

Chapter 8

Exploring Reconciliation Prospects Amidst Identity and Governance Crisis in Manipur

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ABSTRACT

The conflicts in Manipur have a long socio-political history. The root causes behind these clashes are diverse and complex, including colonization, governance issues, drug trafficking, discrimination, geopolitics, and militarization. The ethnic groups and governments have failed to reconcile the differences peacefully. Through this chapter, the researcher is trying to provide an overview of the conflict and how this has affected the people of Manipur. The researcher will identify various dimensions of the conflict in Manipur and analyze how drug trafficking, land rights, and illegal migration are linked to ethnic violence between Kukis and Meiteis by highlighting the historical, cultural, and political aspects of the problem. Further, the existing policies and laws are analysed. Finally, the need for peace negotiations, the requirement for the disarmament of the communities, the need for investigation and trial of grave violations, and the necessity for establishing a truth and reconciliation commission will be discussed.

India is a country more diverse than many continents, yet united by its spirit, with its states embodying this very essence. The Northeast part of India, often referred to as the seven sisters of India, includes Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura, is one of the most culturally diverse areas in the world. Historically, the Northeast region has been one of the world's prominent

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migratory routes, making it a meeting ground for many races and communities (Kumar Das, 2007). Northeast India has a presence of more than 200 tribes with a rich heritage and distinct socio-cultural practices (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2017). Manipur, also known as the 'land of jewels', is a multi-ethnic state with a population of 28, 55,794 (Census of India, 2011). With the presence of various ethnic groups, Manipur has evolved into a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-linguistic society. Geographically, the state is divided into valley districts and hill districts. The valley is known as Imphal Valley and is surrounded by Naga Hill ranges and Lushai Hill ranges. Among population, 58.9% represents the population in the valley, and 41.1% indicates the population in the hills (Thaimei, 2021). The population of Manipur mainly consists of three ethnic groups: Meiteis, who dominate in the valleys; Kukis, and Nagas, who are inhabited on the surrounding hills. Among the Kukis and Nagas, there are 33 recognized tribal groups (Census of India, 2011). The population in Manipur is divided into four major categories: General, Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Caste, and Scheduled Tribes. The Meiteis belong to the non-tribal category and are mostly Hindus, and the Kukis and Nagas belong to the Scheduled Tribe category and are predominantly Christians.

Historically, Manipur was ruled by the Meitei dynasty. The Meities and Nagas have been present in the valley and hills for centuries. The British conquered the Manipur kingdom in 1891 (Khan, 2006). The Kukis were brought and settled by the Britishers surrounding the valley to protect the valley from attacks from the Naga tribes (Schoetz, 2023). As the Kukis had migrated during the 19th century, the Meiteis considered Kukis as outsiders or foreigners, although initially, the Kukis were not enemies but supporters of Meities. However, the Old Kukis are believed to have lived in the state traditionally, and only New Kukis migrated in the 19th century from the Laushai hills (Das, 2005). As the kings of Manipur and the British used the Kuki community against the Naga community to keep the Nagas under control, the conflict between these two communities arose (Kumar Sharma, 2016). The Nagas strongly resisted the efforts to control them or conquer the Naga-dominating parts of Manipur. The affiliation between Kukis and the British did not last long. During World War I, the Kukis refused to join the Labour Corps and declared war against the British, marking the beginning of the Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919 (Guite & Haokip, 2018). The war did not end in favour of the Kukis, as the British troops outnumbered them. In 1949, Manipur was integrated into the Indian Union as a 'C' state, then categorized as Union Territory in 1956, and later upgraded to statehood in 1971.

The ethnic tension between different groups in Manipur continued even after independence. The topography, socio-economic status, and historical factors such as ethnicity, tribal conflicts, migration, control over local resources, and extensive

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