CHAPTER III

SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Before the coming of modern education and Christianity into the tribal areas of Manipur especially the Nagas, they were contented with their own village state of affairs and their highly secluded socio-political system. Each hamlet was a unit by itself and they safeguarded their interests tooth and nail. This is one of the reasons why they became head hunters. Any human being who is found stronger or appeared stronger was treated as their enemies though they knew nothing about modern system of democracy, communalism, socialism, etc. They had their Chiefs as the leader, who is elected on certain merits of capacities to be the leader. In olden days, many of them seemed to follow the socialistic pattern of society in many respects. In the case of the Meiteis or the valley people, the head of a village was called Salais (Chiefs). It is well known and historically recognised that in Manipur there were seven kings of the seven Salais. 1 Each of these clans occupied different areas at different periods.

The Manipur valley existed as an independent kingdom till its annexation by the British in 1891. People had a simple life subjected to their respective leaders. It was a kind of monolithic political organisation with the chief as its head.

There was some kind of social and religious organisation established in the year 1934 under the chief Patronage of the Maharaja of Manipur. For the first time, however, the people of Manipur came to know about the working system of a political organisation only in the year 1938.

With the achievement of independence in 1947, an interim Government under the Chief ministership of Capt. Maharaja kumar P.B Singh was formed. And in 1948, Election to the Constituent Assembly of Manipur was held. Then on Oct. 15, 1949, Manipur was merged fully with the Indian Union as a Part "C" state. The first general Election to the parliament and the state Assembly came in 1952. From that time onwards, the outer Manipur

Parliamentary constituency had been represented. And again in 1965, the State was upgraded as a Union territory from part 'C' State and on 21st. January 1972 it became a full fledged state. In the 60 member House of the Manipur Legislative Assembly, 19 seats have been always reserved for the tribals. There has been great awakening of Politics. Since then, the people of Manipur have been fully taking part in the democratic process of the state politics. Their Political awakening has gone to such an extent, that people became so selfish, communal and identity conscious of their own tribes, leading to highly changed turbulent political atmosphere. It was after the ushering in of the democratic process and formation of the state Assembly that Education as a state subject received its true recognition in the socio-political set up of the state.

In order to protect and preserve their Communal identity and interest, the following political parties were formed.

(1) Kuki national Assembly (KNA)
(2) Komrem National Union
(3) Hmar National Union
(4) Hmar people Federation
(5) Manipur people party (MPP)
(6) Kangleipak communist Party (KCP)

(7) Manipur Hills People Party (MHPP)

(8) Paite Naional Council

(9) Zomi national Congress

Since time immemorial, Manipur has been a place where distinctive ethnic group of people lived together. But there has been a sea change in the socio-political development in Manipur in a short span of years in recent past.

Following factors seem to have been responsible for the fast changes in the socio-political scenario.

COMMUNAL AWARENESS

According to Singh, the inter-ethni-tribal alliance and tribal movements in North east of India emerged under the impact of a number of socio-political and administrative factors. In the pre-British period, the extremely primitive communication system made each village impenetrable to outside influences in the hills and forest. There was the potent barrier. Inspite of these challenging situations, by and by tribal
communities living in the hills established economic and political contact with the people of the plains. Yet, most of the tribes were not conscious of their ethno-tribal identities and their world was confined to their family, clan, and villages.3.

But today, people are very conscious of their communal and social identity. This problem is not the problem of Manipur alone but we can say that the whole of North-east India suffers from the same problem. This has caused much harm to the progress of the state rather than doing any good. This matter has assumed such great proportion that it has drawn the attention of the bureaucrats, politicians and even the Church leaders around the world. The situation seems to be worsening day by day. In North East India, Manipur in particular, every tribe has made a demand for one legitimate cause or the other. "Ethnic Cultural mobilization and ethnic movements have been an on going process ever since they learnt the art of politics. Since then politicising of every issue, inter-ethnic

rivalry, legitimate thirst for one's socio-political uplift and every tribe trying its maximum to outwit the other have been the order of the day. 4.

The tribal groups, the Kukis and the Nagas though they lived together since time immemorial, they have their own political organisations, and armed wings to protect their interests respectively. When the British granted independence to India, the Nagas also demanded independence under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo of the Naga National Council (NNC) which was founded in 1947. Since the demand was not granted by the Government of India, it went under-ground and began an armed struggle against the Government of India and the security forces. Since then, they have not stopped their demand for independence.

