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Editorial

The Need for Reclaiming Critical Social Writings

The current edition of Alternative Perspectives (AP) is an attempt to figure out the state of professing disciplines under social sciences, humanities and research methodology towards the changing epistemic trends. The selected papers of the current edition are expected to offer a multi-disciplinary taste. Not only the significance of writing is given primacy but also the difficulty of maintaining the consistency of publishing research works is duly acknowledged. From a bird's eye view, it may appear that there is no dearth of social writing. Nevertheless, there is an evident mark of dent in the vibrancy of social research in terms of its ability to address existential concerns openly and widely. A dent in social research precision is expected as the social research and writings are found predominantly confined to institutionalization of 'career advancement' concerns. The objective to identify social research themes and writings with an inherent responsibility to unfold the areas of critical social discourse cannot be disparaged as a mere utopia anymore.

The scope of social writing as emphasised here should not be mistaken for a limited exercise of producing written text(s) or writing for the sake of publication. The publication exercise of AP involves a simultaneous collective deliberative process where free opinions and statements are encouraged to become better propositions that can in turn help in explaining the enigmatic conditions of our times and its relations to specified locations. AP is a small collective effort to decipher the reasons for the complacencies of social thinking and writing. To be aware of such an apparent academic complacency itself can be a step towards mitigating long-term academic incapacitations. Therefore, delving into the mundane necessities of speaking truth(s) to power can bring back the significance of freedom of public inquiry and intellectualism. Given the nature of poor representative institutions today, the sustainability of a forthright academic culture is to prove difficult, if not impossible.

Unlike the pure sciences, the social academia is likely to confront a plummeting state of public funding and freedom thereby coercing social writing and research to be either sobber or less argumentative in its method and praxis. Another reason for the dent is the growing essentialization of marketable disciplines in the university systems around the world which has the potential to diminishing of the discursivity of ideas and knowledge circulation. In this regard, the Gulbenkian Commission, 1992 which was constituted to assess the state of social sciences can be recalled. The Commission was grossly aimed at understanding how the neo-liberal regimentation of politics and academia grossly impugned the scope of social sciences and research. The desirability to open the social sciences was recommended by the Gulbenkian Report, 1996. The concern of the Report still holds water due to the continued uncritical reduction of academia to employability and marketability.

The reduction often becomes so significant that it may begin to mainstream the agenda of learning and research. Such an ideological trend was once seen in the late 1970s when Western Europe witnessed significant decline in public funding in the social sciences. For example, the Margret Thatcher government was so enraged at the nomenclature of The Social Science Research Council that it went on to reportedly rename the Council. The government even stepped up to declare that there was no such thing as 'social science' and public 'intellectual'. The perspective of the then British government was an offshoot of the growing size of neo–liberal economy which resulted in the withdrawal of the state from social and public welfare responsibilities. The prejudice of the Thatcher government was ideological and her aversiveness to social intellectualism was to give a formal obituary to the existence of social intellectualism.

The contemporary circumstances surrounding social research no longer reappear in the form of what happened in the 1990s where the crisis was more in terms of disciplinary identity, boundary, or relevance. Today, it is more about sustaining the self-agency of the academics and to retain its proverbial status of 'printing of the voice' of the undocumented and unspoken. Quite aptly in the words of Rosa Luxemberg, if you do not move, you would not realise that you are in chains. In the same vein, writings are to be ideally a reflection on locating routes to escape the circumstances of permanent social and intellectual hibernation. For a highly frontierised political and cultural space like the

Northeast India, the likelihood of a ghettoed academia is even higher. AP is a journal dedicated to unravelling the historicity and politics of such ghettoed conditionalities.

The oversimplifying nature of the ghetto has produced aspiring dissidents who can propel solidarity to counterpose any further prejudiced oversimplification. The solidarity resemble what once Karl Marx termed as a class in itself implying a sense of a shared membership and identity called the Northeast. The articles in the current edition of AP carry the baggage of similar anxiety. Nonetheless, the articles are not strictly mobilised around a particular theme. AP's resolve to maintain a flexible theme can also be read as an expression of the difficulty to collate articles on a given theme. It also implicitly underscores an ongoing methodological struggle to make the journal survive. To place a publication in a continuum is increasingly a tedious job, particularly to find authors for a journal that is considered particular and regional in its theme and coverage. AP is a collective attempt to enhance an act of critical learning and writing as it aims at probing the problems, augmenting the scope, and ensuring speakability in general by reciprocating to the fact that it comes with moral responsibility to rise above the conscription of its relevance to a mere profession.

The present edition consists of six research articles, a commentary, and a book review. The authors come from multiple disciplinary backgrounds. The publication of the current edition which is almost a revival of AP after an undesirous break would not have been possible without the support of its readers, well-wishers and more importantly the associate editors and peer reviewers. The advisory board members of the Journal who come from different disciplinary backgrounds and institutional affiliations deserve a special mention for enabling the journal to hold her ground again.

Lastly, a special thanks to Sagolsem Birmani, without whose support this edition of AP would not have been possible.

- Editor

1 Regionality and Bareness: Understanding India's Northeastern Borderlands

Arambam Noni Meetei

The concept of borderland, in most instances, is constituted externally. All borders, however, do not necessarily transpire into frontier(s). Physical location in a distinct geographical space ought not to be a precondition of becoming an objectified spatial region.

Borders are often altered into politically susceptible sites – of select administrative designs and policies. From a definitional perspective, a border denotes a physical identity of a geography, while borderlands are constituted as an objectified site where the possibility of select *bio-political* deliberations is either high or enacted upon. The deliberations often come as a resultant cohort of the dominant, which the paper claims to re–sequence as state–nation as the nationalising programmes generally induce conditions of subjectivity. Moreover, postcolonial nationalizing edifices are built upon the remnants of colonial state apparatuses which typically lacks sense of belongingness that is integral to both primordial and modern national identities.

Given the complex unfolding of national identity in the post-colonial worlds, the paper attempts to understand how there exists a generalist undermining of several political aspirations located in specified geographies. The denial leads to the production of ghettoization of epistemes and politics. A re–narration of the dominant state–nation making programmes in select geographical spaces which are habitually termed as *borderlands* in the parlance of colonial cartography and

retention of the same in the post–colonial national renderings show how diametrically contesting historical and political churnings play its detrimental part in shaping up the troubled borderlands in the contemporary times.

Regionality and the making of Borderlands

The offensive of ambitious 'nation–state' making programmes give way to new regionalities. Assertive 'proto-national' geo-bodies incessantly come into conflict with the idioms and ambitions of the post–colonial nationalising states. The history of borderlands was not only physically distant to mainstream nationalism, but also the terms of engagement were predominantly undemocratic. Benedict Anderson's proposition of modern print capital induced *imagined community* finds its distractors in hitherto amnesic autonomous territorially specified political spaces. Official nationalism, which was built upon the remnants of colonial census, maps, and museums, began to provide the grammar of (dominant) nationalism. The imaginations of the dominion were to be actualised through quantifications and demarcation of political spaces. According to Anderson, nation's borders are seen as 'definite and limited,' (Anderson 2016, 101), while Nozick argues that such processes of 'acquisition and transfer,' (Nozick 1974, 151-152) of the political in an unsolicited manner were to prove unjust implicating long-term distress in the enforced discourses of any definiteness.

Georgio Agamben has argued that such discourses and functional aspects of ideologies tend to be premised on a generalization of an exception (Agamben 2005, 2) while leaving ample scope for its borders to be finite yet simultaneously making it elastic and permeable at the same time. Agamben's main concern is to explain how (judicial) order is suspended on the pretext of an existing threat, which Carl Schmitt calls a monopoly to decide the usage of exception on the pretext of an existential threat to a (nation) state's integrity (Schmitt 2005, 2). The probability of integrationist state systems involving a strategic and aggressive

ghettoization of regionalities is high. Regionalising cartography was evidential not only in the colonial engagement of borderlands but also thereafter. Often, legal apparatuses are found oscillating between the ordinary and exception as the entry and exit into the borderlands have been structured only to suit the monopolistic ambitions of the paramount. It is accompanied by the hegemonic structures that produce a situation of Foucauldian 'biopolitical significance' of regionalities.

Colonial Cartography and the Rise of a Regionality

The term Northeast India was originally coined by the British colonial cartographers in an apparent identity of a directional usage. The term was introduced in the 1830s when Pemberton Boilieu, a British surveyor, used the term 'East' for directional purposes to refer to the present Northeastern region (NER) of India. The term was subsequently employed in the writings of Alexander Mackenzie. The construction of NER as an objectified periphery in colonial administration and continued nationalists' dispensations re–affirm the site of a preoccupied and prejudiced regionalization. The ramification of a continued extraneous imposition is the frontierization of peoples and territories. Another aspect of the ramification is the internalization of a solidarity due to the prolonged experience of a similar subjectivity–a sense of regionalised *geo-body*. Internally circulated sense of regional solidarity provides a sense of broad community while it also continuously struggles to reconcile with specified sensibilities within – of being an ethnicity, tribe, kingdom, etc. Dissecting the notion of *geo-body*, Thongchai Winichakul argues that the (national) identities are discursively constituted as a *geo–body* while elevating itself into a collective polity based on its experiential territoriality. According to Thongchai, the conception of geographies through modern mapping produced political imaginations, territorialities, and a sense of *geo-body*. His work comes as a response to Anderson's conception of the nation as an *Imagined Community* by emphasising how maps provide a scientific temperament to national articulation and its authoritative growth.

Thongchai further argues how the indigenous Thai conception of the *national* was redefined and diminished by modern (colonial) cartography. Thongchai further contends that nation as a *geo-body* is discursively constituted because an idea of 'we-self' (of Thainess) emerged in response to the European colonization and the possible onslaught of hostile neighbouring powers. Thongchai argues that 'the creation of otherness, the enemy in particular, is necessary to justify the existing political and social against rivals from without as well as from within' (Winichakul 1994, 167). A fundamental emphasis is given to the discursive nature of national construction, which is permeable. The emergence of modern Thailand, signified by a specified sense of territory, constituted a Thai *geo-body*. The Thai *geo-body* of a nation is credited to have been shaped by modern day cartography. Pre-nineteenth century *Siam* was territorially fluid in the absence of a stringent delineation of boundaries. Winichakul views that the advent of Europeans brought in new tools and techniques of mapping, thereby producing frequent contestations between the traditional concept of boundaries and *de facto* maneuvering of the colonial power.

Surveys, mappings, censuses, and demarcations were a site of enormous tussles between the traditional idea of territoriality and the modern process of affirming fixing territoriality. For instance, unwavering mediation between the traditional Siamese authority and modern European cartographic intervention played a major role in the emergence of *Siamese* geo–body. The subsequent rise of a *geo-body* through new mapping technologies started to segment the overlapping spaces of the governed and 'ungoverned.' Such a process of mapping and codification of the overlapping traditional space (s) gradually provided the sources and material requisites of a nation – a *geo-body* of modern Thai state. In other words, the history of modern cartography of Thai nationhood exemplified how historically overlapping spaces and territorialities were integrated and aligned through a new (modern) process of mapping. For Winichakul, advancement in cartography proved to be an efficient process in resolving the permeability of a nation's fluid borderlands.

Giving another interpretation of spatially and politically secluded spaces, James Scott postulates the concept of *Zomia* as a frontier cultural community that historically exhibited tendencies to escape the onslaught of modern state making processes. Scott's postulation of *Zomia* helps in understanding the nature of non-surplus societies that did not require a state and its complex relationship with the relatively better off self-sustained surplus having societies. The surplus societies, largely in low lying fertile agrarian societies, were more into the process of state formation.

Another site of political evolution that Scott's postulation misses out on is that the 'kingdoms' and 'village republics' were apparently aspiring to transform themselves to become a modern state(s) not exclusively on the edifices of colonial cartography but based on their cultural and political experiences. Though the colonial cartographers found the then existing territorialities vacillating, there were precedents of covenants on boundary protection, such as the Moirang Treaty and Sanjenthong Treaty. On the fluctuating nature of territoriality, according to colonial cartographers like Captain R.B. Pemberton (Report), 1835,

> the territories (of Manipur) have fluctuated at various times with the fortunes of their princes, frequently extending for three or four-days' journey east beyond the Ningthee or Khyendwen river, and west to the plains of Chachar (Pemberton 1834, 20).

Though the outreach of ancient kingdoms were dependent on the *fortunes* of the kings, the idea of a shared sedentary political life (Sattin 2022, 3) was constantly evolving due to the daily administrative interfaces, tributary taxations, and military exchanges. The societies with established primordial loyalties and shared cultural sensibilities tend to reclaim these sources to consolidate its nation – state making process to conflate with that of the modern states. The majority of the present–day nationality and identity movements (including those in the uplands) are

directed towards having a state of its own. The contemporary aspirations and post-colonial democratic processes in the form of state formation, as witnessed in the Asiatic uplands, reflect such a story of state–making, not state escaping as propagated by James Scott. The continued preservation of age–old rituals, oral and folk cultures, and linguistic and racial lineages, even between highlanders and low landers, often provides ground for alliances. Prior to the arrival of modern colonial cartography, settled agrarian economy, mundane economic interactions and consolidation of clans or *tribes* paved the way to a sense of kinship or village *republics*, and proto state(s).

As an offshoot of the process, state formation in the lowland valleys with established agrarian life was in an advanced stage. Not exactly in the way of Scott's *Zomia* – the state escaping people – the upland *Zomias* also began to espouse consciousness of their own political space, which later became the ground for the rise of a new political desire to amalgamate the hitherto warring (wandering) tribes which Anthony Sattin calls Nomads. As the uplanders and lowlanders were exposed to new apparatuses of modern colonial administration and cartography, newer sense of subjectivities emerged. As far as the lowlanders are concerned, state formation in low lying areas were rather archaic due to its interaction with the outside world and dynamic integration of clans, races, cultures, and ethnicities.

The integration of the Moirang principality during the reign of King Ningthoukhomba. In the following years, King Kiyamba further expanded the territorial outreach of Manipur by defeating the King of Khampat of Kabaw Valley (now in Myanmar) with assistance from one of his allies King Khekhomba. There was an incessant growth in the power of Manipur Kingdom as King Mungyamba crossed over the Ningthi River and conquered the Kingdom of Pong. King Khagemba, son of King Mungyamba, further consolidated the territoriality of Manipur by defeating the Kingdom of Khagi – which is presumably considered to be somewhere around the present Yunnan region of South China (Kabui

2014, 14 – 17). The antiquity of interaction and the struggle for territorial sustenance of Kingdoms produced a distinct process in the annals of consolidating Kingdoms states through the tributary system and conquest of new peoples and territories. Before the reign of Maharaja Gambhir Singh (1823-1834), the political and territoriality of Manipur was continuously evolving. During his reign, the northern boundary of Manipur was extended up to Thibomei (present Kohima), subduing several Angami villages.

Towards the middle of the Eighteenth Century, Manipur had witnessed an extended territorial control up to the Brahmaputra Valley, subsequently extending its complete control over South Cachar, Kabaw Valley and Chittagong Hill Tracts (Arrowsmith 1832). The Treaty of 1834, which involved the British Empire, also known as the Kabaw valley Convention, mandated that non–payment of compensation would lead to reverting Kabaw valley to Manipur. With the increased involvement of European mercantile powers in the affairs of highland kingdoms, the colonial government began to devise modern mapping to secure its control. The colonial administrative practices in the regional politics of the South/East Asian borderlands reflected such a trajectory. The attempt to align the boundaries in colonial South/East Asia was evident when the British imperial cartographers attempted to demarcate the boundaries. The mapping of the southern frontiers of Manipur was more pressing for the Empire as it viewed traditional administrative boundaries as insufficiently demarcated. Captain Pemberton Report of 1835 intervened with such a perspective when he reportedly argued that,

> the confluence of the Chikoo with the Barak is a point politically important as it marks the union of boundary of no less than three states, those of Manipur, Cachar, and Tripura. From this point, the southern boundary of the Manipur territory is very irregular and ill-defined; unconquered tribes, of whose existence we have but recently acquainted (Pemberton 1834, 20-21).

The colonial cartographic struggle continued. The Colonel McCulloch Report of 1859 also attempted to settle the southern boundaries of Manipur. On the issues pertaining to the southern borders of Manipur, the Report of 1859 stated,

> East and South, the boundary is not well defined, and would much depend upon the extent to which the Manipur government might spread its influence amongst the hill tribes in those directions, and in the south by one drawn west from the source of Numasailung river, the fixed South East boundary, till its junction with the Tooyai river (McCulloch Report (Reprint) 1980, 1).

With the emergent need for cartographic representation of territorialities, the British India Government set up a boundary commission in 1881 under the aegis of Sir James Johnstone, the then political Agent of Manipur, mainly to demarcate the boundaries between Manipur and Kabaw Valley. Another boundary commission was set up in 1894 to define the boundaries of the southern borderlands, including the Chin Hills of Burma. The cartographic Commissions did not, however, entirely resolve the questions relating to boundaries. Standardization of traditional boundaries through modern colonial cartography was easier said than done. Colonial cartography was gradually mediated through new treaties and covenants. With the improvisation of anti-colonial narration and appropriation of modern democratic institutions, a sense of new national consciousness evolved out of the colonial condition. The new consciousness appeared both as an act of critique and appropriation. The discernment of the hitherto politically and culturally autonomous precincts into securitized space was to enhance the mercantilist cartography, which in turn made the borderlands perennially precarious. The colonial and post – colonial essentialization of borders as *buffers* produced prejudicial regimentation of frontiers. The story of crafting a 'sub-continental' South Asian identity indicates an imbrication

of such a rationale of majoritarian politics.

In other words, dominant nationalist maneuverings in the borderlands hitherto unknown as *buffer* produced ideologically conflicting sites. The state making programmes in the South Asian subcontinent were intolerant of the Left (sic. communist) leaning political formations. The presence of non–liberal political formations in the Southeast Asiatic borderlands of what one calls today Northeast India was viewed as politically fragile, 'non-dependable' (Noni 2018, 111) and ideologically perilous. The dominant nationalists' disbelief created an urgency to make unilateral claims over the politics and identities which had been nascently made to become frontiers. The Southeast and South Asian borderlands were witnessed to the different ideological currents; of geo-political tilts, unsettling Sino-Indian scramble and the 'Great Game East'. The tumultuous phase of transition from colonial to post-colonial and continued geopolitical cleft in the region can be explicated as a remnant of the inherent problems in the regionalised identity called Northeast India's borderlands. The lingering conflicts over the McMohan Line that were aimed at demarcating the boundaries between British – controlled territories on the British Indian side and Chinese controlled regions in the eastern Himalayan region continue to shape the region's political equations. Historically speaking, the Chinese were reportedly not prepared to accept the proposal of the British. The Chinese delegation reportedly argued,

> our country is at present in an enfeebled condition; our external relations are involved and difficult and our finances embarrassed. Nevertheless, Tibet is of paramount importance to both (Szechuan and Yunnan) and we must exert ourselves to the utmost during this conference (the Shimla Conference, 1913)' (Maxwell 1971, 47-48).

After a longer period of struggle to understand what constituted the actual NER, in the façade of a frontier, the concept acquired its post–colonial official acknowledgement in 1951 when the colonial Balipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier, the Abor Hills district, the Mishmi Hills district and the Naga tribal areas were collectively renamed as Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA). It was reconstituted under the NEFA (Administration) Regulation, 1954. Much later, the idea of North-East was again officially put into usage when the Parliament of India promulgated the North-East Council Act and the North-Eastern Areas (Re-organization) Act, 1971. The duel of locational determinism and resultant coercive pursuit of state creates geo-political compartments that resemble what Georgio Agamben calls 'camps' (Agamben 1998, 120). The relational dynamics between erstwhile princely Kingdom states and Excluded Areas, on the one hand, and the British India provinces, on the other hand, testifies the embedded political complexities and colonially imposed binaries.

As the integrationist regimentation assumed power, peripheries as securitized buffers began to be reduced to a condition of a 'bare life' – *zoes* – where *bios* (ibid) where the chances of compromising democratic standards are higher. In the words of Sanjib Baruah, there is little scope in the security discourse that the frames of India's policies towards North-East for debating whether the routine use and display of military might be consistent with the ethos of a liberal democracy, or should it be the best way to pursue nation-building in a cultural borderland (Baruah 2007) called the Northeast India. Once colonially perceived to be peripheral, it continues to be treated as a fragile borderland in the post-colonial parlances. The story of such borderlands that seemingly had become *buffers* between dominant geo – political currents show a site of a difficult interface between the superimposing state–nation making in sub-continental South-Asia and its consequent objectification of frontiers in the Western South-East Asian region.

