

Contesting Territorial Claims: Struggle for the Promised Land

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Abstract

Manipur, literally “the land of Jewels”, the last frontier of the Indic civilization in the east, lay traumatized with armed conflicts. It has caught up in triangular conflicts, conflict between the state and non-state actors, the conflict among the non-state actors, and conflict between the relative major ethnic groups of the state. The conflict that began as civilizational crisis, divided ethnically by the colonial rule and idealized politically by struggle for self-determination has at the end, boiled down to struggle for territorial claims, the Meiteis struggle to preserve the Promised Land of the Hindus, challenged by the Naga’s Greater Nagaland or Nagalim and Kuki’s Homeland.

Keywords: Armed Conflict, Territorial claims, Meitei, Naga, Kuki, Colonial Rule, Independence, Merger, ConflictResolution.

The state of Manipur faced severe problems, for political independence from British Rule and integration with Indian Union did not automatically bring them prosperity and happiness. The celebration of the Indian National Congress of Manipur after the merger of the state with India soon died down with disappointments when Manipur was given the status of part ‘C’ state. This was soon followed by rise of insurgent groups demanding the right to self-determination. Meanwhile the Government of India created a separate state of Nagaland in 1960 to quell the Naga insurgency. However, that was not the solution of the political problems of the Nagas. It led to fractionalization of the Nagas, the birth of NSCN, which felt the Shillong Accord of 1975 that created Nagaland was a “betrayal” and “sell out”, which was to have repercussions on the political condition of Manipur, till today. Following the Mizoram Peace Accord (1986) between the Government of India and the Mizo National Front (MNF) under Laldenga, the former Lushai Hill was declared a full-fledged state of India, the state of Mizoram in 1987. But the Kukis living in neighbouring areas were left out from the new state. The kukis living in Manipur had also joined the MNF movement in the defiant hope that on day that they would all be united. The dissatisfactions of the kukis in Manipur have culminated in their demand for Kuki Homeland.

This paper is an attempt to understand the dynamics behind the intractable conflicts in the state. On the background is the struggle for the rights to self determination by the Meitei dominant insurgent groups and the aspirations of the community to preserve and defend the territorial integrity of the state. Juxtaposing on that canvas is the Naga’s aspiration and territorial claims for an honourable solution to the culmination of decades of NSCN (I-M)’s armed struggle against the Government of India and the community’s aspiration to carve out a state of their own. Meanwhile the Kukis on their part are demanding the extension of 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution to the Hill areas of Manipur and a Kuki Homeland. Every aspiration, every struggle, the demands of the three major communities of the state the Meitei, the Naga and the Kuki crosses territorial claims and crosses swords. The state exhibits state and non-state conflicts, and conflicts between the non-state actors overlapping one another. The rationale behind this paper is that a deeper understanding of these conflicts, the different types of dynamics and conflict issues, as well as of the complex connections between these conflicts and other forms of organized violence, is necessary for improving academic research as well as for better informed policy and interventions.

Land and Ethnicity:

The state of Manipur lies in the northeast corner of India. Imphal is the capital city. The state shares her territory with Nagaland in the north, Mizoram in the south, Assam in the west and international boundary with Myanmar in the east. It was an independent kingdom till the British incorporated in the British Indian administration after the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891. It has an unbroken lineage of rulers, the Ningthouja Dynasty, since ancient times till today. Manipur was known in olden days by variety of names. In Renell's memoirs and maps of India it was called Meckley. In Syme's narrative the state was called Cassey. It was known as Mogli in Cachar. Among the Shan and Myanmarese tribes the state was known by the name of Ka Se or Katheⁱ. The name Manipur, a Hinduized term, was introduced after A.D. 1737, when bulk of Meiteis embraced Vaishnav Cult of Hinduism. To the Manipuries it was known as Meiteileipak (the land of the Meiteis) or Kangleipak (the Royal land).

