Chapter IV

Conflicting Claims in Manipur: A Critical Examination

In the Indian political parlance, the very term "Northeast" has almost come to denote a region characterized by ethno-political movements. Since the advent and extension of colonial rule in the region, the region had already been experiencing political and social upheavals. Even after India gained her independence from British rule in 1947, the region has barely experienced a single decade of calm political atmosphere. Instead, each decade saw new movements for political and social aspirations, many of which have turned violent. One need not make a substantial argument to show that these movements have their origin in the ethno-national understanding of the identity. Insurgency, an extreme form of political upsurge, has rocked almost all the states at one time or another. Armed insurrections took roots in Nagaland and Manipur in between 1950s and 1960s. The armed movements intensified in Mizoram in the sixties, in Tripura in the seventies, while in the case of Assam, it was in the eighties. Militancy has also arrived in Arunachal Pradesh but not as menacingly insurgent like other neighboring states. Thus, the biggest challenge we have is to unfold the objective or subjective rationale behind such tensions so as to find possible corrective interventions. This is exactly what I tried in the previous chapter on Meghalaya.

In the present chapter I will study the case of Manipur. Though both the states, viz. Manipur and Meghalaya, are characterized by ethno-political movements, the nature of ethnic relations in these two states are quite distinctive. In Meghalaya the conflicts were earlier between tribal and non-tribal identities. Today the inter-ethnic (between tribes) tensions have erupted. In the past the biggest cause of such tensions was the fear of the indigenous tribes, that is, the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos, of being swamped demographically, culturally as well as economically by the non-tribes who can be broadly categorized into (i) external – foreign influx of
nationals belong to other countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh (ii) internal – influx of Indian nationals from other states within the country. But today, along with this conflict between tribal and non-tribal, there is also the emergence of irreconcilable tension between tribes in the state which has become serious threat to peace in the state. In Manipur, however, so far the conflicts are mainly among the indigenous ethnic groups only. Many provisions within the Indian constitution have been adopted for the Northeast states to resolve ethnic crises. There are special provisions mentioned in the Articles 371A, 371B etc. for these states. There are provisions of the Sixth Schedule and the Fifth Schedule and many other policies specific to each state. In Meghalaya, many institutional arrangements have been developed for easing ethnic tensions.

Manipur, on the other hand, was kept out of these arrangements perhaps with the rationale that it was a separate erstwhile princely state which was made into what had been called Part C State in post independent India. It still does not have any special status under Article 371 and no major initiatives have so far been taken for accommodating the interests of diverse cultural and ethnic groups through arrangements of self-governance or separate representation. Hence, the claims presented by different ethnic groups are quite different here. And even though there are serious concerns about "material and economic" injustice, requiring re-distribution, the political rhetoric has been dominated by the demand for 'recognition'. In such a given condition, one question often mulls over is that does Manipur require framework policies and institutions like the ones that had been initiated in Meghalaya?

In the present chapter I will attempt to address the causes of ethnic conflict in Manipur and to critically study the existing arrangements thereof. While studying ethnic conflicts in the Northeast India, one cannot overlook the case of Manipur which exhibits as many problems that could possibly appear in the discourse of group conflict. Perhaps it is the only state in the entire region which
experiences such varied forms of issues and problems. A study of various facades of ethnic environment in the state will show the complexity of ethnicity and politics that a composite culture would possess. I will also try to classify the existing ethnic groups in the state for two important reasons. First, the effort made on the classification of ethnic groups in the state will unfold the complexity of ethnic diversity and their relationships in its varied forms; second, it will be easier for us to see appropriateness of demands by various groups in the state through such classification and examine the adequacy of recognition politics for addressing these demands.

The Nature of Ethnic Diversity in Manipur

Talking about ethnic diversity in Manipur, Gangumei Kamei mentions that “Manipur is the land of three major ethnic communities – the Meeteis who had formed the nation-state by the fifteenth century; the Nagas who are indigenous community divided into several tribes who are given an exogenous identity by the British colonial rulers through a generic name ‘Naga’ since the beginning of the nineteenth century; and the Kuki-Chin who migrated to Manipur in different periods of history and who had been given another exogenic identity called ‘Kuki’.

These are the three main groups in Manipur; however, it is not exhaustive of the existing diversity in Manipur. In addition to these communities mentioned by Gangumei Kamei, there are many other ethnic communities in the state and they cannot be subsumed in any

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2Not only exhaustive, some people even rightly claim that these are misnomers. In its long history, there had not been such tribes such as ‘Naga’ or ‘Kuki’ in Manipur. In the state, the tribes were (or are) known as Kabui, Mating, Tangkhul, Mao, Maram, Chiru, Khongjai, Thadou, Paite, Hmar, Monsang, Mayou, etc. Many have pointed out that the ‘generic terms’ such as ‘Naga’ or ‘Kuki’ were introduced only after the advent of the British in the state less than two centuries ago to identify different tribes in the hills for their own ‘convenience’. Are not the terms ‘Kuki’ or ‘Naga’ wrongly applied for the purpose of identification of different tribes in the state? Were the terms ‘Naga’ or ‘Kuki’, used in the state to ‘incorporate more tribal areas’ and sow the seeds of the division between the people in the hills and the valley? These questions which will remain unanswered have come up following the demand by some tribal organizations including underground outfits for formation of small states by dividing Manipur. See Tarapot, Phanjoubam, 2005, Bleeding Manipur, Har-Anand publications pvt ltd, New Delhi. p. 17.
of these three groups. Another big problem is that many tribes which are categorized as a single community have different demands and cultural practices.

To be precise, there are twenty-nine different tribes listed in the State Schedule Tribes list. One very interesting point is that this list simply says that Schedule Tribe people will be any Naga tribe, any Kuki tribe and any Lushai tribe. This simply means that distinct tribes are not recognized as having distinct identities. This is the official acceptance of the Naga and the Kuki identity of various tribes. But many of the tribes do not like these nomenclatures and have submitted petitions to the Backward Classes Commission for individual recognition to be given to them as Schedule Tribes. All of these tribes claim to have their own distinct cultures and problems. They want their own ethnic identity to be recognized. Then why are they grouped into Nagas or Kukis? And on what basis have they been given the generic names?

Some claim that the communities within each group do have certain similarities in terms of their cultural practices and on that basis the British colonial masters classified them into these generic groups. But the fact is that all of them claim to have distinct cultural identities. Many of them claim to have asserted their separate ethnic identities and demand the inclusion of their ethnic names in the Schedule Tribes list of Manipur. This includes the mates, the Paomeis, the Chongthuhs, the Kharams, the Taraos, the Inpuis, etc.

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3 SC and ST Lists (modification) Orders 1956, Part X Manipur. According to THE SCHEDULED TRIBES Census of India 2001, the population of Manipur in 2001 Census has been 2,166,788. Of this 741,141 are Scheduled Tribes (STs), which constitutes 34.2 per cent of the total population of the state. There are a total of twenty nine (29) notified Scheduled Tribes in the state. Of the total STs in Manipur, Thadou is the largest with 1.8 lakh population representing 24.6 per cent of the state's total ST population, followed by Tangkhul (19.7%), Kabui (11.1%), Paite (6.6%), Hmar (5.8%), Kacha Naga (5.7%), and Vaiphei (5.2%). Among other major tribes, Maring, Anal, Zou, Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes, Kom, and Simte are having percentages between 3.1 and 1.5 (Statement-I). The rest of the STs are comparatively small in number having less than 10,000 population each.


5 Gangumei Kamei, 2003, op.cit.

6 Nabakumar, op. cit.
The classification of ethnic tribes into generic groups started in the colonial period. During the pre-British period, tribals have their independent identity as they were known by their different tribal names. But during the British colonial rule, they were broadly categorized for administrative convenience which was a causative factor for emerging pan-tribal identity. According to the classical classification of earlier British ethnographers, of the twenty-nine schedule tribes of Manipur, namely, Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Koireng, Koirao, Maring, Kom, Lamkang, Monsang, Moyon, Mizo (Lusai), Paite, Purum, Ralte, Sukte, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei and Zou are Kukis and the remaining seven tribes such as Angami, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Mao, Maram, Sema and Tangkhul are Nagas. The British legacy of polarizing the ethnic diversity of the Hills was followed when, in 1951, the Schedule Tribe List of Manipur was

1. hope it will be important to mention here the present ethnic and demographic composition of the state very briefly. Out of the 2.38 million population of the state (2001 census), the majority Meeteis comprise of 56.9 per cent. They mostly profess Vaishnav faith and are confined to the valley. The valley all surrounded by hills is only one-tenth of the total geographical area. The state’s land act does not allow the Meeteis and other non-tribals to buy land and settle in the hills. The tribal population comprises of 33 tribes in the Schedule list and many other smaller tribes and sub-tribes who are included in the category of “unspecified tribes” in the list. Most of the 33 tribes are chubbed under either of the two current nomenclatures, the Nagas and the Kukis. The fate of those tribes who prefer to maintain their distinct identities, not to be called either as Naga or Kuki, has to face threats and at times severe atrocities in the hands of those who want to encompass them into the larger folds of ethnic identity. The demographic distribution as of present is that Nagas mostly inhabit in the areas of Tamenglong, Senapati and Ukhrul, and partly in the south-eastern district of Chandel. Kukis mostly inhabit in the south-western district of Churachanpur and partly in the district of Senapati. The tribal populations are mainly Christians with some traces of Romgei, Purum and few other tribes practicing their traditional religions. The Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims), constituting a substantive part of the state’s population (1,67,204 by 2001 census), speak Manipuri as their mother tongue and are scattered mainly in the valley. Given such a complex picture one is bound to visualize possible tension and conflicts that are in store for such material entity having varied forms of ethnic composition and settlement. See Bhagat Oinam, ‘Patterns of Ethnic Conflict in the North-East’, Economic and Political Weekly, May 24, 2003, pp. 2031-32.

2. We can look at this point from another angle. Colonial masters did this first for imposing colonial rule and impose the colonial structure after that. The idea of ‘tribe’ neatly combined two of the principal requirements of a justifying theory for the establishment of colonial rule: It provided a system of classification within which knowledge could be organized, peoples identified, maps drawn, and administrative structures imposed. Moreover, since the dominant evolutionist theory of the time placed ‘tribal societies’ low on the ladder of human development, it seems inevitable, and right, that they should fall under the control of developed Western states. Thus, the notion of ‘tribe’ is ‘invented’ as much as ‘imagined.’ See for instance, T Ranger, ‘The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa’, in E Hobsbawm and T Ranger (eds) The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge, CUP, 1983. However, the point I want to bring home is that this classification, under whatever motive and reasons, begot many problems in the inter-ethnic relations.

notified as 'Any Kuki tribe' or 'Any Naga tribe', and 'Any Lushai tribe', without making any mention of the ethnic names of the different tribes.

I will discuss how individual ethnic groups started claiming independent identities later in this chapter. Here it is suffice to say that the nature of ethnic diversity in Manipur is that there are numerous ethnic groups living together in the small territory with unequal recognition. Due to certain historical interventions the ethnic groups have been grouped into generic groups like the Nagas and the Kukis. This is a problem we really need to look into.

**Ethnic Classification: A Case of Manipur**

A large number of ethnic groups are found across the world. The forms of diversity are varied and groups claim different sorts of demands. In short, the problems of ethnic diversity are different from one part of the world to the other parts. So, the question of applicability of certain theoretical groupings of ethnic communities becomes a problem. Thus, it would be interesting to try to see whether the classification made, especially with the western democratic countries as the base, can be applied in other corners of the world.

Kymlicka has identified five major ethnic minority groups - the national minority whose important demands are the maintenance of their own self-governed institutions; the immigrants who are demanding a more tolerant or multicultural approach to integration that would allow and indeed support immigrants to maintain various aspects of their heritage even as they integrate into common institutions operating in the majority language; the isolationist Ethno-religious groups who voluntarily isolate themselves from the larger

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10 We should acknowledge the fact that classification of all ethnic minorities is a very difficult task. There are thousands of distinct minority ethnic groups. In this sense, the work of Will Kymlicka deserves appreciation. He successfully tried to categorize ethnic groups existing in western and eastern European countries. See Kymlicka Will, 2002, Western Political Theory and Ethnic Relations in Eastern Europe, Oxford University Press, Oxford. Also see, Bijen Nameirakpam, 2005, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Examining Issues of Ethnic Diversity with Special Reference to Manipur*, M. Phil Dissertation submitted to the Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, JNU, New Delhi.
society; the Metics whose basic claims have been the regularization of their status as permanent residents, and to gain access to citizenship; and the African-American who are said to be the descendants of the American slaves brought to the U.S. between the Seventeenth and the Nineteenth centuries.