The roots of identarian conflicts and geopolitical complexities in the contemporary Indo-Myanmar region can be, thus, traced back to its

turbulent past. The unnerving political optics in the region has implicated normalization of extra–ordinary laws and surreal ethnocentric squabbling. One of the possible ways to decode the problems in the region might come from unmasking the mindset of fixation and construction as it can induce exceptionalities in 'a particular region, and not in the entire country,' which in the long run gets normalised through the prerogatives of the dominant. The Section 4 of the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, (AFSPA) 1958 is a case in point. It reads,

> search and arrest without a warrant in case where the security forces believed that a person has or may be about to commit an offence or the destruction of homes and any other structure or dwelling if security forces are of the opinion that an attack has been made or may be made or that a structure may be used as a hideout; and the use of force, including killings, if the security forces are of the opinion that such force is necessary, including if persons are carrying items, such as farm tools, that are capable of being used as weapons.

Section 6 further empowers that no 'prosecution, suit or other legal proceedings' may be brought except with permission of the Central Government in relation to any act done under the authority of AFSPA. A colonial 'ordinance' of 1942 later rechristened as a proper law in the post-colonial era indicates to a selective and extraordinary response to a regionalised borderland. The regionalised borderlands are habitually converted into a site of non-reciprocal political relations which is marked by defiance to superimposing predispositions of nationalising state. Nationalising narration of post-colonial States persuades select and regular interruption of constitutionally guaranteed rights. The mandates of Article 34[1] of the Indian Constitution appear to have become operational only in the regions where the provisions of AFSPA have been imposed. Non – revocation of AFSPA and decades-old unresolved armed

insurgency in NER reverberates the predicaments of securitizing slant. According to Max Weber, 'legitimate use of physical force' is a condition that the non-feudal states did not have. There is a boisterous relationship between state–making and frontierised *bios* – India's Northeast – where the employability of the official physical force with impunity is made possible.

A Biopolitical Impasse

The Northeast Region is reportedly home to more than 30 unlawful armed organisation with (sub) national worldviews. The nationalist methodology, as witnessed during the execution of integrationist politics, aroused insurrectionary geo-political articulation with a Weseatic (Western South-East Asian region) tilt. Usage of the concept of an aspiring WESEA in the parlance of outlawed organizations from the Northeast India is the evidence of the attempt to self-exteriorise from the sub–continental South Asian identity. The idea of Western Southeast Asia with a popular acronym called WESEA that has appeared in the resistance narratives for decades imply an existing reality of a counter–locational predilection. The Manipur–Anglo Treaty of 1762, the Treaty of Yandaboo[2] of 1826, the Pemberton line of 1834 and the Manipur State Constitution Act of 1947 were some significant moments that reasons the Weseatic geo-body.

Explaining the concept of geo-body Thongchai argues that the notion of (national) identity, which is discursively constituted in the long run, elevates itself to a sense of collectivised body polity – with a sense of territoriality and practices. The history of military contestations and colonial cartography continuously produced firmer ideas of territoriality and nationality in the Asiatic intersection of South-East and South-Asian borderlands. The imperial British 'use this small country (sic. Manipur) occupied by a martial race as a pawn in the Asian chessboard of the British imperialism' (S.K. Sharma and Usha Sharma 2006, 116). In corollary, the integrationist approach to geographically secluded NER unfolds one of

the most objectified narrations of an ideologically driven state-nation making in India. A relook into an otherwise unaccounted agenda in the mainstream academia exposes how the liberal state that was looking for a post-British nation in India was wary of a possible expansion of communist political yearning in the borderland areas of India-Burma region. The Indian National Congress's integrationist nationalism further frontierised NER as it had a preoccupied fear of communist incursions from Burma. A report issued by the then Congress official hinted at such fear as it read,

> the South Eastern Asia will be for some years to become a hot-bed of turmoil and communist risings. The Communist Party of Burma and that of India may well like to establish a link through Manipur. These circumstances necessitated a strong Government in Manipur direct under the Centre (K. Singh, 1949).

Nationalising politics, therefore, produces securitizing perspectives on borderlands. While integrating the borderlands, several garrisons were deployed to watch over bio-territorially sensitive spaces as a pre–emptive mechanism. Aptly in the Haripura session of 1938, the Indian National Congress resolved to create a new Burma Congress Committee. The main purpose of the Committee was not only to extend solidarity to the Burmese struggle for independence but to initiate steps towards a greater India. In a nationalist inexplicable turn, Subhash Chandra Bose, in his presidential speech claimed that 'the Congress had always recognised Burma as a part of India, and the same policy would be continued' (Bradley 1949). The Congress was evidently becoming aggressive while it was equally becoming intolerant to federal power sharing in India. As a part of the proceedings of the 51st session of the Indian National Congress, Subhash Chandra Bose declared 'my term of office as the Congress President will be devoted to resist the unwanted federal scheme (ibid).

The method of nationalising State in India which Perry Anderson called the 'Indian Ideology' was limited to territorial possession of borderlands as it neither paid any heed to simultaneous political churnings that re-surfaced on the verge of colonial departure nor to actual federal constitutional commitment. The assertion of erstwhile Princely Kingdoms and formerly tribal conglomerates as modern states with the establishment of responsible constitutional government, which Eric Hobsbawm terms as 'proto-national' (J. Hobsbawm 1997, 46), aggravated the dominant nationalists' anti-federal anxieties. The ambiguity between integrationist politics and reclaiming autonomous polities became a site of battle between overarching claims and counter claims.

In Lieu of an Inference

The biography of a geo–politically ghettoed borderlands is marked by extraordinary mechanisation of state-nation and dominant nationalist vigilantism. Newer concepts of territoriality, administration, security, and economic designs largely revolve around managing regionalities and solidarities. As argued above, nationalising paradigms had routine reliance on preemptive methods of regimenting borderlands. For the reasons known, the extraneously imposed directional ghetto comes with a price – the rise of a resisting solidarity of regionalities. Continued transborder population movements, trading off ethnic aspirations from neighbourhoods, dubious economic practices, and the creeping in of insidious global capitalism make the borderlands even more friable and bare.

END NOTES

1. According to Article 34 of the Indian Constitution, 'notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provision of this Part (sic. Part III of the Indian Constitution), Parliament may by law indemnify any person in the service of the Union or a State or any other person in respect of any act done by him in connection with the maintenance or restoration of order in any area within the territory of India where martial law was in force or validate any sentence passed, punishment inflicted, forfeiture, ordered or other act done under martial law in such area.' Also see, D.D. Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, LexisNexis, 22nd Edition, 2015.
2. The Treaty of Yandaboo, 24 February 1826, enthroned Maharaja Gamdhir Singh as an internationally recognised Maharaja and resulted in the transfer of Kabow Valley to Burma. The Treaty of Yandaboo was a tripartite agreement involving the British, Burma, and Assam with an implied payment of Rupees 6000 per year to Manipur as compensation.

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2 Revisiting the Perspectives on Southeast Asia

Chongtham Gunnamani

The Southeast Asia (SEA hereafter) has become an important area of study. It has its success stories in many fields including economy, polity, and regional institutional cooperation. The ever-growing exposure to the major international economic powers has also produced newer aspects of its regionality. The introduction of several centers for studies on Southeast Asia in several universities testifies to its emergent significance.

A homogenous definition of the SEA is uncalled for due to its complex cultural and political identity as a region. The constructs over the identity of the region and people have left more questions than answers as the term is rather loosely referred to as homogenous. Any uncritical rubric identification of SEA as homogenous requires a revisit. Colonially, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century the European ethnographers started to oversimply the SEA cultures as derivative relics of the Sinic and Indic civilizations. Towards the first half of the twentieth century, particularly during Second World War, SEA was predominantly looked upon as a geo–military space that led to the ignoring of the region's cultural diversity. Subsequently, the region became a theatre of ideological struggles amongst the major international powers during the Cold War era.

Locating SEA

The uncritical cultural grouping of SEA has not only come from the colonial European historiography. The construction of SEA within a limited frame of race and culture has also come from the neighbouring Asiatic societies. Similar inferences can be drawn from India's mainstream academia and policy planners as it normalizes a homogenized identity of SEA and India – Myanmar borderlands. A coercive search for a cultural affinity reproduces ambiguity as SEA perceivably and experientially is not one singular cultural and historical entity. For instance, drawing an oversimplified corollary between Northeast India and Philippines would be incongruent in many ways. The oversimplification of an otherwise complex identity called SEA would amount to essentialization of coercive perspectives. For instance, the erstwhile kingdoms of Manipur and Assam had centuries of relations with the Shans, the Tais, Avas and Southeast Asian societies.

To start with the geography, one needs to re-look at the two broadly accepted idea of territorialities in SEA – *mainland* and *maritime*. The mainland consists of the Indo–China countries, Thailand and Myanmar which can also include parts of South and Southwest China and the Northeast India. And, maritime SEA includes Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, and East Timor. The conventional assumptions and categorization of geographies as *mainland* and *maritime* equally finds a significant number of detractors. In the works of James C. Scott, it is suggested that for millennia there are vast traces of hill and mountain zones that runs across southwest China, NE India, and parts of five Southeast Asian countries. Scott offers a history of about 100 million people in the region that he prefers to call Zomia. To him, the Zomia's are characterised by fugitive populations as they fled into the hills to escape the organised state systems (Scott 2009).

Scott provides a fresh insight while pointing out two significant accounts. The first account studies the nature of Kingdom and state

formation in the valleys. And second, it looks at the socio–geographical and political identity of the uplands. To him, the *uplands* are marked by geographical distinctiveness and distinct socio-political structure. An interesting aspect of Scott's work is that it deconstructs the general territorial viewing of SEA as constituted of a mainland and maritime. Culturally speaking, SEA is varied, and has several religious, cultural and value systems. For instance, the synthesis of Confucius and Buddhist values in Vietnam, Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and Myanmar, absorption of Sanskrit traditions in many parts of the region, and Islam in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, and Christianity in the Philippines can be mentioned. The current paper makes no claim that religion is to be the sole factor of defining cultural identities. Undoubtedly, it has played a significant role in defining cultures and social systems in the region.

Historically speaking, the region had been ruled by different European powers namely the British in Malaya (later Malaysia and Singapore) and erstwhile Burma, French in Indo – China, the Dutch in Indonesia, the Spanish and American in the Philippines, and the Portuguese in East Timor. The scramble amongst the major colonial powers and its impact on the region has left varied institutional systems. The impact of the colonial administrative system makes it difficult for the region to build up a symmetric regional identity. In the pre–modern times (it is loosely used here as the pre-European era of administration) as well, it was difficult to find homogeneity in politics and culture. There are several historical and anthropological works in the region, such as the one that is introduced by O. W. Wolters. Wolters's concept of *Mandala* covers both maritime and mainland SEA. *Mandala* is a system of overlapping circles of kings, where the king is identified as the divine being exercising influence and hegemony over his allies and vassals. Each *mandala* is constituted of *concentric circles*, often three in number, describing *centre-periphery* relations. Other prominent models are *Tambiah's* construction of 'galactic polity' based on several kingdoms such as Pegu, Pagan, Chiangmai, Sukhothai, Ayutthya, Lao, and Cambodia. The rulers were revered as the 'King of Kings' resembling the concept of *chakravartin* in Sanskrit. The

King, however, was not perceived to be an absolute monarch. Clifford Geertz's 'theatre state' which is known as *Negara*, suggests that no single state possessed the power to exercise hegemony over others. Instead, there were many independent and semi-independent rulers (Acharya 2000, 21-22). Regarding the above models of pre-modern state systems in SEA, Craig J. Reynolds suggests,

> an indigenous, culturally oriented model that is mobilised against Marxian and Weberian notion of the state with fixed boundaries and the rule of law over a given territory, the Negara has affinities with the mandala, a formulation favored by Wolters. Both models play down the role of warfare and violence had in the exercise of royal authority, and in doing so, they perpetuate an exotic, idealist, orientalist construction of the Southeast Asian past……. Even in the face of the modernity and Eurocentrism of Weberian meanings or the presumptions in Chinese sources, early historians have sometimes locked themselves into a formal and mechanical conceptual framework. What they want to understand is the persistence of a type of state, a type that is seen to be fragile and to have inherent structural weakness. It is almost as if the evidence of so-called fragility and weakness disqualifies these entities from proper historical inquiry (Reynolds 1995, 426-427).

A study of the models of state systems can help in understanding the contemporary SEA's identity. It is the hunch of the paper that the region has struggled to construe a common identity largely due to the colonial distortions and infusion of varied political cultures. It has also failed to do so because of the varied experiences of state formation and introduction of colonial cartographies. The modern political history of erstwhile *Siam* is a case in point. The 'geo-body' of Siam has largely revolved around the terms and conditions of treaties and agreements with the European

powers. In this regard, Thongchai Winichakul affirms that the 'geo-body' and history are powerful technologies that can build up nationhood. The most powerful effect is their operation in the identification of We – Self, as opposed to otherness. Along the frontiers of *Siam*, there are many ethnics who are considered as *Thai* nationals as different from the Burmese, Laotian, Cambodian, or Malaysian – or in fact as opposed to being Mon, Karen, Kayah, Shan, Lao, Hmong, Lu, Lua, Phuan, Khmer, or Malay. Yet by the same power of 'geo-body', today it is equally evident that ethnic people find it eminently desirable to have a political entity whose boundary defines their identity (Winichakul 1994, 164). Winichakul underscores the importance of modern political boundaries not merely limiting to ethnic, cultural, or regionalised identities. If such national identity based on political boundary is so strong, the pertinent question is does it give way to construct a regional SE Asian identity beyond the frame of national boundaries? So far, several studies have been made to find a framework which would be able to explain and fit in all the pre–modern state structures to conclude for a common civilisational SEA.

Narrative of Indianised Kingdoms in SEA

There are debates on Indianised kingdoms in SEA, and proposition of Greater India is often made by the Hindu nationalists, there are also narratives of great Chinese cultural influence in SEA. There were many dynasties which ruled over many parts of the world and had cultural interactions. The Mongols in China, Turks in parts of South Asia and Chinese in Vietnam can be mentioned. Qutub Minar or Angkor Wat, are the fine examples of it. Now, should one consider that present India is a part of Greater Turkey or Persia or India as culturally a part of Saudi Arabia or Iran because of its Muslim populations and civilisational remnants, which are found today? The answer is no.

The term *Indianized* has been using extensively by some scholars since colonial days in SEA without proper historical inquiry. India came into being in 1947, and its boundary has continued to shift until

1970s. As far as British India is concerned, it had different connotation and geographical extent, even though there were many similarities in the two India(s). In the pre-European South Asia, there were many dynasties. The rulers of these dynasties professed different religions. For example, religion of great rulers like Ashoka or Akbar were not Hindus. Secular historians on South Asia have agreed to bring out a framework to extricate a particular religion to define its past. But the problem is, most Indian nationalists both 'self-declared secularists and religious ideologues traced back present India's past exclusively based on Hindu mythology. Before the partition (India-Pakistan partition), Nehru had traced back India's existence as a nation to *Indica* in his book *Discovery of India*. For Nehru *Indica* was a nation (Desai 2000, 111). Such assertion is reflected in many spheres of present India's social and political life as the nationalist eulogisation of Bharat is enshrined in the Constitution of India.

The simplified and exclusivist understanding of history as eulogised by the dominant nationalists' narrative of an Indianising concern produces'Indianised kingdoms' in SEA. Historian *R. C. Majumdar* was one of the pioneers to hold this view. Many scholars working on the region also used the term uncritically because the term had begun to be used loosely and ignorantly by the European ethnographers during the colonial era in the region. Instead of Indianising narrativization of ancient SEA, Paul Wheatley employed the term Hinduisation and the relevance of geography and its interconnectedness with South Asia and SEA in understanding of the progress of Hinduization in the region. In cultural realm too, he stresses that,

> formerly western Southeast Asia was treated simply as a cultural extension of India; now increasing emphasis is being placed on the continuity of indigenous cultural traditions from prehistoric through historic time. Symbolic and organizational patterns once regarded as purely South Asian are now, with fuller knowledge,

> not infrequently seen to be merely redefinitions of indigenous institutions. Ian Mabbett, for instance, has done much to convince us that in Angkor Kampuchea varna were not, as in India, divisions of the population at large but elite groups attached to the royal court; and it is becoming increasingly evident that brahman status in ancient Kampuchea was relatively less exalted than in India, the majesty of the divine monarch overshadowing the religiosity of the priest (Wheatley 1982, 27).

The close historical interface between South Asia and SEA is well known. The Southeast Asian region was able to preserve its indigeneity in the face of the onslaught from foreign religions and cultures.

Making of a Southeast Asian Identity

Not much attempts have been made to define SEA as a collective identity. Some of the scholarly works which have made significant attempts in this regard include Annales School of historiography and social constructivism. In the writing of Annales, the emphasis given more on geography, economics, and anthropology. They focused on material and cultural linkages both at the regional or supra-national level. The sensitivity to the local and personal, and their refusal to the privilege state, were very appealing to postwar historians seeking new paradigms (Sutherland 2003, 2). This school of history writing attempts to loosely construct an integral history of SEA based on its economic, social, and cultural life. According to Fernand Braudel, culture means different aspects of life linked with the seas, say the Mediterranean regions and its derivative linkage with the Mediterranean Sea. As for Braudel, Mediterranean Sea is not just a sea, rather it is vast, complex expanse of space, where people conducted travel, fish, fight wars and experience various contexts. There was no national, religious or class boundaries, but it is a place of variety of interactions and produce many civilizations

– Islam, Christian, *etc.*, (Braudel 1996).

For Braudel, Mediterranean is a nexus of seas, but just as important, it is also the desert and the mountains. The desert creates a nomadic form of social organization where the whole community moves; mountain life is sedentary, and there is movement from the mountain to the plain, or *vice versa* in a given season. So, Braudel has attempted to give a holistic view of understanding history beyond the framework of national boundaries. Owing to the Annales arguments, Sutherland further describes the geographical location of SEA with reference to how it interacted with its vicinities and other part of the world. He states that SEA's west is the solid thrust of the Indian sub-continent, to the east the bulk of China, while it straggles in between, with its ragged coasts, elongated peninsula, and scattered islands. The primary arena for much of Southeast Asia is the South China Sea, together with the smaller Sulu, Celebes, Banda and Java Seas which flow into it. These waters connect the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, Vietnam, southern China, and the Philippines. The other great marine focus of the region is the Bay of Bengal, which not only links Sri Lanka, the Coromandel Coast and Bengal to Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, the western Malay Peninsula and northern Sumatra, but also offers indirect access to other rich markets further west. Around the tip of India lies the Arabian Sea, leading to the harbors of the Gulfs of Persia and Oman, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean (Sutherland op. cit.).

Southeast Asians were involved in both long-distance and local networks as it is in the Mediterranean region. So, reinforcing identities to modern political borders were utterly irrelevant. The density of connections and strength of economic or cultural orientation could be more decisive. Such narrative constructs on SEA are not simply a conglomeration of nations; rather it is a space where several kinds of economic and cultural interactions take place. In cultural realm too, geography is important, and it has also been influenced by perceptions of the dominance of specific religions within each group. The Buddhism and Confucianism of the

mainland linked these territories to neighboring countries further north and west, while the Islam and Christianity characteristic of the islands were more remote in origin. The contrast between the two zones is conventionally reinforced by emphasising differences in economic focus, with intensive rice cultivation seen as typifying the former, and trade the latter. The disparity in resource mobilisation reflected and influenced the dynamics of power, and diverging political trends seemed to reinforce variation. Major states emerged on the mainland, while maritime polities tended to be fragmented. Java is usually presented as the exception that proves the rule.

It is worth noting that the 'maritime' societies typically faced the South China Sea, while the 'mainland' was more oriented towards the Bay of Bengal. Historians had little knowledge of the important overland traffic linking communities in mainland Southeast Asia, Yunnan, and Assam, and may well have underestimated both land and sea commerce. Annales school has been able to give a perspective on the context of a broader historical perspective, which is based on human activities and their relations with the surrounding geography. The interaction between the geographies and societies produced integral relationship and interconnection almost producing a collective Southeast Asian identity.

