CHAPTER-V

POLITICAL ASPIRATION
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Whenever we are in the contemporary discourse of identity crisis, it is necessary to study the political aspiration of the Meitei, the majority community, who are at centre of the scale in the ethnic clash between the Naga and Kuki. The Meitei are the only community in the world who can't settle in their own motherland and the people who have been denied the political right of candidature in their soil, because in Manipur there are some laws, which are implemented differently in hill and valley. In other words, some laws are not common in hill and valley. As cited, Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act 1960 are not extended to the hill areas and Manipur Panchayati Raj Act (MPRA) 1975 is also not implemented in the hill areas. Besides, because of tribal reserved constituency known as outer parliamentary constituency, more than 3 lakhs competent Meitei may cast the vote but without having any right of contesting election
seeking the holding of office of Member of Parliament (MP).
Still they are not included in the inner parliamentary
constituency of valley (for MPs election only). Moreover a
good numbers of Meitei are in neighbour state of India and
foreign countries mainly in Myanmar and Bangladesh. But
Manipuri Diaspora is not at stake to reorganise the state
again; instead they are giving loyalty to their states though
they are facing the problem of Bishnupriya issue in Assam
and Bangladesh. Nevertheless they are extending their
helping hands and contribute constructive views and ideas
to protect territorial integrity of their motherland Manipur.

According to 2001 census report the total population of
Meiteis is nearly 15 Lakhs. Their territory was so large if one
study from the report given by the British.\(^1\) Even it is quite
different to this present size when we have seen the report
given by the king of Manipur on the inauguration of the first
Manipur state Assembly on 18 October, 1948 (his highness
Maharaja Bodhachandra stated:

\(^1\) See TC Hodson (1989), "the Meithel's", DK Fine Art Press, Delhi, p1.
"Read her political history from 24 AD. She had her dominion over a wide areas extending as far as the southern portion of China in the north, the gold mines in the Sibsagar Valley, the river Chindwin in the East and South, and Chandrapore (Cachar) in the West. Her present area is 8,650 sq miles plus 7,000 square miles of the Kabaw Valley, including 7,900 sq. miles of the hills". But today it is only 22,327 sq. km. only. Regarding the unity of hill and valley the king further stated, "All these times when Manipur was in the height of war power, hill and valley were one; and this oneness defended Manipur against all invasions and thus, she could maintained her independence upto 1891, when the rest of India has already been conquered by the British.

British conquest of this land resulted from the slackened unity

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2. Proclamation of His Highness Maharaja Bodhachandra, 18th October, 1948, from "Documents on North East India", Vol.6 by SK Sharma and Usha Sharma, Mittal Publication, 2006, pp.188-89.

3. Land rights and arbitrary confiscation of ancestral lands remained one of the most pressing problems of indigenous communities throughout the north east India particularly in Manipur. Within the decades, the government of India created Nagaland state for the Naga people and Mizoram state for Mizos. These are newly born states by India within the national boundary. But as sovereign state, Manipur not created by India with composition of three major ethnic of mongoloid race namely the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis-chins, lost the Kabow valley. The large part of the Manipur territory, comprising three provinces, Samjok, Kalei and Khambat were later ceded by India to Burma (now Myanmar). The Kabow valley that had been a part of the Manipur territory following Manipuri's conquest of the territory had been a part in the 19th century. And Burmese gave annual revenue of Rs. 5000 to the government of Manipur till India occupation of Manipur in 1949.
between the valley and hills. Now, since the withdrawal of
British paramountcy after 56 years’ rule we have reinforced
the union of hill and valley; and best opportunities have
reached us in order to work hand-in-hand towards achieving
the common object of progress and national prosperity. The
relation has become one of complete understanding and
active sympathy; and it must be so, for Manipur is one and
the hopes and aspirations of Hill and Valley are identical."^4

When we analyse the proclamation of his highness, it
indicates that the territorial boundary and sovereignty of
Manipur should be protected by hill and valley as usually
done in the past. But the cleavage was made by two
external forces they were the Hindu religion and the British
administration. The Meiteis were converted Hinduism as
consequence tribal were in the Christianity. And the British
played divide and rule policy. The same policy was followed
by Indian administration also after Manipur was annexed to

^4. Op. Cit., Documents on North East India, p.188.
India. So the study of political aspiration of the majority i.e. Meitei community is highly needed.