Deeply mixed ethnic groups, the people of Manipur are predominantly Mongoloid, who speak Tibeto-Burman languages. The state has been a centre of cultural synthesis from thousands of years ago, at the same time serving as an important bridge connecting India with other parts of Southeast Asia. It is homeland of the Meiteis, twenty-nine Scheduled Tribes (broadly grouped under Naga and Kuki Tribes), seven Scheduled Castes, Meitei Pangals and a number of unspecified Tribes. There is also a small percentage of other community like Bengalees, Biharis, Sikhs, Marawaris, Nepalais, etc.

The topography of Manipur comprises two distinct geographical regions, the Valley in the middle surrounded by Nine Hills. The total area is 22, 327 sq. Kms, i.e. 1/149 total area of India. The hills are inhabited by two major tribes, the Naga and the Kuki, recognized as Scheduled Tribe by the constitution of India. The valley is predominantly inhabited by the Meiteis, along with Meitei Pangals (Muslims) and others. The total area of the Hills comprises 20,089 Sq. kms, i.e. 92 percent of total area of Manipur, while the hill population comprises only 29.88 percent of the total population of the state (the Meiteis cannot own land in the hills). The valley which is only 2,238 sq. Kms, i.e. 8 percent of the land accommodates 70.12 percent of the total population. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Manipur is 25,70,390. Out of this, the estimated tribal population is 9,02,740 (35.1 percent) Meitei, Meitei Pangal and others are 16,67,650 (64.9 percent)ⁱⁱ.

The Contemporary Crisis:

Manipur, the last frontier of the Indic civilization in the eastern part of India, the land once so fondly described as the "Jewel of India" (Late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru), "Switzerland of the East" (Lord Irwin) lies shattered and devastated rocked by violence and decades of decadence. Schism of every kind, of territorial boundaries, religion, ethnicity and language, among others are present. The state is characterized by a high degree of political, social and economic insecurity. Society and polity are dominated by fragmentation and fractionalization. It wasn't until the introduction of the anti defection law in India that none of the elected assemblies of Manipur completed a full term in state governance. There are proliferations of numerous insurgent groups of every community. They have made their presence felt, in whichever way they feel convenient and justified. Civil organization of these communities follows suit. This in turn has further complicated the political and economic conditions and ethnic relations in the state. Confrontation, public curfews, general strikes, economic blockades have become primarily the basic forms of holding the state and one another in ransom. And the state government in turn has resorted to brutal suppression of any forms of protest.

The political ideology, principles and allegiances of these actors and participants are uncompromisingly diverse creating confusions, competitions and chaos among themselves and to the public life. There is little governance, except in the state capital, Imphal and parts of greater Imphal. In rest of the state, law and order are in the hands of the dominant groups, the state exist nominally. Just the mention of the word "economic blockade", "Highway Band", in the local news channels or the morning news papers whether in effect or in threat to execute is enough to strike fear

among the people of the valley. It would take immediate effect, the result would be panic buying, especially Petrol and Diesel. Long lines of vehicles could be seen in front of the oil pumps before dawn, some spending the night there itself, and by evening all the pumps would put up their favorite signs "Stock Nil". It's a frequent sight, for petrol in black markets would shoot up even up to Rs. 200/250 per liters.

Merger of Manipur and Reorganizations of States:

The tide of Indian national struggle for freedom in British India had a profound impact in northeastern part of India. Manipur was a princely state loosely controlled by British India. For the convenience of administration, the administration of the plains and hills of Manipur were divided by the British government. The Hill administration was directly controlled under the political agent and the plains indirectly through the state durbars. Thus the nature of resentment against the British rule differed and national aspirations of the Hills and plain went out from different directions, which was later to have a profound impact in the post independent India.

The outbreak of Nupi Lal, what is popularly known as the First Women's Agitation of 1904, can be regarded as the first organized form of anti-imperialistic movement from the Meiteis. From the Hills notables are the Kuki rebellion of 1917-20, the Zelingrong Movement under Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu 1930-49. Later on the movements were carried forward by the respective communities. There was no concerted effort for a united struggle against the British Rule.