Another way to understand Southeast Asian identity is offered by social constructivism. As a theory, it focuses on the changing nature of identity. From the perspective of constructivists, an attempt is made to define how the SE Asian identity evolved as a novel phenomenon. Paul A. Boghossian explains that saying something which is socially constructed is to emphasise its dependence on contingent aspects of our social interface. Moreover, he makes two claims - the metaphysical and epistemic claim. The metaphysical claim is associated with something that is real and self-created. The epistemic claim is associated with the correct explanation of why we have some specific beliefs. Such beliefs play significant role in our social lives. Each type of claim is interesting in its own way (Boghossian 2001). He further argues that money, citizenship

and newspapers are transparent social constructions because they obviously could not have existed without societies.

Based on the Boghossian argument on the agencies that help social construction, such as money, newspapers, *etc.*, which provides the ground for a shared common knowledge and value system. For instance, since the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), 1967 and its continued expansion (10 countries), and the process of making rules and norms, it resulted in the creation of certain common values abided by shared norms. For instance, 4th paragraph of 'ASEAN Community' declares -

> the ASEAN Community is comprised of three pillars, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Each pillar has its own Blueprint, and, together with the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Strategic Framework and IAI Work Plan Phase II (2009-2015), they form the roadmap for and ASEAN Community 2009-2015.
> (http://www.asean.org/64.htm).

Within such frameworks, there consisted of several collective concerns such as the student exchange programmes, free movement of its citizens and commodities within ASEAN, *etc.* So, these mediums of sharing resource have increased belongingness of a 'social self.' Amitav Acharya is one such scholar who writes about the Southeast Asian identity by employing Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' in the regional context. He illustrates the development of regional international relations within the local environment, explaining the regional trends in terms of broad historical forces. It also asserts the 'identity' of Southeast Asia particularly in terms of the development of regional institutions such as ASEAN (Acharya 2000). In this context, ASEAN is not only an institution to strengthen and integrate economic, security and political

interactions. Rather, it helps to build up a new regional identity based on both materials and epistemic social set-up which the social constructivists call the 'epistemic community'.

Southeast Asia and Beyond

SEA is largely entangled in geo-political interfaces and influences. The issue of South China Sea, aggressive strategies of the United States (U.S.) such as the rise of the concept of 'Asia pivot' (Krupakar 2015) or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Varadarajan 2007) which is popularly known as QUAD revolves around the issue of containing China in the 'Indo-Pacific' region. The Strait of Malacca is also one of the most important waterways in the world which is located at the heart of SEA. It connects the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It is estimated that more than sixty thousand ships pass through annually constituting a huge trade volume. The strait conducts over 25 percent of the world's commerce and over one-half of the world's oil shipping which is second only to the Strait of Hormuz in the amount of oil that passes through its waters (Hamid and Sein, 2006). This economic importance of the Strait has increased manifold in the recent decades due to the rise of East Asia economically mainly led by India, China and other countries. Moreover, the Strait of Malacca has emerged virtually as a lifeline because it provides an interface for some of the world's most dynamic regions such as East Asia, South Asia, West Asia. Moreover, it stretches into the European and the Eurasian landmass. The Strait's geostrategic significance has further increased with the emergence of Indo-Pacific region as the new geopolitical reference point underscoring not merely the key role that the Indian Ocean is expected to play in global affairs and its growing linkages with the Pacific. In this context, China began to talk about the *Malacca Dilemma* to depend less on the strait due to various geostrategic factors (Myint-U 2012, 119).

In the East Asian economic integration process too, SEA is at its core. There are also several frameworks beyond SEA like ASEAN

Plus Three (APT), East Asia Summit (EAS) or Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RECP). Not only were its members very dissimilar in terms of their physical size, ethnic composition, socio-cultural heritage and identity, colonial experience and postcolonial polities, it also lacked any significant previous experience in multilateral cooperation. Since cultural and political homogeneity could not serve as an adequate basis for regionalism, the latter had to be constructed through interaction. Such interactions could only be purposeful if they were consistent with the principles of peaceful conduct amongst the member states when playing by the rules of diplomacy.

So, ASEAN's diplomacy is based on six core norms – sovereign equality; the non-recourse to the use of force and the peaceful settlement of conflict; non-interference and non-intervention; the non-involvement of ASEAN to address unresolved bilateral conflict between members; quite diplomacy; and mutual respect and tolerance (Haacke 2003). Such an approach is the manifestation of an 'ASEAN Way' (Capie and Evans 2003). Among the characteristics, 'sovereignty enhancing regionalism,' is to be noted where most decision–making powers stays in the various national capitals. In this sense, the member states do not seek to create a supranational authority, nor a political union. ASEAN's institutional resources reflects its preference for informality. To point out the weakness they would avoid some formal terms like the 'multilateral security mechanism' in the ASEAN Regional Forum and rather opt to use terms like a 'dialogue forum'.

The preference of the 'ASEAN way' for informality can also be seen in the Association's use of consultative processes such as 'habits of dialogue' and non-binding commitments rather than opting to a legalistic formula and codified rules. According to Foong and Nesadurai (2007), 'ASEAN officials have contrasted their approach to that emphasizes legal contracts, formal declarations, majoritarian rules, and confrontational tactics.' Advocates of the 'ASEAN way' also stresses the importance of patience. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir had described the

first task of any dialogue process was to be 'tedious business of getting to know one another.'

Another important element of the 'ASEAN way' is its particularity of consensus. Some accounts trace the origins of ASEAN's deep-rooted preference for consensus to Javanese village culture, in particular is its twin notion of *musyawarah* and *mufakat*. Herb Faith (Acharya 2001) has described *musyawarah* as a psychological disposition on the part of the members to give due regard to the larger interests. It is a process of discussion and consultation. At the village level, it means that the leader should not act arbitrarily or impose his will, but rather should make gentle suggestions on the path that a community should follow. The leader is to be careful and consult all other participants to take their views and feelings being considered before delivering a conclusive action. *Mufakat* is the consensus reached through the process of *musyawarah*. It is important to note that ASEAN's approach towards building consensus should not be confused with unanimity. Where there is broad support for a specific measure, the objections coming from a dissenting participant can sometimes be discounted, provided the proposal does not threaten a member's most basic interest.

On the core ASEAN's norms, some scholars talk about the 'Concentric Circle Model' of the regional integration process of East Asia as ASEAN at the centre, APT at the next band and the EAS at the outer band. The model is supported by the Second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation Building on the Foundations of APT Cooperation (2007) which stated the ASEAN's goal was to build an open, dynamic, and resilient ASEAN Community by 2015, in the security, economic and socio-cultural pillars. It also includes narrowing the development gap within the ASEAN member countries. The APT members welcome the signing of the ASEAN Charter and shared the view that a united and resilient ASEAN is essential to ensure regional stability and prosperity in SEA and beyond, particularly in the Asian side of the Pacific rim.

Conclusion

It can be argued that there is a cultural or geographical diversity in SEA. From the geographical point of view, the conventional perception that consider SEA as consisting of two broad areas - *mainland* and *maritime* - is extensively untenable. New geographical identities have been accorded to the region by the recent academic works. For instance, Scott identifies two new geographical concepts - Uplands (Zomia) and lowlands. Discussing the pre-modern SEA, O. W. Wolters's 'mandala concept' brings out another two geographical spaces - *mainland* and *maritime* SEA. Tambiah's construction of 'galactic polity' talks about a space identified by several kingdoms while Clifford Geertz's 'theatre state' which is known as *Negara* gives a commonly explainable geographical identity to SEA. The term *Indianised* kingdoms in SEA needs to be rethought with a caveat. Nonetheless, the usage of the term *Hinduised* kingdoms has limited connection with the contemporary India. Annales school advocates for making a collective SE Asian historiography. It gives new insights on material and cultural linkage at supra–national levels. The Annales school provides a narrative based on human and geographical interface. The emergence of ASEAN is an apt example. As *social constructivism* explains the construction of social selves and its belongingness to a larger social space, SE Asian identity can also be understood from such a socially constructed identity based on shared experiences and emergent values. Moreover, the SEA identity can be interpreted in numerous ways, where many scholars also contextualise it as a part of the larger Asia Pacific, Indo-Pacific and other geographical acronyms based on political, economic, and strategic interfaces and circumstances. Due to the contested interests of the big powers, there are persistent pressure and influence on SEA, and SEA has been successfully handling it, and ably retaining a SE Asian identity driven by the ASEAN.

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3 Politics of Representation and the Violence of Knowledge

Rajkumar Jackson Singh

Manipur has been on the receiving end of ignorance and deliberate rewriting of history so as to be assimilated easily into nationalist history. The anxiety caused by this speaks to the enormous gap between what is written as an official account by the State and what actually happened.

There is an ongoing continuation of the colonial exercise of erasing the marginalised of their particular history, culture and language through the project of representing these communities. It is through the task of representing and defining that the minor communities are put to insignificance. In the postcolonial condition that we find ourselves in, the politics of representation poses an insurmountable barrier in the self-preservation of non-nation state communities. Cultural confluences are an inescapable condition of one's being, but they need not come at the cost of erasing diversity and perpetuating violence through knowledge production.

The state-enforced *Gaudiya* Vaishnavism in 1729, the imposition of colonial rule by the British Empire in 1891, the first democratic election based on adult franchise in the Indian sub-continent in 1948, and India's 'takeover'[1] in 1949 are some of the most significant events that took place in Manipur's chequered history. On the other hand, Manipur continues to apparently remain a distant star millions of light-years away from the planet called India. It has acquired a status of being exotic fuelled by systemic ignorance in many aspects. Largely it is known

only by conjectures as the *truth* is too far away. Yet, these conjectures are conditioned by a search for similarity with what is already present in the projection of subject's being, which is taken as galactical truth. Such an analogy can be only sustained due to an obtained condition of purposeful ignorance on the part of the dominant claimants, similar to how the study of outer space is limited by logistical problems arising out of methodological and normative deficiencies. Unlike the troubles of outer space studies, one only needs to set foot in the libraries of a university and pick up a well-researched text to shed away the ignorance as numerous research works are not wanting; one need not even set foot in Manipur which is nothing less than a farcical glory of modernity. So conventional yet so little is the path treaded. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*[2] opens to Manipur only through a certain path, and that is the path Kuldeep Kumar, like many others, chooses to walk on. It is a path of nationalist integration attended by epistemic ignorance and deprivation.

In the piece *How Hindi helped to build a bridge to Manipur language and culture*[3], published on July 12, 2021 in *The Hindu*, the author of the said article/Op-Ed piece, Kuldeep Kumar, attempts to make a case for the prominence and historical importance of the Devanagari script in Manipuri history and literature. However, larger portions of the piece were spent on unrelated commentary on Manipur's political history, and the only actual references were a handful of translation works done by some writer way back in the early and middle periods of the 20th century. Furthermore, the piece is littered with factual and historical inaccuracies and, at worse, an extremely selective and distortive history masquerading as profound discovery, although traversing along the same frequency as the tried and rejected 'Manipur is in Mahabharat'[4] argument.

Kumar's rewriting and distortion of history is not an isolated event of personal disposition; seeing it as symptomatic of colonial malice under a systematic programme won't be much of a false sight. Such a project of representing the nation fits into a certain 'truth' of macro-nationalist history, and to deepen the legitimacy of a nation-state is undertaken

at the cost of erasing local history and the collective memory of other non-nation-state communities. This paper attempts to comment upon Kumar's writing by deliberating in brief on the socio – political history of the people of Manipur and reflecting upon the larger systematic practice of erasure through knowledge. First, we will deconstruct and qualify his views by way of a brief tour through the arguments he made. And further analyse the grand scheme of the politics of knowledge and representation at work in the task of a nation-building exercise.

The Speaking Ground

The main thrust of Kumar's piece rest on the foundational argument that shared language implies shared history. However, the argument stands on a very weak methodological anchor. Language is a shared element of society that propagates itself through contact, imitation, distortion, and dominance–branching and shooting off in multiple directions (Garcia 2010, 398-411). Sometimes it is as simple as coming across a new language and imitating it out of circumstances and curiosity. A utilitarian reading of events, phenomena and words to fit contemporary political propaganda is not an excavation of the unknown truths. History does not move in a linear time thereby it is not a rough prototype of what exists in the present. It is instead composed of disjunctures, obstructions, startling defeats and victories, unknown breaks and unexpected connections. History does not follow a glorious birth towards a gradual progression of what we find ourselves now (Foucault 1984, 76-100). Moreover, being bound together in a certain geographical region in this case, one that is produced by the artificiality of modernity's nation-state formation cannot be inferred to mean the shared culture and history of a longue durée. Such assumptions are classic sociological errors.

Although unrelated, Kumar goes into tangents regarding the socio-political history of Manipur in brief strokes that seem to be deserving of a people that hardly figures in the nationalist historiography. Kumar writes,

> the Meiteis—an ethnic term that distinguishes Manipur's lowlanders from the hill people—live mostly in the Imphal Valley and make up most of the State's population. While the Nagas have mostly converted to Christianity, the Meiteis are predominantly Hindus.

Such a statement is bereft of an understanding of the complex matrix of ethnicity in Manipur. The hills of Manipur are not occupied by the Nagas alone. There are various tribes and communities inhabiting in and around the hills. There are numerous tribes under the Naga umbrella and many under the Kuki, a group that the author has failed to talk about. Apart from the Kuki and Naga tribes, there are a few who have not yet converted to Christianity and prefer to stay apart from either the Naga or Kuki fold. Apart from the tribes, there is a Manipuri Muslim (*sic.* Meetei-Pangals) population in the State, too, all of which the author has cursorily dismissed or deliberately ignored.

In further deliberations, Kumar claims, 'politically, Manipur may have been under the suzerainty of Burmese rulers, but culturally it remained well–connected with mainland India.' This is another inaccurate statement. The erstwhile Meitei Kingdom was a sovereign entity ruled by the Meitei kings of the Ningthouja dynasty; the valley constituted a united region under a centralised administration, while the hill constituted its frontiers. It lost its independent status for the first time when it was occupied by a foreign power the Ava (in current day Myanmar), from 1819 to 1826. This period is popularly known as *Chahi Taret Khuntakpa* (Seven Years Devastation). The period also saw mass exodus of the Manipuri population to Cachar, Silchar and Sylhet. Manipur was never, until 1819, under the Burmese.

The Treaty of Yandaboo, signed between the British East India Company and the King of Ava, ended the Anglo-Burmese War and the seven years occupation of Manipur. Much later, Manipur became a protectorate of the British Empire. Maharaja Bhagyachandra settled an

alliance with the United East India Company as long back as September 14, 1762 (K.M. Singh 1989, 20-21). The alliance helped Manipur regain its freedom from Burmese rule in 1826 and installed Gambhir Singh as the rightful King of Manipur; the Burmese officially left the Kingdom. After this, numerous treaties were signed between the British and the Kingdom, but these treaties compromised the erstwhile Kingdom's external and internal autonomy. However, Manipur did remain as an independent Kingdom from 1826 until 1891, when the British finally colonised the Kingdom after the Anglo-Manipur War in 1891.

It is also historically contentious to oversimplify the currents of anti-colonial resistance in the mainland India and the then peripheries. A top-bottom simplification of nationalism in South (East) Asia have been largely resisted by the subalterns. An apparent sweeping claim would amount to a reductionist historiography that erases the contextual nature of interfaces. It is tantamount to deny the possibility of organic resistances against afflictions caused by locally bound internal structures against an unlivable everyday life. The resistance, which was a democratic awakening, was not just due to 'close emotional bonds' but also in large part due to forces specific to the local situation economic degradation, resource exploitations, discriminatory social practices, rice shortages, feudal exploitation, and the general indifference of the puppet rulers, mostly known for their extravagant spending in pilgrimages.

John Parratt gives a systematic analysis of the oppression of the people of Manipur during the British period under three headings colonial control, feudalism and Brahminism (Parratt 2005, 11-24). Politically, the British effectively ruled the State via a nominal King and an autocratic Durbar, whose members were unelected and headed by a British officer. The British policy also alienated the hill people through their policies of forced labour, imposition of house tax, and the appointment of *Meetei Lambus*[5] as a representative, which undermined the authority of the village chiefs. The British also bifurcated the administration of the State by ruling the hill and the valley separately, which was previously a single

political entity, as confirmed by *Cheitharol Kumpapa*[6] and its long-term effect is felt to this day. As soon as the British assumed the sticks of power, the import and export trade of Manipur fell into the hands of the Marwaris on the dubious assumption that Manipuris did not have the skill or interest in commerce. It made the entire population dependent on foreign (locally known as *Mayang*) traders with no local knowledge who allegedly enjoyed the patronage of the rulers. The Nupi Lan (women's war) of 1904 and 1939, besides all other factors, were consequences of such economic policy. The situation was extremely distressing to the extent that during the *Nupi Lan* of 1939, the agitators refused a trial by the Maharaja because 'he was the Kaya's Maharaja and not theirs' (K.M. Singh 1989, 113).

The British administration with its own selfish manoeuvrings provided a blanket protection to the King from any insurrection and uprising (K.M. Singh 1989, 35 and Parratt 2005, 17-18). Overdosed by the power, Maharaja Churachand introduced and reinforced many discriminatory social practices to consolidate his feudal power networks. Under his rule, the *anouba* Brahmins[7] were empowered to install a more aggressive form of Vaishnavism. He supported the Brahma Sabha to wreak havoc upon the people with its policy of *Mangba-Sengba*[8] and *Chandan Senkhai*[9], which charged extortionate fees. In addition, Brahma Sabha also made it impossible to perform any rituals without a Brahmin presiding over them. Previously regarded with disdain due to their foreign descent, the Brahmins gradually acquired the top position on the social ladder. More than Christianity, it was the arrival of Hinduism that originally caused the hill-valley to divide as the hill people were declared *mangba* (impure) displacing the age-old inter-community bond (Horam 2000).

The social evils were the product of British colonialism which exaggerated existing material conditions of despair and introduced their own brand of exploitation. As such, being shoved into a cramped space of impossibility, frequent rebellions ensued, and many rebels were born.

When the British decided to withdraw from the sub-continent, Manipur became part of India on October 15, 1949. The 'merger' was not, however, a consequence of a unanimous demand. Recalling Sardar Patel's 'Isn't there a brigadier in Shillong?' would suffice to disapprove the claim (K.M. Singh 1989, Parratt 2005, Baruah 2005, Noni 2018, and others). On September 21, 1949, Manipur lost its status as an independence, but effectively the agreement was declared only on October 15, 1949. As Parratt wrote, 'along with integration into the Indian Union, an era of heavy military presence had begun' (Parratt 2005, 119).

The Stereotypes and Constructions

Kumar also claims that Manipur remained 'culturally well-connected with mainland India' taking a singular example of a certain dance form *Rasa Leela*. He further remarked that 'as early as 1928, Manipur witnessed a movement to propagate Hindi that further strengthened its links with India.' There is no evident marker of such a movement. The 1930s and 1940s saw the growth of the *Sanamahi laining movement*, a revivalist movement under Naoriya Phulo's *Meitei Marup* which started in Cachar. It reached Manipur under the leadership of Takhellambam Bokul (Sanamahi Bokul) when it opened a branch at Imphal in 1934. The aim of the movement may be simply described as the 'de-Sanskrtisation' of the Meitei faith (Devi 2016, 24). But it was not only a religious movement but also a cultural one, with one of its objectives being the revival of the ancient Meitei script, *Meitei Mayek*. The popularity of *Meitei Mayek* script rose in the later period of the 20th century and in the early part of the present century to such a point that it is today a language subject taught at high school and secondary levels which has almost supplanted the significance of Hindi language learning.

Further, Kumar claims,

> it is against this historical-cultural background that Hindi has acquired wide acceptability in Manipur's

> social and cultural life and has, over the decades, emerged as the prime language of promoting a close interaction and a meaningful dialogue among Manipuri and other languages.

The statement lacks evidential basis. Hindi is neither widely spoken nor written in Manipur. It is difficult to find Hindi scripts written in public places signboards, shop names, landmarks, even office buildings, etc.; in contrast, while in part to the cultural revivalist movement *Meitei Mayek* has been increasingly used. The only foreign language that saw wide usage is Bengali, even though it was only the script used in writing, not the language itself. The language used in Manipur is that of Meiteilon, as the *lingua franca*, English and dialects of various tribal languages. To back up his baffling claims, Kumar refers to Manipuri literature which was translated into Hindi. It is imperative to note that translation works are a simple literary exercise, not the unrevealing of a profound realisation of a cultural cosmos. Further, Kumar refers to an obscure figure of Aribam Chhatradhwj Sharma, who traced the origin of *Meiteilon* (Manipuri language) and its script, obviously under the mask of 'local belief', to Shiva and his sons. Chhatradhwj Sharma belongs to the school of Brahminical scholarship of Manipur with a leaning on Sanskritised Manipuri culture. They produced a narration of Aryan–origin lineage of the Meities and enjoyed a certain level of legitimacy as they were among the early writers of Manipuri literature because of their access to Western education facilitated by their privileged position and access.

