

ETHNIC RELATION AND DEVELOPMENT-A CASE STUDY OF HILL VALLEY RELATIONSHIP IN MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a humble and earnest attempt to study and analyse some of the aspects of ethnic relation and development prevailing in the context of hill and valley people. As ethnic relation and development are two broad subjects, it becomes difficult to correlate each other. In spite of that, the paper aims at addressing certain issues and challenges concerning the prevailing ethnicity politics and ethnic relationship from historical as well as from developmental perspectives. It also aims at addressing the disparity in the hill and valley, using some selected indicators like education, agricultural development, poverty, etc. It delves on the triangular relationship of the three major groups in Manipur viz. Kukis, Nagas and Meiteis in analytical perspective. Besides, it includes contemporary events which have a direct bearing on the political, socio-cultural and economic life of the people concerned.

KEYWORDS: *Community, Development, Ethnicity, Corruption, Insurgency*

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INTRODUCTION

The north-eastern region of India comprising eight Indian states namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura shares common border with five neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal. It is connected to the rest of India by a narrow land corridor, 20 km in its narrowest width. The region is said to be one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse in the world with overlapping ethnicities, cultures and colonial history. It is also one of the most trouble-torn regions with a long history of ethnic politics, insurgencies and secessionist movement affecting almost all the states. The three major communities besides, sharing common ethno history and geographical boundaries had been enduring and experiencing various socio-economic and political problems since time immemorial.

Manipur is a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious state with more than 33 recognised tribes. It comprises three major communities, Meiteis, Nagas and Kuki-Chin-Mizos. While the tribals settled in the surrounding hills, the valley is predominantly inhabited by the Hindu Meiteis and Muslims (*Pangals*). Multiple ethnic groups have their own distinct language, tradition and culture. Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and the indigenous *Sanamahi* are the main religious groups.

Ethnic relation is a relation between people of different ethnic groups. Relationship has been defined as the state of being related – by birth or marriage, by friendship, contacts, communication, etc. between people, countries and also

imply intimate bond between two persons. Reciprocal relationship of any kind or nature is almost non-existent among the hill and valley people of Manipur which has resulted in a huge 'trust deficiency' thus further widening the chasm or gulf that has existed between the hill men and the plain dwellers. In spite of that, Manipur is a home to all of them whether one is a hill people or plain dweller. The people's destiny is interconnected though they may owe allegiance to their respective generic terms, like Kuki, Naga and Meitei or be classified based on topography. For a peaceful co-existence and co-development, the inhabitants should strive and aspire for a composite Manipur. There is no doubt that there is a lot of discontentment at various levels among the various sections of the society inhabiting the state. This must be looked into and addressed without any inhibitions or else, 'a spark neglected burn the house' might prevail. One must practice what he preaches. However, problem arises due to emerging sectarianism and the growth of micro nationalism among the people, which is characterised by the agenda of exclusive identities or homeland. Such kind of ethnic assertion considerably affects not only inter-group but also intra-group relation both at the inter-state level among the various ethnic groups.¹

The state of Manipur is passing through different social turmoil, ethnic violence and social upheavals. It includes insurgency for secession to movements or greater autonomy and homeland, intra to inter ethnic clashes and fight over resources and overlapping or contesting claims on land. Frequent eruptions of violence and conflict that arises from the different ethnic groups to assert their identities disturb the peaceful co-existence in the state leading to displacement or forced migration within and outside the state. Violent ethnic clashes between Kukis and Nagas in the 1990s led to a heavy loss of life and property and the two communities gained nothing out of it. Visible changes in displacement and enforced migration was taking place after the communal conflict where people are found to have been migrated to and settled down near National and state highway due to more security and easy access to better schools and other services. State government has totally failed in providing security, assured livelihood and educational facilities in the interior part of the tribal areas. As a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violation of human rights and natural or man-made disasters, many of hill people are internally displaced. This needs to be addressed.

Manipur is a place where there are many communities existing with a small population. This kind of situation creates a fertile ground for marginalisation of all sorts, forms and degrees especially when the dominant community is self-centred and indifferent to the needs of the smaller groups. A tribal community with a few thousand is very small indeed when compared to the 16 to 17 lakhs strong majority Meiteis residing in the valley and hence easy dismissal and easy marginalisation. Thus, isolation, smallness of the number and voiceless-ness are the main reasons leading to easy marginalisation.

