 June 1993 a Chandel district in Manipur and also in other places. How come Kukis are being given massive training in the Indian Army’s Divisional Headquarters Leimakhong and other outposts? How come the Kukis are stationed at outposts of the Indian troops?"

The Nagas claim that they are the original or the first settlers in the territory and the wandering Kukis were used by the British imperialists to suppress and conquer the Nagas, and later they made them settled in the Nagas territory. Now, the Kukis are demanding homeland where in the Nagas claimed Sovereignty. For them their demand is as legitimate as the Nagas demand. At the same time, Nagas feel that the government is desperate against the Nagas movement. The Nagas have been struggling for independence since British rule and the union of India. The Naga perception is that the Indian Government has been frustrated by the repeated failures of its methods applied to

subjugate the Nagas. Thus in the eyes of the Nagas, the demand of Kukis for homeland and the government desperation to subjugate the movement had led them to unite vis-à-vis the Nagas. This led to the outbreak of the violent conflict between government backed Kukis and the Nagas.

*Kukis’ View*

The Kukis’ view on the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict is slightly varied amongst the Kuki organizations but they conclude with the same stance. But there are a few Kuki organizations that are radically different from them. Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) stated in Memorandum submitted to the Union Home Minister that “the present Kuki-Naga conflict in Manipur and some parts of Nagaland is not of ethnic origin. It originated with the Independence of our country. While we the Kukis accepted the Indian Government as the legitimate successor to the British paramount, some Nagas in the present Nagaland did not do so. Thus, present conflict is between the loyal Kukis, loyal to the government, loyal to the constitution of India and upholder of the territorial integrity of the entire country and Manipur who want peaceful co-existence with all.”\(^{305}\) And the Nagas especially NSCN-IM are disloyal to all of them. “The present did not start in 1991 from Moreh but has been with the government and with us since 1947.”\(^{306}\) According Kuki National Council Manipur, “Kukis faced continuous genocide for the last 40 years escalated in the last 2 years at alarming rate. The cause of this conflict is a desire of the Manipur Nagas supported by the NSCN (IM) to achieve greater Nagaland by combining the present state of Nagaland with Ukhrul district, Tamenglong district and Senapati district of Manipur/ Naga inhabited areas. Secondly, to make Naga land a Sovereign independent state. Thirdly, to use Kukis as scapegoats to be able to internationalize their demand for sovereign state. The immediate cause of killings to the Kukis is that they refused to pay the illegal Nagaland tax imposed on them by the NSCN led to greater genocide, now the Kukis uphold that they would only pay government tax and not to any


\(^{306}\) Ibid.
According to the Kuki Peoples’ Forum for Human Rights (KPFHR): The early 1960s saw the launching of the Naga Nationalist Movement by the Naga National Council (NNC) under the leadership of Z.A. Phizo. This did not create any animosity between the Kukis and Nagas even when taxes were collected by the NNC from the Kukis. The Kukis of Manipur living in Naga dominated areas were levied taxes by the Naga Federal Army, which the former complied without any resistance. There were few instances of resistance only when they were subject to extra harassments. A couple of decades back when Naga insurgents started harassing the Kukis in Ukhrul areas by demanding huge amount over and above the taxes they collected which led to the strong resentment and anger. In the areas of Ukhrul, the Nagas reign unchallenged as they are in majority, but in Moreh the dominant Kukis refused to pay up the taxes demanded by the Nagas. This was considered by NSCN (IM) as a challenge to its authority and this led to the campaign of ethnic cleansing to eliminate the Kukis which turned the hills of Manipur into grave yards of the innocents. All these views have the same implication; they only differ in there emphasis. Thus, the Naga-Kuki clash, according to the Kukis, is due to the Nagas Movement against the Government of India for sovereignty and their taxes on the Kukis who are loyal to the Government of India.

The Causes of the Naga-Kuki Violent Ethnic Conflict

Some of the causes for the Naga-Kuki violent conflict of 1990s discussed in the newspapers could be seen from some of the excerpts below:

Sanjoy Hazarika says: “The enmity between the Kukis and the Nagas originates in land disputes as well as the fact that the Kukis are seen as pro-India and control business and the bureaucracy in the state, in addition to the Meiteis, the valley inhabitants who are vaishanavites. There are also reports that the two sides are competing over the control of profitable business routes from Myanmar, the largest producer of heroin in the Golden Triangle of South East Asia.”

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Manipur, is the Centre of the Current trouble. Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay writes, "Over the years Nagas have been collecting 'tax' from the Naga areas. In May 1992 some Kuki groups living in the Naga dominated area in the town of Moreh, on the border between India and Burma, refused to pay the tax they had to pay earlier. The Kukis argued that since they did not subscribe to the NSCN viewpoint they should not pay. Coupled with the spurt of Kuki organization coming up, this indicated the Kukis were once again willing to take on the Nagas." The Hindu, "The multi-crore smuggling business originating in Myanmar is another bone of contention between the two tribes." The Patriot, "It is a non-script town of Moreh on the Indo-Myanmar border that has become the bone of contention in this bloody feud between the two major tribal groups of Manipur. The expulsion of some Nagas, for long engaged in this profitable business of smuggling by local Kukis, provoked fierce retaliatory attacks on Kukis settlement elsewhere in the districts as a siege of NH39 with a view to stifling the KNA. But while Moreh provided the immediate provocation, the conflict has roots in the history. The Kukis particularly recent a 'house tax' they are made to pay to the NSCN. Their refusal to pay this in recent times since the formation of the KNA in 1989. The News Times, "The current spate of killings is a delayed reaction of sorts to the hostility nurtured by the British, who not only settled the kakis on Naga land (at least the land the Naga tribes used for Jhum cultivation) but also used the Kukis to counter the Naga attacks against the Raj. One would have expected nearly half century of independence to have healed the wounds and integrated the Kukis and the Nagas, but this was not to be because independence brought little economic benefit to the remote north-east and the tribals were left to eke out a meagre living poverty became a division issue especially so with New Delhi hardly aware of the tribulations faced by the masses in the border states. The callousness of the Center bred by the remoteness of the event from the seat of power in doubly condemnable because what is being overlooked is not just the flagrant. Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay says, "The Indian government often used Kukis to counter Naga insurgent... In the period since the outbreak of clashes between Nagas and Kukis, there have been reports of official patronage to Kuki groups. The KNO president, Mr Honglen, has been in constant touch with army officials after this meeting in December 1992 with the then army chief, General S.F.Rodrigues......... It did nothing to change the impression that it was backing Kukis to contain Naga nationalism. Because of the government’s policies, thousands of Naga and Kukis live under constant threat. The government might be able to roll back the growth of the NSCN, but the social cost, is proving exorbitant. The former chief minister of Manipur, Mr. R.K Dorendro Singh, and his Finance Minister, Mr Doungel, are also reported to have given financial support to various Kukis groups. In an interview with Northeast Sun, Th. Muivah says that "the intention of KNA was to chase Nagas out from the Chandel Districts’ border town, Moreh and the foot hills near Imphal. This is the crux of the problem. The Nagas

310 'Trouble in Manipur', The Hindustan Times, 16th April 1993.
313 'Manipur Conflict Spreads', The Patriot, 15 September 1993.
never killed Kukis before. Our men went and attacked their army camp near the Burmese side in Chandel because they had started forcing the Nagas to leave their respective homes and villages. Once the foreigners started driving the indigenous Naga people, we could not remain silent.”

The points noted in the above newspapers excerpts were some of the causes discussed in the national as well local newspapers. This study feels like many of them that many causes led to the violent ethnic conflict between the Nagas and the Kukis. When this study looks into their relationship since the time they came into co-existence instances of both rivalry as well as friendship could be found. At the same time, particularly on the rivalry aspect of their relationship, one also needs to keep in mind about the condition of the period: inter-tribe and intra-tribe’s wars, raids and headhunting and treaty and alliances between clans and tribes of the Nagas and the Kukis. Moreover, there was nearly a century of peace or no blood feud between these two groups. Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay says, “Curiously, before the two tribes started clashing about two years ago in the Northeastern States of Manipur, they co-existed in relative peace for more than a century. The bonhomie ended in 1992 and since then thousands of Naga and Kuki homes have been burnt and many villages destroyed.” According to Manipur Naga Baptist Church Leaders’ Forum, “seventy years of peaceful living together”, which implies that there was peace and no violent conflict between the two for seventy years preceding the Naga-Kuki violent conflict of 1992.