The manipulation of historical accounts is dictated by a ruling ideology, that is, of a nationalist account of the organic growth of the nation-state. Upon contemplating the motive of the piece, one is led to ask a fundamental question: how the historical claims of Manipur's close ties to India came to be linked with the 'wide acceptability' of Hindi? What sort of epistemological connection is being made here? The majority of the population of Manipur, or more exactly, the Meiteis, followed the Vaishnavite faith since the middle period of the 18th

century, although the rise of the Sanamahi revivalist movement led to the dwindling popularity of the former. It seems that the pitch for Hindi is only possible because of the majority Hindu–Meitei population. One way of looking at the above project is through the lens of a project of the macro-nation building process. It needs to be kept in mind that the indigenous histories are not erased in favour of the dominant and do not marginalise the really lived worlds. This should not come as a surprise, as Sunanda Datta-Ray writes, as quoted by N. Sanajaoba,

> deep in the Indian psyche lies the belief, lately encouraged by obscurantist political groups, that Bharat is really Aryavrata, or the Hindi heartland, and that outlying districts which do not conform to its manners, customs, language and religion are colonial possessions and must be ruled as such until they can be absorbed in a superior code (Sanajaoba 1988, 22).

What also becomes apparent in the project of nation-building is the economy of representation at play. Representation as a practice and intellectual programme is deeply embedded in the nation-building process, in the construction of the 'social state' (Maiz 1990, 9). Nation, an 'imagined community', is made actual by certain symbols and rituals which are intricately managed and structured (Kertzer 1988). In other words, the symbolism, such as flags, attires, maps, buildings, language, etc., makes an abstract entity like a nation seem an obvious reality. These symbolisms are representations, and the representation defines what the nation is— its units of culture and even history.

Representation, by its very nature, is not, however, an objective reality; it is largely a projection of chosen reality and its truth. It has to decide what to say and what to erase. When the Vaishnavite culture of Manipur was used as a base to draw out a linear and uninterrupted connection with the larger representation of dominant culture while ignoring the contradictory social and political conditions, the

representation itself becomes what Ranciere calls the 'police order.' It disciplines the social order, decides what will be visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, audible and inaudible, and defines, in a sense, the boundary of thought; it is, at last, the 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancier 2005, 12–19). This representational regime acts in the service of maintaining the status quo and its familiar patterns.

The Frame of Stereotyping

Kumar's work is not an innocent mishap but shines a glaring light on the representational exercise of what the Indian nation constitutes and the construction of its collective memory. This much is well established. However, there is a notable change in how this construction project is continued. Earlier, from the period when Manipur was taken over up until the phase of peak state violence in the early years of this century, the people of this region were remarkably portrayed as the 'Other' of the Indian subject. This 'Other' was something of a deviant that needed correction, the people of 'excluded areas', 'disturbed areas', 'Chinkies', *etc.* An "Indocentrism" (Jung 2008, 263 & Fagan 2006) within the country. What has changed is that the 'other' is no longer the other but the 'same.' The people of Manipur are no longer exotic but very familiar. They are Hindus, speak the Hindi language, and are mythologically included, and part of the national movement. Gone are the days of hostility against the unknown 'other'; now arrives the phase of integrating with a complex process of erasing and appropriating the 'other' completely via its identification with the 'same' of the Indian subject.

The shift exactly mimics that of Eurocentrism, which took the drastic step, after a severe onslaught from postcolonial theories, of aligning the European subject into a relation of same to the previously colonial 'Other.' However, this was not severe only in terms of its anthropological paradigm but also in terms of its misguided intellectualism. It's an act 'which simply transfigures the so – called others into the fiction of the Western imagination in which they lack a speaking part' (de Castro 2014,

40). De Castro argues that by seeing the 'same' in the 'other', it only ends up accepting a shortcut and projecting 'what is of interest to us' to the other. The act of imposing 'what is of interest to us' onto the object of the veritable subject is repeated in this case when cultural and historical accounts of Manipur are read through the lens of Indic values and political assignment of nation – building. The Hindi language is made to be spoken at the cost of erasing the diversity and contextual histories of the minor people. By identifying the object of representation with the subject, one erases its differences, i.e., its actual histories, socio-cultural motifs, subjective status, and consequently, its identity. The equivalence with the same is replaced by literally replacing the others with the same. By seeing the 'other' as the same of the 'same'—the 'other' as a representation of the 'same'—the task of representation commits the sordid act of epistemic violence, a sort of violence rooted in the power of knowledge. Although for Spivak (1988), epistemic violence would constitute the creation of the colonial subject as *other*, here the violence constitutes in creating and identifying a same.

Thus, representation performs related two-fold functions: (a) erasure of realities and (b) epistemic violence. Representation creates a reality of its own. Levelling an infinitely diverse and homogenous group of people as 'North-Easterner' creates a monotonous colourisation of a flat geometry out of the multi-dimensional kaleidoscope. It essentially erases the social history of multiple people through the homogenising concept of 'North-Easterner.' This is further enforced by the celebration of feasts and cultural programmes in the metro cities where the 'North-East culture' are represented. It is almost naïve to ask how a very diverse community can be represented on a performance stage by a few because it can be only regarded as a representation and not about reflecting a concrete reality. Representation, therefore, is likely to be nothing less than a dead machine.

In conclusion, the condition of the precarious position of the minor and the local people is that of the looming spectre of the hegemonic

power of the dominant status quo— their cultural capital, social capital, economic capital, as well as the propensity to produce representation. It should be said that the problem has been well understood by many, and there is a realisation that a change is necessary. They have challenged this regime of violence and representation by creating their own representation. Alas, its mimicry, a mapping of the same terrain but this time 'our own,' by myself, not by others. The supposed change turns out to be the equation of the 'same' and the 'other', where the other of the 'same' is equal to the same of the 'other.' However, the nature of change is not in projecting another history to challenge the official history, not another rationality to challenge colonial rationality. The struggle at hand is to not mirror the same image of the object (the nation-state). The nature of change is to cross the boundaries of visible possibilities and escape the proliferation of repetitive images of the same object, i.e., the exhausting task of multiplying representation. The nature of change is to escape the idea of representation itself.

END NOTES

1 As argued by Arambam Noni, 'takeover' is the official term used by a special committee constituted under the Defence Mninstry to monitor Communist activities in regard to the 'annexation' of Manipur. See Noni 2018 for more.

2 Appropriated as part of the Hindu worldview, it is a Sanskritic phrase found in Maha Upanishad, which literally translates as 'the world is one family.'

3 Kumar, Kuldeep. (2021, July 2021). *How Hindi helped to build a bridge to the Manipuri language and culture*. The Hindu. https://www.thehindu.com/society/history-and-culture/how-hindi-helped-to-build-a-bridge-to-manipuri-language-and-culture/article35282002.ece

4 The early Brahminical writers of Manipur pushed forward an agenda that Manipur was part of the Sanskritic Indian tradition. Phurailatpam Atombapu Sharma was a doyen of this scholarship. The basis of his argument was that the 'Manipurna' of the Hindu epic Mahabharata is the present state of Manipur. It became an overused trope for those who attempt to teleologically weave Manipur's history as part of greater Indian Hindu history; even Indira Gandhi used it in her Statehood Day speech. Later, serious scholarships arising from the indigenous and Indian scholars have disclaimed the argument as political propaganda of the pro-Congress integrationist. Hussain wrote that the Aryan origin of the Manipur royal family is now an exploded myth. Further, the region came to be known by the name 'Manipur' only around the 18th century. Although exposed as a myth, its effect, however, is still felt to this day.

5 Although the term may imply otherwise, they are not Meiteis but villagers from the region with knowledge of Meiteilon who acts as interpreters for the British. Now dependent upon a higher power, local chiefs were dwarfed over by the interpreter as the people's representative due to their close and official relationship with the British.

6 It is the royal chronicle of the kingdom that traced the history of the Meitei kings from 33 A.D.E. till the death of the last maharaja in 1955.

7 They are the new royal Brahmins appointed by Churachand Maharaj after he dismissed the ariba Brahmans appointed by Chandrakriti's dynasty. This was done no less than to consolidate his power.

8 The Brahma Samaj had the authority to declare an individual or a group as *mangba* (impure) upon flimsy grounds. Those who were declared as *mangba* were excommunicated; they could only return to their previous state after paying a extortionate amount levied as a fine. Even a simple clerk of the Sabha could declare someone as *mangba*. This power was used mostly to settle personal vendetta.

9 A special tax for applying the Vaishnavite sect's tilak mark on the forehead.

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Manipur during the Time of Colonial Rule: New Order and Responses

4

Samom Tejbanta Singh

Manipur[1] is situated in the North-Eastern part of India, bordered to the east by Myanmar, to the west by the southern part of Assam, to the north by the state of Nagaland and to the south by Mizoram. Despite being a small state with a geographical area of 22,327 sq. km., constituting only 0.7 per cent of India's total area, Manipur has a recorded history dating back two thousand years as an Asiatic Kingdom.

Due to its geographical location, Manipur has historically served as a melting pot for diverse peoples and cultures from East, South, and Southeast Asia. Known by various names among her neighbours—Kathe by the Burmese, Mekhle by the Ahoms, Mooglei by Cacharies, Moglai by the Bengalese, and Cassey by the Shans (McCulloch 2016, 2) — the inhabitants of this region have undergone numerous transformations due to interactions with different cultures and powers.

Epoch-making events mark civilizational narratives worldwide, and Manipur is no exception. From the 18th century C.E. until 1950, an array of events occurred. Some historians of Manipur highlight six of these events as particularly significant in its history. First, in 1714 C.E., King Garibaniwaz adopted Hinduism as the state religion (Bihari 2012, 142), resulting in substantial changes in socio-cultural and religious aspects, especially among the Meiteis/Meeteis (used interchangeably hereafter). Second, the Burmese occupied Manipur from 1819 to 1826, a period known as the *Seven Years Devastation*[2]. This occupation had profound

consequences on Manipur's demography, politics, and economy. Third, following the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891, Manipur was conquered by the British, leading to the establishment of colonial administration. The emergence of the Sanamahi movement in the early 1930s, led by *Apokpa Marup* and headed by Naoria Phullo with its offshoot *Meitei Marup*, sought to restore the pre-Hindu socio-religious values and practices of the Meetei community. The years from 1947 to 1949 mark the fifth significant moment, characterized by the increasing demand for responsible government and the drafting of a democratizing constitution in Manipur. However, this momentum was crushed by the contentious merger of Manipur with the Indian Union. This paper primarily focuses on the third epoch-making event — the British conquest of Manipur and its aftermath.

The Anglo-Manipur War of 1891 marked a defining moment in Manipur's history, leading to significant politico-economic and administrative changes. This paper delves into the *Meeteis* responses to the emerging administrative structures and the regimentation imposed by foreign rule. One of the crucial aspects of this inquiry involves comprehending the strategies adopted by the *Hindunized Meiteis* to engage and resist the colonial power. The paper relies on descriptive and historical methods of study drawing from a combination of primary and secondary data sources. A balanced approach is undertaken by considering the various interpretations of the subject matter.

1891 Debacle and the Aftermath

After the 1891 defeat at the hands of the British imperial forces, Manipur didn't come under the jurisdiction of the British-India territory; instead, the kingdom was retained to the position of a princely state. On September 18, 1891, H.M. Durand, Secretary to the Government of India, notified in the Gazette of India No. 1862-4 that the Governor-General in Council had selected Churachand, the son of Chowbiyaima and great-grandson of Raja Nar Singh of Manipur, to be the Raja of

Manipur (Roy 1999, 157). Until the Raja came of age, the administration of Manipur was placed in the hands of the Political Agent for the period between 1892 and 1907. The minor Raja[3] and his half-brother Digendra Singh were sent to Mayo College, Ajmer, where they received education from August 1895 to July 1901 (Singh 1998, 83). In the immediate years that followed the conquest of Manipur, the British held a major chunk of the political power making the King a titular head. Gradually, Manipur began to witness a dual governmental arrangement as the colonial power and the Maharaja of Manipur were accorded specified spheres of influence. Consequently, the people of Manipur had to pay 'dual taxes', one to the colonial authority, concerning political and administrative matters, and the other to the Maharaja, on issues concerning cultural and religious affairs.

There was a clear division between the civilising empire and the colonised, as the colonisers implemented extensive administrative changes. The colonisers viewed native practices like the *lallup* (mandatory service of the male citizens) as anti-liberal and anti-modern, which led to its abolition in 1892. In its place, a new taxation system was introduced: an annual tax of Rs. 2 per house in the valley and Rs. 3 in the hills. However, this system proved to be ineffective as many people managed to evade it, resulting in its abolition by 1899 (Roy 1999, 157) Furthermore, they also introduced a new system of land holding known as the *patta* system. Under this system, peasants who consistently paid taxes in kind without fail were granted a patta, confirming their rightful ownership of the land. The land revenue was also assessed at a uniform rate of Rs. 5 per *pari*[4]. Additionally, several new taxation systems were introduced, including a revised land revenue collection system, along with taxes such as the cycle tax, dog tax (which was, however, withdrawn by the Durbar in 1931-32), water tax, and the conscription method of pothang senkhai.

The enforcement of the water tax was strict; however, due to widespread protests, the water tax was reduced from Rs. 2.50 *paisa* to

Rs. 2 by order of the Maharaja through the Manipur State Darbar Forest Member, as there was no dedicated water supply department. From its inception, the hill people of Manipur had always opposed the *Pothang system*. During 1915 - 1916, there were numerous petitions from the hill people requesting the British Government to exempt them from *Pothang*. This was due to the challenging conditions of road connectivity, as well as limited means of transport and communication during those times. Both the state and village administrations heavily relied on the *Pothang* services of the people for routine tours, road repairs, embankments of rivers, and more. During the First World War (1914-1918), several hill people, especially the Kukis, were recruited as porters for use in different battlefields. When they learned of the British plan, they decided not to go to unfamiliar countries in connection with the war. Consequently, the British made significant efforts to recruit *Pothang* labor. This naturally became one of the factors contributing to the rebellion against colonial authority by the hill people of Manipur. The fishing and hunting policies of the British Government were also equally exploitative. Several new reserved fisheries were identified by the government, in addition to the existing ones during the mentioned period, and these were put up for public auctions. Revenue collected from fisheries increased from Rs. 69,187 in 1927-28 to Rs. 74,294 in 1931-32. N. Lokendra Singh points out that although it was decided to lease fisheries under Rs. 100 in value to villages for a period of 10 years and the remaining fisheries for 5 years from 1932-33 onwards (instead of one year in the earlier days) to prevent *Pattadars* from exploiting the villagers, the process of extortion and forcible collection of taxes persisted (1998, 114).

During this period, a system known as Jal-Sambandhi was introduced. According to this system, fishing in one's own compound or in nearby waters was prohibited, thereby restricting traditional fishing and hunting rights. The government also banned stream fishing by rolling water and the use of dragnets or cast nets. In hunting practices, no person was allowed to shoot or kill Egrets or trade the feathers of Egrets, as well as the hunting of wild ducks or wild geese (Administration

Reports of Manipur State for the year 1931-32). Violation of these rules resulted in severe punishment. For the first offense, a fine of up to Rs. 100 could be charged. A second offense could lead to imprisonment of up to six months or a fine of Rs. 200, or both. The government even offered a reward of Rs. 25 to anyone who could provide information about violations of fishing and hunting rules (Singh 1998, 144).

Consequently, following the British conquest of Manipur, the political and economic power that was previously held by the King was transferred to the British colonial authorities (Bijoykumar 2016, 82-83). The only sphere in which the Maharaja could exercise his power was in the domain of socio-religious affairs, where the British did not interfere. Perhaps due to this limitation in his authority, the King became involved in revitalizing traditional religious and cultural institutions such as the *Brahma Sabha*[5] (Council of Brahmins), *Pandit Loishang* (Department of scholars), Jagoi Loishang (Department of Dance), and *Pala Loishang*, (Department of Music and Song) (Laisram 2012, 99). The Brahma Sabha was a small association of well-known Brahmins in the state who provided consultation to the Maharaja on religious and cultural matters (Singh 2012, 126). With the assistance of the Brahma Sabha, the Maharaja began imposing peculiar taxes in the name of religion, such as *Lughal Senkhai* (a tax for wearing a sacred thread after performing upanayanna), *Chandan Senkhai* (a tax/levy ranging from 4 paise to 8 paise collected from every house, particularly in the villages for applying tilak), *Napet Senkhai* (tax for cutting hair), *Yairek Sentry* (guards for the revenue officers), *Wakhei Shel* (fee chargeable from the successful party in court cases), *etc.*

Among the most egregious of all the religious policies sponsored by the Brahma Sabha was the *Mangba-Sengba* (pure-impure) practice (Singh 1998, 82). Under this policy, the Maharaja and Brahmins could declare any person as *Amangba* (polluted), although no specific rules were established to define how someone became either a *Mangba* or a *Sengba*. Once declared as Amangba, individuals faced ostracism,

excommunication, and even the prohibition of cremating their dead bodies in collective crematoriums. Additionally, the Sradha ceremony for the deceased could not be performed for them. These individuals were barred from participating in any religious and cultural ceremonies, including local social gatherings. Only those declared as Mangba could be readmitted to the Hindu social fold after undergoing a process of *Sengba* (purification), which involved paying a compensatory fee. The amount varied depending on the authority who declared the person as *Mangba*.

The arbitrary nature of the *Mangba-Sengba* policy created an atmosphere of fear and resentment among the population. Anyone could be declared as Amangba without valid reasons, at any time. In the hands of authoritarian Brahmins, this policy became a tool to settle personal vendettas and suppress any opposition to the King. For example, on April 12, 1938, Hijam Irabot, Banka Bihari Sharma, and Kashiram Sharma of the Nikhil Hindu Manipur Mahasabha (NHMM) were charged as *Amangba* on the grounds that Irabot had dined with some Muslims, and the other two had given *Diksha* (gift) to two Muslims in Assam. When Irabot challenged the decision of the Brahma Sabha, the Durbar ruled in his favor, leading to his reintegration into the Vaishnav fold along with two NHMM members. The terror of this policy even prompted MacDonald, then President of the Manipur State Darbar, to write,

> the plague of blackmail recently swept over Manipur. Gangs of bullies have been quartering the country, demanding money from the public, and threatening those who refused to pay with religious ex-communication. Many thousands of rupees had been squeezed by these scoundrels from the poorest and most helpless of the population (as quoted in Singh 1998, 131).

To address the growing public pressure, the Darbar issued an order stating that Brahmins were not allowed to extort money from the people in the name of Mangba-Sengba without prior government approval. Furthermore, no one could issue the *Mangba-Sengba* dictum without permission from the Brahma Sabha (Notice of MSD dated 17.06.1938). All cases related to *Mangba-Sengba*, as suggested by MacDonald, were to be tried by the Darbar and not by any other inferior authority. However, the Maharaja of Manipur did not favor this colonial intervention, perceiving it as an infringement on his socio-religious power (Singh 1998, 132). The Manipur State Darbar President then referred the matter to the then-Political Agent. After several rounds of talks, correspondence, and pressure from the Political Agent, the Maharaja agreed to MacDonald's new policy. Consequently, the Brahma Sabha also slowed down its activities related to Mangba-Sengba, even ordering the arrest and social boycott of a notorious Brahmin, Brajamohan Sharma, who used to threaten people with excommunication (Singh 1998, 132).

In response to the Brahma Sabha and its conservatism, a new religio-cultural revivalist movement known as the Sanamahi movement emerged under the aegis of *Apokpa Marup*. It was initiated by Naoria Phullo in Cachar in 1930. Phullo himself had been a victim of the *Mangba-Sengba* policy, as he rallied Meiteis in Cachar to abandon Hinduism and return to the indigenous faith. The movement soon reached Manipur in the mid-1930s. Following the model of *Apokpa Marup*, some radical sections of Manipur attempted to organize a *Marup* (organization) for themselves, which was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War, with Manipur becoming a central theater. After the war, normalcy was restored, and the task of forming a *Marup* was completed. An organization known as *Manipur State Meitei Marup* (shortened to *Meitei Marup*) was established in May 1945 under the leadership of Takhellembam Bokul, popularly known as Sanamahi Bokul, with himself as President and Ngashepam Manichand as Secretary (Singh 2012, 124). Regarding the relationship between *Apokpa Marup* in Cachar and Meitei Marup in Manipur, Sanamahi Bokul explained,

> in Cachar, Laininghal Naoria formed Apokpa Marup and organised a strong movement for the revival of Meetei nationality, Meetei religion and Meetei culture…Meetei Marup, as a branch of Apokpa Marup, was born on May 14, 1945, in Meetei Leipak (as quoted in Nilabir 1991, 117).