Now, my classification of ethnic groups in Manipur will also be done on the basis of their origin, cultural practices and their demands for preserving distinct cultural identities. This classification is important for it is one way in which we can understand the ethnic diversity that exists in Manipur.

Following the method used by Kymlicka, we can classify ethnic communities in Manipur into five major groups viz., the Meeteis, the Nagas, the Kukis, the Pangals and ‘the Mayans’. If we use the Kymlickean classification, it will appear that the Meeteis and the Nagas will fall into the category of the National Minority whereas the Kukis and the Pangals will be classified as immigrants. And ‘Mayans’ will not fall into any of the categories given by Kymlicka. For a clear understanding of the nature of ethnic diversity in Manipur we can have a look at the major ethnic groups of Manipur.

The Nagas

For three important reasons, it will not be proper to use the term ‘Nagas’ for every ethnic communities included in this generic term. First, the origin of the term itself is a contested one. We actually do not know what it really means when used for identifying certain communities in Manipur. Second, it is said that the term ‘Naga’ was first used in the context of Manipur by British colonial rulers as part of their divide and rule policy. It is an identity projected for better

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11In Manipur the word ‘mayan’ means the unit which can be a component of a larger entity. The word ‘mayans’ is the plural form of ‘mayan’. Thus, ethnic groups or the tribes which neither fall in to any of the conglomerates nor have been recognized as distinct identity are here referred to as Mayans.
12It is even said that the ideas of ‘Naga’ in the western meaning could not be applicable to the tribes of Manipur, Haobam Indrakumar, 2002, Basic Dimension of Identity and Integration: A Critical Appraisal on Meetei Perspectives published by E. Girani for Leisam Laisu Thoukaikol Research Cell, p. 19.
13Several attempts have been made by different scholars particularly anthropologists, historians and local intellectuals (Hutton, 1912; Mills, 1937; Hudson, 1911; Grierson 1903; Eluen, 1959, 1960 and
administrative purposes – to club different tribes under one administrative umbrella. However, the emergence of Naga as an ethnic identity can be seen as the most recent development. Third and the most important reason is that the constituent groups within the larger group ‘Naga’ are neither identical in their cultures, are divided into different tribal and linguistic groups, have diverse beliefs and customs\(^{14}\), nor similar in the demands.\(^{15}\) A research scholar with the Manipur University even mentions recently that the Nagas expand their ethno-cultural boundary by way of bringing the other non-Naga ethnic groups, either through coercion or cultural level or both, to their ethnic fold.\(^{16}\) Thus, the creation of Naga political identity is still in process, latest being the inclusion of tribes like Anal, Moyon, Monsang, Maring.\(^{17}\) Tribes who are identified as Nagas have little in common among them so far as their dialects, customs and traditional world views are concerned.\(^{18}\) Further, inter-tribal rivalry was a dominant feature. Yet, with the appropriation of Naga as a political identity efforts are being made to have a common political platform where equal participation of the constituting tribes are sought. That is why many see Naga more as a political identity than a cultural one.\(^{19}\)

The single most significant demand made by them is the integration of all Naga inhabited territories, or the formation of a greater Nagaland, ‘the Nagalim’. This demand is mainly based on the

Shimray, (1985) to trace the origin of the word “Naga”. As Varrier Ehen pointed out four decades ago the derivation of the word is still obscure and the problem is not yet solved. Though no final word has been said about the derivation of the label “Naga”, it is certain that the name was given by the outsider – the inhabitants of Brahmaputra and Barak valleys and later popularized and enforced by the British colonial authorities for their smooth and convenient administration. The issue has become more complicated owing to the continuing movements of identity assertion, formation and expansion masterminded by the select few Naga elites and leaders. See W. Nabakumar, op.cit.

\(^{14}\) Lal Dena, op. cit.


\(^{16}\) Nabakumar, 2003, op.cit.

\(^{17}\) Oinam, 2003, op. cit.

\(^{18}\) The names of the tribes considered to be part of the larger ‘Naga’ conglomeration in Manipur as articulated by ‘The United Naga Council Working Group’ are Anal, Chothe, Koireng, Maram, Monsang, Poumai, Tangkhul, Thangal, Chiru, Kharam, Lamkang, Mao, Maring, Moyon, Puimei, Tano, and Zeliangrong. See *Issues Relating to the Territorial Integrity of Manipur – A Naga Perspective*, Compiled and Published by the United Naga Council Working Group, December 10, 2002.

\(^{19}\) Oinam, 2003, op. cit.
idea that the Nagas are a nation and deserved to have a separate territory of its own. Looking not merely from administrative but from a multicultural theoretical perspective, one may question this demand. Multiculturalism, simply put, wants survival of each distinct cultural group regardless of its size or population. As I mentioned earlier, the Nagas are a group of people who actually are different from one another in terms of the languages they speak, and their cultures and traditions. Their demand seems to be mainly based on political motive rather than social and cultural necessities.

Coming to the point of ethnic classification, if we are to support the classification done by Kymlicka, most of the ethnic groups within the Nagas will fall in the category of national minority. But considering the factor of the size of the ethnic groups within the Nagas, one big question arises that whether all these small (in terms of population), but indigenous tribes with more or less autonomous social existence within the Manipur Kingdom, be identified as the National Minority?

Now let's discuss one example. Sema is an ethnic community in Manipur. The total population of the Sema is just twenty five (25). Though small in terms of the size of the population they communicate among themselves in their own language (Serna language) and claim to be one of the "aborigines" of Manipur. The question is whether they be given the right to self government? Like Sema, there are tens of

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20 See also Des, N.K., 2001, Regionalism and Ethnicity in North East India, Anthropological Survey of India, 50:1-16.
21 Kamei 2003, op.cit., Research Paper. People who see ethnic identity or 'nation' from the perspective such as the 'constructivist' or 'modernist' approach may disagree with my view. According to this approach a nation or ethnicity or identity is an imagined community socially constructed, imagined by people who perceive themselves as part of that group. Members of this 'imagine community' hold in their minds a mental image of their affinity. That is what exactly happened to the Nagas. See Benedict Anderson, 1983 Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Verso, 2006.
22 I am talking of the Nagas as national minorities here in the larger Indian context and considering the present India as a multi-nation state composing all groups including those in North-East states. However, Naga nationalists may not agree with it. They have many a time spelt out that Nagas are independent nation. They were not under the control of any government or state.
smaller communities within the Naga umbrella. The Aimol, the Anal, the Chothe, the Chiru, the Angami, the Koireng, the Koirao are some of the groups within the Nagas whose population is well below six thousand (6000). And many of the groups do not occupy a particular location but are scattered in different parts of Manipur. Identifying them as National Minority would obviously mean justifying the demand for self-government.

Thus, two important points emerge from these facts. First, since one umbrella group is composed of different ethnic groups we cannot identify them as single national ethnic minority for granting group specific right. Such move cannot minimize inequality within the group. Secondly, it is very difficult to identify smaller groups whose population is too small to recognition as National Minority even if they have some of the important characteristics of being a National Minority. Such recognition is likely to lead to continuous and unmanageable fragmentation of the society.

The Kukis
Like the Nagas, the Kukis are a conglomerate of different ethnic groups often with different languages and cultural practices. But unlike the Nagas they are sometimes termed as “immigrants”. It is said that they arrived in Manipur in different phases starting from the seventeenth century. However, it will not be just to categorize all the groups in the Kukis as immigrants thanks to the inclusion of original people of Manipur within this generic name “the Kukis”. There are old Kukis and new Kukis classified according to the timing of their arrival in Manipur. As in the case of the Nagas, we cannot claim that the Kukis is a single culture community.

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26 Many see tribes constituting ‘Kuki’ have close cultural affinity – linguistically as well as by custom. However, all agrees that it would be an over exaggeration to project these tribes under one cultural head.
27 This is mentioned in many books-Gangumei, 1988, Col. Shakespeare, 1912.
28 Nabakumar, op.cit.
29 The use of the term “Kuki” is not without controversy and contradiction. John Shakespeare (1912) wrote: “the term Kuki is not recognized by the people to whom it is applied”. The term was arbitrarily
The Kukis, however, have a profile very different from those that Kymlicka classifies as immigrant communities. The Kukis were nomadic people roaming around with all their belongings and family. Neither individual immigration for economic purpose nor for political motives involved. Significantly they arrived in Manipur when the question of citizenship was not so important as today. They were not settled through proper immigration policy either. And, of course, their demand is different from the groups generally taken as immigrants. Their effort is not to integrate to the mainstream society but to have sort of homeland within Manipur where they can maintain their self-government. The best phrase to identify them would be naturalized immigrants rather than simply "immigrants".

The attempt to the unification of all the tribes under ‘Kuki’ has not been successful so far. By the middle of 1940s three major divisions took place within the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of Manipur, viz.


Even if many say that they were nomadic tribes till very recently, sections of Kukis claim that before the British colonial rule, the Kukis were not only fully independent but they also had their own custom, culture and tradition fully developed. With the establishment of the English East India Company, the Indian princely states were colonized one after another. Lower Burma in 1824, Assam in 1870 and Thibaw’s kingdom of Burma in 1886. Even when all the above states in the then India and Burma had been annexed into the British colony, yet the Kukis went on to enjoy their freedom. But the Kukis being defeated in the Anglo-Kuki war (1917-19), became under the British colonial rule. This was mentioned by Admin, 12/24/2006, ‘Brief History of Kuki’, a paper brought out by Kuki Students Democratic Front (KSDF)

This immigration theory is not appropriate to be used in ethnic classification in the context of Manipur from another angle. Migration is a ‘process’ in our history and is still continuing. As people move from different directions to Manipur valley, those people who reached the valley started settling down and gradually integrated and in fact created certain sort of culture based on the most dominant groups which was later blended/compound into one ‘separate’ kind and give rise to ethnic Meitei, the rest who were still in the hills remain as such. Even in 1880s George Watt was surprised to see in Manipur valley that the Meiteis of northern valley looks more alike to Nagas, the southern to Lushais (Kukis), the eastern to Burman Shans and the western to hillmoms of NC hills and Khasi and Garos. See George Watt, ‘The Aboriginal Tribes of Manipur’, The Journal of the anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. 16. (1887), pp.346-370. And there are stories of ‘Kuki abongba’ and ‘Kuki achaoba’ in Cheitheirol Kumbaba. These people helped the king in about first century. Since there are no authentic historical records in this regard, there are so many varied opinions. There are some individuals who even opine that the rulers of Manipur are either Kukis, Nagas, Shans or Cacharis. There was no ethnic Meiteis in Manipur valley until the so called Kukis, Nagas, Shans, etc came and settle down there and ‘formed’ a plain dwelling group called Meitei. Hence, Manipur valley is the real ‘melting pot’ even more than USA and the outcome of that well-cooked pot is the ethnic Meitei. It follows that we all are one and the same, only time and space make us different; some reach the valley earlier and some later. It was the Vaishnavism and later the British who finally stopped such continuous movement of people into the valley by imposing certain restrictions like ‘lacs’, ‘tribes’ etc.
Mizo Union (predominantly constituted by Hmars), Kuki National assembly (initiated by Thadous and Haokips), and Khul Union (initiated by Paite, Vaipei, Simte, Gangte, Kom, etc.). This was followed by creation of political parties based on community lines by 1950.\textsuperscript{32}

Now let's look into the demands made by the Kukis. As distinct from the Meeteis and the Nagas, they demand formal recognition and application of the VIth (sixth) Schedule to the areas in which they are majority under Indian Constitution, so that even as they remain within Manipur a new district can be carved out especially for them. But the biggest claim they put up so far is the demand for a separate homeland. In a momentous meeting at Thingkhanphai in Churachanpur district during January 19-22, 1960, the “elders” of the erstwhile Kuki National Assembly (established in 1946), raised the issue of Kuki ‘Homeland’ in Manipur. Thereafter, Kuki Chiefs and elders submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on 24 March 1960. The memorandum placed for immediate establishment of Kuki State, and unification of all contiguous areas now under the habitation of the Kukis in India under the proposed Kuki state.\textsuperscript{33}

This democratic aspiration for a Homeland was, however, mired in controversies, as the Kuki habitations were spread through mixed settlements with other communities, and the Nagas themselves nursed primordial grievances against them, since they regarded the Kukis as outsiders and migrants who were deliberately settled by the British authorities and Meetei rulers since the Nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{32}It is perhaps necessary to mention about the Kukis here that apart from the differences over a commonly acceptable nomenclature, a number of tribes of this group have dissociated themselves from the group, and joined the Naga constellation or decided to assert themselves by their individual tribes names. Some of them are also in a state of oscillation between the two largest groups, the Nagas and the Kukis. This has contributed a lot to the confusion regarding the question, who were the Kukis at a given specific period of time? See Dr. Senjam Mangi Singh, 2004, ‘The Kuki-Paite Clashes (1997-98) in Manipur: A study’, paper presented in Seminar on “Ethnic Relations Among the People of North-east India with Special Reference to Manipur”, Centre for Manipur Studies, Manipur University, 10-11 November. See also Oinam, 2003.