When a violent clash between them occurred. Many traced the root of the Naga-Kuki clash of 1990s to the period when they came into contact with each other to Independent India. For Example:

In the The Hindustan Times, The hostility between the two ethnic groups has a long history. Pranay Sharma says, the current dashes between Nagas and Kukis by insurgents groups are over establishing control in the region. But the problem stems from the age-old rivalry between the two

communities since the British period what started as a fight between Naga and Kuki insurgents, has now taking an ethnic turn with the two warring factions victimizing innocents.\textsuperscript{320} Utpal Bordoloi says that Large scale Kuki migration from the Chin hills of Burma (Myanmar) into the territory of present day north-east India began in the 1830s, about the same time the British were establishing their rule in the region and setting up tea gardens, concerned on the plains, the British gave settlement to Kuki group at various places to check Naga incursion into the plains – an early version of the Border Security Force. The settlements of Kukis in the hills considered by the Nagas to be theirs – Nagas had migrated hundreds of years earlier to the Kuki- was greatly resented –and there were frequent conflicts at the vallage level.\textsuperscript{321} Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay writes that the clashes are rooted in a long standing hostility and rivalry between the two ethnic groups going back to the first British incursions in this remote area, soon after the British establishment control over Hindu kingdoms in Bramaputra valley of Assam in the only 19th century, they were invited by the Manipuri King, Raja Gumbeer Singh, in 1832 to combat Burmese invaders. The British used this opportunity to force a passage to the Naga Hills. Naga defiance led to a British decision to bring in Kukis from Burma in 1840. The Kuki were provided free rations and firearms to fight the Nagas. The strategy worked to the extend Naga wealth was plunder by Kukis and the Nagas population decimated. Soon the Naga made peace with the British. The British gave up attempts to establish elaborate colonial system in the Naga areas and instead allowed the traditional councils to, administered the affairs of the region. The Kukis, no longer required by the British for containing other tribes, continued living in the area. However, the continued presence of the transplanted Kukis added to the traditional conflict between the hill regions and the plains. Even before the advent of the British there were clashes between the tribal and tribal population. When the Indian National Movement started gaining ground the Hindu kings and their descendants wanted to be a part of Indian. But the tribals had national aspirations of their own. This difference of aspirations lives on in the entire Northeastern region. Though Manipur merged with the Indian Union in October 1949, the Nagas and other tribes like the Mizos continued their insurgents. The Indian government often used Kukis to counter Naga insurgent.\textsuperscript{322}

Looking at the treaty, alliances and peace between one or the other Naga villages or tribes and one or the other Kuki villages or clans or tribes, it is doubtful that they had perpetual hostilities and internecine war as two separate ethnic entities. Of course, I am not denying the instances of hostilities, war, raids and headhunting whether it was they or used by the rulers. But looking at the advent of ethnic consciousness only in 20th century, violent activities prior to this were basically tribalistic sorts. However, total denial of rivalry or conflict aspect in their relationship amounts to fallacy. Thus, war or peace in

\textsuperscript{320} Pranay Sharma, ‘Centre’s apathy fuelling Kuki-Naga Clashes’, \textit{The Telegraph}, 20 September 1993.
\textsuperscript{321} Utpal Bordoloi, ‘Gun shots in the hills’, \textit{The Deccan Herald}, 5th October 1997.
their present relationship is always traced back to the time they came into co-exists together. Yet, such a bloody conflict like the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict of 1990s was never seen by them or by outsiders in post-independent India or even prior to it. Some of the causes of the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict of 1990s will be noted down in the following section.

Government

India is composed of multi-ethnic groups. There are many ethnic groups who are against the government of India. Northeast is one of the problematic regions to the government of India. Among these, the Naga Movement is assumed to be the 'mother of all insurgencies in northeast India'. "Indian state has always adopted both conventional and highly orthodox ways to tackle every kind of challenge to its authority. In the case of the Naga insurgency, for instance, viewing its convolution path with the advantage of hindsight one can see that over the last 40 years or so, every one of the classic "four fold approach" of ancient Indian statecraft – holding talks, offering inducements, creating splits and resorting to coercive force – has been selectively employed to tackle insurgency." To this classic 'four fold approach' one can also add a policy of using one ethnic group or tribe against the other in order to weaken the targeted ethnic movement both internally and externally.

The Naga-Kuki conflict is regarded as a part of the government policy using one community/ethnic group against the other. This could be gleaned from the following excerpts: "Government backing for the Kukis against the Nagas has a long history and is in fact the cause of the historical animosity between the two groups...... Even after independence the government of Indian used the Kukis as a counter to the querillas of the Naga National Council (NNC) who had launched their armed struggle for independence in 1956. The Kukis comprised the major ethnic group in the Special Security Bureau (SSB) armed group set up by the government in the 1960s to counter the activities of the

323 M.S. Prabakara, 'Manipur: Insurgents Active Again', The Hindu, 8th April 1993.
Naga guerrillas in the Manipur hills areas, according to U Hipson Roy, a retired Khasi officer of the erstwhile Indian Frontier Administration Service (since merge with IAS), who was given the duty of sitting up the SSB in Manipur. The Indian army was, therefore, only carrying on a long establishes tradition when it trained and armed Kuki youths to combat the NSCN. Leading Kuki Politicians and bureaucrats liberally funded this effort, while former Kuki officers of the Indian Army actively oversaw the training of the Kuki National Army (KNA), military wing of the Kuki National Front (KNF)*. In the early stages, the arms provided were usually those captured from the NSCN.324 In The Hindu, M.S.Prabakara says, “There is little doubt that the Kuki militants now engaged in bloody clashes with the NSCM (IM) in parts of Chandel district in Manipur have received some discrete official assistance. The persons actually involved in this militancy are themselves much less discrete in disclosing details about the moral support they have received from official agencies of both the state and the union governments. The president of the KNO, Mr. Hengl en, formally a national of Myanmar, with whom this correspondent had a long conversation on the night of March 21 near Moreh on the India-Myanmar border, indeed claimed that he had met the Army Chief, Gen. S.F. Rodriques, in Delhi on December 24 last year and has been otherwise also continuously in touch with various authorities and agencies in Manipur and Nagaland.”325 In The Hindustan Times, Darshan Balwally says, “the Kuki National Army (KNA) is seeking at least Rs. seven crore financial assistance from the Indian government through the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and the Indian Army’s arm and material support. According to source close to Kuki National Organisation (KNO) Chief Sohlun, to enable it to undertake a ‘fight to the finish’ war with the well-organized NSCN (IM) in the Sadar Hills area of Manipur on the Indo-Myanmar international boundary. He, further, writes, “the source said that the Indian defence forces were not adept at counter insurgency and would need the help of outfits like KNA, who knew ‘every inch of the territory’ and could tackle the NSCN for more effectively with full backing and logistic of the army,

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* I think this must be Kuki National Organization (KNO) and not Kuki National Front (KNF) as KNO armed wing is Kuki National Army (KNA)
RAW and other intelligence agencies.’326 Sanjay Kumar Singh writes, “S.B. Chavan’s visit to North-east and the policy of Central Intelligence agency to support Kuki militant outfit in order to check the growth of the NSCN. This fact was acknowledged even by the state owned All India Radio New Delhi, which on the eve of Chavan’s visit to the Northeast on the 10th September, advised the government to desist from promoting a particular tribe or community against the others.”327 Many of the above quoted analysts claim to possess the knowledge, which is supposed to be a state secret. Should their claims be taken at face value? That is the important question

There are also many reports and allegations against the State Government for backing the Kuki militants: “Unconfirmed reports state that the Kuki National Army is being aided by the Manipur Government as well as the Army to help fight the NSCN (Muivah) has raised the hackles of not only the NSCN –M but also the common Nagas.”328 “The cry is heard that the Kukis are being backed by the leaders of Manipur who are out to slaughter innocent Nagas. The matter is not so simple as that.”329 A newspaper report says: “two underground outfits of the Kuki insurgents have come up with claims of having received substantial financial donations from the Manipur Chief Minister, Mr. R.K. Dorendro Singh, and the state finance minister, Mr. C. Doungel. A letter dated July 12 to Mr. Dorendro Singh whom it addresses as ‘Dear Samkhajee’, the traditional Manipuri address for members of the royal family and signed by the Commander-in-Chief of the Kuki Federal Council (KFC), states ‘Received Rs. 1, 00,000 (Rupees one lakh) only from your kind contribution to us on 10th July 1992 at about 7 pm and we shall not forget you for your heartiest, endless help to this council’. Another letter written by the Chin-Kuki Revolutionary Front (CKRF) in Manipur and dated May 5, 1992 claims that Mr. Doungel contributed Rs. 2 lakh to it. It is signed by the Chief Commander of the CKRF, T. Thanglam.”330 This was denied by Dorendro Singh, Chief