On the eve of the outbreak of the II world war, Hijam Irabot led a campaign against the feudalistic rule of the then Maharaja of Manipur Churand Singh. The demand included stoppage of social and religious persecutions by the monarchy and introduction of responsible government. The movement could have been influenced by movement for State of Jawaharlal Nehru, an attempt to abolish the rule of the princely states in India so that future course on integration of Indian state would have been easy. With the demands for anti-feudal, anti-monarchical and anti-colonial rule, Hijam Irabot led the foundation of leftist movement in Manipur. Irabot propagated the idea of an "independent Manipur with full responsible government elected by the people, with the king remaining as constitutional head", after the departure of Britishⁱⁱⁱ.

Indians perceived the end of Second World War as the end of British Colonial Rule in Indian subcontinent. Like other princely states of India, the Maharaja of Manipur submitted a memorandum to the British Government expressing the desire of the Manipurites to have a separate and sovereign administrative unit of their own. "Maharaja Bodhchandra wrote (to the British authorities) on 30th October 1946 in which he explicitly expressed his desire to establish a democratic system of administration with an 'Elected Advisory Assembly' constituted by the representatives of both hills and plains"^{iv}.

It was not an unfounded ambition of the Maharaja of Manipur to publicly announce his desire to claim an independent state. The desire was based on the then British Prime Minister Clement Attlee's announcement on 20 February 1947 that "His Majesty's Government do not intend to hand over their powers and obligations under paramountcy to any government of India"^v. Following these lines M. A. Jinnah also publicly declared on 18 June 1947 that "the states would be independent sovereign states on the termination of paramountcy and were free to remain independent if they so desired"^{vi}. However, after much pressure and objections from the Indian National Congress, Lord Mountbatten who succeeded Lord Wavell softened his stand during the speech on the Independence Bill that in the course of the near future that States could find an appropriate place with one or other dominion within the British Commonwealth.

Manipur's demand for a responsible government was met when Bodhchandra, the Maharaja of Manipur constituted a constitution making body on 12 December 1946. Besides responding to the

popular demand, he was influenced by the “decision of the Chambers of princes to make constitutional reforms in their states to ensure more or less responsible government”^{vii}. The decision was also influenced by the announcement of the of the British Cabinet Mission of the need of introducing new constitution in the Indian states based on the principle of popular and responsible government. The Committee was inaugurated on 10 March 1947 by the Maharaja. It submitted a draft constitution to the Maharaja on 26 July 1947. The designed constitution was named “Manipur State Constitution Act 1947”. A constitutional monarchy came into existence, “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 the Maharaja”^{viii}. The Council of Ministers would consist of seven Ministers including the Chief Minister; out of these two ministers would be representatives of the Hill people. However, the Chief Minister would be appointed by the Maharaja and not elected by the people. Though the Maharaja remained the most powerful head in the structure, the Constitution also provided a number of fundamental rights and duties guaranteeing the people of the state, equality before the law and other safeguard to protect their individual liberty.

The Hill administration was transferred to the maharaja in Council on 10 August 1947. The “Manipur State Hill People’s (Administrative) regulations 1947” was also introduced on the same day. The basic provision was that “the welfare and the good administration of the Hill People of the state must be the responsibility of the Council”^{ix}. The final draft was accepted by the five representatives of the Hill people.

With the lapse of paramountcy on 15 August 1947 Manipur reclaimed her lost independence. Elections were held in Manipur for the first time. It was over a month long affairs starting on 11 June 1948 that continued till 27 July 1948. In India elections were held for the first time in 1951-52 over a four month period^x. The Manipur State assembly opened for the first time on 18 October 1948 at the Durbar Hall, Kangla, Imphal. The new council of Ministers was appointed by an order of the Maharaja on 10 November 1948. The new Chief Minister was sworn in on 26 November at the Palace Durbar by the Chief Judge of the Chief Court. Maharaja Priyobrata was sworn in as the first Chief Minister of Manipur. The establishment of the legislative Assembly that was constituted with the representatives elected on the basis of democratic principles was a landmark in the history of Manipur.