On the other hand, the Kukis formed the Kuki National Assembly (KNA) a regional political party in Manipur in 1947 itself. However, militancy of Kukis came into being only by 1987. Some of the documents issued both by the Nagas and the Kuki Students Union reveal

that the Kuki National Army (KNA) was formed on August 5, 1987. In the sixties, the Kukis raised the demand for Kuki state within the Union of India. But again, the demand was subsequently turned down and afterwards that region they claimed was made into a fullfledged Revenue district with Manipur. There is a Kuki Innpi which is the Apex Organization of the Kukis which takes care of the Kukis Interest.

The Zomi National Congress has been demanding a Union Territory for Zomi inhabited areas of District Churachandpur, Chandel, Sadar Hills and Jiribam since the 1980s. The Party has sent memoranda to the Central Government and sent delegations to New Delhi with their


demands. They had organised a long march (264 Kms) from Tipaimukh to Lamka in 1984, organised bundhs and processions to press their demands. 7.

The Meiteis in the valley also wanted to be free from the hands of the Indian Government and live independently. This resulted in the formation of many underground organisations which we are witnessing today. It is understood that ethnic movements we witness to day are in fact the outcome of the growing discontent among the tribal people in general. It is also due to their inability to adjust themselves to the emerging socio-political situations of Indian Independence and the withdrawal of the British Administration which gave them a measure of special protection and some privileges. 8


INSURGENCY

What began as a movement for realising freedom has now mushroomed into an intractable highly complex situation now conveniently labelled as insurgency. At the time of this investigation, the number of outfits engaged in insurgency is estimated to be around sixteen. With discontent within, a number of splinter groups have also come into existence to make up that number. In a recent thesis submitted to Manipur University (M.U.) by Senajm Mangi Singh on "A study of some selected socio-political problems in Manipur (1947-80)", the author has treated the subject of Insurgency in Manipur exhaustively, therefore in this work, only the socio-political angle of the Problem of insurgency is discussed as it impinges on education.

The complexity of the problem is bound up with a number of factors. The lure of easy money through gun culture is one of the offshoots of insurgency. In Manipur, there is no employee, businessman or wage earner who is exempt from the "tax" the insurgents

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collect. Huge tax levied on road transport has frequently disrupted normal life in this state when the lorry and bus owners stopped plying their vehicles in protest. Trade and cost of living in Manipur have been even seriously affected. Educational institutions have been seriously affected. In October 1997, Donbosco School, a premier institution came to the point of closing down because the demand from the insurgents could not be met.

Secondly, Manipur is one of the golden triangle of drug trafficking along with Myanmar and Thailand and this has been one of the factors in which insurgency has a hand. For transborder illicit movement of this stuff, the services of these outfits have been made use of.

Thirdly, like the "Geni" out of the fisherman's casket, extortionists have been having a hay day in Manipur out witting the underground outfits. Some of them use even the letter head of the important Insurgent outfits to extort money from the public and
with threats to life of the victims if they did not pay. This is taking place much to the embarrassment of the leaders of the insurgent outfits. This problem is quite serious and is the latest development which seems to even put in the shade the main insurgent outfits and is getting out of control.

Fourthly, there is the nexus between insurgents and the politicians. This is the most serious of all problems imposed on the people through insurgency in Manipur. This unholy alliance has made mockery of governance in democratic society. Politicians can blackmail one another now using underground power. In order to secure their own lives, they are obliged to bow to the dictates of the insurgents. Officials and even citizens can be liquidated if they are to be removed out of the way from being a hindrance. Thus, so much of money intended for progressive schemes are plundered and the economic development of the state stalled.

Fifthly, while clamouring for freedom and even accusing the Government both in the state and in Delhi and the armed forces of "human rights violations", they have made a mockery of it themselves. In their assumed
role as custodians of "human rights" they have been plundering the human rights of a wage earner by threatening his life to pay through his nose their exorbitant demand for money or their tax. A man is not allowed to enjoy the fruit of his labour or his industry. He is denied his right to his very life. All that money collected is to run their organisation, to buy more weapons and further anarchy.

Sixthly, by running a Parallel government, they call the tune of social and political life. This state seems to have set the record for frequency of bandhs against the "misrule" of the Government. For anything and everything, the Government is blamed. But this is an irony of truth because it is these outfits which have hampered socio-economic progress of the state through their interference in Public life. In a letter to the Editor of a local daily, "Free Press", an aggrieved student wrote saying in Manipur, Three year Degree course (T.D.C) is a misnomer because nobody is allowed to complete the course in Three years. Insurgency related bandhs and infiltration of their wing in the student bodies results in unpredictable postponement of examinations. Even able students are not allowed to complete their degree course in three years.