Minister, as a concocted stories and without a slightest trace of truth, which was reported in the newspaper. A letter called ‘A confidential letter’ dated 2 August 1992 attributed to R. K. Dorendro Singh, Chief Minister, Manipur signed by the Secretary General of CKRF states that “We are happy that you and C. Doungel, finance minister, contributions received on 31 July 1992 at 1.00 pm i.e. Rs. 2 lakhs each. God may always be with us till the third installment is going to be done.”331

It also alleged that the government is partial between the Nagas and the Kukis. For example, “Kuki villages burnt down by the Nagas are given adequate corrugated iron sheet (CIS) for roofing, Naga villages are neglected (Yaolen Kuki village and Keihao Tangkhul village).”332 Another issue was confiscation of licensed arms and guns. The notification No. 7/1/88-J. DC/UKL (PE) ordered confiscation of licensed arms in Ukhrul District, a Tangkhul Naga dominated district333, whereas other hill districts were not confiscated. It has also been alleged that “R.K. Dorendro Singh, Chief Minister, personally gave compensation Rs. 20,000/- to the family of the late Onkholet Haokip together with many red blankets which in this state is traditionally reserved only for the village chiefs and some selected members of village authorities.”334 In a situation of distrust and conflict every move of the Indian government is looked upon with suspicion.

The responses of some Kuki organizations to the reports and allegations of the support and linked between the Government and Kuki militant- Kuki National Army (KNA): “The NSCN (IM) has further alleged that the Kukis are being helped by the Indian army to crush the Naga movement thereby implying that the Kukis are but state mercenaries. They even labeled them ‘stooges of the Indian government.’ The lives of hundreds of Kuki snubbed out by the NSCN- IM do not count as human lives. It is also a ploy to seek justification for continuing the extermination of Kukis till they are wiped out. As a matter of fact, victims have related eye witnessed tales of Kuki villages being

332 Ibid., p. 13.
raided, looted and razed to ground right under the nose of the army posted nearby to provide protection."³³⁵ Kuki National Council of Manipur states in a memorandum to the president, Baptist World Alliance Pokhara Camp: "the Kukis have no knowledge of the Rs. 3 crore sanctioned to the Kuki militants by the Narasimha Rao government as alleged in the pamphlet "Nagaland for Christ" by Government of the People’s Republic of Nagaland, if this is indeed a fact it should be brought to light."³³⁶ "The alleged statement of the Naga Patriotic Front was printed in The Freedom English daily, Imphal, dated 24th August 1994 and a headline 'Army-Kuki nexus' and 'Mr. Isak Swu’s speech’ (unpublished) in The Telegraph dated 30th August 1994, are meaningless, concocted and baseless."³³⁷ "Had there been nexus between the Indian army and the Kuki militants why should Mr. Hanglen, KNO President be arrested and jailed. Security forces at Motbung killed Kuki National Front (KNF) president on the 13th November 1993 in an encounter. The largest numbers of arrested militants at Imphal jail are Kukis. According to reliable sources more than 100 Kuki militants have been killed in an encounter with the Indian security forces within a short span of two and a half years since 1992. All the allegations by the Nagas against the Kukis are nothing but false propaganda to build up Nagas’ unity."³³⁸

The Naga position on this issue could be seen from the following evidences: A letter to the Prime Minister by the NPMHR states, "the Indian state through its armed forces has trained and armed Kuki militants to attack the Naga people as part of its plan to annihilate the Nagas. And whereas the Kuki militants have declared their war against the NSCN, all the victims are innocent Naga civilians."³³⁹ "The nexus of the Kukis and the Army has been brought to light even by the simple villagers, whose houses have been burnt down."³⁴⁰ Investigation of the All Naga Baptist Church Leaders’ Forum says,

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³³⁶ A memorandum to President of Baptist World Alliance Pokhara Camp by Kuki National Council of Manipur, Nepal, p. 6.
³³⁷ Ibid., p. 6.
³³⁸ Ibid.
³⁴⁰ A letter to the Hon’ble Union Minister of State, Ministry of Home (Internal Security) by All Naga Students’ Association Manipur, 10th August 1993.
"because of many allegations that the Kuki militants are perpetrating killing and many other atrocities on the innocent Nagas, we have investigated into the allegations. In a few cases of the allegations could not be properly ascertained due to the ignorance of the terror-stricken villages. In some cases, however, we have found indisputable evidences of the involvement of the security forces, especially the Assam Regiment and in some areas the Assam Rifles alongside with the Kuki militants." There are also many letters and memoranda etc showing army in collusion with the Kuki militants attacked the Nagas and their villages.

**Ethnic Identity**

The classification of the Nagas and the Kukis as separate ethnic entities by the linguists, ethnographers, and administrators of the British period has a far-reaching consequence. As it was discussed in earlier chapters, the terms-‘Naga’ and ‘Kuki’ existed prior the advent of British rulers but it was popularized by the British rulers. The classification between these two groups, using yardstick, was their invention. The classification of these two as separate ethnic entities and the advent of ethnic consciousness have a great impact amongst these communities i.e., Nagas and Kukis. Prior to this, they were in a state of inter-tribal and intra-tribal feuds, etc, and these feuds marked their relationships not only the two ethnic groups but also the villages and tribes within each ethnic group. With the advent of ethnic consciousness, the Nagas and the Kukis maintained themselves as two ethnic entities yet there was no such animosity between them as two separate ethnic entities. Many a times the British rulers’ classifications are used to answer who are the Nagas? Who are the Kukis? This has both negative as well positive consequences. The ethnic identity with the boundary markers of ‘exclusive’ and ‘inclusive’ features gradually tightens each ethnic group, particularly after India’s independence. These two ethnic groups living in the same areas and under the same government led them to think of their own nation or freedom. They also began

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341 Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India by the Manipur Naga Baptist Chruch Leader’s Forum, 15th June 1993.
to have ethnic competition between themselves, if any, opportunities are provided by the
government. This competition between them could be seen in government jobs, schemes,
land, etc., the objective of this was for the development and welfare of each side’s own
ethnic community. Secondly, It is argued by the Nagas that the government, since the
colonial era and till today, pursues a policy of ‘divide and rule’. The co-existence of two
ethnic entities is an advantage situation for them to use this policy. It has been said
repeatedly that the application of this policy is seen right from the beginning of India’s
independence.

"Just on the eve of British departure a committee was formed consisting of the
official and the non-officials to explicitly draft the constitution of the state. The draft
constitution was divided into two parts – one for the valley and the other for the hills...an
interim council was formed in order to give effect to these constitutional changes. The
representatives of the hills were nominated by the president of the Manipur State Darbar.
The KNA was on principle against the nomination of the hill representatives on the
following grounds: when such was made the KNA was not asked for its opinion, whereas
the Tangkhul Nagas were allowed to change their representative in the committee and the
Kabui Nagas were also allowed to have one representative even when the committee was
nearing its end, whereas some of the hill representatives have mentioned that they
represent a part and parcel of the hill people in the committee.342 According to S.K. Ray
the other issue was land dispute between the Nagas and the Kukis. The KNA pointed out
that ‘the Nagas claim all the land which the Kukis cultivated in the pre-British days.’343
It became clearer when the Tangkhul Nagas and the Kabui Nagas abstained from the
meeting organised by Mr. S.L. Lunneh and Mr. Lorho at Mao on 27 May 1947. In the
matter of selection of five representatives in the Constitution-Making Committee by the
president of Manipur State Darbar there was a clear indication of divide and rule policy
so that the different tribal groups, mainly the Kukis and the Nagas, could never come to a
common platform in shaping the hill politics in Manipur. The KNA after all was
ambitious like any other groups at that time to grab the new political opportunities

342 Ibid., pp.117-118.
343 Ibid., p. 118.
opened up after the departure. Thus, there was a kind of ethnic competition between them on the eve of India's independence when the opportunities were offered by the departure of the colonialists and also dispute over the land emerged. Further, it is alleged that the British government used the policy of divide and rule between these two communities, which is continue to employ by the Indian government.