However under much duress and controversies, the merger of Manipur to the Indian Union came into effect on 15 October 1949 as per the agreements signed between the Maharaja of Manipur Bodhachandra and Sri Prakash the Governor of Assam, V. P. Menon, advisor to the Government of India (Ministry of state) at Shillong on 21 September 1949, “within days the Maharaja of Manipur, on a visit to Shillong, found himself imprisoned in his residence. The house was surrounded by soldiers and under the pressure of considerable misinformation and intimidation, the Maharaja – isolated from his advisors, council of ministers and Manipuri public opinion – was made to sign an agreement fully merging his state with India. When the ceremony to mark the transfer of power and the end of this ancient kingdom took place in Imphal on 15 October 1949, a battalion of Indian Army was placed to guard against possible trouble”^{xi}.

The merger of Manipur to the Indian Union was just the beginning of chains of crisis that followed and that would continue till date with proliferations. After the merger of Manipur to the Indian Union the people of the state expressed their dissatisfactions, but there was some ray of hope for those who believed in the constitutional and democratic set-up Indian Government. The Indian nationalist who inherited the country from the British had suffered for more than two decades of indifferent rule. So the people of Manipur were expecting a benevolent decisions from the new India. However, it was all shattered when Manipur was given the status of Part C State. The state was put under the control of Chief Commissioner. The people felt that it was a humiliating act done on this once martial race who were Hinduized and who regarded themselves as the last frontier of Indic Civilization. There was sharp reaction from the people of Manipur. Those who still believed in the good governance of the

constitution of India started a democratic political agitation demanding grant of statehood to Manipur, the Right to Self-government. But those who had lost faith in the politics of the Government of India launched an armed struggle for the liberation of Manipur from the Indian Union itself: the Right to Self Determination.

In the meantime the state of Nagaland was created from the areas that were called as Naga Hills. It was formerly administered as a province of Assam. The Naga Club, later known as Naga National Council played a very important role in the creation of the State. It was a long journey of memorandums, discussions, violence and negotiation, “subsequently, Nagaland attained statehood with the enactment of the state of Nagaland Act in 1962 by the Parliament. The interim body (the Nagaland Transitional Provisions Regulation, 1961) was dissolved on 30 November 1963 and the state of Nagaland was formally inaugurated on 1 December 1963 and Kohima was declared as the state capital. After elections in January 1964, the first democratically elected Nagaland Legislative Assembly was constituted on 11 February 1964”^{xii}. However the aspirations of the Nagas to incorporate all the Naga inhabiting areas of the Northeast did not materialized. It led to fractionalization of the Naga, fighting against the governments as well as factional fighting among the Nagas.

The rise of Naga insurgents and desire of many Nagas of Manipur to merge territorially and administratively with the newly created state of Nagaland posed an impending threat to the territorial integrity of the state of Manipur. The first conference of the Nagas of Manipur was held at Tangkhul – long in Ukhrul District on October 22, 1957. The conference declared, “We deserve to make it clear that the Naga elements should be brought under one administrative unit as far as physical position permits”^{xiii}. The agenda of the conference was to bring solidarity of the Nagas with the objective to include Naga inhabited areas of Manipur Hills in formation of a Naga administrative unit which would also include Naga Hills and Tuensang Frontier Division. And it was also the time the activities of the Naga insurgents have increased in Manipur especially in the Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Mao Districts of Manipur.

The threat became clearer with the signing of the ‘Cease-fire’ agreement between the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) and the Government of India (GOI). The cease fire agreement became effective from the mid-night of 5 September 1964^{xiv}. Of the three districts proposed by the FGN, the Jampu State, the Patkai State and the Dikhu state, the Jampu State included from the state of Manipur the districts of Mao and Sadar Hills (982 Sq. Kms.), Tamenglong (1772 Sq. Kms.) and Ukhrul (1832 Sq. Kms.). If these three districts were to be taken away from Manipur, fulfilling the desires of the Nagas of Manipur, the areas of Manipur would be reduced to 10,121 Sq. Kms from a total area of 22,327. The seed of Greater Nagalim / Southern Nagalim was sown during this period of time. This became the ‘Promised Land’ of the Nagas of Manipur.