**Political Aspiration of the Meiteis**

The history of Manipur is little known to other Indians. Manipur has a recorded history of its own and it dates back to 33 AD, when Nongda Laien Pakhangba ascended the throne as the first feudal lord of Manipur. Loyamba, one of the wisest and ablest kings of Manipur ascended the throne in 1074 AD. It was during his reign that Loiyumba Sinlon, the constitution of Manipur has been written for the first time. The book ‘Loiyumba Sinlon’ deals with the rules and regulations governing the costumes, duties, etiquettes etc. of the nobility class and common people among the Manipuri from the fifth century.

The annexation of Manipur in 1891 to the British India Empire put an end to monarchy in Manipur. In place of it a Durbar with limited Legislative and judiciary powers was constituted. According to Prof. Sanajaoba Naoriya, an

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eminent scholar of NE, the sovereignty of Manipur was honoured by the British crown even after its defeat in the Anglo-Manipuri war, 1891. The British gobbled up all the powerful Indian kingdoms, except Manipur and Tripura among others, which are honoured for its valor. The Government of India following hectic debates about Manipur in the British Parliament proclaim:

"It is further notified that her Majesty the Queen Empress of India, has been pleased to forgo Her right to annex Her Indian Dominions the territories of the Manipur State; and has graciously assented to the re-establishment of Native Rule under such conditions as the Governor-General In council may consider desirable..."

In the words of Barrister M.M. Ghose, native ruler in Manipur was already an Asiatic sovereign, which continued till its merger into the Indian Union in 1949. The external sovereignty partly eroded as the Britishers deputed a political

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agent to look after British interest in Manipur and outside; at most British had limited suzerainty over Manipur to some extent without affecting the native rule. Although the British political agent exercises considerable power, a historian clearly defines its political status: “it is quite evident that the duty of the political Agent in Manipur was like that of an ambassador”. Sometimes ambassadors could be more powerful considering the international or bilateral relations. What is important to historians is not how strong and influential was the political Agent but how far its master, the British Crown honour the native rule by Meitei King.⁷

Prior to the Merger, the Maharaja of Manipur ruled under “Rule for the Management of the state of Manipur”, which was enforced on 14 September, 1933, the Article 1 of the Rule states:

“His highness the Raja will be responsible for the administration of the state; He will be assisted by a Durbar which will consist of an officer specially selected by the

⁷ Ibid, p.255.
Governor of Assam who will be styled as the president and at least three Manipuri Members..."

They merely assisted the Manipur Monarch and responsibility did not lie with his assistants. 'Manipur State Constitution Act (MSCA)' (here state implies Nation-State) empowers the Maharaja in Council to administer the state thereby installing a constitutional monarchy following the model of the British Crown, subject to numerous checks and balances.

Article 3 of the Act provides, "Government of the State by his highness, the Maharaja; the territories for the time being and hereafter vested in the Maharaja are governed by and in the name of maharaja. All rights, authority and jurisdiction which appertain or are incidental to the Government of such territories are exercisable by the Maharajah subject to the provision of this Act". 8

The entire Manipuri constitution could be amended following the due procedure for constitutional amendment. This sufficiently indicates the Manipuri political culture which could keep peace with the democratic aspirations of the incoming civilisations, should such dynamic and progressive and political ethos be contained in totalitarian system with a rigid constitution nearing a closed system, like the Indian Constitution, it should be like showing hospitality to the aquatic lives in the beautiful expanses of a desert. The rigid structure of dominance which is a logical extension of castiesm is completely foreign to Meetei mental make-up and when the casteist through their casteist glance and manners, the Meiteis simply conceive the ethos as pre-historic gestures. Similar is the case with a constitution. With the consolidation of a newly born Indian Union, Manipur was brought within the fold of the Union after the signing by the representatives of the two Governments, of the instrument of merger on September 21, 1949. The merger was not a smooth sailing business and later on, it became a curious
object or controversy. Since Manipur had a history of independence, a constitutional monarchy preceded by government under ‘Rule of Law’ and had experienced as how to meet the challenges of the mighty British Crown at the peak of its power and had also taken up armed struggle three years after the 2nd world war which had its operational theatre in itself. When one became weary of the successive events of war including the seven years devastation by the Burmese in early nineteenth century, the merger was signed by a Maharaja under duress, which was not ratified by the Maharaja in Council or by the legislature. The general feeling is that a constitutional head, which had political obligation to a constitution, lacked the political capacity to sign all instrument of merger in the absence of ratification by the constitutionally elected assembly and a plebiscite.