Thus, separate ethnic identities brought the two into non-violent contest, which was continuously going on. With the reservation for Scheduled Tribes there is a sort of covertly ethnic clash and also when Kukis demanded Sadar Hills Revenue District, the Nagas protested on the ground that it carved out Nagas' land. These sorts of non-violent ethnic conflicts run through their relations though there was no bloody violent conflict between them like the violent ethnic conflict of 1990s.

Ethnic Movement

The ethnic movement of the Nagas and the Kukis vis-à-vis the Government of India and their relations with each other will be discussed here. It will also look how it contributed to the violent ethnic conflict. The ethnic or nationalist movement of the Nagas traced its root to the formation of the Naga Club in 1918. This is the first organization of the Nagas. In 1929 Naga Club representing the Nagas gave their option against inclusion in either India or Pakistan. On the eve of India's independence, and after the formation of the Naga Hills District Tribal Council which was to:

- unite the Nagas;
- repair the damage done during the World War II;
- train the people for self-government;
- encourage the existing tribal council of the Naga tribes;
- administer their own local affairs; and
- consider possible reforms.

344 Ibid., p. 119.
All the tribes had a full discussion on the future of the Nagas for creating greater cohesion and Naga National Council (NNC) was formed in April 1946. The objective of the NNC was to achieve sovereignty over the Naga territory. Since the formation of the NNC, the movement has been gaining momentum. In 1956 March, Federal Government of Nagaland was formed as an armed wing of NNC. In 1975 November, a Peace Accord called “Shillong Peace Accord” was signed between the government of India and some of the leaders of Federal Government of Nagaland. This peace accord was refused by the Nagas, which led to the emergence of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. It split up into two factions – NSCN- IM and NSCN - K.

The main objective of the Naga movement is to achieve sovereignty of Nagalim i.e the land inhabited by the Nagas, which is compact and contiguous but divided by successive rulers: divided between India and Myanmar. In India, it is divided among the states Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Assam, and Nagaland. Till today, the movement is going on. This movement according to Baruah is “one of the longest movements and least known in the world.” The Government of India has been dealing with the Nagas movement right from India’s independence but so far unsuccessful. Today the Government of India is holding talks with the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland - Issak Muivah. The ceasefire is going on between them.

Kuki National Assembly was established on 24th October 1946. It was not a political party at the beginning but political platform of the Thadou chiefs. It was recognized by the government as a political party in 1975. “Its activity started since then,” says S.K. Ray. He further says, “The nature and activities of the KNA was

345 White paper on the Naga Integration. Published by Hekhevi Achumi, Secretary (Finance), Naga Hoho, Nagaland, 2002, p. 26.
coloured by its own ethnic consideration" though "it is perceptible that the ethnic based organization - KNA had no big mass base." The main objective of Kuki National Assembly since its inception was for the welfare of the Kuki communities. Right from the formation, it was concerned for the land settlement between the Kukis and the Nagas. In 1960, a memorandum was submitted to prime minister of India by the KNA, in which they had demanded the Kuki State.

In 1970, "Kuki Chiefs Zonal Council voiced a demand for a separate district for the Kuki people." Kuki Chiefs' Zonal Council in collusion with KNA demanded a separate District for the Kukis but somehow it was not achieved. The ideas of separate State and separate District are still in demand. During these years many of the Kukis joined underground organizations like NNC's FGN and Mizo National Front (MNF). In 1987-88, the Kuki militants appeared with a demand of Kuki homeland.

According to Mr. Henglen, President of KNO (with its armed wing called Kuki National Army) "his organization was formed on 5th August 1987." Mr. Donney says, "KNA and KNF were established on 18th May 1988. They were in the same camp receiving training. But due to geo-political differences they split up. Now they are two distinct groups." The president of KNO writes that Kuki-Gam (Land of Kukis) is located half in present Burma and the other half in India. The area in Burma (Myanmar) exists in the present Sagaing Division of Burmese territory with its boundaries as Chindwin River in the east, India in the west, Nan-ta-Lait River in North, Myitta River also called Manipur River in the south. The area which falls under India are, namely, Churachandpur District, Chandel district, Sadar Hills, Tamenglong district, Ukhrul district in Manipur state and NC Hills and Karbi Anglong in Assam. Tarapot says that the underground Kuki National Army KNA, aims at achieving an independent sovereign Kukis State by carving out the Kuki - populated areas of Myanmar and some portions of

348 Ibid., p. 116.
349 Ibid., p. 121.
350 Ibid., p. 12.
351 M.S. Prabakara, 'Manipur: the Kuki vs. the Nagas', The Hindu, 9th April 1993.
352 Excerpt from the Interview of Mr. Donney, a freelance journalist of Sangai Press, Imphal, Manipur.
Thoubal, Ukhrul and Chandel districts of Manipur where Kukis have settled over the past decades. KNO and KNA are demanding an autonomous state for the Kukis in the Sagaing Division.

According to Kuki National Front (KNF) chairman Nehlun, his organization was established on 18 May 1988 in Molnoi. The objective of KNF is Kukiland in Manipur. The resolution of KNF stated that it is “resolved that 3½ districts of Manipur shall be made as Kukiland and 4½ district be left for the Manipur so that there shall not be disharmonies between old, new and modern Kukis and other neighbours.” According to Tarapot, Kuki National Front (KNF) split up into two factions—one group known as KNF – President (KNF-P), and KNF-Military Council (KNF-MC). Both the factions have a common aim of fighting for a ‘separate state for the Kukis’ to be known as ‘Kukiland’. The Kuki National Front (KNF) and Kuki Defence Force (KDF) want a Kuki homeland comprising the whole of Chandel district, the south western part of Ukhrul district, the Sadar Hills area of Senapati district, the south eastern part of Tamenglong district, Parts of Churachandpur District and parts of the valley including Imphal, Bishnupur and Thoubal district and Kuki inhabited areas in Nagaland and Assam. Reorganization and Confederation of Kukis (ROCK) with its armed wing Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) is also demanding Sovereignty of ‘Kukigam’ (‘Gam’ means land). The ‘Kuki Gam’ comprises of Kuki inhabited areas of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

According to KIM the root cause of all the troubles in this is the NSCN (M)’s claim of secessionist movement and its subsequent drive for the so-called “Ethnic cleansing”.

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357 Ibid.
359 Gleaned from narrations of K. Hangsing.
360 Traditional Policy and Standpoint of Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM), Kuki Inpi Manipur.
present trouble did not start in 1991 from Moreh but has been with the government and with us since 1947. It also says, “the present Kuki-Naga Conflict in Manipur Hills and some parts of Nagaland is not of ethnic origin. It originated with the Independence of our country. The Kukis accepted the India Government as the legitimate successor to the British Paramountcy, some of the Nagas in the present Nagaland did not do so. They observed Independence Day on 14.8.1947 and every year on this day.” According to P.S. Haokip, “the ethnic conflict can find its root to a much earlier period to the beginning of Naga underground movement soon after India Independence but more clearly, the problems appear to begin with 16 point agreement between Government of India and the Nagas during 1960. At the time of demarcation of the state of Nagaland there was a demand for inclusion of other contiguous areas into the state. To appease the Naga sentiment, it appears, that the 16-point agreement was drawn up with the promise that as and when the contiguous areas were populated by Naga tribes, the state boundary would be revised to form a greater Nagaland. These views of the Kukis explain that the present violent ethnic conflict was due to Nagas’ movement for self – determination. Secondly, integration of all Nagas inhabited areas into a single unit also paved the way to the violent conflict due to clash of interests between the Kukis demanding Kuki homeland, which meant carving out territory demanded by the Nagas.