In response to the Brahma Sabha's policies and the conservatism it represented, the Sanamahi movement gained momentum. Puya, the ancient Meitei text, played a central role in this revivalist movement. From the Puya, the movement drew various pieces of information about traditional religious beliefs and practices, which were then used to revive the pre-Hindu religion and its associated practices (Singh 2012, 122). With the rise of this revivalist movement, many Meiteis began to conduct rituals in their mother tongue, *Meiteilon*, effectively replacing Sanskrit, the language of the Vaishnav faith. Furthermore, they replaced the Brahmins with a new class of Meitei Maiba (Priest).

Christianity, Western Education and Resistance

During the height of the Maharaja's cultural and religious programs in the 1920s, the king initiated a policy aimed at increasing the number of Hindu followers by assimilating the tribal populations inhabiting various parts of the hill areas of the state into the Hindu fold. One potential reason for adopting such a policy may have been to expand the tax base. Additionally, efforts were made to establish Hindu religious institutions and promote the learning of Sanskrit among the hill tribes (Bijoykumar 2016, 84). However, this policy ultimately proved unsuccessful. Concerns regarding the financial implications of converting to Hinduism (in the form of taxes imposed on Hindu followers, as mentioned elsewhere) posed a significant obstacle to the King's objectives. Nevertheless, the primary reason for the policy's failure was the increasing popularity of Christianity among the hill population.

The spread of Christianity, particularly in the hill areas, along with the establishment of formal education (schools) and hospitals, played a pivotal role in consolidating British rule in Manipur. Singh pointed out that,

> first, with the help of these institutions, a new 'socio-cultural industry' was set up to produce a new category of elites who would support the colonisers and challenge the traditional authority. Second, the colonisers, in order to get full control and command over the resources, needed to displace the native people from their own culture and belief; native culture and belief had its own principle of ownership towards their environment and resources (2016, 79– 80).

However, in the valley the situation was quite different. After the defeat and occupation of Manipur, William Pettigrew[6] arrived at Imphal, the capital of Manipur, on February 6, 1894. Initially, Pettigrew began preaching the gospel in the valley, particularly among the Meiteis. The Meiteis, who were influenced by Hinduism, perceived Pettigrew's preaching as an attempt to impose the government's religion, Christianity, upon them (Parratt 2012, 212). Consequently, when Maxwell resumed his role as the Political Agent, he halted Pettigrew from further conducting his religious preaching, fearing potential trouble if it were allowed to continue. One reason for this hesitation was the nature of British administration in Manipur, where they governed on behalf of the minor Raja. More importantly, since the Revolt of 1857, the British strictly maintained neutrality regarding matters of religion in their policies. Any deviation from this policy risked antagonizing the population, so British officials chose to maintain the *status quo*.

The Meitei-Hindus regarded Christianity as the religion of the colonial masters. An impression grew among the Meitei community that their religion was under attack by the British, and William Pettigrew's proselytizing efforts only fueled this perception. Hinduized Meiteis

labeled Christianity as *mangba* (polluted) as a form of resistance. Conversion to Christianity by a Meitei was strictly prohibited, and those who defied this prohibition would be outcast from their locality (Parratt 2012, 213). Porom Singh[7] of Moirangkhom became the first Meitei to be baptized by Pettigrew in 1896. Unsurprisingly, this triggered a strong reaction from the Hindu Meitei community.

Saroj Nalini Parratt remarked that, the news of converting a Meitei into Christianity spread like wildfire. Messages were sent throughout the state by means of flaming torches being carried from leikai to leikai, and village to village (Parratt 2012, 213).

In the context of the Meitei perspective, the British, being followers of an alien faith, were viewed as *mangba* (polluted). It was widely acknowledged that during their extended presence in Manipur, British officers were prohibited from entering Hindu Meitei temples. They were not even granted unrestricted use of land. Notably, both McCulloch and Brow[8] faced limitations when it came to constructing their residences in areas considered sacred to the *lai* (deity) (Parratt 2017, 167). Regarding this matter, B.C. Allen made the following observation,

> the profane foot of a European must not enter even the compound of a Brahman, and, if he so much as steps on the veranda of an ordinary villager, the house will be instantly abandoned and another erected in its place (2002, 61).

Resistance against British rule was not limited to just the Britishers and Christianity; it extended to English education as well, which was also considered *mangba* (polluted) by the Hinduised Meitei population. As a result, establishing Western education faced significant challenges in its initial stages. Captain Gordon, the first Political Agent of Manipur, introduced the English education system in Manipur by establishing a primary education centre in the mid-nineteenth century. Unfortunately,

due to Gordon's untimely demise, the center ceased to operate and yielded no positive results (Jamini 2006, 30). In 1872, Major General W.E. Nutshell initiated another school project, but it ultimately failed despite government support (Jamini 2006, 30). The only school that experienced some success was the one operating under the auspices of Sir James Johnstone, later known as Johnstone Middle School. However, in the aftermath of the Anglo-Manipuri War, numerous schools were established but struggled to attract students.

The primary reason behind the difficulty in establishing English education was the prevailing resistance to British policies among the Hindu-Meiteis. English and Western education were viewed as 'amangba' by the Hindu-Meiteis. Many parents looked down upon their children for attending schools to learn English. Students would hide English books from their parents, and upon returning home after school, parents would not allow their children inside the house until they had taken baths and changed out of their school uniforms[9]. Such strictures of the Hindu-Meiteis can be interpreted as a form of resistance and non-cooperation in the religious and cultural spheres against British rule. Losing control over the political domain to the colonial rulers strengthened their resolve not to relinquish their cultural realm. The cultural domain became the last bastion of their resistance against colonial rule. However, resistance in the realm of education was somewhat diluted.

The early 20th century marked a new chapter in the modern education system in Manipur. To boost student enrollment in schools, various incentives, such as scholarships and the free distribution of textbooks and exercise books, were provided by the Government (Jamini 2006, 37). Consequently, the education system expanded, and student enrolment increased significantly. The first batch of Manipur students appeared for the matriculation examination in 1909 at Sylhet (Jamini 2006, 37). Until 1921, many students could not continue their secondary education because there were no high schools in Manipur at the time. In 1921, Johnstone Middle School was upgraded to a High School,

recognized by Calcutta University (Parratt 2005, 28). Moreover, in August 1924, Manipuri Language was acknowledged as a vernacular language for the Matriculation Examination by Calcutta University (Administration Reports of Manipur State for the year 1927-1928)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the British conquest of Manipur brought about significant socio-economic changes in the region. The new administrative structure placed all political authority in the hands of the British, relegating the King's power to the cultural and religious domains. Besides land revenue, various unconventional taxes like cycle tax, dog tax, and the conscription system of *Pothang Senkhai* were imposed on the population. In response to the loss of political power, the King attempted to reassert his influence through socio-religious practices, imposing taxes in the name of religion. The British colonial rule introduced Christianity and Western education to Manipur. However, the Meiteis resisted the spread of Christianity, viewing it as the religion of the colonial masters. Christianity was branded as *Amangba* (polluted) by the Hinduized Meiteis, leading to the social ostracism of those who converted to the faith. Initially, Western education faced similar resistance and was considered *Amangba*. Parents discouraged their children from studying English books. Over time, this resistance waned, and people began to embrace Western education. During the transformative period, the society in Manipur witnessed a complex interplay of political, cultural, and religious forces as it adapted to the changing dynamics brought about by British colonialism.

END NOTES

1 The present state of Manipur lies in the range of 23°83″ N and 25°68″ N latitude and in the longitude range of 93°03″ E to 94°78″ E.

2 It is known as the Seven Years' Devastation and *Chahi Taret Khuntakpa* in Manipuri

3 At the time of the investiture, Raja Churachand Singh was only 6 years old. Lansdowne in his note on 10 August 1891 specifically mentioned that the age of the person selected should be such as to place between the present time and his succession an interval long enough to enable the British to forge effective safeguards for the future good behaviour of the state. Maxwell, the Political Agent of Manipur, suggested that the five-year old Churachand, son of Chowbiyama and great grandson of Raja Nar Singh should be the raja. The government of India confirmed Maxwell's proposal and Churachand was selected as the future ruler of Manipur.

4 A Pari is a land area of nearly 2 ½ acres, and is roughly 120 yards by 100 yards.

5 Brahmasabha was the highest authority on religious affairs that was set up during the reign of Maharaj Bhagyachandra.

6 Pettigrew was born on 5th January 1869 at Edinburgh, Scotland. He was educated at Livingstone College in London. By denomination, he was a member of the Church of England. He left England for India on December 16, 1890 and then came to Cachar, Assam in 1891 under the sponsorship of the Arthington Aboriginese Mission Society. (Named after Robert Arithington, a millionaire at Leeds near London).

7 He was only about eleven or twelve years old at the time of his conversion to Christianity.

8 Col. William McCulloch served as political agent from 1844 to 1867 and Dr. Capt. Robert Brown from 1867 to 1875, both married the Meiteis girls.

9 In those days, majority of the population of Manipur belonged to the agricultural community and it was natural to have the bunch of straw after harvesting in every household.

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5 Life and Times of Md. Alimuddin

Syed Ahmed

Md. Alimuddin served as the first Chief Minister of Manipur after it attained statehood in 1972. He is hailed as one of the chief architects of modern Manipur. During his two short stints as Chief Minister of Manipur, he laid the foundation of a modern Manipur by setting up several premier institutions of the State. It was under his strong and abled leadership that Manipur People's Party (MPP hereafter), a regional political party, emerged as a powerful political force after statehood. He is also the first and only Muslim to have served as Chief Minister of the State till date. Md. Alimuddin was born to Haji Md. Saheruddin and Hajibi Gul Zahera in 1920 at Lilong Haoreibi Turel Ahanbi, in Thoubal District. He had four brothers and a sister. The family belonged to Phundreimayum clan. His father earned his livelihood working at his fish farm (pat-chaba) at Ningthikhong Loukol.

Md. Alimuddin received his education from Churachand High School in Imphal. In 1942, he married Manira Begum. Thereafter, he moved to Imphal and worked as a contractor in the Public Works Department. He is also said to have engaged in the construction of Moreh-Imphal road as a contractor and supplier of essential items to various departments of the Government. He was gradually attracted towards social activities, which is often colloquially termed as 'social work'. He was increasingly exposed to people from various walks of life. It proved to be a catalyst in shaping his political personality. The post-Second World War ambience and the Constitutional developments in Manipur proved momentous in Alimuddin's political career.

Md. Alimuddin not only became a public figure in Lilong but also in the entire State of Manipur. Alimuddin joined the Manipur State Congress in 1946, the year it was formed. He was one of the few Muslims who were involved in the intense political activities that developed in Manipur after the War. With the demand for the institution of a constitutional and representative government in the State, he plunged into the political movement led by the emerging middle class that gained momentum after the War. Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, Manipur Krishak Sabha, Manipur Praja Sangha, Manipur State Congress, Socialist Party and Communist Party were the major political parties which were active then in the valley of Manipur. These political parties were largely led by an educated section, impressed with liberal democracy, communism, and socialism etc. In addition, some segment of it was influenced by mainstream nationalist orientation while some other section espoused determined objective to uphold an idea of Manipuri nationality. It was during this juncture Hijam Irabot emerged as one of the most prominent leaders demanding a democratic constitution, representative government, adult franchise, and the merger of the administration of hills and plains, etc.

As the pressure for political reforms intensified, Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh (1941-1955) accepted the demand for setting up of a responsible government by introducing constitutional reforms. The move was supported by the then Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari, who entrusted F.F. Pearson, a member of the Indian Political Service, to supervise the whole process of preparing the constitution. Manipur State Durbar constituted the Constitution Making Committee on January 21, 1947 to draft a constitution headed by F.F. Pearson. The committee prepared a draft Constitution and submitted to the Maharaja for approval on July 26, 1947.

In the meantime, the Maharaja dissolved the Manipur State Durbar and constituted the Manipur State Council, an interim government, on July 1, 1947. The Council comprised of F.F. Pearson as the Chief Minister and a Council of Ministers[1]. On August 11, 1947, the Maharaja signed

the Standstill Agreement and the Instrument of Accession[2]. On August 15, 1947, as per the Indian Independence Act of 1947, the British rule in India came to an end. In the midnight of August 14, 1947, the Political Agent, G.P. Stewart, announced the end of British rule at the presence of the Maharaja at the Residency (now Raj Bhavan). The following day, on August 15, 1947, Maharaja celebrated the Independence Day at Kangla. The Union Jack flag was pulled down and the national flag of Manipur was hoisted. The event marked the end of the colonial rule in Manipur since 1891.

The new political developments necessitated the Maharaja to abolish the Manipur State Council and re-constitute a new one with Prince Capt. M.K. Priyabrata as the Chief Minister. F.F. Pearson handed over the charge to M.K. Priyabrata on August 14, 1947. The Second State Council, also called Interim Council, existed till October 7, 1948[3]. There was a long delay in the introduction of the final constitution which infuriated the political parties. The Maharaja, who wanted some amendments in the draft constitution, asked the people to wait for eight months for a responsible government in Manipur. Hearing this, the Manipur State Congress launched civil disobedience movement from the first week of November 1947. Consequently, the new State Council was forced to prepare to conduct the election for the State Assembly. The Franchise Committee, constituted on November 14, 1947, prepared the Assembly constituencies, the election rules and electoral roll[4]. The much-awaited draft Constitution was approved by the Maharaja in January 1948. The Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 put in place a constitutional monarchy in Manipur, limiting the power and status of the Maharaja. The act laid down the establishment of an assembly of elected representative as a law-making body[5]. Manipur has the distinction of having a constitution before India had one.

The first general election for the 53-member Manipur Legislative Assembly was held on June 11 and 18, 1948 in the valley areas, and on July 26 and 27, 1948 in the hill areas. Manipur and Travancore became

the first two states on the Indian subcontinent to hold elections by full adult franchise (Parratt 2005, 2). Md. Alimuddin contested the election as a candidate of Praja Shanti Party from Lilong Assembly constituency. The party was a gathering of Independent candidates which had the support of the Maharaja of Manipur[6]. In all, 10 candidates contested in the Lilong constituency. Md. Abdul Kadir garnered the highest number of votes (1,242), while Md. Alimuddin got the second highest (1,192). Arambam Kala Singh secured third (1,088). As per the plural voting system, Abdul Kadir and Kala Singh were to be elected. Instead, Abdul Kadir and Md. Alimuddin were declared elected. A case was filed with the Election Tribunal, formed to settle the election disputes; however, the Maharaja intervened by supporting the election result (Kamei 2015, 59). Two other Muslims were also elected in the historic election, namely Md. Suleiman Mia (Mayang Imphal) and Md. Amjad Ali (Yairipok).

No political party could secure majority in the Assembly. The Manipur State Congress secured 14 seats, Manipur Krishak Sabha three seats, Socialist Party three seats, Independent (Hills) seventeen seats, Praja Shanti Party (Independents) twelve seats, nominee of the Maharaja one seat. The elected Members of the Assembly were highly educated political leaders of the time. Praja Shanti Party, Hill independents and the Manipur Krishak Sabha came together to form the government. The Maharaja appointed a Council of Ministers on November 10, 1948 which was represented by all the major communities of the State, followed by the appointment of M.K. Priyabrata Singh as Chief Minister (Home and Revenue) on November 26, 1948. The Council of Ministers included Major R. Khating (Hills), A. Ibotomcha Singh (Finance, Local Self Government, Town fund, Hydro-electric Board, Water and Vehicle Tax and Chairman Bazaar Committee), Dr N. Leiren Singh (Education, Press & PWD), A. Gourbidhu Singh (Commerce & Industry) and Teba Kilong (Forest, Agriculture & Veterinary), and Md. Alimuddin (Jail, Medical, Public Health & Sanitation). The ministers took over the charge of their departments on November 29, 1948. T.C. Tiankham was appointed as the Speaker, while T. Bokul Singh was made the Deputy Speaker. The

Congress party assumed the role of the Opposition with Somorendra Singh, former Durbar member, as the leader.

The Assembly existed for a year as it was abolished with the merger of Manipur to the Indian Union. On September 21, 1949, Maharaja Bodhachandra was coerced to sign the merger agreement at Shillong. The last session of the Assembly was held on September 28, 1949 to protest against the merger agreement signed by the Maharaja. The assembly had passed a resolution stating that it would not abide by the merger agreement as the Maharaja had signed it without the consent of the Assembly. In spite of it, Manipur was merged officially on Oct. 15, 1949 as a Part-C State. The merger marked the end of Manipur's existence as an independent Kingdom for centuries.

The two year rule of M.K. Priyabrata Singh saw some significant achievements besides the introduction of the Constitutional Monarchy. The rule united the hill and the valley. The hill areas, which were administered by the British, were brought under the Government of Manipur. The introduction of Manipur Hill People's Regulation, 1947 brought a comprehensive law for the administration of the hill tribes without interfering in their traditional customs. A department for tribal affairs was created which was in turn headed by a Hill Minister.

As a Part-C State, Manipur was to be administered by a Chief Commissioner, assisted by an Advisory Council of 14 members. The Chief Commissioner recommended the names for nomination to the Government of India on July 27, 1950. Md. Alimuddin was nominated as the honorary member of the Advisory Council representing Praja Shanti Party[7]. In 1952, in Manipur too election was held for the 30 seats of the Electoral College, and 2 members of Lok Sabha and one for Rajya Sabha[8]. In the General Elections, Md. Alimuddin was elected as a Praja Shanti candidate from Lilong Constituency by defeating his nearest rival Abdul Kadir, a Congress candidate. Md. Tomba Mia was the other Muslim elected to the Electoral College.

Blatantly ignoring the long-standing demand for statehood by the political leaders and the people, Manipur was upgraded to a Union Territory in 1957 under the Union Territories Act of 1956. The Electoral College was replaced by Territorial Council which was to have thirty members elected by the people and two nominated members for five years to be headed by a Chairman and a Vice-Chairman elected from among its members. The Chief Commissioner administered the Union Territory with the Advisory Council. The Territorial Council had limited power and function such as to supervise public works, constructions and maintenance of roads, schools, hospitals, embankment of rivers, water supply, etc.

The Council was inaugurated on September 2, 1957 after the elections. Md. Alimuddin was again elected to the Council as a Congress candidate from Lilong Assembly constituency. Md. Amzad Ali was the other Muslim elected to the Council. The Congress Party secured 12 seats, Socialist 6, Communist Party 4 and Independents 8. Congress formed the Government and H. Dwijamani Dev Sharma was elected as the Chairman of the Council (1957-58). Within a short span of one year, Sharma was removed after a no-confidence motion was passed. Sibo Larho was subsequently elected as the Chairman of the Council (1958-62).

The general election for the second Territorial Council was held in 1962. Congress secured 15 seats, Socialist Party 5 and Independents 10. Once again Congress formed the Government and M. Koireng Singh, elected from Thanga Assembly constituency, was elected as the Chairman of the Territorial Council. Md. Alimuddin was re-elected to the Council from Lilong Assembly constituency as a Congress candidate. Md. Chaoba Mia (Charangpat) and Md. Ashraf Ali were the other two Muslims elected to the Territorial Council as Independent candidates. The Government of India, owing to the intense agitation for granting of statehood to Manipur, adopted Union Territories Legislative Assemblies Act, 1963 which gave legislative power to the Assembly. As per the Act,

the Territorial Council in Manipur was converted to Territorial Legislative Assembly. The 30 members Territorial Council included 2 nominees while the nomenclature of Member of Legislative Assembly with a popular acronym MLA was adopted. The Assembly now had the power to make laws. Koireng Singh was officially became the Chief Minister from July 1, 1963 to January 12, 1967. Under his leadership, Md. Alimuddin served as the Deputy Speaker from December 10, 1965 to January 12, 1967.

The next general election for the Assembly was held in 1967. Congress secured 16 seats, Socialist Party 4, CPI 1, and Independents 9. Md. Alimuddin was elected as a Congress candidate from Lilong Assembly constituency by defeating his nearest rival, Md. Habibur Rahman, an Independent candidate. Md. Ashraf Ali (Irilbung-Topchingtha), a Congress candidate, and Md. Chaoba (Charangpat - Khangabok), an Independent candidate, were the other Muslims elected to the Assembly. 7 Independents joined the Congress. Congress secured 25 (including the 2 nominees) MLAs and formed the Government with Koireng Singh as the Chief Minister on March 20, 1967. The Council of Ministers included Sibo Larho as the Finance Minister, N. Tombi Singh as Education Minister, Goukhenpau as Medical Minister and Md. Alimuddin as Development Minister. Salam Tombi Singh and Khwairakpam Chaoba were elected as the Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively.

