



GOVERNMENT POLICIES: THE REASONS FOR INSURGENT MOVEMENT AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT

This paper closely examines the possibilities of the various important government policies formulated and implemented by the British Government, Government of India, and the Government of Manipur in over a century towards the current political and ethnic instability in the state of Manipur. The policies might have been formulated and implemented with good intentions as at the larger interest of the state and nation at large but seem to have miserably failed in governance and integrating the people into the national mainstream. The origin, breeding and thriving of the numerous insurgent groups and the unending ethnic centric conflicts and violence in the state has its root in the policies. Today, we find that the ethnic centric problems including insurgency draw its lifeline from these very policies.

Key words: Innerline permit, AFSPA, Disturbed area, Sixth schedule-Autonomous district council, Insurgency

INTRODUCTION

The British arrived in the princely kingdom of Manipur from the Cachar hills not with the intention to rule but to trade and also on the invitation of the King to help keep the Burmese invading army at bay. The kingdom was brought under the direct rule of the British empire under the proclamation issued on 21st August, 1891.. When the British left the sub-continent in 1947, Manipur princely statehood and independence was restored but was eventually annexed to the independent democratic India on Oct. 10, 1949 after King Budhachandra Singh signed the document of annexation. (M. Amarjeet Singh:26)

Manipur is a small state with very rich culture, traditions and ethnic groups. The history of the Meiteis has been chronicled since 33 A.D, the Manipur muslim community “Pangals” came from the present Syllet valley of Bangladesh, but the tribals in the hills have been



calling the hills surrounding the valley their home since time immemorial. The origin of the various communities has not been chronicled but it is an accepted fact they migrated to this present settlement.

The largest community is the Meitei, and then followed by the Nagas, Kuki-Chin-Mizo, and the Pangals. There is a small community of migrant traders and labourers. The Meiteis and Pangals constituting 63% of the population occupy the 10% of the state landmass in the valley while the numerous tribes occupy the 90% of land area in the hills. There is no chronicled history that the hill tribes were ever directly ruled or subjugated by the valley king but they pay tax or tribute sometime.

It is said that the communities of the valley and the hills consider themselves to be brothers and related. Till date there is festivals that are observed to substantiate this, they have co-existed since time immemorial, they have traded, they have fought, and they have shared traditions. Time, lifestyle and religion have played a role in their strained relationship but the greater question is, could there be a factor besides these that have created so much division and trust deficit among the ethnic groups in the state?

Manipur host the largest insurgent-militant groups in India. Ethnic conflicts and violence expressed in the form of arm struggle, bandhs, strikes, economic blockades and counter blockades, and damage and loss of property and lives is the norm of the day in Manipur. The insurgency problem is not a law and order problem. The groups are not homogenous for they have different objectives and are founded on different environment. Is it not pertinent to ask the why? And how question to the present situation? Could there be a colossal failure? What could be the cause of it? It is a socio-economic and political problem that needs urgent solutions, but for that we need to find the root cause. The people of the state did not deliberately chose to but are made to chose this path to be heard, survive, sustain, and preserve.

Objectives:

This paper is to examine the various important government policies and their contribution to the geo-political situation prevailing in the state. It is the desire of the author to highlight the errors but not to discredit the merits of the divisive policies so that it can be corrected and wounds can be healed or furthers wounds in the ethnic relationship is not inflicted by rubbing more salt through additional wrong policies.

Methodology:



Survey through questionnaire and interviews were done to find out the opinion of the people in relation to governance and ethnic relationship.

Policies that matters:

1. British policies: Inner line permit/House tax/buffer zone

The British colonial power had adopted a policy of “Inner line permit” in 1872 to divide the territory of jurisdiction. It was meant to protect the British subjects within the line, while leaving the tribes beyond the line on their own. The British subjects were not to venture into territories beyond the demarcated line, underlying that the territory and subjects beyond the line were different, nomads, and barbaric tribals that need to be left alone to be protected. This policy was conveniently adopted by the independent Indian government. It is this policy that sowed the seed of difference and independence.

When the British annexed the princely kingdom of Manipur in 1891, they also formulated and implemented a policy of house tax to extract resources from the subjects and generate revenue. The house tax was not uniform throughout the state territory as the valley house tax was Rs. 2/- per house while the hill house tax was Rs. 3/- per house. (Mahindra Gulati: 168). These differentiated policies alienate and create division among the people of the state.