The Nagas, on the other hand, view the Naga-Kukis violent conflict due to “the political agenda, the Kukis dreams for the Kuki homeland.” Further, on 23rd August 1993, NPMHR reiterated: “the genesis to the current problem in Manipur started with the political agenda of ‘Kuki homeland’ to be curved out of Naga territory. This was introduced to promote tribal strife between the Kukis and the Nagas. The Indian state through its armed forces has trained and armed Kuki militants to attack the Naga people as part of its plan to annihilate the Nagas. And where as the Kukis militants have declared

361 Memorandum submitted to the Union Home Minister, Government of India by the Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) for and on behalf of the Kukis of Manipur, India, The Paper Anniversary Souvenir of the Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM), Published by Souvenir Committee, 1994, p.31.
362 Ibid.
their war against the NSCN, all the victims are innocent Naga civilians.\(^{365}\) One of the main causes of recurrence of Kuki-Naga ethnic problem disturbing the peace and amity amongst the people is because of the demand for creation of the so-called Kukiland and so also the Sadar Hill District. The Government of Manipur notification number 140/12/60-R (pt) dated 19\(^{th}\) September 1992 issued by the Commissioner (Revenue) tends to give a fillip and semblance of encouragement to such a demand.\(^{366}\)

Thus, these two ethnic movements, the Nagas for the sovereignty of Nagalim or Nagas ancestral homeland and Kukis demand for Kuki homeland clash with each other. The Nagas demand for sovereignty, looking from the point of view of the Indian Constitution, is ‘extra-constitutional’. The Kukis demand for separate state or full fledge revenue district is regarded as within the constitution of India but Kukis demand for sovereignty of Kuki land or Kuki Gam is also ‘extra-constitutional’. The difference in their demands is that the former is extra-constitution and the latter except ROCK with its armed wing KRA demand is within the constitution. The ethnic movements of these two ethnic groups clash over the question of territory (land). The land, which the Nagas call it as their traditional homeland, is also a part of a land demand for a Kuki-homeland. This clash was carried on in non-violent form but with the emergence of Kukis militants in 1987-88, it transformed itself from non-violent to armed clash.

**Land**

The discussion that says land is a cause of Naga-Kuki Violent Conflict of 1990s. Some of the excerpts from the newspapers: “There are several causes behind this bitter enmity between the two Christian tribal groups. Both demand separate homelands. The Nagas stake their claim to an independent Nagaland consisting of all Naga-inhabited areas of India and Myanmar. The Kuki militants want their Kukiland, which overlaps Naga areas. The demand for a Kukiland in India is bolstered by the

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\(^{365}\) A letter to Sri P.V. Narasimha Rao, Prime Minister of India by Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights, 23\(^{rd}\) August 1993.

\(^{366}\) The minutes of the dialogue between the Naga Student Federation (NSF) delegations and the Government of Manipur help at the office chamber of the Deputy Chief Minister of Manipur at Imphal on 10 November 1992.
Kuki National Force and the Kuki Defence Force (KDF). Historically, the Nagas are the original settlers of
the hill ranges and are extremely possessive about their land, most having taken to farming. But Kuki
settlements have also penetrated deep into traditional Naga regions. So the Nagas feel upset an upstarts
demanding a homeland carved out of their territories. The Kukis are less passionate about a land of their
own – in fact, the majority does not support the ideas of a Kukiland. They are, however, angry over having
to pay house tax they pay to the Manipur Government. Kuki spokesman have often stated they will not pay
the tax to the NSCN to which to the NSCN has naturally not taken kindly.  

The Kukis demand a homeland in Manipur while the Naga inhabited hill areas are up in arm against the proposal. The banned NSCN has been supporting the Nagas in Manipur. The Kukis too have a bewildering numbers of militants outfit: The Kuki National Army, the Kuki National Front and the Kuki Defence Front. "368 "Tangkhuls also
say that the Tangkuls had allowed the Kukis to settle down in their areas but they feel that the Kukis have
abused their hospitality by raising the question of a Kukiland. And since the Kuki National Front has called
for a five-day Manipur bandh later this month to press their demand for a separate homeland, the
Tangkhuls say the Kukis will be allowed to stay on in Ukhrul only if they drop their demand. The second
condition is that the Tangkhuls should be allowed to live in Moreh in peace. The fear for a Kuki
encroachment was reflected when the Naga Students Federation of Kohima imposed economic blockade in
November (1992) and lifted only the state government agreed that not a single inch of Naga soil would be
given away. At the backdrop was the move to bifurcate Senapati district and carve out a separate
Kangpokpi district with Kuki-dominated population.  

The longstanding proposal by the Manipur Government to create a new Kuki- dominated district threatens to re-ignite the six year-old conflict between Nagas and Kukis in the hill districts of the state. The bone of contention is the Sadar Hills territory of Manipur's Senapati district, comprising the two Kuki- dominated sub-divisions of Saikul and Kangpokpi. The Kukis have been demanding that these two sub-divisions be hive off from the rest of Senapati District and Constituted into a Senapati Sadar Hills district, since 1972. The demand was agreed to in Principle by successive government and also figured in the election manifestoes of the Congress (I) during the last two Assembly elections held in the state. The issue, however, remained more or less on the backburner till it came to the forefront with the eruption of the Naga-Kuki ethnic conflict in 1992. The reason for creating more districts was “better administration”. In the case of the Sadar Hills, however, the reason could have been to checkmate the NSCN (I-M) led demand for integration of the hill districts of Manipur- Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Chandel into Greater Nagaland. The Manipur government announcement that it was going ahead with the creation of the Sadar Hills District has created a similar storm of indignation in Nagaland and Naga areas of Manipur. The delegations comprise the organization: United Naga Council (UNC), All Manipur Students Union Manipur (ANSUM), Naga People Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), Naga Women Union Manipur (NWUM) and Naga Tribal HoHos. These organizations, behind whom stand the NSCN (I-M) guerrillas, asserted that the demand for a Kukis

368 M. Vinyak, ‘Winning over the northeast’, The Hindu, 12th November 1996.
homeland was the root cause of the Kuki-Naga ethnic strife. They urge the Chief Minister to consider the three MoUs signed with the Manipur Government in 1981, 1992 and 1996 that the views and objections of the Nagas would be considered while upgrading the Sadar hills into a full-fledged revenue district.\(^{370}\) “Although the origin of the Kukis-Naga clash can be traced to the refusal by the Kukis of Moreh town, the focal point of large-scale smuggling in contraband, to pay “taxes” to the NSCN-M, it is the Naga militant outfits demand of a “Greater Nagaland” that is behind the violence. The avowed aim of the NSCN-M is to carve out a “Greater Nagaland” comprising the State of Nagaland, the contiguous areas of Assam and four of the five hill districts of Manipur. The Kukis are opposed to this moved as they perceive in it a threat to their very survival. For, in all four Manipur districts, which form part of the proposed “Greater Nagaland,” the Kukis are present in substantial numbers, although they do not constitute a majority in any of them. The Nagas, on the other hand, suspect that their land is being usurped by the Kukis. They believe that the Kukis are surreptitiously increasing their population through infiltration from Myanmar and Bangladesh, which have a large number of Kukis.”\(^{371}\)

These discussions imply that the Kukis demands for Kukihomeland and Sadar Hills District were opposed by the Nagas as it meant carving out the territory demand for ‘Greater Nagaland’ and sovereignty for Nagalim and also the Nagas demands for ‘Greater Nagaland and Sovereignty for Nagaland were opposed by the Kukis. Thus, these were the reasons that led to the violent ethnic clash between them.

Land issue between the Nagas and the Kukis is one problem that strained their relationship. This land problem has been traced to the colonial period particularly when the ethnic consciousness began to surface in an organized form. On the eve and after India’s independence, the land problem between these two ethnic groups was accentuated. As mention earlier, Naga National Council was founded in April 1946 and carried forward the movement to achieve the above discussed. “When Nagas refer to Nagaland they mean the entire area inhabited by the British between India and Burma. Hence, the Nagas are found both in India and Burma. In the North-East States of India they are found in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland and in Burma they are found in Kachin State and the ‘Sagaing Division’\(^{372}\) The total geographical area of the land which is desired to be integrated is approximately 1,00,000

\(^{370}\) ‘Fresh row over new district’, The Deccan herald, 25th May 1998.
\(^{372}\) A Brief Historical Account of the Nagas, Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights, p. 1.
The division of the contiguous Naga inhabited areas into India and Myanmar was done by the British and they gifted about one-third of the Naga territory to Burma (Myanmar) and another two-third to India. Further division of Naga territory into the above mentioned states was done by the Government of India. Another objective of Naga movement is Naga integration: Naga integration implies explicitly that it is an issue of removing all the arbitrary boundaries created without the free and informal consent of the Naga people by the government of British-India, Burma and India. This implies that the Nagas are claiming the areas inhabited by them, which is theirs, conquered by the British colonialist and divided it amongst the two countries namely India and Myanmar without the consent of the Nagas. Thus, the Naga movement is for all the land that they claim rightfully belongs to them.