The desire for the Kuki people to raise the Sadar Hills in the Northern part of Manipur as a revenue district was strongly objected to by the Nagas, who claimed these areas as part of their ancestral domain. The Sadar Hills in the Senapati district continued to haunt ethnic relations for quite long, and the Naga national movement could however appropriate these areas as part of their future southern Nagalim.

Even if there are counter claims to these demands as some people see them as immigrants, I feel this demand is a legitimate one. Through such arrangements, they feel, they can address their problems more effectively. However, like the Nagas, they are not a single ethnic group. So the question, ‘how will they manage internal differences?’ still remains unanswered.

**The Meeteis**

The Meeteis have been identified as the core community in Manipur. They are settled throughout the Manipur valley and make up about 60 percent of the total population.\(^34\) If we recall Kymlicka’s work, the Meeteis can be the perfect example of a National Minority. They formed a complete and functioning society on their historic homeland prior to being incorporated into larger Indian society. They had been a self-governing people operating in their own language, i.e., the Meeteilon or Manipuri. It is said that they had formed a nation-state by the 15th century. The Anglo-Manipur war of 1891 led to the British conquest of Manipur but Manipur remained a state under the British paramountcy. After independence, Manipur formed its own constitution (the Manipur Constitution Act 1947), and was an autonomous State with complete internal independence.\(^35\)

The case with the Meeteis is that in the larger Indian context they are a minority group. They have been demanding the status of

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\(^34\) Nabakumar, op. cit.

being a National Minority. They claim that they are original settlers of Manipur and Manipur is their motherland. In terms of population they are the biggest ethnic group and had fair amount of political dominance. Fragmentation of Manipuris started with the arrival of Hinduism and British along with Christianity. The revivalist segment of the Meetei population has put up their assumed aspirations that broadly include: Hinduism should be replaced with the Meeteism by doing away with the festivals and rituals of Hindu religion. This particular demand is rationalized on the basis that Meeteis had a distinct religion and a socio-cultural cosmology of its own. The Meetei monarch converted most of his subjects into Hinduism. However, this rule cannot be applied to those who had willingly been converted or drawn to Hinduism on their own individual moral conscience. Since the adoption of Hinduism by the Eighteenth century, the cultural practices of the Meeteis including the script of their language had been replaced by Bengali script followed by additions of imbibed new cultural values based on the Bengal School of Vaishnavism. The impact of the revivalists to reinstate the pre-state-sponsored Hinduism seems so pervasive now that it will be surprising for a cultural historian to encounter practices that impacted the public sphere. For instance, the popular trends is for the discontinuation of Durga Puja and taking an interest in Panthoibee Eratpa, lack of curiosity in Deepavali and giving significance to Emoinu, doing away with and replacing Hindu calendar with Meetei calendar beginning with Cheiraoba (the first of Meetei Calender starts with Cheiraoba celebration) etc.

These practices has also been simultaneously accompanied by demands of the Meeteis that the territorial integrity of Manipur should

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36 When I say that "Hindu culture should be replaced" with the Meetei culture, I don't mean that this is a claim of all sections of Meetei community. Here I am referring to that section of the community who are often termed as "revivalists". There is not much empirical reference available in this regard. However, it is a fact that many of the early cultural practices of the Meeteis have been given renewed emphasis. For instance, people give much importance to "Emoinu Irapta" festival over Dipawali, "Panthoib" has been given preference over Durga Puja, etc.

37 Indrakumar, 2002, op.cit., pp.2-3
not be disturbed in any case and also looking at the future with a rear mirror image of the past where each of the tribes and communities had a peaceful coexistence. This demand seems to be based on one specific point namely, that Manipur is a historically unified and independent territory in which the Meetei kings ruled Manipur giving adequate and considerable local autonomy. Thus, the pre-existent territory where all tribes and communities lived cannot be separated from the Meetei identity. However, in an over emphasis of this fact, the Meeteis too seemed to have forgotten that Manipur is a land inhabited by ever changing ethnic combination and permutation, in short a multicultural and multiethnic cauldron. There are many other people who are as indigenous as the Meeteis. So they cannot claim that Manipur is that land of the Meeteis only.

I argue the case for maintaining the current territorial space of Manipur from a different perspective. That, dividing Manipur into 30/40 pieces (for each ethnic groups) will do more harm than solving the problem. Considering the smallness of its territorial size on the one hand, and the existence of a vast number of ethnic groups within the state, on the other, the division of territory will not be a feasible policy. Instead all communities should learn that living together within the territory with equal respect and concern is the need of the hour.

**The Pangals**
The Muslims of Manipur are called ‘Pangals’ or Meetei-Pangals. It is often claimed that they are different from other Muslims because they have a different history and a unique process of ethnic evolution. They are naturalized people of Manipur following Islam.\(^{(38)}\)

The case of the Meetei-Pangals is altogether different from all other groups. Unlike the Nagas or the Kukis, in that they are a single unified Muslim group settled in the valley sharing space with the Meeteis. Their most important demand is to be recognized as a

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demand, which needs serious consideration.

If we follow the classification made by Kymlicka, the Pangals seem to be immigrants. They are claimed to be not original Manipuris. They arrived there in the 18th century as war prisoners. The Meetei king gave them certain portion of land in Manipur where they started settled lives. However, today they do not speak a language different from the Meeteis. They have adopted the same mother tongue. And significantly, their aspiration is not separation but certain affirmative actions which ensure them proportional seats in legislative Assembly, educational institutions, jobs, etc.\(^{39}\)

As a matter of fact, Pangals should not be seen as immigrants. It is true that they are not indigenous groups of Manipur. Yet, they are well naturalized in the state. Therefore, to add to Kymlicka’s concept, they could be termed as ‘non-indigenous but naturalized’ citizens of Manipur. This does not mean that they are to be incorporated or assimilated into the Meeteis. Rather, they should be treated as original and separate community of Manipur. They should be treated as citizens because, in the first case they arrived here not on their own free will or choice but were brought by Meetei princes as warriors and slaves.

Their case is very similar to that of the Fijian Indians who were brought to Fiji by British colonial masters as indentured labourers. More than that, the Meetei-Panglas started their settled lives by marrying Meetei women. In this sense they are not totally outsiders. Nevertheless, they should be treated as a separate community. Even though they speak Meeteilon as their mother tongue, their religion and other cultural practices are altogether different from the Meeteis and other communities in Manipur.

\(^{39}\) Ahmad, p.cit.
The Mayan (or the other Groups)

I am using a category called ‘Mayans’ for those who do not fall into any of the groups mentioned above. They should not be confused with either isolationist group or the Metics as identified by Kymlika and others. Rather, they are to be seen as complete ethnic groups who remain outside any of the greater social conglomerates viz. the Nagas or the Kukis. They do not belong to the Meetei community either. They are separate groups asserting their rights to exist as distinct people possessing their own identities. Many of them are indigenous tribal communities. But these groups have not been classified in the official Schedule Tribes List of the government of Manipur. Among them mention may be made of the Mates, the Paomeis, the Chongthus, the Kharams, the Taraos, the Inpuis.40 Most of them speak different dialects and languages. For examples, the Taraos use their own dialect known as Taraotrong and have adopted the Roman script for written communications.41 They also pursue cultural practices quite different from the others mentioned above.

When I started this chapter, I had two broad objectives in mind. The first is to critically examine the classification of ethno-cultural groups in Manipur along the lines used by Will Kymlicka in western democratic countries. I have already mentioned that the classification cannot be applied even in the eastern European countries. After an impassionate enquiry on the nature of ethnic diversity in Manipur, I see Kymlicka’s classificatory framework cannot be randomly applied in the North East context too. Thus, it will be cumbersome to apply such method of ethnic classification in other context too. First, he does not clearly define what is ‘complete and functioning society’, a characteristic of National Minority given by him. Second, he does not discuss the size of population of a particular community as an eligibility condition for granting the status of being a National Minority. For me, National Minority is a status which carries certain

41People of India Vol XXXI Manipur, p. 209, 1996.
specific meaning in terms of their claims or demands which need to be fulfilled for a peaceful co-existence. In this sense, the size of population should be an important criterion. This is because of the fact that the most common demand of national minorities is the maintenance of their own self-governed institutions often operating in their own language and sometimes, they even demand outright secession. Further, as I will mention later in this chapter, there are generic groups in Manipur that can not be identified as single cultural entity for granting or considering a common group right.

**Conflicting Claims and Inter-community Relations**
The second objective of the chapter is to discuss the grounds and justifiability of various claims of different ethnic groups within Manipur with a view of creating an atmosphere of ‘multicultural coexistence’. This objective has its own significance due to the fact that ethnic communities existing or living together with equal rights and respect entails certain set of policies which neither deny individuals their basic human rights nor undermine the acceptable practices of cultural community. The remaining pages will be devoted to an elucidation of this objective.

In the previous chapter when the nature of ethnic relations in Meghalaya was discussed, for a clear understanding of the whole problem I divided the conflicts in the state into two viz. between tribal and non-tribal identities, and inter tribal tensions. In Meghalaya the inter-ethnic (between tribes) tensions have become serious threat to the peace of the state. In Manipur, however, the nature of ethnic conflict cannot be subsumed in the same way. The conflicts are mainly among the indigenous ethnic groups only. However, very interestingly, the whole relationship among various ethnic groups in the state can be looked at from two different perspectives; first, relationship between hill tribes and valley inhabitants and second, between different communities in the state.
Hills vs Valley: a question of domination and negligence

The indigenous peoples in Manipur (both hills and plain or valley communities) were said to have a common origin, meaning they were descendants of a single family. There are numerous legends that support such claims. Legends apart, they once had similar habits, manners, customs, and beliefs, many of which still linger in spite of the changes otherwise brought about by many factors such as constant contact with other advanced groups and adoption of different religions. The best example given in this regard has been the coronation ceremony of the King and Queen of Manipur. In that ceremony the King and The Queen had to dress like Nagas and hold a dao and a spear; otherwise the ceremony was declared invalid. The façade of the coronation hall was decorated like the house of a Tangkhul Naga.

Today, however, the peoples of the hills and the valley are quite apart in terms of their beliefs, culture, religion, language, habits, etc. New groups of people have come and settled down in both the Hills and the valley. This, besides constant contact with other advanced groups and adoption of different religions, broaden the gap between the two peoples who were once very close to each other.

Again, the Meeteis, by virtue of their being the majority community of Manipur, are the reference group of the other communities inhabiting Manipur. Their relationship with other groups particularly the hill people is worth analyzing. The history of the Meeteis, though rich in records of assimilating hill people at the individual level, has no substantial evidence of en masse absorption of other groups into the mainstream of Meetei society. As evident from historical records it is beyond doubt that the Meetei kings carried out

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43 Dao is a big and broad knife.
frequent raids on different hill peoples and collected tribute from their Chiefs who also made counter attacks on the Meetei kings. The history of relationship of the Meetei with the neighboring hill tribes centered around the frequent wars fought between the Meetei kings and the Chief of the hill tribes. However, the Meetei kings always had the upper hand. Such a historical reality has paved the way for establishment of the conveners-convenored relationship between the Meeteis and the hill peoples.