The Maharaja was concerned to sign the instrument of Accession on August 11, 1947 under which defence,

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communications, external relations passed within the exclusive jurisdiction of New Delhi. Prior to the merger on October 15, 1949 as a response to the pressure from the officials of New Delhi, the Maharaja clarified that he was governed by the Manipuri Constitution, unlike other rulers of the native kingdoms. He wrote to the concerned official of Government of India on September 20, 1949, just one day before he was coerced to put his signature to the merger agreement. The letter states:

"Direct dealing with me was feasible when sovereignty was vested in me but, after the introduction of the State Constitution Act, the sovereignty and administration of the state has been shifted to the people."

Earlier, the Maharaja wrote to the official of Government of India "if I am compelled to work independently of my people, my action will be quite unjustifiable".\textsuperscript{10} He also wrote to the official of government of

\textsuperscript{10} Maharaja letter to an official of Government of India, named Prakash, \textit{Resistance}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} October 1979.
India three days ahead of merger to Indian Union that, "Now that the sovereignty of the state has been vested in the people. It would be in the fitness of things to hear the people's voice and learn their sentiment so that the line of action may not in any case be unconstitutional."\textsuperscript{11} In the fitness of things, a referendum on merger could have been held, but the colonial chieftains had not taught their greedy political heirs what constitutional procedure should have to be followed short of confiscating the state by war, even the peak of power, the mighty British Crown had foregone even their right to annexation of Manipur after a state of belligerency in 1891 and through debate in the Parliament.

Here one may raise a question querying why the story of merger agreement is stressing up and down again and again. The answer is that it is the only argument made by all the insurgent groups of Manipur. They even claimed that Manipur was an occupied territory of India and deploying security forces of India was named as occupying forces.

\textsuperscript{11} The Resistance, 25th September 1979.
They considered it as a hidden war of India against the Manipuri’s by matching their sovereignty. So, waging war against India means war against war. It means that they are compelled to launch armed resistance in order to restore the lost sovereignty of Manipur. So it is true to say that the armed struggle started by Irawat from the latter part of 1948 and formation of Meetei State Committee (MSC) in 1960, United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in 1964 and People Liberation Army (PLA) in 1978 have articulated the same argument and aspiration.

The political aspiration of armed opposition groups of Manipur is not confined to the Meiteis only. They embraced all the people of Manipur both hill and valley. For instance, the Revolutionary Peoples Front (RPF) and its armed wing PLA submitted a memorandum to the Chairman of Decolonization Committee of the United Nations in 1996 and it states,

"The memorandum was submitted by the organization on the behalf of the dependent and colonized people
of Manipur representing the ethnic and indigenous people namely the Meitei, the Nagas, the Kuki-Chins for granting and restoration of independence and decolonization of the state of Manipur from the present colonial and hegemonic administrative power of India”.  

It had submitted six prayer with historical facts, politico, and socio-economic materials as well as legal and constitutional materials which were also for the interest of both hill and valley. Their self-determination is national self-determination not racial or ethnic self-determination.

But some scholars having aspiration for separate administration remarks that, “...the tribal argued that the merger agreement signed by the Manipur maharaja couldn’t and didn’t cover the territory occupy by the tribal chiefs and their subjects, because the maharaja of Manipur was not a tribal representative who had authority to act on

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their behalf and tribal were not his subjects." It further stated "The agreement kept the tribal untouched and it was mainly concerned with the plain people the Manipuri's."\textsuperscript{13} The argument of those who belong to such school of thought is that before the merger of Manipur into the union of India, there was separate administration between the hill people and the Meiteis. By taking the advantage of this agreement and of Manipur state not being under the schedule areas in its pre-merger period, it appears that, the hill areas of Manipur state are completely merged with the valley. The separate identity of hill administration had disappeared.