On the other hand, the first major Kuki organization was Kuki National Assembly (KNA) established on 24th October 1946. According to SK. Ray the activities of the KNA started right from the time with its plan for the “settlement of the Kukis in the Kangpokpi-Kanglatongbi. On the most important and sensitive issues, that is, to settle the otherwise landless tribe in the reserve forest areas and to settle land disputes with the Nagas. The KNA for this purpose, suggested the government to form a committee of land enquiry commission consisting of an equal number of Kukis and Nagas and to be presided over by an impartial government official to settle down the land problem of the Manipur hills amicably. This also implies that prior to 1960s, for the Kukis like KNA on land issue was to settled land dispute between them and settled landless tribesmen. The situation changed, “if the 1960s was the decade for the demand of a separate state within the Indian union, the 1970s was a decade for starting a democratic movement for a separate revenue district.” But the demand for district autonomy for the Kukis has been facing constant and organized opposition from the Nagas of Manipur, particularly of the

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373 White Paper on the Naga Integration, Published by Hekhevi Achumi, Secretary (Finance), Naga Hoho, Nagaland, 2002, p. 64.
376 Ibid., p. 116.
377 Ibid., p. 126.
North District (at present Senapati District) who have been threatening to secede from Manipur and join Nagaland if a separate district is given to the Kukis. 378

**Taxation**

On the taxation as a cause of the Naga Kuki conflict, newspaper reports say: "a sore point for the Kukis of the area has been the regular collection of ‘taxes’ by the NSCN. This was paid with little demure for a decade till the split between the Kaplang and the Issak-swu factions, the Kukis of the area saw the possibilities of escaping from such exactions. This was naturally resented by the Naga militants. In the meantime, emboldened and materially strengthened by the emergence of a new Kuki militant organization (though only vis-à-vis the Naga militant for the present). Some Kuki villages not merely refused to pay taxes to the NSCN but instead served notices on some Naga villages demanding return of taxes exaction from them over the years by the Naga militants." 379 "In recent years, the war of attribution between the two groups has acquired a new dimension. Today, the traditional rivals are fighting over the spoils of smuggling of narcotics. The Kukis settled in and around Moreh, a border town in Manipur, have benefited from widespread smuggling. The NSCN had been extracting “taxes” from Kukis. But the Kuki National Army, which has demanded a separate “Kukiland” within India has prevailed upon Kukis not to pay any “taxes”. This has enraged the Nagas. The politicization of the issue has only served to compound matters.” 380 Kukis now not only refused to pay taxes but also went ahead to the extend of serving notices on Naga villages to return the taxes collected by them earlier. 381 "The Kuki Student’s Organisation in a memorandum submitted to Mr. R.K Dorendra Singh, said the Kukis had been suffering at the hands of the Muivah led National Socialist Council of Nagaland group and added that those killed so far had been refusing to pay taxes to the NSCN (M)." 382

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378 Ibid., p.127.
379 M. S. Prabakara, ‘Manipur: The Kuki vs the Naga’, The Hindu, 9th April 93.

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National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) says: "since the very inception of the Naga Government with the Naga National Council (NNC) every household was taxed. It is for the functioning of its self-government. With reference to Naga National Government, though we may not have all the machinery of a government, certainly we do have a Government and a standing Naga Army. Today, Our Government under the banner of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the Government of the People's Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) do continue the imposition of tax on every household. We do believe that by this, every Naga is identifying our stand and participation in the cause of our people. We reiterate our stand that we have not used gun or threat to secure the tax from the people...........we must also state that our Government's objective is to drive out the enemy and all his occupationary forces from Nagaland. We have forced taxation on Government of India's establishments wherever it may be. We are using-force against India otherwise she ignores other languages. With the people's contribution as tax and the forcible taxation on the occupationary forces, the Government of the People's Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) is surviving from hand to month...The NSCN is against extortion. We have taken a number of actions (AHZA) against such person(s) / group/gangs. But unfortunately, extortionists inspite of such action from us continue to mushroom. The NSCN reiterating its stand has never secured the people's contribution/ tax by using gun or threat. The NSCN continues its forcible taxation on the occupationary forces establishing till they left our country. The NSCN shall never allow the extortionists to flourish and the Mafias to prosper in Nagaland."\[383\]

According Kuki Peoples Forum for Human Rights: since the launching of the Naga Nationalist Movement, Naga National Council (NNC) collected taxes from the Kukis in Nagaland. In Manipur, Kukis living in Naga dominated areas were levied taxes by Naga Federal Army (an arms wing of NNC), which was complied without any resistance. The few instances when they resisted were when they were subjected to extra harassment like extortion of money, property, livestock and harvested crops. In such instances the Naga rebels responded by burning down houses, uprooting villages and even abducting and killing the village Chief or any other persons from these villages.\[383\] "NSCN Clarifies on Taxation", The Freedom, 19th August 1993.
which refused their dictates. Such acts recorded since late 1960s were confined only to the Tangkhul dominated Ukhrul district. Since late 70s the Kukis apprised them (government) of the pitiful plight of the Kukis of this district and requested them to provide protection. But enough attention was not paid to this issue. So, the hapless Kuki villages in the area had no choice but to pay up or face the wrath of the Nagas, or had to flee to save their lives. Thus a strong feeling of resentment and anger had formed among the Kukis even though they had no alternative but to bear it considering they were but a handful in the area. The NSCN (IM) was not contented with it and moved on to Moreh town, entirely populated by the Kukis to seek for more booty and spread their might further. The Kukis thought was impossible to take it lying down. In the areas of Ukhrul, the Nagas reign unchallenged as they are in majority, but in Moreh the dominant Kukis refused to pay up the taxes demanded by the Nagas. They probably might have been more courageous in these areas, but the bigger reason for their refusal was their awareness that payment of taxes implied surrendering their land to the Nagas. They therefore were prepared to fight for their land and refused to pay the taxes. The expansion policy of the Nagas being stopped was considered a serious challenge and threat by NSCN (IM). It therefore, took no time for them to unleash terror and mayhem on the Kukis wherever they found them and to start annihilating them to wipe them out completely, which soon turned the hills of Manipur into graveyard of innocents. 384

The above statement shows that the NNC then NSCN had been collecting taxes from the Nagas and this also has included the Kukis in the ‘Naga areas’. The reasons for including the Kukis in this taxes collection by the Naga militant might be due to the claim of the sole ownership of land as the objective of their movement is sovereignty of the territory. “Nagas of India and Myanmar live in compact and contiguous area they have a strong desire to develop as people like other nations in the world. Hence to achieve the aspiration of the Nagas, the removal of the imposed boundaries, government and system is necessary”385 Secondly, the reason might be due to the assumption of Kukis subscribe to Naga nationalism and partaking in the Naga movement this could be seen from NSCN

385 White Paper on Naga Integration, Published by Hekhevi Achumi, Secretary (Finance), Naga Hoho, Nagaland, 2002. p.X.
statement, "We do believe that by this (i.e. Taxes collection), every Naga is identifying our stand and participating in causes of our people"\(^{386}\) and also considering the Kukis participation in the Nagas movement since the beginning—"Kukis were amongst the 20 signatories of the Naga Club’s memorandum submitted to Simon Commission on 10 January 1926,"\(^{387}\) Kukis were signatories supporting NNC’s demand for self-determination"\(^{388}\) and the Kuki Tribal Union (KTU) in the NNC’s FGN.

According to the above quotes, the reasons for the Kukis refusal to pay the taxes: one, they were more courageous in Moreh than other places like Ukhrul due to their dominance. Two, to fight for land as paying taxes implies surrendering their land. Three, splits of NSCN into Kaplang and Issack-Muivah as the Kukis show it as possibilities to escape from taxes. Four, emergence of Kuki militants also emboldened the Kukis to refuse to pay taxes. Finally, KNA asked Kukis not to pay taxes and this enraged the Nagas.

One thing that needs to remember on this issue is that there was two sections of Kukis- one section supporting and participating in the Nagas’ movement for self-determination and the other section was indifferent or against it. If one takes taxation of the Nagas on the Kukis and the refusal of the Kukis to pay taxes in and around Moreh town as the sole cause of the Naga-Kuki conflict, I think, one missed out many other important issues. Looking at NSCN taxation, it is related to many issues like land, establishment of self-government etc. The Kuki refusal to pay taxes in Moreh is also a result of many like a section of Kukis who were against the Nagas’ for Sovereignty or Greater Nagaland, emergence of Kuki militants with a demand for Kukihomeland and the Kuki militants demanding taxes from the Kukis and asking the Kukis not to pay taxes to NSCN etc. It will be good if one considers all the things that were at worked to ignite violent conflict between these two groups. Thus, ‘taxes’ was one of many causes and one of immediate issues that triggered Naga-Kuki violent conflict but not the sole cause of the Naga-Kuki violent in 1990s.