Koireng Singh led the government till October 4, 1967. It was toppled due to the defection of some Congress MLAs. A new Government was formed with L. Thambou Singh as Chief Minister. Md. Ashraf Ali was in Thambou's Council of Ministers. However, it lasted 13 days only, October 13 - 25, 1967. Koireng Singh, the opposition leader, moved a no-confidence motion against Tambou's Government, subsequently the Speaker resigned after adjourning the Assembly. The Central Government imposed President Rule on October 25, 1967 which ended in February 18, 1968.

Koireng Singh, who had the support of 22 MLAs returned to form the new Government. His second Government lasted from February 19, 1968 to October 16, 1969. The construction of Loktak Hydro-electric Project, establishment of INA Memorial Complex at Moirang with the statue of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, a museum and auditorium, etc., were some of the major works taken up by Koireng's Government (Kamei 2015, 109). Md. Alimuddin played a crucial role in bringing down Koireng's Government. A no confidence motion was moved against Koireng Ministry on September 23, 1969. 11 Congress dissident MLAs decided to form a United Front Government with the support of 10 opposition members. Md. Alimuddin was appointed the leader of the United Front Legislature Party.

The Front attempted to form Government but failed. The then President, V.V. Giri imposed President Rule in Manipur in October 16, 1969. While the President Rule was imposed until March 1972, Manipur saw intense agitation for statehood. There was also a growth in Naga and Mizo integration movement. Md. Alimuddin along with other Congress defectors, Salam Tombi Singh, Yumnam Yaima and Khwairakpam Chaoba formed MPP on December 26, 1968 as agitation for statehood intensified[9]. According to former MPP leader, O. Joy, MPP was a brainchild of Md. Alimuddin.

Due to the immense pressure, on Sept. 3, 1970, the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, announced the acceptance of the demand of the statehood to Manipur in principle. Subsequently, the North Eastern Area (Reorganization) Act, 1971 was passed by the Parliament. Under the Act, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura attained statehood. Indira Gandhi visited Imphal and inaugurated Manipur as a full-fledged State on January 21, 1972. B.K. Nehru, the then Governor of Assam and other States was sworn in as the first Governor of Manipur. Under the provisions of the Act, the post of Governor was instituted as the Constitutional head, besides establishing a Legislative Assembly with 60 members (40 seats un-reserved, 19 seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes and one seat

reserved for Scheduled Castes).

Subsequently, elections were held in March 1972. Contrary to the expectations, the grant of statehood on the eve of election did not become an issue. The Congress party, however, proclaimed to take the credit of attaining statehood while projecting the benevolent leadership of Indira Gandhi. The Manifesto of the Party also began to pay attention to the completion of Loktak Multi-purpose project, expansion of education with free education for girls up to secondary stage and boys up to class VIII and opening University Centres as some of the key targets (Singh 1981, 68). MPP pointed out the deficiencies of the Loktak Project, and the need for immediate implementation of the plan for rural electrification, formation of Education Reform Commission, Engineering and an Agricultural College, Board of Secondary Education, etc. Most of the manifestos of the political parties highlighted setting up of a University and a Medical college in the State, inclusion of Manipuri in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, to deal with the issue of educated unemployment, land reforms, industrial development, improvement of transport and communication, development of hill areas, recognition of Manipuri as the state language, etc., (Singh 1981, 70). Manipur saw its amalgamation with India's electoral politics. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and some of her Cabinet Ministers visited Manipur for election campaigns. Mrs. Gandhi addressed public gatherings at Lamphel, Churachandpur and Kakching. Moinul Haq Chowdhury, Union Cabinet Minister, also campaigned in few of the Muslim majority constituencies. The Congress Party could secure only 16 assembly seats while MPP ended up with 15 seats. The party wise distribution of results is listed in the Table 01.

Table No. 01: Party-wise votes polled in the General Election of 1972

Party Candidates	No. of Contested	Seats Secured	Seats polled	Votes	% of votes polled
Congress	59	59	16	1,35,678	30.02
Congress (O)	10	10	1	10,699	2.37
C.P.I	25	25	5	45,765	10.13
C.P.M	5	5	-	2,986	0.66
Socialist	16	16	3	24,195	5.35
Jan Sangh	1	1	-	1,004	0.22
M.P.P	42	42	15	91,148	20.17
Independents	102	43	19	1,40,475	31.08
Total	260	201	59	4,51,950	100.00

Source: Singh 1981:96

A total of 5 Muslim candidates elected including Md. Alimuddin (Lilong), Md. Jalaluddin (Keirao), Md. Chaoba (Athokpam) on MPP tickets, Md. Habibur Rahman (Khekman) on INC ticket and Md. Abdul Latif (Mayang Imphal) as an Independent. Md. Alimuddin secured the Lilong Assembly constituency after defeating his Congress rival, Abdul Gani, in a direct contest by a margin of 1,167 votes. Three political parties fielded 9 Muslim candidates contesting 6 seats. There were 5 Independent Muslim contestants from 4 constituencies. Thus, out of 260 candidates 14 were Muslims.

MPP forged a coalition with Socialist, Congress (O) and Independents called United Legislative Party (ULP) with Md. Alimuddin as its leader. The party was invited to form the Government with Md. Alimuddin as the Chief Minister. According to Ravindra Pratap, two top leaders of MPP, Salam Tombi Singh and Sibo Larho were defeated in the election giving way to Md. Alimuddin to lead the legislative wing of the party (Singh 1981, 110). Salam Tombi Singh was the founder President of MPP who also served as a member of the 3rd Lok Sabha and a former Speaker of State Assembly. Md. Alimuddin was the Vice – President of MPP.

Md. Alimuddin was sworn in by Governor, B.K. Nehru, on March 23, 1972. A twelve-member Ministry was constituted with Md. Alimuddin as Chief Minister (Home, Medical, Public Health, Civil Supply, Transport,

GAD, Appointment and Cabinet Affairs), and Yumnam Yaima Singh (Education, Local Self Government, Law and Labour), Yangmaso Shaiza (Finance, Forest and Revenue), Kh. Chaoba (PWD and Industry) and Ngurdinglien (Development, Planning, Veterinary & Animal Husbandry) as Cabinet Ministers. The Ministers of State included L. Manaobi (Planning), Holkhomang Haokip (Industries), T.P. Kiulengpao (Works) and Y. Nimai Singh (Medical). H. Nilamani (Education), H.T. Thungam (Revenue) and R. Vio (Cooperation) were Deputy Ministers. Dr. L. Chandramani was the Speaker, while Tomba Ngairangbamcha was the Deputy Speaker.

Very soon dissensions had cropped up in the Government. 9 MLAs including 2 Ministers and Deputy Speaker defected to the opposition by March 15, 1973. A no-confidence motion was moved against Md. Alimuddin's Government on March 22, 1973. The discussion on the motion continued till March 26, and ended being inconclusive. Md. Alimuddin submitted his resignation letter on March 26, 1973, to the Governor[10]. The Speaker suspended the Assembly sine die. Progressive Democratic Alliance, which was a coalition of Congress, CPI and the 9 MLAs who defected from ULP, sought permission from the Governor to form the Government. The Governor turned down the request, instead advised the Centre to impose President's Rule on March 28, 1973, and it lasted until March 3, 1974. The mid-term election was held in early 1974. No party could get the majority. Overall, 21 candidates returned on MPP tickets, while Congress got 13 seats. The details of the results are shown in the table number 02.

Table No. 02: Party-wise votes polled in the Mid-term General Election of 1974

Party Candidates	No. of Contested	Seats Secured	Seats polled	Votes	% of votes polled
Congress	49	49	12	1,64,717	27.62
Congress (O)	13	13	-	8,764	1.47
Socialist	16	16	2	32, 972	5.53
C.P.I	12	12	6	33,030	5.54
C.P.I (M)	3	3	-	3,347	0.56
M.P.P	40	40	20	1,34,493	22.55
M.H.U	15	15	11	52, 389	8.78
K.N.A	6	6	2	17,592	2.95
Independents	111	43	7	1,49,108	25.00
Total	265	60	60	5,96,421	100.00

Source: Singh 1981:180

The elections of 1974 witnessed the highest Muslim representation in the State Assembly with 7 elected members. Md. Alimuddin (Lilong), Md. Abdul Wahid (Khetrigao), Md. Jalaluddin (Keirao), Md. Ashraf Ali (Andro), Md. Abdul Latif (Mayang Imphal) and Md. Chaoba (Wangkhem) were elected on MPP tickets, while Md. Habibur Rahman (Wabagai) got elected on Congress ticket. Md. Alimuddin defeated the Congress candidate Abdul Kadir.

MPP again constituted ULP with Socialist 2, Manipur Hill Union (MHU) 6 and Independents 7. Claiming majority, ULP formed the Government and Md. Alimuddin was again sworn in as the Chief Minister on March 4, 1974. The Council of Cabinet Ministers included S. Tombi Singh (Finance), Kh. Chaoba (PWD), Yumnam Yaima Singh (Education), Dr. L. Chandramani Singh (Agriculture), Haokholal Thangjom (Medical), T.P. Kiulengpao (Power), and N. Gouzagin (Development). The Ministers of State included H.T. Thungam (Revenue), K. Borthakur Sharma (Industries) and Ngulkhohao (Transport). R.K. Dorendro Singh and Th. Chaoba Singh were elected as Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively.

This time too, the Government was short-lived due to dissention and defection of MLAs. Yangmaso Shaiza claimed for the Chief Ministerial post. As a result, he was not included in the Ministry. He soon left with his supporters and formed Progressive Democratic Front (PDF). During the annual Budget Session held in early July 1974, Md. Alimuddin did

not have the requisite number of MLAs to sustain the Government. Alimuddin resigned on 8th July 1974. The Government lasted for just 4 months. The PDF formed the Government with Yangmaso Saiza as the Chief Minister on 10th July, 1974. However, the government became a minority and collapsed on 5th December, 1974, lasting around 5 months. Another Government was immediately set up with R.K. Dorendro as the Chief Minister which lasted from 6th December 1974 to 23rd July 1975. Md. Alimuddin was elected as the Speaker (December 16, 1974 to September 4, 1975). Md. Jalaluddin was the Minister of State for Medical and Health.

The imposition of Emergency in India from 1975 to 1977 by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was an enormous setback for the Congress party. Janata Party, an alliance of INC (O), Bhartiya Lok Dal and Bhartiya Jana Sangh challenged the Emergency. Later, it emerged as a new political force in India and formed the Government at the Centre after the Lok Sabha elections were held in March 1977. Morarji Desai became the Prime Minster (March 24, 1977 – July 28, 1979). In Manipur, many prominent leaders joined the Janata Party.

It may be mentioned that Md. Alimuddin contested the Lok Sabha election of March 1977 for the Inner Manipur Parliamentary seat as an MPP candidate. He suffered electoral defeat for the first time at the hands of the Congress candidate, N. Tombi. N. Tombi got 1,05,740 votes, while Md. Alimuddin secured 80,081 votes. After the defeat, Md. Alimuddin left MPP to join Janata Party. Many prominent politicians also joined Janata Party.

In Manipur too, a Janata Government was formed with Yangmaso Shaiza as the Chief Minister on 29th June 1977, which lasted up to November 14, 1979. Md. Alimuddin served as the Finance Minister in Shaiza's cabinet. The other members of the Cabinet included S. Tombi Singh (Industries), Kh. Chaoba (Agriculture, till 1978), Ngurdinglen (Medical), Dr. L. Chandramani Singh (Agriculture), Haokholal Thangjom

(Animal Husbandry) and Yumnam Yaima Singh (Rural Development). Md. Ashraf Ali was the Minister of State for Forest.

Among the key activities, the Shaiza Government introduced the Manipuri Official Language Act, 1979 which made Manipuri in Bengali script as the official language of Manipur. The Government also approved the 27 scripts as the official Meitei script of the State. It also reportedly allowed the sifting of the idol of the divine Sanamahi from a private temple to the Sanamahi temple at First Battalion Manipur Rifles. In the field of education, several High Schools and Higher Secondary Schools were converted to Government schools, and 9 University affiliated colleges of the State were also recognized as Government colleges (Kamei 2015, 137).

MPP AND MUSLIM SUPPORT

In the following elections, Md. Alimuddin contested the Assembly elections of 1980 from Lilong constituency on Janata ticket. Alimuddin suffered defeat at the hands of the Congress candidate, Md. Helaluddin Khan, by a margin of 2949 votes. 1980 elections proved to be his last election. Helaluddin Khan served as Cabinet Minister for Transport in the R.K. Dorendro Singh's Government (January 14, 1980 to November 11, 1980), which lasted less than a year, then as Cabinet Minister for Forest in the Rishang Keishing's Government (November 27, 1980 to February 28, 1981). Three other new Muslim candidates won the 1980 elections. They were Md. Abdul Salam (Wabagai) and Md. Abdul Matalib (Keirao) as Independent candidates and Md. Muhamuddin Shah (Khetrigao) on Congress ticket.

Till the 1980s, the Muslim voters bank a major chunk of MPP vote Bank. According to Ravindra Pratap,

> MPP had appeared as champion of the interests of scheduled castes and Muslims in the State as it

> captured the only reserved scheduled caste constituency of Sekmai, and 60 percent of the Muslim candidates elected to the Assembly (of 1972 election) belonged to this party (Singh 1981, 109).

The Muslim voters became the deciding factor in the electoral politics of Manipur. The community was such a stable bloc that they could not be influenced even by the Muslim Congress leaders at the Centre. State Congress had invited their leaders, including Moinul Haq Choudhury, to campaign among the Muslims. The attempts hardly had any significant impact. Muslims solidly voted for MPP in the Assembly elections of 1972 and 1974. Ravindra Pratap re-iterated that,

> it appears that the Muslim electorates have obtained a greater self-confidence during the preceding years. Now they have become an important political group in the State and a deciding factor in the political frame of the State, which has a dominant Hindu population. The divisions in the Hindu votes have provided increasing strength to the Muslims and nowadays every political party tries to woo the Muslims voters by fielding Muslim candidates. But when the Muslim votes are divided non-Muslim candidates win the predominantly Muslim populated constituencies (Singh 1981, 113).

In the late 1980s, the popularity of MPP gradually declined so as the Muslims also began to steadily shift their support towards Congress[11]. The tenure of Md. Alimuddin as Chief Minister of Manipur in both the terms was short. The first term lasted for a year, while his second term lasted 136 days. His governments paid special attention to three sectors – Education, Health, and Agriculture. The Government laid the foundation of a modern Manipur by instituting several premier institutions in the State, many of which the Party had promised during the election.

THE SINGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS

As Md. Alimuddin's Party had promised to establish a progressive Government (Awonba Sarkar) and it unfailingly gave high hopes to the people. His government worked in tandem with the North-Eastern Council (NEC) which was established in 1971. B.K. Nehru, the Governor of Manipur, presided the Council. Alimuddin addressed several issues pertaining to development in the State to the Council (Kamei 2015, 131). It was during this time the Central Government agreed to establish a Regional Medical College in the North-East India. It coincided with the Alimuddin's Government groundwork for establishment of Manipur Medical College, at Lamphel. The foundation stone of the medical college was laid by Governor, B.K. Nehru, and Md. Alimuddin on May 22, 1972. After a prolonged perusal, the Central Government decided to establish the Regional Medical College in Manipur. Manipur Medical College was officially upgraded to Regional Medical College on September 14, 1972 under the aegis of NEC. Today, the college has developed into Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), which is one of the premier medical institutes in Northeastern part of India.

Md. Alimuddin and his Education Minister, Y. Yaima Singh, took special attention to develop education system in Manipur. The Government knew that a modern Manipur cannot be brought without educating its people. The literacy rate of the State was low with evident gender gap. The literacy rate in 1971 was 53.70% while male education stood at 53.70% and female at 22.87%. The Government introduced a comprehensive policy to develop and streamline the school and higher education system in the State.

The Government instituted Board of Secondary Education Manipur (BOSEM), the foremost regulatory body of school education, by an act of the State Assembly on September 6, 1972 to regulate, supervise and develop school education. The Board conducted the first High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) Examination in 1973. A total of 2,808 students (1,968 males and 840 females) appeared the exam. It also developed

curriculum and syllabus, besides preparing school textbooks. In the preceding years, without an examination Board, the students in Manipur had faced difficulties in appearing matriculation examination under the Assam Board.

The Government also saw the urgent need of setting up an institution for post-Graduate studies in the State. During the 1960s, post-graduate classes in Mathematics, Economic, History and later English were arranged along with the under-graduate classes in Imphal at D.M. College. Post-graduate classes were held in the evenings at the office building of the Directorate of Education at D.M. College campus, and the students faced a lot of inconveniences in appearing final examinations under Gauhati University. The establishment of a post-Graduate institute in the State was a necessity and it became a priority for the new Government. It may be mentioned that 1972-73 saw massive increase in the enrolment of students in colleges. In the academic year of 1970-71 the enrolment was 7,767 males and 2,385 females; in 1972-73 and 1973-74 it increased to 9,561 males and 3,712 females, and 10,004 males and 4,104 females respectively (Devi 1989, 79-84).

The opportunity came when the Chairman of UGC, Dr. D.C. Kothari, during his visit to Manipur had expressed his desire to set up an institute for post-graduate studies under a central university. The matter was discussed with G. Parathasarathy, the then Vice-Chancellor of JNU, New Delhi. He accepted to open its Centre in Manipur and sent a high-level team to study the situation and condition in Manipur. The team included eminent personalities like Dr. B.D. Nag Choudhuri, the then Scientific Advisor to the Prime Minister of India, historian and Professor Romila Thapar and Dr. Surjit Sinha, Former Director of Anthropological Survey of India. The proposed plan was accepted (Kamei 2015, 131). The site for the Centre was chosen at Canchipur, once the capital of Manipur. Md. Alimuddin laid the foundation stone of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) Centre on 19th November 1972. From then on, the post-Graduate classes held at D.M. College of Arts, Imphal campus were merged with Jawaharlal Nehru University Centre.

Seven years later, in June 5, 1980, Manipur University (MU), a full-fledged university was instituted at Canchipur resulting in the closure of Centre.

As time progressed, the State Government felt the need for having a college for teachers' education and training. The Department of Education of D.M. College of Arts was converted to a centre of teachers' education. It then came to be known as the Teachers' Training College, re-named as Post Graduate Training College on 15th September 1972. In addition, the Government took over the Adim Jati Technical Institute as Government Polytechnic by introducing Civil, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering courses at Diploma level in between 1972 and 1973. The construction of new building was started at Takyel (Administrative Report 1972-73, 45). The Manipur Public Service Commission (MPSC) was inaugurated by Md. Alimuddin on 23rd October 1972 in the presence of B.K. Nehru. Under the initiative of Alimuddin several initiatives in the field of administrative reforms were undertaken including institution of Manipur Pay Commission (Kamei 2015, 132). The period coincided with the re-organization of the States in North-East India as per the provisions of the Northeastern Area (Reorganization) Act, 1971. A common High Court was set-up for the five states including Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura and two Union Territories - Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh – which came to be known as the Gauhati High Court. The Imphal Bench of the Court came into existence on January 21, 1972 (Manipur Administrative Report, 1972-73, 10).

Regarding armed insurgency, the Government followed a pacifist approach. It granted general amnesty to the leaders of several underground groups. (Kamei 2015, 132). The Government of Md. Alimuddin made determined efforts to make Manipur a self-sufficient and reliant State. He took keen interest in developing agricultural sector possibly upholding it as the backbone of the State's economy. Soon the Government initiated the Green Revolution in agricultural sector by introducing double-cropping system while introducing High Yielding Variety seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, and irrigation facilities by constructing dams, water supply

depots, canals, etc., in various parts of the State.