The policy of the British also to place some of the existing communities who migrated late or came as portals for the British were placed in territory between the valley and the hills as a buffer zone so that the nomadic wild tribe will not raids the British subjects in the valley.(M. Banerjee & R.P. Attparia:2011). This did not go down well with the tribes that claim the territory as their ancestral home. Till date one of the main bones of contention is the conflict over territory.

2. Annexation document and statehood

When the British left the sub-continent in 1947, the princely kingdom of Manipur was given its independence. The king was restored and the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947, and the Manipur State Hill (Administration) Regulation, 1947 were adopted. Then on 21st September, 1949 the honourable King of Manipur was invited to Shillong and the history of Manipur was never to be the same again. King Meidingu Bodhchandra Singh was supposedly forced to sign the instrument of Accession to be become an Indian territory without consulting his subjects. (Namrata Goswami:2011) This has never been kindly accepted by the people. It was the beginning of insurgency and armed struggle for total independence especially in the valley.



To rub salt in the wound, the newly annexed state was placed under “Category C” state until 1962 when it was given the status of a Union territory. A neighbouring small state of Nagaland was created in 1963, this was taken as an insult to the people of Manipur. Manipur attained its full statehood only on 21st January, 1972.

3. Gifting of the Kabaw Valley 1952/3

Kabaw valley of Myanmar was a territory that belong the Kingdom of Manipur. The Yandabo treaty of 1926 ensured that the Burmese King pay Kabaw valley compensation tax to the Manipur king. In 1952 the first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, gifted the Kabaw valley to the Burmese government on the stately visit of the Burmese leader U Nu for political reasons without consulting the people of Manipur who owns the territory. (B.G. Verghese:218) It is considered as a great insult and disrespect. It send out a message to the people of the state of Manipur that the government at Delhi does not care as long as they are able to achieve political mileage at the cost of the people at far flung areas. Surely this is not a policy or practice that will build national integration and feeling of oneness. Policy of “big brother bully” creates a sense of fear, uncertainty, frustration, and rebellion.

4. AFSPA/Disturbed Area

The draconian law of Arms Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which empowers the arm forces to arrest anyone on mere suspicion without anycharges or warrant has been imposed in the state since September 8, 1980. This law gives unlimited powers to the armed forces to arrest, interrogate and eliminate. Through this Act, the people of Manipur have been living in constant fear. There have been many instances of innocent bloodshed, lives lost, rape, staged encounter, and disappearances of individuals whose ends are never known. Such draconian Act of a nation that terrorises its own innocent citizens for the act of a few cannot achieve the end as outcome of such law further drives the people away from the mainstream. Why would “the iron lady” Irom Sharmila of Manipur fasted for 16 years (2000 to 2016)? Was it not against the atrocities and high handedness of the armed forces against innocent citizens of India?

After the implementation of the AFPSA in 1980, the insurgency situation in Manipur has not got any better infact it has spiralled out of hand. The insurgent activities have increased and insurgent groups have multiplied, how long before we wake up and ask the pertinent question “Why?” It need to be remembered that “Love begets love, hatred breeds hatred and rebellion”. Every individual is born free and freedom is paramount, this freedom can never be subdued but can be allowed to exercise and blossom. The law of nature proves that all thrives well when enough space of freedom is provided.

5. Assembly representation

The policy of determining the elected representative in the state Assembly need to be reviewed as there is huge imbalance in geo-political representation. This unbalance representation has resulted in discord and dispute. It is felt by the tribals in the hills that their right to representation has been denied. The 5 five hill districts have only 20 elected members while the 4 valley districts have 40 elected members.