And when the Meeteis became the followers of the Vaisnavism, the framework of pollution-purity relationship got fabricated. In the process the alienation of the non-Hindu tribals took its roots. The tribes, who have embraced Christianity since the extension of colonial administration, also have alienated themselves from the Meeteis. This social gap resulted from the mutual alienation becomes wider with the metamorphosis of the colonial subjects into free citizens of independent India.

There is another line of argument on why is the divide between the peoples of Hills and valley aggravated. It says that day by day, the ‘trust’ between various communities is missing and there is total lack of ‘social capital’ in Manipur. This has been brought by not only changing social and political discourses but also there is an evident unequal relationship of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ ethnic groups in the state. This argument takes economic as major factor for the rift between the peoples of hills and the plain. It argues that there is an economic divide between the hills and the plains. The development factor is one important area of conflict in terms of ethnic relations. The people of the hills have been complaining of step motherly treatment by the majority Meetei community towards the development of the hill areas. Elements of history combined with this notion of deprivation makes the tribals unhappy with the major community and this in turn becomes a factor for the increasing distrust between them.

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The spread of education in the hill areas had contributed to the growing consciousness of these communities. Various historical evidences helped them know about their social status in the past vis-à-vis the ill treatment meted out to them by the then Meitei kings. In Shakespeare's 'Manipur Under British Management 1891-1907', it is mentioned that “The hill people were governed avowedly for the benefit of the Manipuris only; they had to make journeys to Silchar bringing goods for their ruler. Although the Manipuris are entirely illiterate they treated all hill men as inferior creatures good only to carry loads, pay revenue and do manual work”. Again in a letter from the Secretary to the Governor of Assam to his Excellency, Crown Representative (22 April 1937) it was mentioned that “Till 1891 as much tribute as possible was extracted from the hill while not a rupee was spent for their upliftment. The method of dealing with recalcitrant subjects in the Hills was simple and a barbarous one based on the fact that all the Hill tribes were head-hunters. If any village failed to pay the taxes demanded, other villages were armed with guns by the State and allowed to go in and decapitate as many inhabitants as they could”. Even after 1891 there was no proper administration of the Hill tribes and no proper provision was made for them in the budget. It was a regrettable fact that neither the king of Manipur nor any concerned British officers was interested in the betterment of the Hill tribes. These above mentioned facts and many others have made the Hill tribes treating the Meiteis with suspicion till today.

It will be interesting to mention at this juncture the case of Kuki rebellion of 1917 to 1919. Though the attempts to conscript laborers from the Hills was considered as primary and immediate cause of rebellion, the administrative system had, in fact, kept apart the hill and the valley subjects for years. Hill people had also been nurturing

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47 A note on Kuki Rebellion prepared by J.E. Webster, Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to Secretary to the Government of India No. 6310 dated 27 June 1919 (Manipur Archives). Also see ‘Extract from the proceedings of the Chief Commissioner of Assam in the political department No.8836, dated 27 September 1920. (Manipur Archives).
ill-will against the authorities since they felt ignored. It was, on the other hand, not possible for the President of the Manipur State Durbar or MSD\textsuperscript{48} to cover in his annual tours the whole of about 20,000 sq km of impassable mountains and give adequate attention to the tribes. Loose administration and dealing of hill people mostly through intermediary persons caused extreme discontentment and unrest among hill subjects. The inexperience of the President of the MSD, want of staff, bad means of communication and lack of funds also added to the problems faced by the hill people. Outwardly the British emphasized the need for good governance in the Hills but no welfare schemes or other development programmes had been implemented there. Thus, some sections of the Kukis, mostly Khongjais viewed the foreigners with suspicion and were not satisfied with the then prevailing system.\textsuperscript{49} Thus, in one sense, this rebellion is part of the expressed dissatisfaction of the hill people against the state system of which the Meetei king was highest authority.\textsuperscript{50} However, some sections of the Meetei community joined hands with the Kukis in their rebellion against the foreigners. And this is a glaring example of the Hill and valley people fought together against the foreign forces in the past.\textsuperscript{51}

There is still another line of argument in this regard. The aspect of material deprivation is causal agent of ethnic tension especially between the Hill and valley people. It is in this context that we need to discuss the material conditions in the Hills and their impact on the Hills and valley relationship in particular and inter-ethnic conflicts in general.

\textsuperscript{48} MSD, stands for Manipur State Durbar formed under the ‘Rules for the General Administration of the state’, is the main body (formed to assist the Maharaja) through which administration of the state is carried out during the British period.

\textsuperscript{49} Phanjoubam, op.cit., p. 146.

\textsuperscript{50} Sir Robert Reid mentions many instances of the neglect of the hill people by the Meeteis in administration. Thus, the rebellion was provoked by lack of good administration in the hill areas. Cited in the Issues Relating to the Territorial Integrity of Manipur – A Naga Perspective, United Naga Council Group, 2002.

\textsuperscript{51} Phanjoubam, op.cit., pp. 147-48.
Still today the material condition in the hills is not impressive. This is many a time seen as a case of alienation, oppression and deprivation of the hill people economically, socially and politically by the majority community living in the valley. In most of the Hills or the tribal areas schools from primary to the higher secondary level lack infrastructure, have less number of teachers and even class rooms are not properly furnished (many of them have been even burned down during the past ethnic clashes). It has been often reported that the children and teenagers are facing problem of poor health and malnutrition. It is very easy to see poor condition of hospitals without proper material, doctor, nurses and scarcity of medicine for patients. Large number poor families are dying due to poor conditions of the hospitals. Those who have settled in the hills have no proper communication with valley people and they are marginalized people facing the problems of food, water, shelter, transport facility, clothing, etc. and so many daily needs are absent in their life. Adding fuel to the fire greater number of hill people or tribals consider ‘themselves’ as second class citizens called by valley people as “Hao”, “Chingmi” and the likes.

However, it will be wrong to highlight these problems only as a result of oppression by the Meeteis over the hill people. Yes, in the historical records, it is shown that in the monarchical past Meetei kings often attacked hill people and extract resources. This is not the case today though. We have a democratic government which is composed of representatives from the Hills as well as the valley. Many MLAs from the hills have been Chief Ministers of Manipur. Moreover, today, valley people are not allowed to buy land and settle in the hill areas. Development and hill people welfare funds have been utilized through tribal Ministers only. It is not that there has not been any fund sanction for the development of the hill territories and its people. The problem lies in the misuse of these funds by those leaders and managers of the funds. Regarding the misuse of these funds, in a personal interview, a professor from Manipur narrated the story of
tribal students selling water pipes which is meant for common use in the Hill areas. In the hilly areas water and its collection is a deadening task. Water pipes are very important for this purpose. The government has sent enough water pipes through the related tribal welfare department. However, these pipes never reached the intended destination. Where has it gone? Very interestingly, however, these kind of problems are used to present as issue of domination, exploitation by larger community of the valley over the hill people.

The atmosphere of mistrust between the hill people and the valley people is further deteriorated due to lack of interaction between the two. This is in fact part of the outcome of the post independence administrative structure of the State. According to the new policy, those who have permanent native inhabitants in the Hills can migrate to any area of the valley of Manipur. Those who have non-resident inhabitant or the valley people are not allowed to migrate to any area of the Hills as they are prohibited to live or to buy land in the Hills. Those who have migrated to the valley from the Hills become more prosperous but those who cannot migrate to the valleys will permanently live in a schools society, disfigured hospital. This is owing to their material conditions of life. In addition to this critical situation, the hill people who migrated to the valleys are further boost up with benefits from SC/ST scheme of the government of India. While the greater number of ST in the Hills do not have such chance to get this opportunity due to lack of information, illiteracy and bad communication. Such misunderstanding and communication gap is increasing day-by-day affecting Hills and valleys relationship. For many years hill societies have been suffering from various problems - economic, educational, and social inequality. The inferior syndrome of the groups of hill people is trapped by their active ethnic militants. These economically backward families drift towards group identity

52My interview with a Professor (name withheld) was on 22-7-08 in Delhi. As the professor does not like me to reveal his name, I am not mentioning his proper identity. However, since he has explained many of the day to day incidents such as the story of 'water pipe', I may use the experiences for supporting my arguments whenever necessary.
giving support to ethnic militant movement. Group psychology polarizes thinking, dividing society into two camps; “we” and “they”. Consequently, it is always the familiar story of “good vs evil” and “us vs them”. The greater the intensity of identification among “we”, the greater is the polarization.

The most recent major ethnic tension was flared up between Kuki and the Meetei at Moreh. This marked yet another rupture in the chequered history of pluralism in Manipur. It is for the first time that two ethnic communities – the Meetei and Kuki – who shared an age-old history of friendship and amity were locked in ethnic tension. The incident at Moreh which nearly sparked off a communal bloodbath between the Meetei and Kuki communities has been assuaged temporarily through the combined efforts of various civil society groups and the Government. However, the press releases of the two militant outfits, which lie at the root of the incident, remind us of conflicting perceptions on issues of land and territory. KNU (Kuki National Organization) believes that the unfortunate event of June 9, 2007 at Moreh, in which 11 people died, were a direct consequence of UNLF’s “intrusive presence in Kuki territory”, and urged “the UNLF to confine their

53 This small place (Moreh) lies at about 120 miles to the southeast of Imphal at the international border adjoining Myanmar. It is important to note the ethnic configuration of this small place as it is where many of the major ethnic violence started. This hill township has a diverse population including Tamils, Malaysians along with Manipur’s ethnic indigene, notably Nagas, Kukis and Meeteis. Interesting point is that Nagas claimed the district of Tengnoupal, wherein Moreh was a major economic and political centre, as the ancestral domain of Nagas. On the other side of the ideological spectrum, the Kukis had been actively pursuing the political goal of Zale’n-gam (Kuki homeland), the abode of Kukis which include Moreh. A significant number of Meetei settled in Moreh too.

54 The Kukis co-existed in peace with the Meeteis right from the time of their first settlement in Manipur. They indeed migrated and settled in the hills of Manipur as early as in the pre-historic times along with or after the Meetei’s “advent” in Manipur valley. However, the great kuki exodus is said to occur in the 18th century A.D. It is true beyond doubt that so far until very recently history has never recorded strained relations between the two communities. The kukis were indeed never ruled by the Meeteis but on the contrary, they came forward to give assistance to them. In this regard, P.S. Haokip (Zalengam, The Kuki Nation, Private Publication, 1998, pp.27) writes, the Meetei King Chourajit could not fight the Ava’s in 1810 and therefore, asked the kukis for help by declaring “the hills surround Manipur Golden Land like a stockade and the tribal guards the stockades” and in due course of time the kuki chiefs also sent its soldiers to guard the Maharajah and his Kingdom so as to resist the merger agreement on the eve of Manipur's annexation to India in 1949 and that has brought about an ideological clash with the Akhil Manipur Hindu Mahasabha. See Ethno-Political Relations Between Kukis and Meeteis, by Th. Hethang Haokip, Thursday, 03 July 2008 20:16, in Kuki International Forum website, www.kukiinform.com.
revolutionary activities, ideologically and physically, to the valley called Manipur, which had been their abode from time immemorial.” The UNLF, on the other hand, charged the KNO of targeting the Meetei people indiscriminately with the sole agenda of whipping up communal tension in Moreh.55 Interestingly, the Naga civil society groups who support the implicit claims of Naga ancestral domain which include Moreh proffered friendship to the Kuki community. Incidentally, the Nagas and the Kukis were involved in a no holds-barred mutual ethnic cleansing campaign in 1992-93, which began from the struggle to control Moreh and its economic under-belly.

**The Root: Colonial Policy and Faltered Political Representation.**

The awry relationship between people of the Hills and valleys is just the tip of the whole problem. The most crucial factor in the problem is the inter community relationship. We have a very complex inter-ethnic relationship in Manipur. This complex nature of ethnic relationship has been many a time overlooked by producing a generalized ethnic mapping of Manipur. That generalized ethnic mapping present Manipur to be a home of only three communities viz. the Meeteis of the valley and the Naga and the Kukis of the surrounding hills.56 This sort of simplification conceals many important factors in the ethnic relationship of the state. The conflicts are not only between the so called Generic groups Nagas and Kukis or between the Meiteis and the Nagas, etc. there are whole lot of tussles within the composite groups. We need to take into account all such problems for the clear understanding of ethnic relationship in the state. This is because of the fact that one of the important problems in the state in particular and in the northeast region of India in general is the rise of sectarianism and the growth of sub-nationalism characterized by the agenda of exclusivist identities.