The National Development Council (NDC) was apprised with the issues of Manipur. Alimuddin proposed the construction of several minor irrigation projects to facilitate double-cropping system. The Loktak Lift Irrigation Project was the first major irrigation project taken up in 1972 as an important component of the Loktak Multi-Purpose Project with an aim to create irrigation facilities in Bishenpur and Imphal West Districts. It was completed in 1989 at a cost of Rupees 28.79 crores. The Imphal Barrage at Oinam Samurou was also inaugurated in 1972 and completed in 1984. The barrage enabled the supply of water to the fields during lean seasons. The Regulator Dam was constructed over Lilong Turel Ahanbi to solve the problem of water shortage of farmers in the region. Works for the construction of other dams and barrages were also initiated, namely Singda Dam, Thoubal Dam and Iramsiphai Barrage. The work of Loktak Hydro-electric Project made further progress during the tenure of Md. Alimuddin[12]. On March 10, 1973, Alimuddin inaugurated the erection of steel penstocks of the project. Alimuddin's Government took up several water-supply schemes since the early part of 1972 to provide drinking water to the people. The construction of water reservoirs in Imphal town at Chinga Hill, Chingmeirong, Porompat, Langthabal, etc. also started. Water supply schemes were also taken up in the hills, particularly at Ukhrul, Mao, Jiribam, Karong, Sugnu, Thoubal, Bishenpur, Tamenglong, Churachandpur, etc. (Administrative Report 1972-73, 39).

As a result, there was gradual improvement in agricultural production. In the field of industrialization, Alimuddin Government proposed to set up a Spinning Mill at Loitang Khunou village at an estimated cost of Rupees 238 lakhs. The foundation stone of the Mill was laid down by Md. Alimuddin on 22nd November 1972. The Government also commissioned a 60 ton per day sugarcane crushing capacity Khandsari Sugar Mill at Khangabok at the cost of Rs. 21.87 lakhs on 4th March 4, 1973. The Government further planned to set-up a cement factory at Hundung in Ukhrul and a bamboo-based Paper Mill at Chandighat in Jiribam (Administrative Report

1972-73, 48-49). Another significant development was seen in the field of tourism administration. The Department of Tourism was separated from Publicity on 23 August 1973. It requested the Union Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation to assist in harnessing the sector. The construction of Tourist centres at Kaina, Koubru and Waroiching started in 1972 – 1973 (Administrative Report 1972-73, 52).

The Government also made its efforts to improve connectivity by constructing and improving roads. The major roads which connected Imphal with far-flung areas were significantly improved. The construction of Imphal-Chuachandpur Road, Imphal-Tamenglong Road, Imphal-Ukhrul Road, Mayang Imphal-Sugnu Road, etc., was taken up (Administrative Report 1972-73, 38). Md. Alimuddin's Government also started paying official tribute to the Manipuris who laid down their lives fighting against the British mainly in the Anglo – Manipur War of 1891. The government started observing 13 August commemorating martyrdom of Bir Tikendrajit Singh and Major General Thangal as Patriots' Day (Athoubasinggi Numit). The observation was reportedly not in line with what the New Delhi government desired then. The first observance was made on 13 August 1972. The function was attended by Chief Minister, Md. Alimuddin as Chief Guest and Yumnam Yaima Singh, then a Minister, as President. It has been said that the Union Home Minister on receiving information about the observance sent telegram to the State Government instructing not to organize such commemoration. The then Government, however, did not pay heed to the instruction. Since then, State Government has been observing the day every year as State function (Souvenir 1993).

The Government also went ahead with extending recognition to Paona Brajabashi and several other valiant soldiers who sacrificed their lives at the Khongjom War by constructing a memorial at Kheba Ching. Alimuddin invited the then President of India, V.V. Giri (1969-1974) for its inauguration. The President came and inaugurated the war memorial on 21 October 1972. He paid homage to the war heroes by laying wreath at the memorial, acknowledging their supreme sacrifices for their motherland

(Souvenir, 1993). Since then, the dignitaries of the State, led by Governor and Chief Minister, have been paying tribute to the memorial every April 23rd as Khongjom Day.

Alimuddin had earned significant feat of winning seven General Elections. In his attempt to develop his own constituency, primary health centers, police station, veterinary office, water supply plants, kutcha dams and bridges in various parts of Lilong constituency were set-up. Alimuddin played a major role in setting up of Lilong Keithel in 1958. In 1972, he developed the infrastructure of Madrasa Alia, at Lilong, one of the oldest Madrasas in the State, 1944 by constructing 5 rooms with half pucca wall (Salam 2006, 176-177). He also played a crucial role in the establishment and development of Lilong Haoreibi College at Usoipokpi. The College was established in 1976[13].

The glorious political journey of Alimuddin came to an end as he passed away on February 3, 1983 at the age of 63. A year before, in 1982, he performed hajj in Saudi Arabia. His mortal remains lay buried at the compound of his residence at Lilong Turel Ahanbi. He was survived by his wife, seven sons and a daughter. His eldest son, Md. Allauddin, and son-in-law, Dr. Md. Maneruddin Sheikh, later joined electoral politics[14].

Speaking at the 27th Death Anniversary of Md. Alimuddin organized by MPP at Lilong Haoreibi College on February 3, 2009, MPP leader, Dr. L. Chandramani Singh described Alimuddin as the only political leader of Manipur who ruled the State judiciously, with farsightedness and prioritised the integrity of Manipur.

Veteran politician and former MPP leader, O. Joy terming Alimuddin as his political guru did not fail to hail Alimuddin as the 'architect of modern Manipur'. To him, Alimuddin was a true leader who not only advocated for self-reliance and dignity but sacrificed his life to the cause of the people (The Sangai Express 2009). He also remembered that Alimuddin and his Government were so popular with the people of the State that the

general public, particularly the women potfambis (vegetable vendors) of Khwairamband Bazar, shed tears when Alimuddin's government was overthrown by Congress. Several womenfolk were lodged in jail for protesting against toppling of MPP-led Government. These women formed Chanura Marup, the women wing of the party (Ahmed 2012).

Referring to the legacy of Alimuddin O. Joy had once remarked,

> I admired his courage as a political leader. Being the Chief Minister of a small State of North-East India he had the audacity to stand against the dominating attitude of the leaders at the centre. He was a lion. He was an exemplary among the Chief Ministers of India. Today's generation need to know more about Md. Alimuddin and study his political philosophy. As a mark of respect for this great man we need to erect memorial statues all over the State (Ahmed 2012).

Undoubtedly, Md. Alimuddin is one of the most distinguished and unsung politicians of Manipur. He started his political career at a young age as a member of the first and historic Manipur State Assembly of 1948 representing Lilong Assembly constituency. As a legislator and Minister, he was actively involved in major legislations and political decisions taken by the State Government. He led the regional party, MPP, in forming a popular Government after Manipur got its statehood. He is considered by many as one of the most successful Chief Ministers who during his short tenure had established some of the most important Government institutions and developed infrastructures which became the basis for building a modern and vibrant Manipur. He was unfailingly a leader with vision, will and political acumen. Undoubtedly, Md. Alimuddin deserves a place in the electoral history of Manipur.

END NOTES

1 Most of the members of the Manipur State Durbar were retained in the Council. It included M.K. Priyabrata, Sougaijam Somorendra Singh, Sanjenbam Nodiachand Singh, Waikhom Chaoba Singh and Md. Waliullah as ministers.

2 The Instrument of Accession provided for the accession of Manipur to the Dominion of India, which was announced on August 15, 1947. It provided the internal autonomy for Manipur and handed over Defence, External Affairs and Communication to the Government of India.

3 The Ministers in the second State Council included R.K. Bhubon Singh (Revenue), K. Gouro Singh (Education and Local Self Government), T.C. Tiankham (Forest and Agriculture), Major R. Khating (Hill Administration), Md. Basiruddin Ahmed (Medical, PWD and Jail) and S. Krishnamohon Singh (Finance).

4 The Franchise Committee divided the Manipur valley into 29 constituencies, in which 3 constituencies with large Muslim population (of around 20,000) were to follow plural voting system - a voter had two votes, one for Muslim candidate and other for non-Muslim candidate. Jiribam area was treated as a constituency for general seat. The Hill areas were divided into 18 constituencies. For the special constituencies, the matriculates, title holders in Sanskrit and maulvis were to vote for the education and all the registered shop-keepers for the commerce and industry.

5 As per the Manipur State Constitution, a State Assembly was to be constituted for 3 years with members elected by the people on an adult franchise and on the principle of joint electorate and the representatives returnable from General, Hill and Muslim constituencies were in the ratios of 30:18:3 respectively, and an additional 2 seats for the representatives of educational and commercial interests.

6 The party was founded on November 10, 1947 under the leadership of a former Police Sub-Inspector, Kh. Ibotombi Singh. It was against the Congress and the Communist, so the party was used by the Maharaja to defeat the Congress in the 1948 elections.

7 Four members in the council were representative of Christian Hill tribes, one of non-Christian hill tribes, 5 of Manipur State Congress, 3 of Praja Shanti Party and one non-party person.

8 L. Jugeshwar Singh (Congress) was elected from Inner Parliamentary constituency, while Rishang Keishing (Socialist Party) was elected from Outer Parliamentary constituency. The Electoral College elected Ng. Tompok Singh (Congress) as Rajya Sabha member. However, the seat was shared by Manipur and Tripura for two years each.

9 The Statehood movement was a significant event in the post-merger Manipur. The leading political and various civil society organizations joined hands making it a mass movement. In February 1968, All Manipur Statehood Demand Committee was formed by a few prominent political parties. The Committee organised series of public meetings, demonstrations, bands, etc. The State Congress also held a series of conferences in different parts of the State demanding statehood, and organized

mass hunger strike on March 19, 1970 at B.T. Park, Imphal, which was participated by one thousand volunteers, and another was arranged at Delhi. An all-Party Statehood Demand Co-ordination Body was also formed on April 26, 1970 and organized a massive rally at Imphal on May 9 on the occasion of the visit of a team of MPs to the State in connection with the statehood issue. The body submitted a memorandum demanding statehood for Manipur. Later, a delegation went to meet opposition leaders and Prime Minister at Delhi. The Committee also organized a bandh on May 18, 1970 followed by Civil Disobedience Movement. Finally, on September 3, 1970, the Prime Minister announced the acceptance of the demand of the statehood to Manipur. The bill for the grant of statehood was introduced in the Parliament in December 1971, and it was passed unanimously.

10 Md. Alimuddin submitted a report to the Governor, B.K. Nehru, on the political situation of Manipur where he mentioned that two defectors had the record of changing sides four times each and both of them were Congressmen, while some Congress members defected thrice. He wrote, "the Council of Ministers of Manipur have painfully observed during the last few days the unfortunate political situation which had bedeviled this unhappy land owing to the defections and horse-trading indulged in by some power hungry and self-seeking politicians…defections in all cases have been found to emanate from a desire of bargain and putting political pressure on the ruling party for advantages which are extremely difficult to entertain" (Singh 1981:176-177)

11 In the 1980 General Elections, MPP secured just 5 seats; in 1984, it further reduced to 3 seats. In the elections of 1990, the Party's seat increased to nine seats, and managed to form Government with the support of several political parties. MPP's leader, R.K. Ranabir Singh, was elected as Chief Minister. However, the Government lasted for just two years. Subsequently, the party became insignificant. The party was de-recognized by Election Commission of India in 2013 as the party could not win a single seat either in the Manipur Assembly elections in 2012 or the Lok Sabha elections in 2009.

12 The Union Ministry of Irrigation and Power initiated the Loktak Multipurpose Hydro-electric Project in 1971 to generate 103 MW of electricity and irrigate 24,000 hectares of land in Imphal valley. The project was commissioned on June 4, 1983. Then it was handed over to the National Hydro-electric Project Corporation (NHPC) for execution. As a part of the project, Ithai barrage was also constructed in the downstream of Imphal River to generate power and provide lift irrigation facilities to the land.

13 Md. Abdul Kadir, Md. Jalaluddin, Habibur Rahman, Helaluddin Khan and Dr. Maneruddin Sheikh were also some of the politicians involved in the establishment and development of the college, besides a few other social workers and educationists.

14 Md. Allauddin, son of Alimuddin, was elected to the State Assembly from Lilong Assembly constituency in 1985 as an MPP candidate and in 2000 as Nationalist Congress Party candidate. He served as Minister. Dr. Maneruddin Sheikh was also elected to the State Assembly from the same constituency in 2002 as a Congress candidate. Sheikh served as Minister and later as Speaker of the State Assembly.

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Commentary

6 BJP Victory Was Not Hindutva Victory in Manipur

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There is an understandable tendency among analysts to generalise the results of the latest elections in five states as a forecast for a sweep of the 2024 Parliamentary election by the Bharatiya Janata Party. While the assumption appears natural, there are reasons for the winners not to be complacent and those who lost too not despair, for each of the five elections was fought and won on different issues and by different strategies. All said and done, in the case of Manipur where the BJP emerged with a clear but thin majority of 32 in a House of 60 the average number of voters in each of Manipur's 60 constituencies was about 35,000. The average winning margin generally was 3,000 to 6,000 votes depending on whether the contest was a straight fight or multi-cornered. This time, however, 22 of the victories had margins of less than 1,000 votes and 12 of these were of BJP candidates. Furthermore, nine victories were by margins of less than 500 votes and of these, eight were of the BJP. In one constituency, Wabagai, Kakching district, the BJP candidate beat his Congress rival by just 50 votes. In Lamlai Constituency (Imphal East), the BJP nipped, the Janata Dal (United) by 121 votes and in Lamsang, Imphal West, the BJP trailed the National People's Party all the way but surged ahead when postal ballots were counted to win by 400 votes. As per the first-past-the-post system, where a victory by one vote is as good as by several thousands. However, what is clear is, there was nothing in the result to say the winners of the elections have eliminated all prospective future electoral challenges.

The BJP probably would have done better if not for the exodus of many of its leaders and their workers ahead of the elections when Congress defectors were preferred over them for party tickets. It remains to be seen if the party is going to be able to reconcile with the rebels and reconsolidate its base before 2024. If the BJP suffered and paid for its consciously acquired excess weight in the latest elections, the decimation of the Congress which could manage only five seats, also provides valuable insights into the Manipur electorate's mind. The Congress once held sway in the state, having had an unbroken three terms reign before being ousted in 2017. To take one case, there was a time when the Congress had no serious challengers in the 12 seats considered to be the stronghold of Naga tribes in Manipur's 20 seats in the hills. Some of the most prominent politicians of the state have been Nagas, among them, two Chief Ministers. This time, however, no Congress returned from any of these 12 seats.

Ethnic fault-lines

A tour of other meta narratives of ethnic fault-lines in Manipur will be helpful in understanding Manipur's voting pattern. Some of these divisions are also bitter, sometimes dangerously so. These fissures are over above the more common rural – urban, rich–poor divides, literacy levels, etc. If in much of the rest of India caste is important, here caste is virtually non-existent but, in its place, there are such impenetrable ethnic identity boundaries. In the last many decades, a distinct hill-valley divide premised on ethnic polarity, and all the accompanying senses of mistrust, rivalry, deprivation, anger at economic disparity and more are apparent in the public domain.

Of Manipur's 60 Assembly seats, 20 are in the hills and 40 in the central Valley where the state capital Imphal is also located. Of the 20 hill seats, 19 are reserved for Scheduled Tribes and one, that of Kangpokpi in the foothills, is a general seat. The latter seat, together with two other constituencies (each a sub-division in administrative classifications)

flanking it, Saikul and Saitu, once formed a buffer ring around the valley separating the valley from the higher and more rugged mountains beyond. The British colonial administration classified this buffer as Sadar Hills, which was treated as neither hill nor valley.

Of the 40 seats in the valley, one is reserved for the Scheduled Castes. With one seat in the hill falling in the general and one in the valley in the reserved categories, the aggregate remains as 20 reserved seats and 40 general. The seat distribution corresponds roughly with the population distribution. The other peculiarity is, Imphal Valley is, in area, only one-tenth of the state, and the surrounding hills make for the rest 90 percent. The population concentration, however, is in the reverse order. The hills are homes of the Naga and Chin-Kuki groups of tribes and modern land revenue system is not made applicable here. Instead, traditional land ownership is what are in vogue here. The tradition is also vastly different between the Nagas and Kukis. Generally, in the former, village land is owned by the village as a community, and in the latter, the village itself or the village chief. The law forbids non-tribal from acquiring land in the hills.

Modern land revenue system, defined by the Manipur Land Revenue & Land Reforms Act, 1960, amended from time to time, is followed in the valley. Therefore, in the valley government owns all land and individual lease their plots of land from the government and pay taxes for them. It is also open to settlement by all citizens of the country, therefore, although the indigenous community, the Meiteis are in the majority, it has a very cosmopolitan mix of population. Meitei candidates have also won these seats so far, but every domicile has the right of franchise and to contest for these seats.

Sadar Hills and frictions within

The Sadar Hills question (now Kangpokpi district) is a convenient cue to understanding the ethnic tensions in Manipur and for a glimpse

into the character of its politics. Records show, that even at the time of Manipur's traumatic World War II experience, when troops of the advancing Japanese Imperial Army and Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army, fought a bitter, devastating battles with the British forces for four months on Manipur soil, Sadar Hills was very sparsely populated, but now it is dominated by Nepalis and Kukis with a few Naga villages as well.

Of Sadar Hill's three sub-divisions of Saitu, Kangpokpi and Saikul (each also an Assembly constituency), the central Kangpokpi through which one of Manipur's important lifelines, National Highway-2 (formerly NH-39), connecting this landlocked state with Nagaland and Assam, is left as the general seat, allowing its non-tribal Nepali domiciles to vote and contest. However, although the Nepalis are now more numerous, the constituency has been won by a Nepali candidate only once in the state's legislative history as a full-fledged state since 1972.

Districts creation fallouts

Sadar Hills was once a part of the Naga-dominated Senapati district but its Kuki population for long demanded a district status separate from Naga-dominated Senapati district. Many prolonged and crippling blockades along National Highway 2 accompanied these demands, and finally, in December 2016 barely three months ahead of the February 2017 elections, the then Congress government led by Okram Ibobi, conceded to the demand and made Sadar Hills a district after renaming it Kangpokpi on the plea that the Sadar Hills was already practically functioning as a separate district, though officially it was a part of Senapati district. In the same move, the Ibobi government also bifurcated six more districts to create seven new districts including Kangpokpi, citing the need for more administrative ease and efficiency.

The move was welcomed by non-Naga districts but was vehemently opposed by many powerful Naga civil society organisations, saying this

was designed to encroach upon Naga's ancestral homeland, a reference to the demand for a unified Naga homeland made up of territories Nagas consider theirs extending into all states neighbouring Nagaland, and even Myanmar. The nature of the issue being emotive is opposed by the non-Naga communities sharing the same homeland in Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh, and has been a prominent campaign point by both sides in elections after elections in these states, especially Manipur.

The 2016 creation of seven new district, was met with a blockade of NH-2 and also on NH-37 which connects Imphal with the Barak Valley in Assam, by Naga civil society bodies, dovetailing the earlier blockade by Kukis demanding precisely the opposite – the creation of Sadar Hills as a new district. The district creation decision backfired on the Congress, and its electoral prospect in the Naga-dominated districts slumped with Naga civil society bodies and allegedly also militant groups forbidding the party. It is also unlikely to be a coincidence that the fortune of the Naga People's Front, a Kohima-headquartered political party, and a new entrant in Manipur electoral politics, rose, in the wake of this controversy, managing in the end to return four MLAs for the first time.

ADC agitation and Muivah visit

The Nagas disenchantment with the Congress has also to do with another earlier incident in May 2010. After decades of hiatus the then Congress government, decided to revive the six Autonomous District Councils in the Manipur hills, a local self-governance mechanism in lieu of the Panchayat system implemented in the valley. Powerful Naga civil bodies again opposed it. Instead, it wanted an "alternative arrangement", an administrative unit, autonomous of Manipur state, for the Nagas of Manipur while they embarked on blockading the state along its 'lifelines' – Highways. It was again unlikely to be a coincidence, that amidst this agitation, Thuingaleng Muivah, the leader of a powerful Naga insurgent group, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak–Muivah), wanted

to visit his village Somdal in Ukhrul district Manipur on May 3 and also hold two public meetings, first in Ukhrul district headquarters on May 8 and two days later on May 10 at Senapati district headquarters.

The then union Home Minister, P. Chidambaram had sent a telegram to chief minister Ibobi, asking him to make security arrangements for Muivah's visit and the public rallies. Chief minister Ibobi put his foot down and decided to block Muivah's entry into the state at that juncture. Protest against this decision at Mao gate resulted in the death of two students on May 6. Despite shrinking support in Naga areas, the Congress managed to return as the single largest party in the 2017 election with 28 MLAs, the three short of majority mark, leaving its nearest rival BJP to be content with 21. However, as we have seen, it was the BJP which formed the government with the support of other non – Congress parties, including the NPF.