Dominance

Struggle for dominance in the area cannot be ruled out for the area for the control over which the clashes are currently taking place is as central to the dispute as 'rememberance' or 'historical vengeance'. It was also reported in this newspaper that "the beginning of the violent Kuki-Naga confrontation was proceeded by several aggressive and violent actions on both sides in the area of conflict (Chandal district); each side trying to establish its dominance in the area." The Naga militants have been dominating the hill districts particularly the Nagas inhabited areas. The emergence of the Kuki militants with a demand of Kuki land which means curving out the Nagas claim for sovereignty led them to chase each other so as to establish a dominance over areas, particularly Chandel district through which National Highway 39 passing through it and at the dead end lies International border trade point called Moreh town. Therefore, the struggle for dominance is one that led to the violent ethnic conflict between the two militants i.e. Naga militant and Kuki militants.

Control of Moreh Town and National Highway 39 (Pallel-Moreh)

The excerpts from newspapers: "The present Naga-Kuki conflict has its origin in the desire of the Naga to exercise control over Moreh, a border town, and the road linking Imphal and Moreh (NH-39). Moreh, through which flourishing illicit trade and smuggling take place, has a mixed population, with a preponderance of Kukis. 'Kukis resented the imposition of taxes by the Nagas here, leading to clashes between the two.' " It was then seen as a war for territorial control fought between the outlawed groups of two communities. In the beginning, it was 'prisely that. The fight was for the control of National Highway 39 in the Pallel-Moreh sector, the stretch that connects India

389 M.S. Prabakara, 'Manipur's Insurgents active again', The Hindu, 8th April 1993.
390 M.S. Prabakara, 'Manipur: The Kuki vs the Nagas', The Hindu, 9th April 1993.
to Myanmar. This stretch gives easy motorable access across the border and also provides easy revenue. Militant groups can impose clandestine but systematic taxes on goods, mostly smuggled, that move along this road. According to a reliable source a militant group that controls the highway can extort anything between Rs.3,000 to Rs.10,000 per truck, depending upon the goods carried considering the traffic on this stretch, the revenue generated daily is a substantial and sustained source of income for various underground organizations. Until about a year ago, the NSCN (IM) faction enjoyed absolute control over this stretch. Even today, they still have considerable control. But then, local Kukis residents, supported by the KNA began to challenge their position.392 Intelligence sources said the Nagas activists of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), who had earlier infiltrated into the district, were still controlling the Imphal-Moreh road in the district and collecting Rs.500 from each truck or vehicle passing, either burnt or destroyed, the sources said, adding that such vehicles were set ablaze on Tuesday. The NSCN also ambushed the security escort of a passenger bus, killing three Jawans, in the last week of March. "Moreh is an important town on India's border with Myanmar. As a result of the blockade, business activity in Moreh has come to a standstill. This is disturbing since the government is activity considering a proposal to legalise trade between Moreh and Myanmar border town of Tamu."393

Tension began building up when the banned factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland and the Kuki groups sought to take control of the border town of Moreh.394 "There clash between the Nagas and Kukis erupted when the NSCN (I-M) tried to wrest control of Moreh on the India – Burma border in Manipur's Chandel district Moreh has for long been the center of a smuggling trade. This was resisted by the Kukis with the not-so- count backing of the Indian Army which provided training and arms.395 The National Socialist Council of Nagaland NSCN-M and the Kukis National Army (KNA) have taken up the cause of their respective clans and what began as a battle for supremacy over the border town of Moreh in Chandel district, has now spread to the

393 'Ethnic feud in Manipur', The Times of India, 17th April 1993
neighbouring districts......Evidently the focal point of the dispute center around the nondescript town of Moreh from where "imposed" trading is conducted with Tamu, about two Km across in Myanmar. The Naga-Kuki row is seen by observers as a battle over who controls this multi-crore clandestine trading market. \(^{396}\) "This border town which sees transaction worth crores of rupees everyday was initially a free trade zone of all the communities. Initially the trade was under control of the uniform force but gradually under the influence of the NSCN was on the rise. The Kukis began taking note of development and began making counter moves."\(^{397}\) Moreh is where transaction worth crores of Rupees is carried out everyday, most of which is through smuggling which is why the Naga group levied a house and trade tax on Moreh. The Kuki groups were agitated because they considered Moreh to be their area of operation. They, in turn, declared that no tax would be paid to the Naga groups. \(^{398}\) From the above excerpts, one could note that the clash between the Naga militant and the Kuki militants to control a prosperous town- Moreh and National Highway-39 for taxes and this clash led to Naga-Kuki violent conflict.

It is a fact that Moreh town is coveted by the Government, both ethnic groups' militants and both legal and illegal civilians. The town is an Indo-Myanmar border trade point. It lies at the end of NH-39 opposite to Tamu, a trade point of Myanmar. The importance of trade in this border trade point could not be underestimated. The report says the largest volume of trade is carried out unofficially at Moreh and Tamu. "The illegal trade is said to be more profitable due to the wide discrepancy in the official and actual exchange rate of Myanmar’s currency kyatt."\(^{399}\) It also says that "the Indian foreign secretary Mr. J.N. Dixit recently concluded a three-day visit to yangon (Rangoon) and finalized a draft agreement to regularize the voluminous trade along the border of the North-Eastern States. Another draft agreement entailed frequent interaction between civil and military authorities on the two sides to check rebel activities"\(^{400}\) Further, the importance of Moreh town could be viewed from a different set of people, both legal and

\(^{396}\) 'KNF raises demand for Kukiland', The Statesman, 21st April 1993.
\(^{397}\) Ibid.
\(^{398}\) L. Yaba, 'Naga Kuki Tension: A tale of two villages', The Speaker, 14-21st April 1993.
\(^{399}\) Prasun Sonwalker, 'Insurgency queers N.E. border trade', The Times, 10th April 1993.
\(^{400}\) Ibid.
illegal people for business. The town is also important for militants over sundry reasons like land, revenues, motorable access etc. For the Nagas and the Kukis, besides others, it is important for the ownership of town (Land). This could be seen from KPFHR statement that paying taxes to NSCN-IM means surrendering their land.401 And the Nagas stand is that “not an inch of Naga traditional land should be curved out”402 and Moreh town is very much within the claim of Nagas for sovereignty. Taxation is not only for revenues but also linked to ownership of land and political-ideology etc. Thus, a clash over control Moreh town, which includes taxes, land etc., is one of the causes for the Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict. However, Moreh is not the sole factor for this bloody ethnic conflict as some portrayed it. One of many reasons being there were also skirmishes between these two militant groups prior to Moreh incidents of May-June 1992 in other hill districts like Ukul district.

**The State of Manipur Response**

A newspaper report says: "Cause of ethnic conflict is due to bad governance. The recent chapter of violence in Manipur is neither a cloudburst of ethnic clash nor a deluge of secessionism, but grave symptoms of a morbid analogy of governance. If the genesis of the outbreak of ethnic clash between the Nagas and the Kukis is as simple as a squabble over the control of illegal trade in the border town of Moreh, (as the State Government would like to insist), the solution should have been then, when the first few shots were fired between a handful of smugglers."403

Before we proceed on to the discussion on the nature and peace process of the Naga-Kuki violent conflict, it will be appropriate to have a glance at the condition of the state of Manipur in which the Naga-Kuki violent conflict triggered and spread to other states like Nagaland and Assam. The state of Manipur, like any other state, is a multi-ethnic state. The foremost is the division of territory and population into two parts, the Valley and the Hills. The valley population is mostly non-tribal following religions like Hinduism, Sanamahi, Islam and Christians, etc., but mostly Hinduism and Sanamahi. The

402 ‘Not an Inch of Naga Traditional Land Should be Curved Out’, The Freedom, 19th April 93.
Hills populations compose of tribals and no non-tribal could reside in the Hills. These tribals are mostly Christians; only small percentages of tribals are still practicing animistic. The Valley and the Hills looking from a macro perspective, are quite different from each other in many aspects, despite the notion of same origin, race and under same classification of language. The macro divisions of the state into – Hill country and the Valley country have many problems. The hills since pre-British days maintained themselves as independent villages. The conquered villages gave tributes to the king and the unconquered villages or small kingdoms continued to live independently, even the conquered villages continued to carry on their practices undisturbed by the ruler except when tribute was not sent. This sort of relation between the Valley and the Hills continued into the colonial rule except that there were certain modifications. During the British reign, the hills were administered separately under the British Political Agent or President of Darbar. This was a continuation of the earlier period but in a modified form. On the eve of the British departure, the hill peoples refused to be left with the valley instead they wanted to be merged with the hills of Assam or left free. This is stated by A.K Ray that “the hill tribe like the Nagas and the Kukis did not like to remain as the state subjects of Manipur. It was also argued that geographically the hills of Manipur form a part or parcel of its surrounding hill district of Assam and Burma. For all intents and purposes, the NNL demanded secession of the Manipur hills.”\textsuperscript{404} KNA also renewed its threat of secession from the Manipur State Darbar.\textsuperscript{405} This was not accepted by the British rulers nor Manipur state or government of India. This secessionism or merger with other co-hill tribes is still continuing especially by the Nagas. This was totally against the valley people particularly the Meiteis. As a result of it, there was and is suspicion and fear between them.