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56 For such generalized ethnic mapping of Manipur see Kabui, Gangumei, 1988.
It is often said that the need to classify and name the people with whom they came into contact and eventually governed was almost a compulsion with the British bureaucrats. During the pre-British period, tribals have their independent identity as they were known by their different tribal names. But during the British colonial rule, they were broadly categorized for administrative convenience which was a causative factor for emerging pan-tribal identity. According to the classical classification of earlier British ethnographers, of the twenty-nine Schedule Tribes of Manipur, namely, Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Koirao, Maring, Kom, Lamkang, Monsang, Moyon, Mizo (Lusai), Paite, Purum, Ralte, Sukte, Simte, Thadou, Vaipei and Zou are Kukis and the remaining seven tribes such as Angami, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Mao, Maram, Sema and Tangkhul are Nagas. As a part of the British political strategy the hill tribes were administered by the British political Agent and the valley by the Maharaja. Again, the tribes were also encouraged to form tribal solidarity organizations. As a result after the Second World War every known tribe was organized into tribal organizations and the Meitei political elites formed territorial based organizations instead of ethnic based organization. Thus ethnicity was ‘invented’ by the British in their administration with far reaching consequences.

The situation was further aggravated when the popular government of Manipur was replaced by bureaucratic rule under the Chief Commissioner. Many are of the view that with the departure of the British in 1947, the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 provided monarchy with a representative form of Government. The Drafting Committee members were nominated from among the hill tribes also. In the 53 member assembly, eighteen seats were reserved

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for hill tribes which were represented by five Tangkhuls, two Zeilanrong, one Monshang and nine Kuki-Chins including Paite. Every community was represented except the Mao as there was no election due to political agitation. Historian Kamei Gangumei says that the participation of the hill tribes in the Drafting Committee and the mandate of various hill tribes and valley people were for a separate united Manipur with treaty relations with the dominion of India. But such a highly functional plural democracy models were put to an abrupt end after Manipur was merged with India on 15 October, 1949. The ugly head of colonialism resurfaced when the popular Government of Manipur was abolished and replaced by bureaucratic rule under the Chief Commissioner. The British legacy of polarizing the ethnic diversity of hills was followed when, in 1951, the Schedule Tribe List of Manipur was notified as ‘Any Kuki tribe’ or ‘Any Naga tribe’, and ‘Any Lushai tribe’, without making any mention of the ethnic names of the different tribes. So political derrepresentations combined with ethnic polarization became fertile breeding grounds for the spurt of identity and ethnic assertion. When such assertion led to the claim over a territory as ones own homeland by armed protagonist, it fosters ethnic tension and conflict.

It is often stated that the Kukis and the Nagas had a historical grudge against each other because of the divisive policy of the British colonialism. In 1840, the then political agent, Mc Culloch adopted the policy of implanting Kuki settlement to act as a buffer against the recalcitrant Nagas. The colonial officials recruited Kukis to suppress the Zeilangrong Raj Movement initiated by Zadongnang of Kambiron (Puilon), southern side of Tamenglong in 1925-26. Kukis and Nagas lived together right from the prehistorical period. The Nagas are more concentrated in the four districts of Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati and

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60 Kamei, 2003, op.cit. also see Das, 2001, op.cit.
61 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
Tamenglong whereas the Kukis are scattered all over the Hills of Manipur. Initially the colonial policy was to insulate British territory from any Burmese threat. Therefore, in 1840, McCulloch, the then Political Agent, purposely adopted the policy of allowing the settlement of Kukis on the front lines and even among the Nagas. The double purpose of the Kuki settlement in and on the frontiers of Manipur was that the Kukis had to act as a buffer, first, against the Burmese and, second, against the recalcitrant Nagas and Lushai tribes. In a like manner, the colonial administrators also used the Nagas first against the Burmese and then against the Kukis and the Lushais. And on different occasions, such as the invasion of the Mao Nagas in north Manipur, the Suktes in south Manipur and the Naga uprising in Kohima in 1879, the Kuki warriors were used by the colonial officials and this was the time when probably the first seed of discontentment of the Nagas against the Kukis was sown.64 Thereafter, the Kukis, settled at the exposed frontiers of the state, were constantly locked in deadly clashes with Nagas.65

The Twin Etymon of Conflict: Assertion of Identity and Contest over Resources.

Post-independence ethnic conflicts in the state are often rooted in two important reasons; contest over land and other material resources, and assertion of cultural identity and demand for recognition. Besides these two factors, politics play an important role in mobilizing people on ethnic lines which ultimately lead to ethnic conflicts. This, however, is not to overlook other several factors which contribute to the conflict in the state. Some, for example, start narrating the story of how growth

64Laba, Yambem, 1995, 'Kuki-Naga Conflict: An Insight Imphal' (Unpublished manuscript)
65In 1892, some 286 persons were massacred when a band of Kukis raided Chingjaroi Naga village in the eastern Manipur. In a series of intra-tribal conflict, a Kabui Naga village in the western part of the state in one of the retaliatory attacks of a previous foray on their village wiped out a small Kuki settlement in 1918 slaying the inhabitants. The leader of the same Kuki settlement, in yet another revengeful act, collected supporters and destroyed 20 Kabui villages besides taking 76 heads. The main reason for the frequent clashes was because of attempts by different tribes to dominate over the other. Kukis from Burma borders also made forays on some frontier Naga villages to extract their allegiance and pay tribute to them. See Tarapot Phanjoubam, p.144.
of sub-nationalism and ‘displacement’ become reasons behind ethnic conflict in the region. Still others talk about demographic configuration as the cause of conflicts. However, my contention is that all these factors are the outgrowths of the groups’ contest for limited resources such as land, and their conscious longing for the promotion of cultural identity and demands for recognition.

In the pre-British period the large number of tribes had their independent existence with more or less closely-knit way of life. During the colonial rule, these tribes were grouped into larger categories such as the “Nagas” and the “Kukis”. This was the starting point of politicization of the tribal communities and pan-tribal identity movements. Thus, started the emergence of collective consciousness among the tribes in the region through the formation of separate political identities. In addition to their earlier existing identities both as a cultural and political unit, a new form of assertion attempting internalization of new political ethos is in the process. The tribes in the state are not only trying to redefine themselves through this new consciousness, but many (larger) tribes are moving out of tribal identity to that of ethnic community identity. To take the case of Nagas as an instance, after the creation of ‘Naga’ by the British as an identity projected for better administrative purposes, self appropriation of the group came into being with the creation of Naga club. It initially started, in the same colonial fashion like that of Indian National Congress, with the participation of English educated Nagas serving under the British Indian Army. And in the process, Angami Zapu Phizo, as the champion of Naga self-determination, called for a separate Naga State outside the Indian union. Thus came

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66 Koireng Aheibam, Growth of Sub-nationalism and Displacement in the North East India with Special Reference to Manipur, the Orient Vision, p. 8.
69 The Naga club in 1929 submitted a historical memorandum with the demand for excluding Nagas from the propose ‘Reformed Scheme’ (by Simon Commission) of India. The Nagas preferred to be under direct administration of the British Government so that their rights are protected and guarded against all encroachments from the non-Nagas. See Vashan, 2000, and also Oinam, 2003.

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the projection from the Naga national workers that Nagas achieved independence one day before India did. The creation of Naga political identity is still in the process. However, during the course of its formation we have witness many claims and counter-claims which lead to tensions and conflicts. We will see in the later part of this chapter how ethnic conflicts are manufactured during such identity formations. On the one hand larger groups are trying to expand their ethno-cultural boundary by way of bringing the other ethnic groups, either through coercion or cultural level or both, to their ethnic fold, on the other hand many of the groups who were part of the larger 'identity' want to have separate cultural and political identity. Even in regard to religion these smaller tribes want to delink themselves from the influences of other religions.

These ethnic tensions and clashes due to the questions of identity have another manifestation in Meetei-Naga tension. The much covert Meetei-Naga tension shows the complexity of the ethnic relationship in the state. One of the prominent causes for the development of this tension is the fast expanding Naga nationalism. The Naga identity formation in Manipur engages a particular method (of projecting a common enemy to consolidate otherwise scattered groups through which new community identity is formed) largely based on anti-Meetei sentiment. The propagation of its political standpoint is marked by what is often stated as the past 'ill doings of the (hinduised) Meeteis to the hill tribes.70

In a State, such as Manipur, which is small in terms of geographical territory but inhabit a large number of ethnic groups, contest over limited resource is often a factor leading to ethnic conflict. Naga and Kuki clash started over control of Moreh town though it spread over all the Naga Kuki inhabited areas not only in the state of Manipur, but also to the adjoining states of Nagaland and Assam. Moreh is a commercial town mainly flourishing on border trade where wide range of smuggling operates, starting from

70 Oinam, op.cit.
household items to drugs and narcotics. The town is the financial nerve centre of the insurgent organizations, particularly the Nagas and the Kukis. It was over the control of this town that the tussle started between these two groups. Chandel district, where Moreh is located, is mainly inhabited by thadou Kukis and Maring Nagas. With the UNC's increasing anti-Kuki stand, the outburst took place on May 12, 1992 when NSCN-IM burnt down Kuki villages at Molphei. Thus, a chain of massacres started. Immediate reasons behind Naga-Kuki clash are: control and occupation of Moreh, tax on Kuki residents in Naga territory by the Naga militants and refusal by the Kukis to pay, and refusal to renew the land agreement by the Nagas to the Kukis.

Today many more conflicts are in the offing. Expressing concern over undue interference from other religious groups and attempt for forceful conversion of believers of Tingkao Rag-wang, General Secretary of Chingmeirong Rongmei Pei Authority, R Aholeng has pledged that the Pei Authority would try its level best in preservation and promotion of the indigenous religion, culture and tradition of the Rongmei people. Talking to media persons in this connection at Chingmeirong Kabui Village, Aholeng observed that disowning one's own religion, culture and tradition amounts to disowning one's own identity. So every possible effort should be made toward preservation of the cultural elements and tradition of the Rongmei community. Taking serious note of the undue influence of other religions, which he maintained, is posing a threat to the existing religion and cultural elements of the Rongmei people, Aholeng is apprehensive of a possible inter-religious conflict if such undue interferences are not stopped in time. He also reminded all concerned people that even if the Indian Constitution allows any person to profess the religion of one's choice, any forceful conversion and luring people to convert is in contravene to the provisions of the Constitution as well as to the judgment of the Supreme Court in this regard. So along with embracing Tingkao

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71 Op. cit.
Ragwang wholeheartedly, the Chingmeirong Rongmei Pei Authority would continue to work for the preservation and the promotion of the religion and culture of the Rongmei people, he said.\textsuperscript{73}

**Ethnicization of Land; and Foul Politics**

Land has become an important political agenda among ethnic groups in the recent past in Manipur thereby making a ground for ethnic conflict. Instead of sloganeering land as 'capital', 'the right of the peoples and nations to sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources' has been projected as the starting point for political campaign. Projecting 'possession of native land' as an inalienable rights not only unifies tribes under pan-Naga identity because of common practical interest of inheritance of each tribe, but this strategy also serves as a good ground for wiping out the enemy.\textsuperscript{74}

Violence is often seen as the unavoidable means of realizing the community's inalienable rights. Whether it is East Timor or northern Sri Lanka or Northern Ireland, the story has all been the same. Naga-Kuki story is nothing different in this regard. Rishang Keising, the Deputy Chief Minister at the time of Naga-Kuki clash (1992) was of the opinion that land disputes due to encroachment, imposition of heavy taxes in hill areas for many years and demand for 'homeland' from both sides were responsible for the outbreak of the clashes.\textsuperscript{75}

What is worth studying the adoption of political moves which not only integrates the constituting groups within a party but also finds rational ground for justifying certain strategic means which otherwise are morally as well as legally unjustified. 'Migration' and 'settlement' have been projected as the best-suited themes to enhance such moves.

I am apprehensive about such projections. Though migration is a universal phenomenon, locating migrants (especially in the case of Manipur) is an uphill task. Where do we draw the historical line of

\textsuperscript{73}Sangai Express, 28 August, 2007.

\textsuperscript{74}Oinam, 2003.