Coming to the history of ethnic relation, the Kukis and Nagas alike have ruled their hill territory independently² through the ages. There had been acts of treachery raids, outrages, etc. no doubt but in spite of that they generally continued to live together for centuries together in peaceful co-existence. The history of their relationship is thus marked by a mixture of amity and enmity which nevertheless continued to play an important role in the politics of the state. As such there is no water-tight division of their inhabited area since they were intricately mixed with one another. For the Nagas, the practice went on for a long time, whereby the life of the weaker Nagas became so threatening that they needed a stronger power for their security and protection. In those days had there been no Kuki intervention, the magnitude of human lives toll on account of the internecine wars among the Naga tribesmen could have been much heavier than that was actually seen among Naga villages.³ The natural fighting capabilities and the bravery of the Kukis has been fruitfully used and had been benefitted not only by some of their Naga neighbours but also the British and the Maharaja of Manipur as well.

The Meitei kings fought with the hill chiefs for several centuries and exacted tributes from the subjugated tribes. It is also a fact that the Nagas and Kukis were not always defeated. There were also a series of reprisal from them. The Meitei kings made the powerful and warlike Kukis weak by putting one clan against the other. Instead of provoking them, the Meitei kings developed friendly relations with some Kuki villages and used them against the Nagas. The fierce Kukis were also employed irregularly in the army of Manipuri kings. The Meitei kings notably Charairongba and Garibniwaz became friendly with the hill chief and advised their nobles to do the same.⁴ To maintain friendly relations with the hill people and to collect tributes from the subjugated tribes, the Meitei Kings used to organise Haochongba (tribal dance festival) in the palace. On this occasion, the Meitei king received tributes, offerings and the king, in return, offered them drinks and food. In fact the subjugated tribals shared the common joys and sufferings of the state with the Meitei kings through the ages.⁵ In analysing the true nature of relationship between the valley and the hill people in the ancient past, it is to state that the tribal had an exclusive and independent political existence of their own. While some of the subjugated hill tribes owed allegiance to the Meitei kings and paid tributes, much of the tribal pristine mobility remained unaffected.⁶ They lived an independent way of living. The relationship was limited to trade of the barter kind and the nature of interaction was petty-trade oriented without any conflicting interest.

It was only after the arrival of the British and the subsequent establishment of their foothold on the soil of Manipur, the tribals were brought under their political domination. The Meitei kings failed to bring the powerful and independent tribals under their control. The political administration of the former was confined wholly in the valley. They were contented with whatever tributes they could extract from the tribals and non-payment entailed punishment in the form of periodical raids and massacres. So long as the Raja enjoyed tributes, he remained contented. He did not think in terms of conquering the neighbouring tribal people and established their political domination or hegemony by way of annexing their land. The Rajas failed to evolve long term policy to deal with the tribal people. They limited their activities to collecting tributes and then sending punitive action against those recalcitrant tribes residing within the fringes of the valley. The Rajas even obtained military assistance mostly from the war-like Kukis though they were not part of the regular royal army of the Meitei kings, for meeting external aggression or for certain military expedition beyond his suzerainty or abroad. The Kuki warriors used to assist the kings of Manipur as loyal sentinels and the sole protectors of Manipur frontiers.

But the great divide between the hill and the valley people was further intensified by the conversion of the valley people to the Vaishnavism form of Hinduism by the middle of the 18th century. If there ever was closeness between the valley and the hill people, it was completely torn asunder by the valley people's acceptance of Vaishnavism, which brought along in its wake caste consciousness and other discriminating beliefs and practices which gave birth to a feeling of racial superiority over the hill people. The heart of the matter is that this conversion drove the final wedge between the hill and the valley people. The undesirable outcome of the valley people was the birth of false racial superiority and the practice of considering the hill people as outcasts, unclean and untouchables⁷ similar to that of the larger Indian society. Thus, the practice of caste system which the bane of Hinduism has sharpened the social distinction. It was only some decades ago, such inhuman and discriminatory practices have been done away with.