SI #	District	Constituency	Electors (Lakhs)	% of Electors	% of MLA
1	Bishnupur	6	1,68,003	8.87	10
2	Imphal East	11	3,24,491	17.13	18.33
3	Imphal West	13	3,53,705	18.68	21.67
4	Thoubal	10	2,96,884	15.68	16.67
5	Chandel	2	91,994	4.86	3.33
6	Churachandpur	6	1,93,838	10.24	10
7	Senapati	6	2,59,294	13.69	10
8	Tamenglong	3	93,469	4.94	5
9	Ukhrul	3	1,12,065	5.92	5
	GRAND TOTAL	60	18,93,743	100	100

Source: compiled

It can be seen close examination of the table above that there is higher representation from the valley in relation to the electors while there is lower representation from the hills in relation to electors. Take the example of Bishnupur 1,68,003 electors (6 MLAs) with 8.87% of electors and Senapati with 2,59,294 electors (6 MLAs) with 13.69% , Thoubal (10 MLAs) with 15.68% of electors but Senapati, a hill district with 13.69% of electors have only 6 MLAs and Churachandpur with 10.24% have only 6 MLAs. If the 4.94% of Tamenglong is equivalent to 3 MLAs, then how is it justified of the difference in the representation between Imphal West and Senapati (18.33% - 13.69% = 4.99%) but the number of MLAs differ by 13 - 6 = 7. Take for another instance the combine hill districts of Chandel, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul have 15.72% of electors but the MLA is only 2+3+3 = 8 while that of that of Thoubal with 15.68% of electors have 10 MLAs. The differences are wide open and stakeholders are not blind to the fact. Would it not be in the interest of the state as a whole to restructure the representation? It is not about justice and equality but more of justice and equity.

6. Sixth schedule and District Autonomous Council



The demand and failure of granting Sixth schedule to the tribal area of Manipur has been a huge drawback in the ethnic relationship in Manipur. The ADCs were established under a special Act 1971. This has not helped in the insurgency issue as their claim that they are not cared for is substantiated and it also compounds and complicates the ethnic relationship between the valley and the hills. The tribals of the hills blame the non tribals for denying their rights as majority of the legislatures are non-tribals. This blame and claim could be right or judgemental but prevalent. This issue have further divided the state on ethnic lines. The reality is that there is partial implementation of the sixth schedule by having organised District Autonomous Councils in all the hill districts but unlike the other four states of the Northeast, the ADCs of Manipur is a rubber stamp with hardly any power or finance to execute. This partial implementation was wrong from the very inception as it creates more conflicts and confusion thansolutions and appeasement. I would say that the government got into a quick sand and does not want to go forward nor know how to get out but it need to be remembered that we cannot continue to float in the quick sand for too long.

7. Manipur Land Revenue and land reform Act 1960:

The Manipur Land Revenue and Land reform Act 1960 was as good as throwing a bone in between. The intention and objective of the Act might have been noble and of course have protected the tribal land but it surely has raised the degree of confrontation, antagonism between the ethnic groups. Land is the most important resource in an agrarian state like Manipur and surely any policy that deals with land is sensitive and explosive.

The MLRLRA (1960) does not permit the non-tribals of the valley to own land in the hills while the tribals of the hills are permitted to buy and own land in the valley. This law had done much good in protecting the tribal land from encroachment and loss of livelihood. It had protected the flora and fauna.

Now this should not have been a serious issue but for the reason of distinct geographical and ethnic division. The valley covers on 10% of the land area of the state but host 63% of the population and this land is primarily occupied by the non-tribals. The tribal constitutes only 37% of the population but occupies 90% of the total land area. Now according to the land reform Act, tribals can own land in the already highly populated valley but the non-tribals can't, is this not a recipe for trouble? Today, the government plans to denotify the tribal land but the tribals would fight for it, at the same time due to the influx of the tribals in the valley the pressure on land is increasing in the valley. It is a time bomb waiting to explode.

8. The flip-flop peace talk agreements



The Government of India entered into a ceasefire agreement with the NSCN (I-M) “mother of all insurgents” in the North east on August 1, 1997 which have fruition into the Framework Agreement in 2015. It was a great relive for all to see this as people have grown weary of the gun culture and longed for peace. Along the course of this ceasefire there were some development to which the government was a party which have not help in the peace and relationship of the ethnic groups. On June 14, 2001 the union government decided to extend the ceasefire with the NSCN (I-M) “without territorial limits” to all Naga-dominated areas in the Northeast. This had a direct bearing on Manipur territory integration as three (3) of the hill districts were Naga dominated. This resulted in violent protests in the Manipur valley where 18 precious lives were lost. In May, 2010 Mr. Thuingaleng Muivah (leader and founder of NSCN (I-M) was granted permission to visit his native village in Manipur by the Government of India but was denied permission by the state government of Manipur which viewed through the prism of ethnic faultlines. This reflects the poor coordination and communication of the government at different levels. It also reflects how sensitive and delicate the ethnic situation in Manipur is. There are claims and counter claims of granting “Nagalim”, there is clear statement from the government of Manipur that they would never accept territorial division of Manipur. Where does this take us all to? Confusion-Chaos!!! Confusion-Chaos!!! and Confusion-Chaos!!!. The people of Manipur lives in times of uncertainty