\textsuperscript{75}The Freedom, 1993, 'An exclusive Interview with Rishang Keising', May 24, Imphal
demarcation? Who are to be called ‘natives’, and who the ‘migrants’? If we look back to the history we all are migrants. The nature of such assertions is more political than historical. Therefore, it is worth challenging the thesis of historical rooted-ness, the idea of nativity, of a community or tribe over the land it propose to hold/control beyond the areas where their mode of production operates. The infamous Naga-Kuki conflict started with the issue of settlement, more accurately with UNC’s ‘quit notice’ as mentioned earlier. The argument of the Naga apex body supported by many others was that Kukis have been residing in the land ancestrally owned by the Nagas, that they are intruders, and hence they have no rights over the ‘Naga territory’. The expression ‘Naga dominated areas’ is now converted into ‘Naga inhabited areas’. The change in the expression not only pictures the present state of affairs but also takes a step towards verifying the claim of the Nagas over their ‘ancestral land’, that the demographic composition is exclusively Nagas.

The problem of migration and settlement continued even after the Naga Kuki clash in the district of Churachanpur between the Kukis and the Paites. Following the same trend, fear became the focal point of conflict. The fear in the Paites was that of being demographically overshadow, land being snatched, and politically dominated by the increasing Thadou Kuki migration in the so called ‘Kuki homeland’. In spite of Kuki attempt to create Zale’n-gam (with Paites included), Paites refuse to be dominated and subsumed both in form and content.

Thus, this Kuki Naga conflict is partly responsible for the ethnicization of land and territory in Manipur. Mass exodus of Naga civilians started from Moreh area on July 13, 1992, after KNA (Kuki National Army) served quit notice to Tangkhuls residing in Moreh on 30th May, 1992. Meanwhile, Sadar Hills District Student Union

77These two communities were earlier grouped under the common nomenclature ‘Kuki’.
78Kamei, 1988, op.cit.
called for Manipur bandh on July 22nd and 23rd to press their demand for creating a full fledged Sadar Hills District with the administrative jurisdiction boundary of Kangpokpi as its boundary. The demand for Sadar Hills District was construed by the Nagas as a step towards the realization of Kukiland. In connection with it NSCN (IM) took the stand that it cannot include even an inch of the land of the Nagas. Such stand of the NSCN (IM) was later parroted by other over ground organizations of the Nagas.

Such territorial politics have been sharply manifested in the respective demands by underground organizations of Kukis and the Nagas. KNF, which has been in existence since 1988, seeks a separate Kukiland within India consisting of the districts of Chandel, Churachandpur, parts of Tamenglong and parts of Senapati. NSCN (IM) also has the agenda of integrating all Naga inhabited areas under one political entity. So in the process of evolving the Naga inhabited areas, the Naga ultras must have felt the inevitability of either driving out the Kukis or assimilating the intermediary tribes in their fold either through persuasion or force. According to NSCN-IM the active collaboration of the Kukis with the Indian occupation force and the demand for the creation of Kuki homeland by carving out the Naga territory was the genesis and the crux of the Kuki-Naga clashes.

It is interesting to note that the clashes had repercussion on the smaller intermediary tribes like Kom, Koireng, Chiru, Aimol, Karam, etc. in that it has strengthen their independent and intermediary identity by remaining aloof from either group as they don’t want to be a party to the conflict. Sometimes these small groups assert their opposition to the political agendas of the larger groups. The Chin Kuki Mizo (CHIKM) Congress while condemning the demand for the Kuki homeland by the KNF issued a press release on the later part of May, 1993, that such demand has created turmoil in the hills of Manipur. In the process the larger Kuki polity got fragmented due to ideological

80 Koireng, op. cit. p.9.
differences among the constituent ethnic groups. Thus another
generic group “Khulmi” was born. The Khulmi was constituted by
Paites, Vaipeis, Gangtes, Simtes, Zou and other non-Thadou tribes
from the Kuki-Chin groups who claimed to have originated from
“Khul” meaning cave. Though pan-tribal concept of “Khulmi”
disappeared after it was not granted recognition by the Government of
India, none of its member tribes returned to the Kuki fold. The non-
Thadou Kukis in Churanchapur looked upon the KNF and its demand
for Kuki homeland with suspicion, as they already have experienced
inconvenience regarding the imposition of Kuki homeland tax.
Majority of them feel that if the Kukis have to demand homeland, they
can do it so at Sadar Hills but not in Churachandpur. They don’t
want to be a part of Kuki homeland under Thadou hegemony. Thus,
in the recent times we witness many tribes such as the Hmars, the
Paites, the Gangtes, the Vaipeis, etc. have disowned the name Kuki
and have averted their own ethnic identity. Such an act led to the
formation of splendid groups like the Hmar National Union, the Paites
National Council, the Gangtes Tribal Union, the Simte National
Council, the Vaipei National Council and Mate Tribal Union. This is
primarily because of the lack of common ideology and partly because
of the dominant attitude of the larger group namely the Thadous.

There also exists an aspiration of Zo land or Zomi land among
some sections of non-Thadou Kukis. Zomi are another generic group
which came into prominence after Kuki-Paite clashes constituted by
Paites, Vaipeis, Zou, Tedim Chin, Gangte, Mate and Simte.82

Thus, clearly the conflict which led to the large scale
displacement, hardships in Manipur are about the aspirations of
exclusive ethnic territories under the influence of ethno-identity
politics and resistance to it.

Perhaps it is important to mention here the recent turmoil in
the state over the demand of separate territory by the Nagas. Meeteis
today feel embattled and embittered by the identity discourse of the

82 Aheibam, op. cit. p.11.
Nagas that threatens a radical diminution of the state's territory. Meeteis narratives of Manipur stress the state's historical pluralism. A publication brought out to publicize the Manipuri point of view during the controversy over the ceasefire puts it this way: it is an undeniable fact that there are many similarities in customs, habits and manners between the Meeteis and hill people. The term 'Naga', it points out, quite accurately about a period that is now past, 'had never been applied to the hill people of Manipur', but it was a term used by the Tai-Ahom kings of Assam and the British to refer only to the people who inhabit the territory that is today called Nagaland. It puts out that two tangkhul Naga politicians, Yangmasho Shaiza and Rishang Keising have been Chief Ministers of Manipur. And Meeteilon or Manipuri, it claims, is the 'language of all Manipuris' since it is both the language of the Meeteis and the lingua franca of the hill peoples.83

Meeteis resent that Nagas are supposedly trying to 'destroy' their state. Since Nagas acquired 'a state of its own within a short span of time', even when 'historical states like Manipur' did not, their aspirations have now 'run wild' even 'threatening the territorial integrity of the other historical and advanced states like Manipur and Assam'. Meeteis are critical of Manipuri Nagas who identify with NSCN-IM: 'it is most unfortunate' that sections of some tribes who 'claim' to be Nagas and 'whose roots are deeply embodied in Manipur and whose parents shed blood for Manipur are now working in tandem with an outfit (i.e. the NSCN-IM) whose ambition is to destroy Manipur'.84

Manipur's anxiety about the Naga's claim on its territory long precedes the current controversy. In 1994 when the Nagaland Assembly called for the unification of all Naga areas, the Manipur Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution to uphold the territorial

83 This was in the pamphlet by AMCTA (All Manipur College Teachers Association), Manipur Fact File 2001, Imphal, Manipur: All Manipur College Teachers Association cited in Sanjiv Baruah, Confronting Constructionism.
84 Ibid.
integrity of Manipur. Interestingly enough, the Chief Minister of Manipur at that time was a Tangkhul Naga, Rishang Keising.85

There is a demand now for an amendment to the Constitution of Indian to guarantee the inviolability of Manipur's borders. Like Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur merged with India as a distinct entity, says a Manipuri publication. Since it had a ‘definite historical international boundary at the time of the merger’ India should not destroy those boundaries. ‘Neither alien force nor internal contradiction can break the territorial integrity of Manipur’.86

Political Game: Instrumentalist Agenda

Ethnic conflict in the state has to do with the political games of the day too.87 Ethnic identity has been often used by political elites to enhance their political position. Many of the violent ethnic clashes in the state are the results of such political games. There are many examples in this regard. To mention the least, it is said by the President of Kuki National Organization (KNO), that the pogroms against the Kukis...
started only after the NSCN-IM faction was created. The reason is that on 30th April 1988 at 5:30 am Muivah’s group was attacked by NSCN-Khaplang group and Burmese army. Muivah along with his 32 men managed to survive the assault and teamed up with the Chaimen Isak Awu. The latter was compelled to stay back with some men because of his sickness. About forty of them excluding Isak Swu started to make for home in the later part of October 1988 in which further attack led to the killing of its another eleven members and only seven of them finally reached the lower part of the Konyak area after three months. It was also alleged that fighting with Khaplang resulted to the killing of many committed Naga nationalists. At such juncture, Muivah, fearing Naga retribution initiated an anti-Kuki drive as a diversion scheme. It is quite pertinent that Muivah because of his enmity with Khaplang, no longer feels secure to operate from Burma. So in his quest to establish his base in the hills of Manipur he might have found it inevitable to evict the Kukis as he viewed them with certain skepticism. Thus the trouble started brewing up between them. Even though this clash between the two groups is tried to project ethnic jehad by leaders of each group against each other, many people within the Kuki-Naga community insist that it is between NSCN (IM) and KNF. The then Governor of Manipur Lt. General V.K. Nayar, in his report to the President of India on October 5, 1993 recommending a proclamation of Article 356 stated that the conflict was an expansion of National Socialist Council of Nagalim [NSCN] (IM)’s expansionist design, fight for control of NH-39 and Moreh for illegal resources borne out of smuggling of narcotics and contraband trade, and to get a major share of Rs. 12.5 crores of Maphou Dam in Thoubal. Further, he added

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88 Cited in Abeibam, op.cit., p. 8. Also see KNO’s Rejoinder to Isak and Muivah’s (NSCN-IM) article ‘Kuki and Naga Public Clashes’ appeared at www.nscnonline.org.
89 Ibid. Koireng, and KNO’s Rejoinder to Ishak.
90 Example turmoil in Moreh was not taken to be ethnic clash. See Poknapham, 18th Anniversary Special Issue, 1 February, 1994, p.8.
that ethnic complexion has been injected by the leaders of both the communities to further their political agenda.\textsuperscript{91}

These are just ocular incidents. There are many invisible political games playing around the ethnicity. The case of Tarao tribe is very interesting one. This Tarao tribe is one of those tribes in Manipur which have their distinct ethnic identity. The only problem with them is that they are very small tribe in terms of population. Their educational level is also very low. At many occasions they expressed their longingness for preserving that distinct identity. During ethnic clashes between Nagas and the Kukis, they remained neutral. However, bigger tribal groups, especially the Nagas have been urging them to be with them. In a personal interview, on 23-7-08 in Delhi, a Professor from Manipur University talked about a Tarao student. This student, perhaps, is the first Tarao tribal student to complete M.A. The student said that even if they are culturally different from Tangkhul (a major group in Naga conglomerate) and want to be identified as Tarao, have no option than to be identified as Tangkhul in order to get Schedule Tribe status and facilities thereof, as Tarao tribe is not recognized by the State. He cannot, even if very underdeveloped socially, educationally and economically, seek ST status as a Tarao. Not only that, Tarao students are strictly warned by some bigger tribal communities against establishment of their own independent Tarao student union. If they want to have an organization it should be “Tarao Naga Student Union” not ‘Tarao Student union’.\textsuperscript{92}

This clearly shows that smaller groups are often victims of the political games of the larger groups. Discussing about possibility (or impossibility) of ‘ethnic homeland’, some have even out rightly worded such demands as “selfish motives”. It is said that demand for a homeland is very often not the battle cry of the man in the street. It is fuelled by those with political ambition or those who need to establish

\textsuperscript{91}The Freedom, 1994, Historic Report of Manipur – T Secretary to the President of India’, Imphal, March 8-10.
\textsuperscript{92}Interview with a Professor from Manipur, op. cit.
a political platform for themselves. There is no dearth of self-style political wannabes among small ethnic communities. "These leaders use their educational backgrounds and oratorical skill to brainwash people. They speak of an ideological homeland, where the future will be brighter and where there are fewer people to share resources".93 Accordingly, whether the demand for a homeland becomes a reality is immaterial. In the intervening period, these self-styled leaders accumulate a lot of political clout.