It has been observed that among the tribes of Manipur there has been a growing consciousness of separate identity in recent times. As a result of this, their socio-ethnic boundaries are also changing fast and consequently many tribal ethnic groups have also shifted their political loyalties as well. The process of trans-association in which some tribes sided with other to form a separate ethnic national entity has a political overtone. The Tengnoupal area of Chandel district were largely occupied by the anthropological 'old Kuki' such as Anals, Lamkang, Maring, Moyon and some smaller tribes who

recently sided with the Nagas either by will or by coercion for reasons best known to them after the post-independent India. As mentioned above, these smaller tribal groups have shifted their political loyalties despite their close affinity with the Kuki-Chin in terms of their mythological origin theory, languages and socio-cultural practices as well. In this regard R.K Das writes, "Tribes such as the Anal and Aimol who now prefer to call themselves Naga, originally belonged to Kuki group"⁸ Marings are, of course, regarded as independent tribe but show inclination to be affiliated to Naga. Further, Gangumei has also written in the same manner as, "Now with the entry of a few more tribes of Manipur into Naga constellation, few Kuki-Chin speakers are now among the Naga tribes"⁹ Thus, with a view to gain political advantage the above mentioned tribal groups can even change their ethnic identities by shifting their political loyalties as well. One should be reminded that political brotherhood is sometimes thicker than blood.

The term 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic group' is derived from a Greek word 'ethnos'. In English the Greek word 'ethnos' is translated as nation. The term signifies people who belong to common ancestry sharing a well-defined culture. In English, ethnic was used to mean pagan from the 14th century up to the middle of 19th century. It was only in the 19th century when the modern meaning of ethnicity was used. The term 'ethnicity' refers to strife between ethnic groups, in the course of which people stress their identity and exclusiveness.¹⁰

There are many dimensions to ethnicity. In short, it involves concepts of group solidarity based on common customs, common beliefs systems, common cultural heritage, and a shared consciousness. Ethnicity, minority nationality, tribals, indigenous people etc, are some of the terms used in the modern times to refer to a people who claim to be united on some primordial consciousness. It is difficult to say who is ethnic. In a pluralist society, a minority nationality could be defined as ethnic; the majority nationality may be ethnic where it is in a minority. So, ethnicity is always a relative rather than an absolute term.

Ethnicity politics refers to use of ethnicity for political purpose. It is very similar to caste politics in India. Just as "caste, the most pervasive ... most retrograde of India's social institutions has not only survived the impact of British imperialism but also transformed and transvalued itself,"¹¹ ethnicity too, of late has transformed and trans valued itself, in this part of the country.

Ethnicity politics or politics of ethnicity has manifested itself in various articulations. Its manifestations vary from demand for a government scheme to demand for separate sovereign and independent nation. The people of Manipur have been mobilised on ethnic lines. Both on primordial and situational levels, ethnicity has been mobilised. Even though one does not notice a proactive social exclusion, there is no proactive social inclusion either. The harmony between the people of the state is very visible in any given locality, but the disharmony between them is vociferously expressed in daily newspapers, by various protagonists in the ethnicity politics. This sometimes, leads to ethnic divide among the people.

There is also polarisation of ethnic tribes into broader ethnic groups, or even the dominant ethnicity. This has happened in Manipur history in the past. The Meiteis themselves are an amalgamation of different tribes. T.C. Hodson in his book, 'The Meitheis', quotes Colonel McCulloch, "From the most credible traditions, the valley appears originally to have been occupied by several tribes, the principal of which were named Koomul, Looang, Moirang, and Meithei, all of whom came from different direction...By the degree the Meithei subdued the whole, and the name Meithei has become applicable to all."¹² He goes on to say that "there is far more ground to conclude them to be descendents of the surrounding hill tribes. Tradition brings the Moirang tribe from the South, the direction of the Kookies (Kukis), the Koomul from the East, the direction of the Murrings, and the Meitheies and Looang from the North-west, the direction of the Koupooes.

.All these tribes have also traditions amongst themselves that the Munniporees (Manipuris) are offshoots from them. These traditions then, and the composite nature of the language, appear to me to afford more reason for supposing hill tribes rather than a Tartar colony from China. Besides the stories of their ancestors, which at times the Munniporees relate amongst themselves, show, hat up to a very recent period, they retained all the customs of hill people of the present day. Their superstition, too, has preserved relics, which alone would have led to the suspicion of an originally close connection between them and Nagas. The ceremony denominated 'Phumbankaba' or 'ascending the throne' is performed in Naga dress, both by the Raja and Rani, and the Yim Chau, or 'great house' the original residence of the Meithei Chief, is, though he does not now reside in it, still kept up , and is made in the Naga fashion."¹³

After the conversion of the Meiteis to Hinduism, the ethnic division had begun. The tribals formed a separate ethnic group. Among them too many other sub-ethnic groups have sprung up. The new trend in Manipur is Manipuri nationality, Naga nationality or Kuki nationality. More and more ethnic polarisation such as, Naga ethnicity or Kuki ethnicity are taking place. Today we hear of a Meitei nation, Naga nation or a Kuki nation etc. There is more of ethnic assertion than ever before which has not helped in state or nation building and also globalisation process.