Moreover, one could not discard the maximum efforts taken up by valley based civil society organization to bring unity in Manipur, of which mention could be made of Committee for Peace and Integrity (COFPAI) during the Naga – Kuki conflict, All Manipur Ethnical and Socio-Cultural Organisation (AMESCO) to bring common socialisation among the people of the hill and valley and All Manipur

United Clubs Organisation (AMUCO) towards bringing unity, development and peace on the basis of the political formula of ‘Unity criticism Unity’.14

Thus political aspiration of Meiteis for the interest of both hill and valley is either redesigning the democratic constitution or re-inventing the democratic constitution of India. Because, they conceive the idea that India has democratic institution but not democratic politics at all. So the genesis of all conflicts is related with it.

The north east India had witnessed struggle for political affirmation, separation and self assertion. These struggles have never been mere issues of law and order nor for secession. These struggles have fundamentally been assertions of independence and the right to self determination by indigenous communities and ethnic groups that were suppressed by the Indian state. Some of these armed resistance started immediately after the transfer of

power when the government of India annexed the areas of the region. Many started much later in the 1970s and 1980s as protest against impoverishment and marginalization of the native populace. The Indian state engaged in short term and long term agreements with some of these armed groups at the insistence of an incipient peace constituency and the international community and herein started the history of the peace accords in north east India that continues till date.

So many accords and agreement stand out in the region. The Assam accord, the Mizo Accord, the Akbar Hydari agreement and Shillong Accord standout as outcomes of long term negotiation and even intimidation between political movement and settlement that have been signed periodically by the Government of India (Gol) and marginalized section of people of the region. At present there are a few peace process and negotiation that are under way between the Gol and different ethnic armed groups in the region. Many of these processes had been undertaken with the objective of creating conducive
atmosphere to initiate dialogues. Some are still to come to any agreement on the modalities of peace talk and political negotiation.

Here the researcher of northeast India have for long wanted to undertake a comprehensive analysis of some of the major accords and peace processes of this region. So one who analyse all this accords and agreement, definitely could find out that these are the groups of which some want to redesign the democratic institution and some advocated for reinventing the democratic institution. For the former one, accords and agreement could serve well and for the latter, they don’t like to come at any accord and agreement except sovereignty. That is why UNLF have demanded plebiscite. Recently, RK Sanayaima, Chariman of United National Liberation Front (UNLF) reacted to the Republic Day speech of Manipur Governor in 2005. The proscribed UNLF said that in order to find lasting solution to the Indo-Manipur Conflict, the root cause should first be understood and spell out a four joint proposal for the GoI to ponder over.
In a statement issued to the press by the chairman of the outfit said that the root of the conflict is the independence of Manipur, "as such it is necessary to seek the mandate of the people by holding a plebiscite under the United Nations." To make the plebiscite free and fair, the outfit proposed that the services of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNPKF) be utilized. Further it states, "...to enable the plebiscite to be held within the time frame given by UN, the cadres of UNLF will deposit their arms to the custody of UNPKF. Similarly, the Indian government should withdraw its regular army and paramilitary forces from Manipur."\(^{15}\)

The so called national liberation outfits in Manipur has been claiming that the people of Manipur had experienced democratic government as early as 1948 on the basis of Manipur Constitution Act 1947. This was civilized venture of the masses but spoilt from the bud and liquidated it. In return, the people of Manipur got part ‘C’ state ruled by chief

\(^{15}\) The Sangai Express, 3\(^{rd}\) February, 2005.
Commissioner as political agent of British without people's representatives and their own house. So they put a big question whether such conduct could be counted as democratic politics within the democratic institution of constitution of India. This is the genesis of all conflicts in Manipur.