**Economic Backwardness and Ethnic Violence**

Now let me stress very briefly to another aspect of this issue of ethnic conflicts. This is regarding the economic backwardness, development process and ethnic conflict as linked problems. This aspect can be analyzed at two levels, first, how can economic development be better managed, so as to reduce the potential for violent ethnic conflict? Second, is there any link between these two phenomena, if yes what is that link all about? While I will take the first question in the next Chapter when I study the role of redistribution in maintaining ethnic tension in a given social set up, I will concentrate here on the second question.

It is said that violent conflict between rival ethnic groups sometimes breaks out spontaneously, but "ethnic conflict" is mostly a struggle between rival organizations seeking to maintain or gain control of state power. To understand ethnic conflict, we must understand the role ethnicity plays in mobilizing, structuring, and managing such organizations.94 It also insists, further, that we must

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93Patricia Mukhim, 'Ethnic Homeland or Myth', *Telegraph*, 24-1-06.
94 Readers will see here the influence of "resource mobilization" theories of conflict that trace their roots to theories of collective action proposed by Karl Marx. Perhaps the most important contemporary scholar writing in this genre is Charles Tilly (1978). Kerbo (1982), provides a useful comparative critique of resource mobilization theory and an alternative that places greater emphasis on conflict as a mass phenomenon, relative deprivation theory. See also John M. Richardson Jr. and Sinjinee Sen, School of International Service, American University, March 24, 1996 Ethnic Conflict and Economic Development: A Policy Oriented Analysis, Prepared for a workshop in Budapest, Hungary, May 15-17, 1996, in connection with an international research project on Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Conflict Management and Resolution: International Experience and Lessons for Central Europe. A preliminary version was given at a workshop held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, March 27-29,
understand how leaders use ethnically divisive strategies to mobilize political support. In typical scenarios, leaders of a dominant ethnic group gain office and then use state institutions to distribute economic and political benefits preferentially to their ethnic brethren. Discrimination against subordinate group members, often portrayed as less deserving human beings, accompanies this preferential treatment. When force is needed to impose discriminatory practices and quell subordinate group resistance, it is exercised by police officers and soldiers recruited almost exclusively from the dominant group, who often view themselves as "ethnic soldiers". In democratic societies, a dominant group, that is majority often uses its voting power to entrench discriminatory practices by legal or quasi legal means. When a dominant group is the minority, it typically imposes discriminatory policies by force although, as in South Africa, cosmetic democratic institutions may legitimize discrimination. Democracy alone cannot ensure ethnic harmony. Instead, it may allow freer expression of ethnic antagonisms and legalized persecution of minorities.95

Subordinate group members may suffer discrimination for an extended period of time, however a sense of shared deprivation strengthens identification with their group, providing a basis for political mobilization along ethnic lines. Before inter-group relations polarize, "moderate" subordinate group leaders often seek a modus vivendi with their dominant group counterparts. In some nations, notably Malaysia, leaders have been able to work out a relatively stable accommodation, involving trade offs between political and economic power. More typically pleas of subordinate group leaders for accommodation are ignored or judged to be "politically infeasible" by dominant group leaders. The more severe and inflexible the discrimination, the more probable that subordinate group members will become radicalized. As radicalization proceeds, subordinate group

95Richardson and Sinjinee Sen, op.cit.
members shift support from moderate to militant leaders. Militant leaders form disciplined paramilitary organizations committed to violent force as the only feasible strategy for ending discrimination.

An escalating spiral of violent political conflict, ethnic polarization, social disintegration and economic decline is the most probable outcome. This scenario has been all too prevalent in developing nations and now in former Communist nations. Ethnic conflicts, once they become violent, are exceedingly difficult to resolve. Indeed, some observers argue that separating protagonists physically is the only practicable solution. Since members of dominant and subordinate groups are often economically interdependent and physically intermingled, however, this "solution" may be impossible or only slightly less tragic than protracted conflict.

It is easy to see why subordinate group members who experience discrimination would use ethnicity as a basis for political mobilization and eventually turn to militant leaders who argue that "we have no choice" but violence. However, protracted ethnic conflict is, more often than not, a negative sum game in which both dominant and subordinate groups lose. Lebanon, Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslavia, Sudan, Rwanda, Ethiopia and the Punjab are just a few recent examples of conflicts where the long-term costs of discriminatory policies to almost all involved far outweighed any conceivable benefits. In view of this history, it is often asked that why do dominant group leaders choose to implement discriminatory practices in the first place. Also, why they so often underestimate the probability of a violent subordinate group response, and their capacity to deal with it? Thus it is said that typical development policies and

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96 This point is emphasized in works of the late Edward Azar (1987, 1990) who labeled the phenomenon protracted social conflict. K.M. de Silva and S.W.R.D. Samara Singhe's edited volume, Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflict (1993) includes a number of case studies that emphasize the difficulties of resolving ethnic conflicts.

97 This is sometimes termed "the green line solution" after the line that divides Greek and Turkish factions in Cyprus. A more extreme version of this approach has motivated "ethnic cleansing" policies, most visibly in nations of the former Yugoslavia. See also Rechardson and Sijinee Sen, op. cit.

the process of development, as they unfold in many developing nations, contribute to such miscalculations.

A supportive climate for this cycle of discrimination and militant response is provided by long standing beliefs and attitudes, held by many ethnic group members in multi-ethnic nations. Most important among these are historical legacies of mistrust, a mentality of victimization, and feelings of shared deprivation. They make group members more receptive to simplistic appeals from extremist leaders and encourage leaders to make such appeals.

Thus, in the context of Manipur too one of the reasons for the hill tribes to organize into militant organizations is to fight against the injustices done by the majority and more advance community namely the Meeteis. As evident from historical records it is beyond doubt that the Meetei kings carried out frequent raids on different hill peoples and collected tribute from their chiefs who also made counter attacks to the Meetei kings. It is argued that there is an economic divide between the hills and the plains. The development factor is one important area of conflict in terms of ethnic relations. The people of the hills have been complaining of step motherly treatment by the majority Meitei community towards the development of the hill areas. Elements of history combined with this notion of deprivation makes the tribals unhappy with the major community and this in turn becomes a factor for the increasing distrust between them. As mentioned earlier, In Shakespeare’s, Manipur Under British Management 1891-1907, it is mentioned that “The Hill people were governed avowedly for the benefit of the Manipuris only; they had to make journeys to Silchar bringing goods for their ruler. Although the Manipuris are entirely illiterate they treated all hillmen as inferior creatures good only to carry loads, pay revenue and do manual work”. Still today, hill tribes are claiming that the material condition in the hills is not impressive. This is many a time seen as a case of alienation, oppression and deprivation of the hill people economically, socially and politically by the majority community in the valley. Such
condition of the hill people is said to be a key factor for the strained relationship between the hills and the valleys. If I quote one of the most popular historians of present Manipur, "the hill people face a number of basic problems. The poverty of the hill people is reflected in several forms - illiteracy, ill health, unemployment, failure of commercial development and general development. This dissatisfaction is reflected in complex political agitations including insurgencies organized by different ethno-groups." 99

We need to analyze this matter further to prove such propositions. I will take this issue further to the next chapter where I discuss the role of redistribution in easing ethnic tensions. For the time being it is suffice to say that economic backwardness of the hill people has been often made responsible for the present dismal relationship between the hills and the valleys.

**Justifiability of Territorial Demands**

The demand for separate territories is not new in the 60 years history of independent India. In the process of fulfilling such demands territories of the federal units in the country have been reorganized at different levels. But, there are demands which cannot be fulfilled by just dividing the territory on the basis of administrative conveniences. Because, it involves a complex problem of managing demands from various communities within limited territory. This demand for separate territory by different groups has led to more political conflicts and armed insurgency in Manipur which is already besieged by identity politics based on cultural differences. Since I cannot devote much space to discuss the much debated problem of territorial integrity of Manipur vis-à-vis demands for separate territories by different groups in the state, I confess that this is an injustice not only to certain sections of the population but also to the complex problem. However,

the sole purpose of this is to highlight the complicated ethnic relationship in the state.

The demand for “Nagalim” or “Greater Nagaland” is perhaps India’s most enceinte example of territorial demands (based on differential cultural identity) by ethnic groups within a multi-ethnic state. We need a serious discussion on this particular issue because of two very important reasons among others. First, this demand from the ‘Nagas’ seems to be legitimate as they seek autonomy to promote their distinct cultural values which they often claimed to be bottled up under the domination of major community. Second, this is not the demand the State has been facing. There are claims and counter claims over the territory of Manipur from various groups. While I will discuss the legitimacy of this particular of the Nagas little later, let me very briefly cast here the counter claims to the demand for “Nagalim”.

Cutting across party line and affiliation, various political leaders of the State including that of the ruling Congress have come out strongly against the Nagaland State Congress unit’s message to the Centre to integrate all contiguous Naga inhabited areas with Nagaland. The Nagaland Congress, in its annual general session on August 25 adopted a resolution to the effect of working towards integrating all the Naga-inhabited areas with Nagaland and settling the boundary dispute with Assam. The session also urged the Centre to implement the same. Denouncing the move of the Nagaland

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There are other similar demands from other ethnic communities in the state such as demand for Kuki homeland by the ‘Kukis’. However, since this demand of the ‘Nagas’ is the most politicized and known to larger section of the country, I am taking this example. Not only have such exclusivist territorial demands in the form of separate autonomous territory, there been problems and turmoil over demands of separate district by ethnic groups. Demand for upgrading Sadar Hills to a full-fledged revenue district is one fine example. Decrying the alleged indifferent attitude of the Government to the demand for the last 35 years, president of Sadar Hills District Demand Committee Hao-kholien Guiite has asked the State Government to make its stand clear on the issue and come out with a clarification on why the demand cannot be met so that the people of the area can start looking for another way for their survival. Intensifying its demand to grant full revenue district status to Sadar Hills, the Demand Committee imposed a 48-hour total bandh in Sadar Hills area including the stretches of the NH39 and NH- 53 passing through the area since the midnight of August 26. Picketing of Government offices, financial institutions and educational institutions in Sadar Hills is already in force over the same demand in the said areas. See Sangai Express, 28 August 2007.

Sangai Express, 28 August 2007.
Congress unit, the Congress led Secular Progressive Front (SPF) Government in the state has termed the resolution as provocative, while its partner CPI has categorically stated that the Centre will never heed to such moves as the UPA is committed to safeguarding the existing boundaries of the Northeastern region. The August 25 resolution of the Nagaland Congress was passed barely ten days after an all-political party meeting at Imphal that resolved to hold a special Assembly session to discuss the recent submission of a memorandum to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh by six UNC MLAs and MP Mani Charanamei demanding unification of Naga inhabited areas including areas in Myanmar with Nagaland. Journalist turned Minister, N Biren Singh said the Government will never compromise on the territorial integrity of Manipur.102 Describing the Nagaland Congress resolution as provocative, Biren said it should not have been adopted. Chairman of MPCC Media Cell Seram Mangi Singh quipped, “That is not a good gesture (from the side of Nagaland Congress). But the stance of AICC is very clear that the boundaries of the Northeastern states should be kept intact”, he said, while noting that the same point has been elaborated in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the UPA. The state Secretary of CPI B Sharma, while referring to the UPA’s CMP, reiterated that the Centre will never endorse the move to disturb existing inter-boundaries of the region to facilitate create a greater Nagalim. “The resolution might have been taken only for their political gains”, he said, while reminding that all the Government and political parties of the NE States that shares boundaries with Nagaland including Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh are deadly against creation of a greater Nagaland. Nonetheless, the CPI leader took serious note of the failure of the Central observer Ranji Thomas, who participated in the Nagaland Congress session to react at the time of passing such a provocative

102 Manipur’s anxiety about the Naga claim on its territory long precedes the current controversy. In 1994 when the Nagaland Assembly called for the unification of all Naga areas, the Manipur Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution to uphold the territorial integrity of Manipur. Interestingly enough, the Chief Minister of Manipur at that time was a Tangkhul Naga, Rishang Keising.
resolution. State BJP unit Gen Secy. Saikhom Tiken Singh questioned how AICC, the major partner of the UPA which is committed to protect the existing boundaries of the NE Region, could allow its Nagaland unit to pass such a resolution. While the Nagaland Assembly had passed resolutions three times for Naga integration, the Manipur Assembly too had resolved for safeguarding Manipur's territorial integrity. It clearly shows the Congress's double standard policy", he said.