Interestingly, not long after the BJP-led coalition government was installed, the blockade by Naga civil bodies also ended even though the district creation decision over which the blockade was called, was never rescinded. This was also perhaps influenced by the fact the NPF had then become a partner in the ruling coalition. The Sadar Hills issue highlights most succinctly the complex, bitter and multi–layered frictions between ethnic groups in the hills, as well as between these groups and the Manipur state, but obviously there are numerous more symptoms of the same ailment, all of which need not be profiled here.

Hill-Valley friction

There is yet another important dimension to the ethnic frictions in Manipur, one that illustrates the hypothesis that conflicts are more often than not, predestined by geography. This embedded conflict should be obvious from a study of the topography of Manipur. It is a mountainous state with a central valley, flat alluvial and very well irrigated, therefore suitable for agriculture, making it a case study of what Yale professor

James C. Scott called a Zomian theatre in his 2009 book "The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchic History of Upland South East Asia". Zomia is a term coined by Dutch scholar of Asian borderland studies, Willem Schendel, denoting the mountainous massifs of northern South East Asia and its inhabitants stretching across northern Thailand, Myanmar to Vietnam and Yunnan and more, and it includes much of Northeast India. The region is marked by vast mountainous expanses punctuated by fertile riverine valleys.

In a crux, these valleys become melting pots of identities as people descend into them, and because of their suitability for stable rice agriculture, economic disparities between them and the surrounding hills become inevitable. The valleys are also where rudimentary state formation happen, in keeping with Friedrich Angles prediction in his classic, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State", that at its basic, the state is also a mechanism for managing surplus. Scott calls these Zomian states "Paddy States". The conflict theatre between "state carrying" populations in the valleys and "non-state hillmen" still living on subsistent slash and burn farming, hunting and gathering, is thus foretold.

British Colonial administration

Arrival of the modern state, in the case of the Northeast, marked by takeover by the British in 1826 complicated the scenario. The colonial government with its primary interest in revenue was quick to separate productive flatlands from non-revenue "wild" hills. The creation of an "Inner Line" by the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, in Assam by the British is a case in point. The line separated hills from the agricultural plains in the British province of Assam, which virtually meant the entire Northeast of today with the exception of Manipur and Tripura which were independent kingdoms. The hills beyond the Inner Line were left unadministered under the broad gaze of the governor, while the agrarian plains came directly under the colonial administration. In

Manipur too, after the British defeated and entered the kingdom in 1891, this tried system was introduced, although without formally drawing an Inner Line separating the hills from the revenue plains of the valley. From 1907 onwards, after the coronation of Maharaja Sir Churachand upon his attaining adulthood, the hills were left largely unadministered but under the broad gaze of the British Political Agent (the equivalent of a governor as Manipur was left as a Princely State and not completely absorbed as British territory) who also assumed the title President Manipur State Durbar, and the revenue affairs of the plains were put under the charge of the Maharaja's Darbar.

Instead of the Inner Line, however, as I have outlined earlier, the Sadar Hills belt was created to demarcate the hills from the plain's territory. This crystalised the hill-valley duality further, and now it has come to be internalised so much so that a great section of the population has come to believe this as an intrinsic feature from 'time immemorial'.

Democracy as divider

Democracy further accentuated these divisive trends. The contest for power under it, with a premium on building vote banks, often requiring resorts to negative campaigns, has only made matters worse. As Fareed Zakaria wrote in his 2003 book "The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad", democracy will have to be predicated by a culture of liberalism or else it can actually be dangerous for democracy demands building vote banks and enclaves. Zakaria takes the example of Yugoslavia, which held together as a nation all the while under a Communist dictatorship but disintegrated violently on ethnic lines not long after the country switched to democracy. Manipur, and the rest of the Northeast have seen and continue to see, this phenomenon at work, though they have proven much more resilient than Yugoslavia.

Economic disparity between the hills and valleys, as in Manipur, is a reality. The hills have always claimed to have suffered from a sense

of being discriminated and oppression by the more 'prosperous' valley communities. Such a problem cannot simply be dismissed as misplaced citing equal allocations of funds for both regions. May be asymmetric investments, calculated to bring parity is what is called for. In Scott's words, this is so because the 'terrain friction' on the road to development is much greater in the mountains than in the plains. One of his lectures to promote his book named above, was provocatively but illustratively titled as 'Why Civilisations Cannot Climb Mountains'.

Valley's sense of siege

There is also another reality to be tackled, and sure to be reflected in these elections as well. This has to do with a growing reverse sense of being unfairly handicapped amongst the valley communities. In Manipur, the valley community Meiteis now have come to suffer from a sense of siege, and of losing their land and jobs to constant migration and settlement from the hills and elsewhere on what they consider as their traditional domain. A sizeable section among them demands protection, including not the least by having the community within the Schedule Tribes fold. Why then did the BJP do well despite what had seemed to be grave threats to its prospects. On the first, the answer is simple. Had the outward migration not happened and the BJP vote bank remained secure to the end, the party's tally would probably have been much higher but even after their departure, their score was still good enough. Most of the six seats the Janata Dal (United) bagged and some of what the NPP won, would probably have been in the BJP kitty, bringing up its total to possibly 40 plus as the party vaunted all along.

The second is more intriguing and deserves a deeper analysis. Not just in Manipur, but also in the rest of the Northeast, very often people are fiercely opposed to certain policies of the government, but when it comes to voting, they still vote for the ruling party which either were responsible for the specific policy they oppose or else openly ignored their opposition to it. Nowhere was this demonstrated louder than in the

Assam Assembly elections, 2021. Almost the entire population rose in opposition to the Citizenship Amendment Act, CAA, with civil society leaders like Akhil Gogoi getting jailed over it and in turn acquiring iconic status in the Assamese society, yet, when the state assembly election was held in its wake, contrary to expectations the CAA would define the tone and tenure of the mandate, the BJP which sponsored and literally bulldozed its way in Parliament to get this become an Act, was voted back to power overwhelmingly.

Gulf between grassroots and formal politics

Something of this is what Manipur also witnessed in the recent election. Not much ahead of the election, the AFSPA had come out of the back burner to occupy prime space in public consciousness. The Disturbed Area Act which predicates AFSPA, lapsed in Manipur on November 30, but the government did not immediately extend it, probably not wanting to annoy the public on election eve. Then the Oting incident happened on December 4 in Nagaland's Mon district, in which 14 civilians were killed in a botched ambush by para commandos based in Jorhat, further heightening passions against AFSPA in the entire Northeast. However, when the Centre government showed no sign, it was willing to withdraw the act even amongst the public outrage, the BJP government in Manipur finally, in order not to displease their central leaders, extended the DAA and AFSPA on January 8 with retrospective effect from December 1. But probably in a dilemma not to also displease the public ahead of the election, not only was this extension done quietly, but the BJP held back releasing its manifesto till about a week from the election, for unlike all other parties in contention, the manifesto made no mention of AFSPA.

The moot point is, AFSPA, is one of those grievances the people of the state and indeed the entire Northeast share. Yet, AFSPA and other similar hot issues seldom have had any tangible impact on the state's electoral politics. This brings to mind another very important attribute

of the Manipur society. Nobody can doubt or dispute that the state is far from being apolitical. It does have very strong grassroot gut politics, and should anybody, including the government do anything that is seen to run against the core interest of the state and its people, there will be mayhem in the streets. Civil society organisations, both established ones as well as instantly formed ones, in the hills as well as in the valley, will spring alive to challenge the policies they see as detrimental. In all likelihood, if these struggles become protracted, they will also throw up new street fighting leaders and icons. Examples are plenty. Just to cite a few; the agitation for district status for Sadar Hills; the agitation against the creation of seven new districts by bifurcating existing districts; the agitation for more autonomy for the hills; agitation against the AFSPA by Irom Sharmila; Pebam Chittaranjan's self-immolation protesting Manipur's loss of 'independence'; and indeed, the many underground militant movements for claiming to regain the loss independence are evidence of this political attribute of the people. The sad thing is, the energy evident in such an out-level street politics have never been successful sublimated and prepared for transition to the formal electoral politics where leaders are decided by the ability of contestants to get themselves elected and not solely by calibre as in the former. Since winning election is all that is needed to qualify to be a leader, politicians of today concentrate only on mastering the technics of winning elections, which is increasingly becoming the ability to buy or else coerce voters to vote for them.

Manipur's strength

I have no doubt that the minute of this raw energy of Manipur's street fighting politics is successfully sublimated and allowed to transition to the formal electoral politics. There will be the likelihood of a strong regional political force, rich and deep beyond expectation. Till then, electoral politics in Manipur will remain the carnival it has become, in which voters come out to make some quick pocket money, betraying in the process a cynicism that sees electoral politics as just a formality and not one

meant to change lives, much less steer the state towards a peaceful and prosperous future. There is yet another interesting social insight thrown up by this round of Manipur election. It is in many ways seen as one aspect of the defeat of the Congress. The Congress leadership rank from what it was at the end of the last election in 2017, when it emerged as the single largest party with 28 seats, was already decimated by the time of Manipur went to the polls again in 2022. Of its 28 MLAs, there were only 12 left to contest on the party's ticket, the rest and more having joined the ruling BJP to look for greener pastures.

Yet, in the-run up to the election, the party showed a rare sense of composure and confidence. It was among the first to release its list of candidates without waiting to pick from BJP leftovers. It indulged little in slanging matches with rivals. It was again amongst the earliest to release its election manifesto. It had appeared it was interested in just going about its own business without looking at what others were doing. This notwithstanding, the party lost miserably, bagging only five seats, though in some others they lost by very narrow margins. So, what exactly happened? One of these has to do with its past and quite ironically it had to do with the way it waged its war against insurgents. In the hills, the blocking of Th. Muivah's visit to the state in May 2010 under its watch disenchanted the Nagas. In the valley, the campaign of eliminating insurgent suspects resulted in 1528 recorded cases of fake encounter killings, again under the party's watch, leaving deep wounds amongst the public. The BJP was quick to see this, especially the latter, and took advantage of it to the hilt, continually hammering on the policy's brutality in its campaign.

The irony is, a state is expected to fight and overcome any military challenges to it. In Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* they are the 'mailed fists' of the society. Hence, though in any protracted insurgency, no matter if the people have grown disenchanted, when government campaigns go too far, the hurt begin to be felt by the people themselves, after all those eliminated would be a son, a daughter, a friend, a neighbour's

son, etc. The hard lesson for the Congress, and for everybody fighting insurgency then is, tackling insurgency will have to be nuanced for there cannot be a pure military solution to the problem. While the military approach cannot be abandoned altogether, the challenge is to balance this with an effort to reach a political resolution. The first step in this is to acknowledge the political nature of these troubles, and that they are not just a law-and-order challenge. It still needs to be seen, if the electoral politics can deal with these critical political questions sufficiently.

Book Review

'1949: Story of India's Takeover of Manipur': A Sociological Reading CADM, 2018

7

Imphal
R.K. Gunikanta

The author of the book '1949: The story of India's Takeover of Manipur' (2018), Arambam Noni has shed a new light on how to look at historical events through the extensive usage of archival sources. Expressly unravelling the circumstances surrounding the infamous turn of events in 1949, the book exposes some intricate aspects. The value of this book lies in the way the historical references relating to India's takeover of Manipur are culled out to signify the subjective realities. The book interrogates the singularly narrativised and politically motivated background of India's takeover of Manipur.

The book *1949* talks not only about the infamous political events that took place at that point of time; it also analyses the various possible causes that made up the event. The reviewer feels it pertinent to investigate the ontological stance of the author's account while reviewing the essence of the rationale of the nationalizing subjectivity. The author not only narrates the stories surrounding *1949* event chronologically but also the nature of the constructs associated with the dominant nationalist aspirations. From a sociological perspective, the review explores cues to

interpret the author's work from an interpretative sociological approach developed by German sociologist, Max Weber. Weber's interpretative understanding of social action helps in arriving at a causal explanation of events. Weberian theory shows that social action of any kind, say the Indian nationalist action in this context, would require ensuring parameters of aesthetics while simultaneously keeping in view of the effects that it may have on the supposedly *other* – a condition of moral, just, and rational orienting.

The author explicates on how Indian integrationists used coercion in the takeover of Manipur. In the eyes of interpretative sociology, the apparent intention of Indian national integrationists can be regarded to have displaced the Weberian 'value–rational action' that informs a particular social action. Expansion of the idea of subjective 'Indian nationalism' in the book provides a ground for embarking on an interpretative sociology where the 'value rational action' gets openly relegated as it opened the ground for the adoption of any means due to its overall instrumentalism. The book reproduces several official documents and records, 1946-1950, to explicate the context in which the Indian integrationist actions were reasoned which consequently brought down the then procedurally established government of Manipur. The rise of communism in Manipur under the leadership of Hijam Irabot who had allied with the communists in Burma (Myanmar) had caused a geo–political concern to the integrationist nationalists in India. Such a geo–political anxiety produced politics of apprehension for there was a likeability of communists' infiltration into the frontiers called Northeast.

The line 'these circumstances necessitated strong governments in Manipur direct under the Centre', mentioned in the book explicates the instrumentalism of nationalist dealings with the Northeast. Another trajectory of nationalistic politics is unraveled as the Hindu Indic footprints were invoked to justify all that was unfolded during the process of integration of Manipur, officially announced on October 15, 1949. The book notes 'the takeover of Manipur was presumably fastened due to

already existing fertility of high Hinduisation process.' For instance, to ease out the integration process, Sri Prakasa reportedly invoked the Hindu link to foreground the significance of Lord Vishnu and other Hindu gods in the social life of people in Manipur. The popular term 'Merger' has been referred to as 'takeover' in the book. The book evidences the point that it was an officially acknowledged term extensively used during India's dubious integration of Manipur. India's takeover of Manipur in 1949 was not an overnight story. It was a cumulative effect that involved various factors in achieving ambitious ends of post-imperial power which the author prefers to re – sequence as 'State-nation' instead of Nation-state.

The author prefers to read the takeover of Manipur broadly into Generalist, Insurrectionist and Ambivalent to sort out several epistemic questions. The epistemic positions on repressed experiences are often found accentuated by well-designed academic and policy relegation. The generalist denial is highlighted by the author when author's write up on 'Northeast' was declined by a prominent London – based Left publication house on a bizarre ground that it was too 'particular'. Interestingly, the author reproduces the reply as it reads 'focus on Manipur in 1940s would be too specialised for a generalist journal like ours, even it merits publication.' The book expresses shock and a feeling of denial by questioning why an epistemic expression concerning Western Southeast Asiatic (Northeast) (Indo-Burma) region embroiled for long in a geo – political conflict be ghettoed and excluded from the purview of wider academics.

This is an instance of interaction between the writer and the publisher indicating generalists' subjective construction that distresses the other. Likewise, the nationalist in India donning the Generalists cap have ignored the local and specific polities, as seen in the story of 1949. The book underscores 'the ignorance is, therefore, evident even among the historians as many have indulged into de-historicization of pasts as 'non-living memories.'

Insurrectionist

Had the insurrectionaries and communist movement not emerged in Manipur, the Indian-integration project would not have possibly unfolded. The preference of Maharaja Bodhachandra to hold a plebiscite before the integration was unheard of by the nationalists. The significance of the book lies in the revelation of undemocratic and totalitarian nature of Indian integration politics with pertinent details. The obvious contradiction between totalitarian nature of integration politics and its contestability is lucidly discussed. The resistance to the coerced merger was rather expected. The impending merger was opposed by Praja Sabha Samiti (a political party) hoisting of black flag on 15th August 1949. Manipur Students' Federation also opposed. Much later in 1990s, while issuing a small booklet entitled 'Annexation of Manipur, 1949' by People's Democratic Movement (PDM) organized a National Convention and resolved to declare the 'circumstances of Duress and Coercion mentally and physically imposed upon the Manipur Maharaja at Shillong, who was under military siege by the paramilitary forces of the dominant India that led to the signing.'

Ambivalent

The question on why India integrated Manipur in such an ambiguous way has been attempted for answers in the book. The book tries to reveal the unaccounted, repressed histories and events to understand the ambivalences. It gives a sense of what had happened. The ambivalences are offshoots of distortions of historical polities. In this regard, political actions oriented towards 'affective action', in Weberian sense which means impulsive action gets played out. Reason for putting them into this category arises from the fact that there was a failure to comprehend the exact nature of the subjectivity of people whose self and polities were othered. As a result, the currents of ambivalence are recuring due to its contestable historicity.

Signifying the erroneous story of integration, the book dwells on Gandhi and nationalism. It is well known that Gandhi did not want the two-nation theory perhaps on the ground that it was to bring in extensive casualty on inter-community relations. Unlike Gandhi, Nehru opted an aggressive approach towards resistance movements. In the case of Nagaland, a referendum on the independence of Nagaland was reportedly held on 16th May 1951 in which nearly everyone voted in favour of the motion. While responding to the Naga question, Gandhi was quoted to have said 'we also do not want the British and they are going. India will not attack you. She has no right to do so, and I will sacrifice my life for you before any Naga is shot', when Naga delegates asked Gandhi 'if Indians will attack Nagaland when it became free.' The political conversation between Naga delegates and Mahatma Gandhi reflected deeper possibility of engaging differences in a democratic way at least in this case, which was largely absent in other cases.

The book not only explains the historical events that took place more than seventy years ago, but it also set forth how national – integration history distorts and smudges the unaccounted and repressed history of insurrectionary polities. It can be inferred from the discussion that the integrationists in many ways used functionalist approach and manipulative laws. Historical inferences, therefore, can be also drawn from the construed subjectivities, where the existing histories are put into oblivion. The dichotomous over past denial by nationalist assimilative politics and 'othering' of frontier is what the author describes as a moot point.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Contributors are requested to follow the following guidelines (an in-text citation [T], followed by a reference-list entry [R] at the time of submitting articles.

1. Book – (i) One author – T: (Doniger 1999, page no./nos.); R: Doniger, Wendy. 1999. *Splitting the difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(ii) Two authors – T: (Cowlishaw and Dunbar 2000, 104–7); R: Cowlishaw, Guy, and Robin Dunbar.2000. *Primate conservation biology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(iii) Four or more authors – T: (Laumann et al. 1994, 262); R: Laumann, Edward O., John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994. *The Social Organisation of Sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(iv) *Editor, translator, or compiler instead of author* – T: (Lattimore 1951, 91-92); R: Lattimore, Richmond, trans. 1951. The Iliad of Homer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(v) Editor, translator, or compiler in addition to author – T: (Bonnefoy 1995, 22); R: Bonnefoy, Yves. 1995. *New and Selected poems*. Ed. John Naughton and Anthony Rudolf. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(vi) Chapter or other part of a book – T: (Wiese 2006, 101–2); R: Wiese, Andrew, 2006. 'The House I live in': Race, class, and African American suburban dreams in the postwar United States. In *The new suburban history*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, 99-119. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(vii) Chapter of an edited volume originally published elsewhere – T: (Cicero 1986, 35); R: Cicero, Quintus Tullius. 1986. Handbook on canvassing for the consulship. In ***Rome: Late republic and principate***, edited by Walter Emil Kaegi Jr. and Peter White. Vol. 2 of University of Chicago readings in western civilisations, ed. John Boyer and Julius Kirshner, 33-46. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Originally published in Evelyn S. Shickburg, trans., *The letter of Cicero*, vol. 1 (London: George Bell & Sons, 1908).

(viii) Preface, forward, introduction, or similar part of a book – T: (Rieger 1982, xx-xxi); R: Rieger, James. 1982. Introduction to Frankenstein; or, *The modern Prometheus*, by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, xi–xxxvii. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2. **Journal Article** – T: (Smith 1998, 639); R: Smith, John Maynard. 1998. The Origin of altruism. *Nature*, 393: 639–40.

3. **Newspaper article** (Newspaper articles may be cited in running text ('As William Niederkorn noted in a New York Times article on June 20, 2022, … ')

4. **Thesis or Dissertation** – T: (Amundin 1991, 22-29, 35); R: Amundin, M. 1991. Click repetition rate patterns in communicative sounds from the harbour porpoise, Phocoena Phocoena. PhD Thesis, Stockholm University.

5. **Paper Presented at a meeting or conference** – T: (Doyle 2002); R: Doyle, Brain. 2002. Howling like dogs: Metaphorical language in Psalm 59. Paper presented at the annual international meeting for the Society of Biblical Literature, June 19-22, Berlin, Germany.

6. **Explanatory notes cited as footnotes must be placed at the end of the article as END NOTES. It must be place above the WORKS CITED.**

7. **References must be put as WORKS CITED at the end of the article and cited works should be alphabetically arranged (ascending order).**