The process of ethnicity formation gets more and more pronounced. From a single racial stock, there have emerged the Meiteis, the Naga and Kuki-Chin tribes besides the Meitei Muslims. Each group forms a separate ethnicity possessing the essential attributes. Today among the Meitei nationality, there are groups demanding the creation of an independent nation. A number of insurgent groups who call themselves 'national freedom fighters' have avowed to reclaim the lost freedom which has been usurped by the Indian government. They contest for a united Manipur which includes the so called tribal people too. On the other hand, the Naga groups in Manipur aim to create a unified Nagaland or 'Nagalim' which includes the amalgamation of what they call all Naga dominated or inhabited areas. The Kukis on the other hand, are aiming for the creation of a separate Kuki state, though some of the Kuki militant groups are opting for an independent Kuki state. As of now, there are more than 30 underground groups operating in Manipur who are campaigning for their own ethnic communities. Collectively, they are waging a war against the central and state security forces in the recent past. Of course, The Naga and Kuki groups are now engaged in tripartite talks involving the Centre and the State. The valley based militants on the other hand refused to enter into negotiation with the Indian authorities and are still fighting to restore the sovereignty of Manipur.

Ethnicity politics is also the result of lack of development and prevalence of rampant corruption at various levels. Lack of development is visible all over Manipur. A generation of people have not seen good and clean road, good water supply, proper drainage, sanitation facilities, etc. Development work is slow and tedious. The living conditions of the hill people are pathetic. The government and all those involved in the development works have failed to define and execute priorities. Significantly, there are various layers of powers like the Union government, State government, Elected Members of Parliament, State Legislative Assemblies, Ministers, District level administration, Sub-divisional level, and Local self government such as Municipalities, Panchayat, and Autonomous District Councils from the government side. Various civil society organisations like student unions, clubs, and associations based on tribe, ethnicity, area, etc. and religious groups like the Church organisations seem to have not delivered the desired outcomes. As a result of these, Manipur has been described as 'a failed state' by the people and the media. Perhaps, globalisation with its promises of economic development and growth could be an alternative in this part of the country.

The tribal people in northeast India have their constitutional right to govern themselves traditionally in order to promote their distinctive identity and culture. It appears that the tribals of Manipur have practically no rights except the insertion of some provisions in the constitution. They have the land but no power to rule. The hill people as a tribe could be united for their common interest but unfortunately due to divergent political aspiration they cannot go together with an issue. The immediate need of the hour is to introduce a separate land laws for the hills or extend the provision of Sixth Schedule as the institution of tribal chieftainship could not protect the indigenous tribal lands. Further, it is to say that Art. 371 C of the Constitution of India in the case of Manipur through Hill Area Committee (HAC) cannot ensure full protection and security to the tribal lands. The Sixth Schedule provisions, if extended in the tribal dominated hill areas of Manipur, would serve as a basis for working out the genuine principle of autonomy which in turn will serve further as the cementing force for the unity and integrity of the state. Probably, it will also help to arrest the fissiparous tendencies and the mushrooming of different tribal movements for separate homelands in Manipur. But unfortunately, due to trust deficiency, the majority people in the valley perceived that in the event of granting Sixth schedule to the tribals, Manipur will be ultimately disintegrated or will be a stepping stone for secession of the hill people from Manipur. It is to state that such perception is simply unfounded fear. The tribal aspiration is that there should be a real devolution of power. As such the dominant Meitei community has a bigger role to play. They have to shoulder greater responsibility and ensure that tribal community in Manipur, no matter how small they are, should not be made to feel alienated and marginalised. As matter of fact, when such feeling come then the aggrieved community tends to explore options and avenues where their future and wholesome development as a community can safely be secured. The hill-valley divide is more apparent and real. Decades of mistrust, suspicion, shabby treatment and neglect and the feeling of being a second class citizen in the state have a strong prejudiced outlook in the minds of the Hill people vis-à-vis their relationship with the valley people. Because of this syndrome, the feeling of alienation has erected strong impassable iron wall between the hill and valley people. In a democratic state, numbers play a big role in the determination of the formation of government. Thus, 'the rule of the majority' is more often than not, insensitive to the feelings of the rights of minority, in spite of the provisions made in the constitution or protection of the rights of minorities and other weaker sections of the society.