The Opposition MPP, while taking serious note of the resolution, urged both the AICC and MPCC to clarify on the matter in no time, failing which, he said, the Party (MPP) will take that the Congress as a whole has been playing a key role in breaching the boundaries of the Northeastern region. MPP Gen Secy. S Umananda warned that his party and the people would not remain silent if the AICC leaders endorse the resolution of Nagaland Congress.103

Claims of political parties and personalities apart, there can be two grounds for accepting demands of a separate territory. First, the original territory, from which a new territory is to be formed, should be large enough so that after its separation, the territorial interest of other groups are not disturbed. Secondly, the new state formation should be based on survival of each distinct ethnic identity. Meaning, we cannot do it at the cost of the other ethnic groups. Another question that comes up is, "whether a 'conglomeration' (of various different groups) can be given certain group rights in the name of multicultural co-existence?"

A conglomeration of groups is just like a state where different cultural communities exist. If the differences within the conglomeration remain unrecognized, the problems, of a 'liberal state' in which a dominant community is placed at an advantaged, will come back again. Thus, it will be very problematic to consider providing certain group rights for a conglomerate. Instead, we need to take into account the differences within such a conglomeration. Thus,

103The Sangai Express, 28 August 2007.
the question of preserving and promoting different ethnic groups is more important than merely providing a single group right for ‘Nagas’ or ‘Kukis’ or any other conglomerate as a group. And there is no guarantee that after having a distinct and separate territory, the conglomerate groups will preserve and promote the distinct ethnic cultures of its constituents. If one claims that they cannot live together with the Meeteis, or the Kukis or the Paites or the Muslims because their interest is different, then the question is ‘how can they maintain their internal cultural differences?’

Problem with the Institutional Arrangement in Manipur

So far there has not been any systematic institutional arrangement aim at resolving the crisis in the state. There are some administrative arrangements in the hill areas of Manipur. These institutes are meant for enhancing development of the tribals. These measures are taken for the development of all the tribal people regardless of their community affiliations. One such arrangement is that out of total 60 Assembly seats, 20 seats have been allocated to the representatives of hill tribal citizens. This is more than the quantum warranted on the basis of total hill tribal population. Thus, the present representation system gives due weightage in favor of the hill tribals. In such a system there is no space for community representation. Therefore, the larger community/ies has/have more representatives in the Assembly. In other words, in such representation system, which gives due weightage to the tribal population as a whole, there is no possibility of ‘recognition’ of each ethnic group in the state. This may, however, help development of the hill areas to some extent.104

I should mention here one more administrative arrangement in the state, the District Councils established under The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971.105 There are six District Councils

105 Rajendra Kabetri, 2006, District Councils in Manipur, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, p.16.
in the hill areas of Manipur. The Councils have been entrusted with as many as seventeen functions. However, they will carry out these functions subject to the transfer (of these functions) by the district administrator of the government of Manipur. These are mainly developmental functions such as, the management of property, the construction of roads, bridge, etc., establishment and management of primary schools, dispensaries, cattle pounds, and markets, etc. Unlike the ADCs under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, District Councils in Manipur are not entrusted with any judicial and legislative powers. There is no provision for protecting tribal ways of life or cultures of ethnic communities under the District Councils in Manipur. That is why tribal leaders have been demanding for the extension of the Sixth schedule in the hill areas of Manipur.106

The present system of governance has many limitation and even negates the value of pluralism enshrine in the Constitution. It does not have the scope of recognizing the different characters and values of different communities thereby continuing the dominant and dominated relationship in the small state. To begin with, one of the most important claims of all the smaller communities in the state is lack of space for self-development and promotion of their cultural identity. One of the bases of their arguments against the larger community is that of historical records such as that of Lt. Colonel Shakespear.107 So far the State has not come up with any concrete roadmap to diffuse such a fear in the minds of the tribal communities. As long as we do not have an established institutional arrangement for protecting the cultural and political identities of the smaller groups, such claims and counter claims will continue breeding more

106Ibid. p. 22.
107One of Shakespear’s often quoted remarks in this regard is “the Manipuris treated all hill men as inferior creatures, only good to carry loads, pay revenue and do manual work. They used the Kukis, who, to great extent were armed, to overawe the other tribes, and they managed the Kukis by cajolery and deceit. None of the Manipuris called “humbus” employed in the management of hill tribes received any remuneration. They numbered some hundreds and lived on what they could extort from the hill men by profession to exempt them from coolie work, a boon for which high prices were paid”.
and more ethnic conflict in the state. Today, thanks to the understanding among the youths and new generations of Meetei community, it is often claims that there is no ‘untouchability’ practice in the state; they are very tolerant in dealing with other communities in the state, tribal communities have been enjoying many benefits from the affirmative action programmes, so and so forth. However, one should understand two points very clearly. First, the problem in the state is not simply lack of education, unemployment, untouchability, etc which can be done away with certain temporary measures like affirmative actions. This is a matter that also involves different ‘identities’ (recognition and promotion of those identities) which one carries with him or her from the day of birth till the last breath. Secondly, this is not a problem between just two or three different communities which can be minimized if the bigger one remains tolerant giving more space to the smaller ones. Thus, it is not a problem that can be solved by Meeteis being tolerant, kind to the smaller ones or showing respect for the rights or opinions or practices of other communities. The problem is more complex than what we merely see it. For instance, how can we deal with the complaints of the smaller tribal communities being forcefully assimilated into conglomerated groups such as the ‘Nagas’ or the ‘Kukis’? Therefore, the problem cannot be resolved without an established system of rule, regulation and other institutional mechanisms. So far the system governing the relationship among the communities has not been doing anything but sustaining and sometimes escalating the conflict.

To begin with, even the state schedule tribes list has many problems. As mentioned earlier, there are twenty-nine different tribes listed in the State Schedule Tribes list. One very interesting point is that this list simply says that Schedule Tribe people will be any Naga tribe, any Kuki tribe and any Lushai tribe. This simply means that distinct tribes are not recognized as having distinct identities. Such identification has given a chance to the larger groups to absorb the smaller ones into their fold. This systematically destroys the space of
their own development. This is nothing but defeating the value of multiculturalism. And in order to have some safeguards the smaller tribes cannot but join a larger group. We should accept the fact that we are diverse ethnic groups with different interests and cultural needs. Such non-recognition of diversity will breed more trouble in the future than resolving it. Even the proposition of the NSCN-IM that ‘Nagas had always been a sovereign nation’ has been off and on challenged by non other than people from within the ‘Nagas’. In the summer of 2000 a remarkable pamphlet appeared in Nagaland’s capital Kohima that explicitly took on this view of Naga’s past. The pamphlet entitle “Bedrock of Naga Society” was published by the Nagaland State Congress Party and by all accounts, it was the brainchild of the state’s Chief Minister S.C. Jamir (NPCC, 2000). The Bedrock took on the independentist argument that the formation of Nagaland compromised the sovereignty of Nagas. The idea that the Nagas have been a separate independent entity from time immemorial may be an ‘attractive proposition’ but ‘is it really true?’ the author asked, ‘were we really an independent nation?’ In words never heard before in Naga political discourse, the pamphlet gave this answer:

The stark and inescapable truth is that neither did we have a definite and unified political structure and nor did we exist as a nation. We were actually a group of heterogeneous, primitive and diverse tribes living in far flung villages that had very little in common and negligible contact with each other..... Each village was practically an entity in itself. The main ‘contact’ between villages was through the savage practice of headhunting. Mutual suspicion and distrust was rife. Internecine warfare was the order of the day. There was no trust or interaction between different tribes. In these circumstances, the question of a unified ‘Naga Nation’ did not arise (NPCC 2000).108

It is worth examining at this juncture, ‘how the State (Indian state) attempts to address the issue in the Northeast in general and Manipur in particular’. Of course, the region is important in Indian

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politics. But, many fear that this importance of the region in the national politics is demonstrated from the point of ‘national security’ rather than human and cultural security of the individuals and groups inhabiting this region. The region has been taken as a space where ‘physical power’, rather than anything else, plays dominant role in constructing a political discourse of citizenship and peoplehood. As a result, it is even said that “this region does not find itself within the narrative and memory of the nation, yet continues to occupy a central position regarding the territorial integrity of India. In this context, the Naga struggle for self-determination has been considered a threat to the territorial integrity of India”. 109

The state should understand that providing human security should precede national security as it is the devoid of the first that the challenge to the later comes from various affected groups. The Indian State manifested its presence in the Northeastern region mainly through military expedition and operations. Continued militarization has reinforced people’s view that the Government is not committed to protect the rights of citizens. One of New Delhi’s containment policies has been the paternalistic carrot-and-stick approach routine with the use of military force interrupted by lavish doles of development money – whose source and targets are often couched in secretive deals – in the backward region. 110 Thus, one of the claims against the present state system being applied in the region is that the growing campaign for transparent and democratic governance, has failed to take into consideration the extremely undemocratic and militarized conditions under which electoral systems are introduced. The initiation of the democracy process through the processes of electoral politics has not contributed towards any solution. “Electoral mechanisms have not only been unresponsive but have systematically destroyed existing

indigenous institutions and created a group of parasitic ‘elite managers’ for New Delhi’.\textsuperscript{111}

The present system of political participation of the electorate is necessary, but not sufficient indicator of democratic practice in a plural society like India or Manipur. This system sometimes contradicts the Constitution that spells out a cultural diversity and a pluralistic political system. Thus, it will not be exaggerating to say that until and unless, all ethnic groups in the state have been given equal opportunity to protect and promote their distinct characters, the state will remain in chaos. Mere policy of militarization will not but help intensifying the problem. This is because of the fact that the present political system lacks a framework to tackle demands of ethnic groups and sub-nationalist movements, other than a coercive one.

So far the State has no policy of safeguarding the groups such as the application of Sixth Schedule, though there have been demands for the same. It is high time that State should think of some concrete institutional arrangements so that the peaceful environment of co-existence can be built. There are already demands for the creation of ADCs under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. It is in this context that I would like to start a debate on what kind of institutional arrangement would be appropriate for the state within the framework of Indian Constitution. To begin with, we need to look at the provisions catered in the Constitution, and application of those provisions in some of the Indian states. It is here that the case of Meghalaya is important. Because, this is the state where, many of the provisions in the Constitution are being experimented.\textsuperscript{112}

Now the important point is that with so many policies and special provisions the state still faces problems of ethnic conflict. Again, it is learnt that the claims presented by different ethnic groups in Manipur are quite different. And even though there are serious

\textsuperscript{111}Dolly Kikon, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{112}All important provisions and experiences are explained in third chapter of this thesis.
concerns about material and economic injustice, requiring re-distribution, the political rhetoric has been dominated by the demand for ‘recognition’. Perhaps it is the only State in the entire region which experiences such varied forms of issues and problems. I have already shown the complexity of ethnicity and politics that a composite culture would possess. Identity formation by more than 30 communities and tribes harping on exclusivity, integration and dominance, often result in several forms of conflict that would provide ground for several observations and narratives, that may not even have meeting points.

Coming to the particular institution, we can talk about Sixth Schedule very briefly. Sixth Schedule is very good example in this context because, it is one of the most important mechanism introduced so far to reduce ethnic tension in the Northeast region. Again, it is important because some of the groups in Manipur have started demanding for it and in fact Manipur Assembly has passed a bill to introduce it in some districts of Manipur. Now we need to understand one thing very clearly. I have always maintained that the idea behind the creation of ADC under Sixth Schedule is quite encouraging and affirmative. Practically, however, it fails to promote/achieve the objective for which it had been established. It cannot promote cultural values of ethnic communities. Even traditional institutions are not happy with this system. Again, in Manipur there are communities against the application of such Schedule in the state. One newspaper report says that in Manipur, the Sadar Hills issue is still simmering and can boil over again along with the Sixth Schedule implementation. We hope the government is also thinking of tying up all these loose ends before taking the final leap. Considering all these factors and failure of present provisions in the state of Meghalaya, it is clearer than ever that Manipur needs

113 See third Chapter.
new models of institutional arrangements to resolve or rather minimize the tensions and conflict that haunting the state for decades.