The various Mizo clans lived in autonomous villages before the British Raj. The tribal chiefs enjoyed an eminent position in the gerontocratic Mizo society. The chiefs were the absolute rulers of their respective clans' territories (ram), although they remained under the nominal political jurisdictions of the Rajas of Manipur, Tripura and Burma^{xv}. The Mizo Hills formally became part of British India in 1895. North and south Mizo hills became part of the Assam province in 1898 as the Lushai Hills District, with Aizawl as headquarters. After independence from the British Empire, the hereditary rights of the chiefs were abolished under the Assam-Lushai District (Acquisition of Chief's Rights) Act, 1954. Village courts were re-implemented in Mizo region along with other parts of Assam. All of these regions were frustrated by these arrangements and centralized Assam governance. The Mizos were particularly dissatisfied with the government's inadequate response to the 1959–60 mautam famine. The Mizo National Famine Front, a body formed for famine relief in 1959, later developed into a new political organization, the Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1961^{xvi}. A period of protests and armed insurgency followed in 1960s, with MNF seeking independence from India. In 1971, the government agreed to convert the Mizo Hills into a Union Territory, which came into being as Mizoram in 1972.

After the Mizoram Peace Accord (1986) between the Government of India and the Mizo National Front, Mizoram was declared a full-fledged state of India in 1987^{xvii}.

The creation of the state of Mizoram created despair among the Kuki-Chin-Mizo grouped Manipur as they were left out of the new state. They were struggling two pronged battle on the eve of India's independence. The Kuki National Association (KNA), Manipur in 1947 declared that "the hills of Manipur were never a part of India and Manipur prior to the British colonialism and vehemently protested against the transfer of hill administration to the Manipur State Durbar. They insisted to the British government that their territory should be return after they left India"^{xviii}. Later in 1960 the KNA submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India for the creation of Kuki State. "Side by side with this homeland movement in Manipur they also participated in the pan-Kuki movement under the banner of Mizo Commoners Union which was soon renamed Mizo Union in 1946"^{xix}.

The Kukis also joined the Mizo National Front (MNF) with the objective of amalgamating the Kuki hills in Manipur and Chin Hills with the Lushai Hills. However when Mizoram was created only the former Lushai Hills formed a part of Mizoram. The exclusion of the Kuki Hills in the accord was betrayal to the Kukis of Manipur. The dream of a pan-Kuki state ended in despair and the Kukis now struggles for a home land, in Manipur, the "Promised Land" of the Kukis.

Ethnic Identities and Growth of Nationalism:

What began as aspirations of the three major communities in Manipur manifested itself by the peoples of the land by proposing their own version of territorial claims. The territorial claims were further politicized on ethnic lines. These movements are carried forward by the insurgent groups and the civil societies of these groups. There is a thin line dividing the insurgent groups and the civil societies in Manipur. It has become a very sensitive issue. Any form of protest and violence are carried on the lines of ethnicity. Manipur has more than thirtysix insurgent groups operating in the state.

The Nagas of the Manipur have refuted the composite civilizational history and lay authenticity on the "unique history" of the Nagas, claiming territories of the neighbouring states and creation of Greater Nagaland or the Nagalim. This is one of the most contentious issues in the ongoing Indo-Naga talks. This has resulted in the protest from the neighbouring state, the worst impact was felt in the state of Manipur. It resulted in the death of eighteen protestors protesting against the extension of Indo-Naga ceasefire into Manipur on 18 June 2000. The protestors earlier had burnt down the state assembly and were marching towards the Chief Minister's bungalow, but in the altercation they were shot dead by the C.R.P.F. jawans on duty at the gate. Every year 18 June has been declared as a state holiday and celebrated in glory of preserving the territorial integrity of the state by United Committee, Manipur.