At a micro-level, valley people are also divided on the ethnic lines and within the Meiteis, majority population of the state settled in the valley country, there is a contest for identity between the Meiteis-Hindu and the Meiteis-Sanamahi. The hill peoples are also divided on ethnic lines viz. Kuki, Nagas, Mizos, and Zous etc. These hills-based

\textsuperscript{405} Ibid.
ethnic groups are also having (whether noticeable or unnoticeable) non-violent and violent forms of clashes amongst themselves over the identity, land, government jobs, schemes etc. Thus, in the State of Manipur one finds sundry of ethnic groups contesting over many issues.

In this state, each ethnic group has its own body of militant(s). The state has become so vulnerable that any ethnic competition for government opportunities, land and resources could be easily turned into a bloodshed. The State government together with Central government assistance has spent quite a good amount of money to deploy police, para military, army, central reserve police forces to counter them.

Table 3.1
Expenditure on Maintenance of Police (1990-91-2000-01) – Manipur

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Expenditure on policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>52.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>66.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>71.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>76.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>89.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>86.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>168.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>127.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above figure of expenditure is on the state maintained police alone. The centre is deploying many battalions in the state, which are paid by the centre. Despite, such amount on armed forces to counter them, the state remained ineffective, nay, insurgents are toppling the state government.
In the political sphere, the state is marked by instability. The state of Manipur attained statehood on 21 January in 1972 and is 33 years old now. In these 33 years, the state has witnessed eight (8) Legislative Assembly elections when it should have been five (5) Legislative Assemblies if all of them have completed its full term. This shows the political instability of the state. This instability is further shown by the numbers of Chief Ministers. The state has 21 Chief Minister since 1972 till date. Pradip Phanjoubam says that within the life span of a single Assembly, the State has on many occasions, seen ministry changes. All this formed a part of the Indian brand of democracy, the infamous "number game". Hence the State has seen 21 Chief Ministers. While in the same period it has seen only 10 Governors.406 The hallmark of the State Legislative Assemblies was defection, split and merger to form a new ministry. Now anti-defection law has been passed, it raises hopes of certain changes in the state of Manipur. Moreover, the state has been under President rule for seven times. All this shows political instability.

In the economic aspect, the state revenue earning is about 9%, 91% of State kitty comes from the Centre. Out of this 100% non-plan revenue of the State, 80% is spent on the salaries, pensions, and interest. The state has about 80,000 employees at the moment and their salary bill amounts to nearly Rs. 70 crores a month, an amount far above the means at the command of the state Government. Development Funds were diverted to meet salary commitment.407 The yearly deficit of non-plan began after 1986 when state government employees' pay became equal to the centre's pay. This parity was brought with Fourth Pay Commission. "The government is also not able to fully spend and utilize the money being released under various centrally sponsored schemes, due to pressing and unavoidable requirement on the non-plan revenue account like salaries, pensions and interest payment."408 Since the development funds were diverted to the state commitment, development pace became slower. The non-plan revenue deficit of Manipur stood at Rs. 164.31 crores in 1998-99. The deficit also increased annually so the

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407 Ibid., p. 130.
408 Ibid.
Government borrowed from various sources like RBI and also later on availed overdraft facility from RBI. From the above discussion of the state economy, it shows that the state economy was in a bad shape and was in worsening condition since the late 1980s.

In the sphere of religion, the state of Manipur is a multi-religious state. According to 1991 census Hindus constituted 57.67% Christians-34.1% Muslims-7.27%. The Meitei—Hindus are the majority in the state. The Meiteis are divided into two: Meitei-Vishnuvites and Meitei-Sanamahi. The relationships between these two groups are always tension ridden. Meitei-Sanamahi group advocated revivalism of Sanamahi religion by saying that it was their religion in yore days. The Meitei-Vishnuvites were also in a position of offensive. One reason for this was that the RSS movement was gaining momentum in Manipur. Meitei-Muslims, also called Meitei-Pangal or Pangal, are the people, who follow Islam but used Meitei language, etc. Thus, they are called Meitei-Muslims or Meitei-Pangal or Pangal. The Meitei-Pangal or Pangal and the Meiteis have an age-old suspicion with each other yet they avoided clashes. According to a news report: “following Ayodhya and post-Ayodhya incidents one members of the community was ki lied in the clash”.409 In early May of 1993 there was a riot between these two communities, which came to be interpreted as communal riot or clash but was pacified. This was a part of degeneration in relationship in Manipur.

The second largest religion of the State is Christianity, which is advocated by the majority of the tribals (a few of tribals are still animistic). The Christianity in Manipur is divided along ethnic lines and many denominations, which became very rigid in the late 80s and early 90s. Oneness in Christ became blurred. Spirituality was declining and their fleshly desires or ambitions overwhelmed them and many became nominal Christians. Spiritual Christians received a non-violent or verbal form of persecution from the Christian themselves who are ‘nominal Christians’. These nominal Christians are a Christian in name and do not believe nor follow nor practice what the Bible says. This trend was on the rise and they came to form a majority, particularly on the eve of 1990s.

Thus, the Christian belief of denouncing violence in any form (‘no revenge for perpetrator’ see Mathew 5: 39, ‘Forgiveness’ see Mathew 6:12,14-15,18:21-35, “love” see Mathew 22:37-40 I Corinthians13, “peace” see John 14: 27 and 16:33. These are just a few of them from the Holy Bible) was ignored, for they have been overcome by their desires rather than spirituality.

The Society was such that they became individualistic and extreme in communitarian spirit. The communities of the state were indifferent to each other and apathetic to the condition of the state. The result was that there were rampant corruptions, which was an ‘open secret’ to all. Crimes (petty crime to a major crime) were escalating. The condition of the state could be further seen from the observation of Pradip Phanjoubam that “it must be made known that insurgency is not the sum total of law and order. The state is in total atrophy today not just because of the insurgency, but because of the administration has literally made law and order a free for all agenda while it watches mutely. Students and youth organizations, tribal associations, village councils, the government’s own employees, and for that matter practically any and sundry organizations, have been assuming the role of the law enforcers, ordering ban on anything not to their taste, calling highway blockades or crippling extended bandhs and public curfews, punishing petty criminals, tonsuring etc. While many of these activities may actually be a show of conscience by these organizations, the fact remains that the Government is allowing there to snatch away a very important part of its responsibilities, that of law enforcement. Too many parallel administrations exist in Manipur today and this fact has been a cause of the depletion of public moral and more relevantly, faith in the establishment." It may also be good to point out that the State of Manipur is among the few states where there are frequent bandhs, strikes, blockades, curfews etc. In fact all these were more on the eve and during the Naga-Kuki clash due to Meitie-Pangal clash in May 1993 and Paite-Kuki clash in 1997.

Thus, the condition of state administration in all the spheres, such as political, economy, social, religion, etc., was in a worst state. Owing to this, the state became atrophied and sundry organizations, both underground and overground, got upper hand over the state. In this situation of multiple tensions Naga-Kuki clash occurred. It went on for nearly a decade taking the lives of hundreds, uprooting and displacing villages and villagers in terms of thousands. Many were injured, maimed, starved and roofless. The state administration remained a mute spectator because of its rottenness within. In fact one could say, the state itself is a nurturer of violent ethnic conflicts.