**Communal Politics and Accommodation of Interest**

The glorious past of the people of Manipur, the ancient most people of the region, the hill people and the plain people, confer a sense of pride on each one of them. Decades of years ago, these people led a peaceful, jovial and prosperous life. They live together in an atmosphere of love, care and mutual sharing of responsibilities. However, the indebility of this glorious past seem to be threatened to extinction by the animosities among the tribal and the plain people of the present days. So much of that the existing condition of tribal and that of plain people spelt out continuous conflict, misunderstandings and miseries not only among the people of the respective tribes and groups but
also for the governments both the state and the centre. So, we have a big question that how it is happening in the hidden paradise on earth i.e. in Manipur. The genesis of it is external forces. They are coming of Hinduism, British colonial rule and India’s political-economic system. As consequence, the formation of ethnicity, emergence of ethnic nationalism and its ethnic armies are coming up in the state. The formation of ethnicity in North East India presents a unique picture from their counterpart of the rest of India. This is also due to the fact of geo-political situation, historical background and influence of heterogeneous tribal group into the region, Manipur being a multi-ethnic society, ethnicity becomes an important instrument in demanding economic and political upliftment, which consequently leads to the consolidation of each ethnic group.

As by-product of above fact, another factor is compounded again that is communal politics. The Meitei always defended when Nagas and Kukis raise the question of communal politics that in its long history of post statehood
the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947, under Article 17, it was in the ratio of 30:18:3 between General, Hills and Mohamadans with an additional two seats to represent educational and commercial interests. Only the changes could be seen in the post statehood period.

When Manipur become a full-fledged state on January 21, 1972, the Assembly constituencies were delimited into 60 seats. Out of which 20 are reserved seat for the scheduled Tribes and one seat for the scheduled castes and the rest are for Meitei. The state is represented in the Lok Sabha by two members and sends one member in the Rajya Sabha. The Assembly constituencies of the state are made and distributed according to the population as is the case all over the country. The total population of the state is 23,99,000 (2001 census). There are 9 (nine) district in the state – five in the hill and four in the valley. The five districts in the hill are Chandel, Churachanpur, Senapati, Tamenglong and

Ukhrul. The four districts in the valley are Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West and Thoubal.

Here, if one analyse about the seat allocation based on territorial size, it is true to say that seat allocation is uneven at all because 40 seats are distributed to the four districts in the valley while the remaining 20 seat are distributed to the five hill districts. These five hill district constitutes 9/10 of the total area of the state mainly inhabited by the two group Nagas and Kukis.

But no one could claim that it is uneven allocation of seats because of seat allocation or distribution according to the population basis. It is not exceptional case only in Manipur, but followed all over the country. Interestingly, the Nagas elites reacted on large scale as big issue in their political movement. So the Naga political organization (South Nagas Union of Nagaland state) elaborating the opposition of the tribal members in the state Assembly.
In the state assembly, the tribal members affiliation to different political parties and their attachment to different ethnic group led to contradiction of ideas among themselves, and they are found to be handicapped to raise the issue when a matter of urgent importance arises covering the tribal, because of their individual survival and political compulsion.18

The southern Naga Union of Nagaland states (SNUNS) stated in Manipur Hill voice that, "... There are brilliant tribal members in the Assembly and in the council of minister too. Yet, they are helpless when the time of voting comes. If you have to fight through for the cause of the minority, you are a fool. You have either to surrender your cause or to resign from the seat, whether as an MLA or a Cabinet Minister, or even as a Chief Minister if the majority will not to your plea. This is the exact position of our hill members in the Assembly to day..."19

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Furthermore a Naga scholar stated that large numbers of people are affected either directly or indirectly by the government and politics, because the common people depend upon the government for their livelihood. He illustrated with example that, “to start a school or college, to form a cooperative society, and sometime even to get into a college or obtain admission into a government hospital, one needs government. Further, the employed people whether they are transferred to another locality or not, whether they can obtain a loan, and whether they got promoted, all depends on the decisions of other government officers. Thus, to get one of these things done, members of the state legislative assembly are among the most sought after elected official since they are in direct contact with the government administration.”

According to him the tribal communities feel that they are left behind the valley people in every development aspect, because their elected representatives are always in the minority both in the government and in opposition. From
this pre-occupied feeling of minority in the political life of Manipur, they started their demand for a separate tribal state.20

Thus communal politics in Manipur could be visualised in the eyes of the masses both hill and valley by blaming each other. Now-a-days the critical new dimension is that the various ethnic movements spearheaded by militant outfit only hinder the economic condition of the common people instead of bringing about harmony. Therefore, the collective and collaborative effort of the government, academicians and civil society organisations are significantly required in order to promote harmony and spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of the state. That means the majority communities should give political space of them in order to avoid minority political exclusion with understanding of their political interest.