9. Blanket policy of insurgency problem as law and order issue

Can a multi-facet problem have a common solution? The insurgency problem of Manipur is multi-facet, some are fighting for complete independence and does not respect the Indian constitution, some are operating to demand for greater autonomy, some against the government institutions for its failures, and some are operating to protect and preserve the ethnic identity due to the failure of the state machineries. It is unfortunate for it seem that the government fail to see these differences and have treated all armed groups operating in the state as insurgents against the constitution and government. The government approach to the insurgency problem should also be multi-facet and not a blanket policy. The insurgency issue is considered to be a law and order problem and therefore there is imposition of draconian Acts and Laws, heavy police presence, and militarization. Militarization is never a solution to such problem infact it aggravates it further, how can an ethnic group that has resorted to self-protection from annihilation due to the failures of the state to provide protection be subjected to such pressure tactic by the state? Should the state rather not provide protection by correcting its course of action?

The government must not ignore the grievances of the general public or an ethnic group, nor consider a small armed group as an irritant or militant and try to squash it like a cockroach



with military might. Many insurgent/armed groups will shut shop if their need is fulfilled and if remedies to the root cause of the problem will is administered.

10. Poor governance

The state government of Manipur has failed to meet the expectations of the people time and time again. This is reflected in the number of insurgent groups that sprung up due to frustrations after the state attained its statehood in 1972. Failures of the state in terms of providing employment and employment opportunities, development, corruption, discrimination, lack of funds, leakages of developmental funds, poor infrastructural facilities etc.

The study survey has shown that poor governance is the greatest problem of Manipur. Under the issue of poor governance; corruption tops the list, followed closely by lack of leadership and lack of will. People have grown weary of the government and its failure and they have resigned to their destiny. People don't seem to see the light at the end of the tunnel for they have suffered for too long. Corruption has become the norm of the day, the poor have no hope, ethnic diversity is used to gain political mileage etc.

The study shows that majority of the people does not support the economic blockade and counter blockades, and ethnic conflicts and violence but why does it happen frequently? They have grown weary of insurgency and long for peace but then why does it continue to breed and thrive? Could it be in the interest of the handful few for their socio-economic and political benefit? Why do the political parties play the ethnic-community card? Can the government elect on money-ethnic-community lines really provide good governance? Governance cannot be based on emotions but reasoning, not on money but management, not on votes but people, and not on self interest but people's interest.

Conclusion:

The state of Manipur has endless prospects with its rich flora and fauna, rich diverse culture and traditions, rich in natural resources and bountiful opportunities especially with the long international border. The only hanging question is, can these opportunities and prospects be turn into benefits? Resources don't turn itself into gold and silver and finish products, it does not add value by itself but that utility have to be created by the most important factor of production; labor (people).

Decades have been lost in mismanagement, and poor governance. Policies were formulated with good intentions but short sighted or poorly conceived or discriminated. People have



been ignorant and misled, and in many cases were left with no choice but to take the path that they seem to follow even though knowing that it is not in their best interest.

Are people not the government? Is Government not for the people? Then the need of the hour is the change has to begin with the people. The people of that state need to wake up to the deceive of short term benefits, realise and live with the ideal that reconciliation is better than revenge, love is stronger than arms, and it's worth taking a step back to take two forward. How can two swimmers swim and live if one push down and the other pull down? Both will drown at the end.

The state machineries in the government need to come to the realization that policies have bred and nurtured the present situation in the state. The government need to have a paradigm shift in dealing with the issue, since policies created the insurgency and ethnic conflict monster, it is only in the policy approach and its transparent and sincere implementation that will heal the wound inflicted by all the stakeholders of the state.

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