It may be noted that, while majority people living in the valley are politically and economically more advanced and linked to national and international market, the majority tribals in the hill of Manipur are still languishing for their survival despite widespread impact of globalisation. Economic backwardness of the tribal is multi-faceted. They continue the traditional practice of jhum cultivation, depended on forest resources and have no modern methods of cultivation and technology. The tribal land ownership system in the hills especially among the 'Kuki-Chin' is not conducive to economic growth and development. Besides, failure of District Council as a developmental tool, increasing landless labourer, etc. multiplied the problems.

The indifferent treatment of the state at various institutional or non-institutional levels is also one of the causes of misery and suffering of the tribal people of Manipur. However, it should also be kept in mind that on the alleged discrimination and marginalisation of the hill people the state Government is not always responsible. The tribal leaders and elites are also partly responsible in this regard. At the same time some of the problems of the tribal are also inherent in nature. It is believed that more than half of the tribal population in Manipur still lives below the poverty line. This is in fact, a grim picture substantiating the prevailing low per capita income scenario of the state. Different forms of social exclusion at different levels and hill-valley disparities on certain issues are further highlighted briefly as below:-

- The grievances of Scheduled Tribe (ST) & Scheduled Caste (SC) community in terms of employment opportunities and safeguards be addressed. Manipur is a state where people are judged not on the basis of one's conduct or merit but on the basis of creed and ethnicity.
- Developmental infrastructure is lop-sided based on valley centric approach. The hill people wish to see that this should be done away in favour of an all round development of the state.
- Among the infrastructures, transport and communication is one of the most fundamental and essential of all kinds in as far as developmental work is concerned. The hill districts and more specifically the remote areas are worst affected.
- It is evident that Pre primary, Primary and Middle Jr. High schools in the hill districts accounted only 44.85% of the total state it was found that Churachandpur contributed maximum share of only 12.81 of the total hill and valley district. The disparity is more in the number of teachers, hill districts accounted only 30.26% of the total hill and valley districts.¹⁴
- The disparity of agricultural development is also considered another indicator of hill valley divide. For instance, in terms of consumption of fertilizer there is huge disparity between hill and valley districts.
- The level of hill-valley disparity in the state in terms of industrial development can be examined by using three indices vis-a-vis number of industrial units in each district, total investment in these units and the value of production of the industrial units. Regarding the number of industrial units there exist wide disparity between hill and valley with Imphal West with a total of 34 units (SIDO +Non SIDO) had more number of units than the five districts taken together. Moreover, the total number of units in the four valley districts was more than three times the number of units in the five hill districts.¹⁵

Besides, disparity in the field of education, agriculture, transport and communication, industrial sector, health, social and family services, fisheries, marketing and storage, labour and employment, irrigation, animal husbandry and dairying, etc. are all indicators of hill-valley divide syndrome. Deprivation of all major developmental infrastructures, the pathetic road condition and the resultant isolation and under-education, makes one to see poverty looming large as one enters this remote tribal area. These hapless ignorant tribal people have no alternative but depend on a few local elites, unscrupulous politicians and exploiters. There is not even basic infrastructure in the government run schools at many hill villages. In this regard, formation of school-less teachers' association reveals the stark reality. All this led to the deterioration of education system. Many of the schools were left with insufficient number of teachers that too run by proxy teachers which seriously affect the quality of teaching-learning aspect. According to 2011 census, the tribal population of Manipur constituted 40.88 % of the total state population and 95 % of them are settled in the hill districts while the remaining 5 % are in the valley districts.¹⁶ this vast tracts of land in the hills are owned by the tribal people irrespective of Nagas and Kukis.

Protection of property rights is most important precondition for the development of the markets. A legal framework, the implementation machinery to maintain law and order and effective and judicial system are essential components of the incentive systems. Providing a corruption-free and responsive administration in the state is a major challenge that has to be faced for the resurgence of Manipur. Media and non-governmental organization can play an important role of diligence and vigilance in ensuring this. Development requires infrastructure and capacity building.

Similarly, connectivity can dampen insurgency. All these can be done only when there is effective and efficient administration conducive for an all round development.