The animosities between the Naga and Kuki began with the colonial policy of Kuki settlement in 1840, when Mc Culloch, the then Political Agent, purposively adopted the policy of allowing the settlement of Kukis on the frontlines and among the Nagas. The purpose was that the Kukis has to act against the Nagas and Lushai tribes. Kukis and Nagas were used against one another by the British in subduing the other. The Kuki rebellion of 1917-19 can be regarded as the foundation of Kuki Nationalism in Manipur. During the rebellion a series of brutal outrages were committed on their surrounding (Naga) villages by the rebels, nineteen villages were raided with the loss of 193 persons killed and twentysix missing. In the recent past another factor that strengthened Kuki nationalism was the Kuki-Naga Clash of the early 1990s. It was payback time, where NSCN (I-M) committed brutal atrocities on the Kuki, a sort of genocidal attempt to claim their promised land. It created a sense of insecurity amongst the Kuki community regarding their land and settlement. They felt that they were threatened and they even feared the total annihilation of their ancestral land that strengthened in a political demand for a Kuki homeland.

The basis of the claims and counter claims for lebensraum of the expanding Kuki and Naga ethnic groups, though rooted in the historical process of migration and settlement, to a large extent is abetted by the antipathy of the government against these ethnic groups. The fragmentation and fractionalization of the ethnic communities and their competing claims have created an environment

of uncertainty where total strikes, economic blockades, lockouts and burning of state institutions and properties have become the order of the day.

A Search for Solutions:

All these conflicts and violence have resulted in complete transformation of social, economic and political landscape of Manipur, and most importantly the relations between the three major communities of the state. There is decline in morality and ethics, corruption in administration, disillusion and anomie in the youth populations. Anarchistic, philistine characters of youths, a decadent political and bureaucratic environment and vehement dissident movement by non-state forces and an equal vehement form of state oppression and intimidation, violations of basic rights and dignity have created a vicious cycle of violence and conflict in Manipur.

The increased accountability placed on the armed forces in Manipur is a step forward, but it will not solve the problem in the near future. The 'raising's' of increased number of Indian Reserve Battalions(IRB) in Manipur, and increased in recruitments of Manipur Police Commandoes with latest combat weapons has shown little signs of improvements in the law and order or in controlling or finishing off insurgency in Manipur. On the contrary, it has only fuelled the race for government employment with unimaginable corruptions. The re-imposition of the Armed Forces Powers Act (AFSPA) by the successive Governments in Manipur is a clear indication of the government fear that easing of military presence in Manipur would lead to an upsurge in the insurgent activities, with possible implication for separatist movements in other areas of Northeast India. The key question is however, whether the Government of India or the insurgents is willing to take the risk associated with such a strategy. The Government needs to ponder over Irom Chanu Sharmila's crusade against the AFSPA 1958, with fast unto death. She has been forced fed, with the drama of re-release and re-arrest cycle. Instead of brushing off her campaign as a mere case of attempting suicide, the state need to reassess the decades of operation of AFSPA not just in military and security aspects but the repercussions on the people and society itself and the psychological impact. The impact of militarization is felt not just on the civil population but is also felt the military personnel too. Once a General in his address remarked that army are here to maintain law and order, and the solution to insurgency is in your (the state and the people) hands. They are more comfortable in dealing with the enemies on the borders. They have no business here.

The Cease-fire agreement (with Meitei, Naga or Kuki insurgents) is not the solution; it is just a ground on which the solutions to these conflicts have to be built upon. It seems that the government is buying time with extensions of cease-fire agreements. Nothing concrete has ever come out of it, except that there is no firing between the state and the insurgents. The ground meaning of cease fire means no firing between the combatants, nothing else. The brunt of insurgency to the masses still remains the same; it has only legalized the extortion nexus of insurgents groups. Besides this, the lure of material prospect of the rehabilitation packages (whether fulfilled or not) of ceasefire agreements have also encouraged the politics of divide in the insurgent groups leading to splits in the ranks and files and birth of another insurgent group. There are reports of 'surrender drama', where the local boys are promised a job and paraded out as members of surrendered insurgent groups. It's high time that the administration reconsiders extensions or incorporations of cease-fire on fine lines of conflict resolution. One of the worst pitfalls of the Indo-Naga Cease-fire Agreement was the "extension of cease-fire without territorial limits", it has become the thorn in the pride of the Nagas in Manipur. The Nagas could never reconcile the withdrawal of the word 'without territorial limits', it has shattered their dream of the Promised Land. Meanwhile it has become the pride of the Meiteis as an achievement in the preservation of the territorial integrity of the state. It has sharpened animosity and mistrust among the Nagas and Meiteis (who spearheaded the movement against the extension to Manipur).

The National Highways connecting Imphat to Dimapur (NH 57) or Imphal to Jiribam (NH 39) has become the best weapon to express the dissatisfaction of the Nagas and Kukis against the government. It has little or no impact on the state administrations, but for sure on the common people. Protestors use it to hold the people to ransom. Since the issues are concerned and blockades are spearheaded by the Nagas and Kukis, it has created a sense of feeling of negative reaction from the Meiteis, who lives on the plains of Imphal and most affected. The issue is not seen as blockades against the administration but felt as and on the communal lines. This has produced counter blockades to roads leading to the hills by the Meiteis, simple, 'if they block our lifeline we will block theirs'. It has resulted in more animosities between these three communities. The fault lies not on these communities; they are being used as pawns for political gains. It's all about political leverage as one of the professor from Manipur University says, as crisis emerges along with it 'heroes' also emerges (individual or organization) and they exploit the situations for their gains. Now, it's time the administration understands and addresses the politics of 'national highway'. Hoping that the introduction of railways to the state will change the highway politics, it may ease the movement of goods and people, but will it change for better the mindset of the people and their relationship with one another.

With opening of the eastern borders of India, the transformation of the 'Look East policy' to 'Act East policy' by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi Government, Manipur is at stake. Every opportunity poses a challenge and every challenge comes with an opportunity. When the world has become a global village, and when borders and boundaries have become irrelevant, where knowledge has become the source of wealth and identity, is the struggle for territorial claims, the Promised Land worth fighting for among themselves? For in the history of Manipur it is not the enemy from outside that have devastated the land and people but it is the Manipuris themselves that they are responsible for. Manipur was defeated by the Awas (Burmese) in the war against the Awas when one of the princes betrayed the kingdom, which resulted in seven years of devastation on Manipur. The Anglo-Manipur war of 1891 was also the result of fratricidal war among the princes for the crown, which resulted in the British occupation of the state. Now the people need to reexamine and reassess these decades of conflicts, including fighting for domination among themselves and be prepared for the future. The solution to these intractable conflicts will not come from the Government of India but it has to and will come from the people of the state, for they know their problems better and thus the solutions, before history repeats itself on these people...

End Notes:

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- ^{iv} Ibid, p. 162.
- ^v Bipan Chandra, Mridaula Mukherjee & Aditya Mukherjee, *India After Independence 1947 – 2000* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 72.
- ^{vi} Ibid.
- ^{vii} Memo no 456 p. II – I dated 21 September 1946, from the maharaja to the political Agent in Manipur.
- ^{viii} Manipur State Constitution Act 1947. Chapter 1, part 3.
- ^{ix} Manipur State Constitution Act 1947. Chapter VII, section 38.
- ^x Bipan Chandra, Mridaula Mukherjee & Aditya Mukherjee, *India After Independence 1947 – 2000*, p. 133.
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- ^{xiii} Resolution of the National Executive of the PSP dated August 11, 1960, cited in J. Roy, *History of Manipur*, (Calcutta, 1973), p. 154.
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