Due to this trust deficiency syndrome, the Kukis and Nagas feel that they were deprived of their right to economic development for which plight the Meities are solely blamed. It is therefore, pertinent to note that, such syndrome born out to the hill-valley divide should be done away with to thwart off potential threats that may disturb the atmosphere of peace, unity and integrity, security and overall development of the state. The people irrespective of community affiliation should aspire for a composite and developed Manipur by respecting each other culture, identity and rights in which all shall live together on the basis of peaceful co-existence and balanced development. It is suggested that all the stakeholders need to work out certain things like formulation of inclusive policies, building mutual trust and understanding, promotion of socio-economic parity between the hill and the valley, give and take initiative, promotion of communal harmony and so on. The present problems of corruption, social divide, protests, ethnicity politics and poor infrastructure etc. are to be seriously addressed. Solution for cessation of all hostilities should be explored. The advance majority people in the valley should accept without any prejudice that some positive discrimination and favourable treatment made in favour of their backward brethren is nothing but temporary constitutional provision to enable them to come at par with them. After all tribal enjoying such facilities do not hamper the progress of advanced communities.

The role of Hill Area Committee (HAC) over the years is not satisfactory at all as they completely failed to deliver the kind of expectation that the people had look in for. This constitutional body should take pro-active role and ensure that the legitimate demands of the people are fulfilled by the government so that development programmes penetrated at the grass root level. In short, they should fulfil their constitutional mandate. However, it is seen that HAC has been frequently at the mercy of Chief Minister belonging to the majority community as the latter has the power to promote or destroy the political careers of HAC members. Moreover, the HAC being chosen by the CM is not accountable to the tribal people whose interest they are supposed to serve. So the HAC has totally failed to protect the tribal and their land. The rampant nexus of the chiefs with state officials and other elements in the most unethical and unreligious manner with scanty regard for the welfare of the poor and helpless innocent villager is indeed a big tragedy. There is no doubt that in the past the tribal chiefs had played useful role for the village community. As such their office was retained as part of administrative empowerment and machinery. The trend of misusing the institution by the ruling elite and the political class needs to be addressed. More importantly their nexus with certain anti-social element group which brazenly siphoned off village development funds is the real concern of the people. It became a source of discontentment, disunity, hatred and enmity. The failure of the chieftainship institution to meet the demands and requirement of the people in the contemporary complex society has led to the erosion of its sanctity. Individual rights and freedom has to be respected and safeguarded. The government, the chiefs and the communities should put their heads together in restructuring the complicated land holding system which may involve cultural, technical and political questions. Chieftainship should continue but not without a sweeping changes and reformation. The ballooning of the non-viable villages should be checked. We have to accept the fact that many elements of our traditional polity are also antagonistic to democratic principles and values. At the same time many acts of state legislation are again not always acceptable as it often contradicts the time-honoured socio-economic and political institutions. The tribal needs to develop a living and growing identity in the age of globalization. A developed hill district is also an asset to Manipur. To ensure good governance, civil society should also suggest policy initiatives as well as effective outcome-oriented measures to improve development indicator and strengthen public delivery to the people of Manipur as a whole.

CONCLUDING REMARK

The ethnic conflict in Manipur has its root in the overlapping and the contested political breathing space imagined by the respective struggling community. Today, the majority people in the valley aspire for a united and independent or a composite Manipur on the one hand but it is being potentially confronted by the dual challenges of Nagalim and Kuki Homeland/Zalengam on the other. This sort of divergent political aspiration and perspectives for a particular ethnic group exclusively were believed to have been conceived as a result of certain historical or political reasons. This paper suggests that the political leadership of Manipur should evolve strategies for a peaceful co-existence, as the land is a home of different tribes and tongues. Therefore, the people of Manipur needs 21st century ideology and act on those lines where we should accept, respect and celebrate our differences, without which there would be unending internal conflict in the already trouble torn state. There should be light at the end of the tunnel even in the midst of such encircling gloom. Lastly, but not the least, touched by the wind of change and impact of globalisation where boundary has no much significance except for political reasons, the tribal people of Manipur too will be part and parcel of the larger Manipuri society. The desire to maintain separate existence could also be perhaps, a short-lived affair provided that certain legitimate demands are fulfilled. The state has to rise above from the politics of deprivation and consider certain genuine demands of the tribal people in the right earnest for peace, prosperity and progress of the tribal people in particular and the state in general. Developed hill districts are central for a long lasting peace in Manipur. Certain genuine problems of the tribal people are indeed a serious concern which needs immediate attention if the territorial integrity of Manipur is to be safeguarded.

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