Ethnic Nationalism and the State Response: A Study of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Movement

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By

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Under the Guidance of

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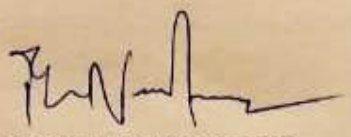
DECLARATION

I, Phairembam Newton Singh, hereby declare that the research work embodied in the thesis titled "Ethnic Nationalism and the State Response: A Study of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Movement" submitted to Sikkim University in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my original work. The contents of this thesis did not form basis for the award of any previous degree to me and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute.



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Ethnic Nationalism and the State Response: A Study of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Movement", Submitted to Sikkim University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of International Relations, embodies the results a bonafide research work carried out by Mr. Phairembam Newton Singh under my guidance and supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.
We recommend that this be placed before the examiners for evaluation

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Abbreviations

AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Power Act
APPM	All Political Parties, Manipur
AR	Assam Rifles
BSEM	Board of Secondary Examination Manipur
BSF	Border Security Force
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CKRF	Chin-Kuki Resistance Force
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
HNA	Hmar National Army,
HPC(D)	Hmar People's Convention (D),
HPC	Hmar Convention
ILP	Inner Line Permit
IMTDA	Indo-Myanmar Tribal Development Association
INA	Indian National Army
KCP	Kangleipak Communist Party
KDF	Kuki Defence Force
KIA	Kuki Independence Army
KIF	Kuki International Front
KIM	Kuki Inpi Manipur
KLA	Kuki Liberation Army
KNA	Kuki National Army
KNF	Kuki National Front
KNF-MC	Kuki National Front-Military Council
KNF-Z	Kuki National Front-Zougam
KNO	Kuki National Organization

KNV	Kuki National Volunteers
KRA	Kuki Revolutionary Army
KRF	Kuki Revolutionary Front
MLR and LR Act	Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Amendment) Act.
MNF	Mizo National Front
MoS	Memorandum of Settlement
NLGs	Naga Lim Guards
NSCN(IM)	The National Socialist Council of Nagaland
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRA	Pakan Reunification Army
PREPAK	People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak
SoO	Suspension of Operation
UKLA	United Old Kuki Liberation Army
UKLF	United Kuki Liberation Front
UKRA	United Komrem Revolutionary Army
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Asom
UMLF	United Minorities Liberation Front,
UNLF	United National Liberation Front
UPF	United People’s Front
UPF	United Peoples’ Front
USRA	United Socialist Revolutionary Army
ZDV	Zou Defence Volunteer,
ZNC	Zomi National Congress
ZORO	Zo Re-Unification Organisation
ZRA	Zomi Revolutionary Army
ZRF	Zomi Revolutionary Front

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Chapter-I: Introduction

Chapter I
Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The study focuses on the Chin-Kuki-Mizo (Chikim) ethnic nationalism and how the State responds to the movement. The transnational character of the movement, the issue of territoriality, and associated inter-ethnic dynamics all become important issues of security both for the State as well as various ethnic communities in the northeast region. Many ethnic communities formulate and define their identity politics, in the shape of ethnic nationalism in the context of the state-centric position of security, territoriality, and state ideology.

To maintain security, many of the ethnic groups in the region invoke ethnicity as the subject of security. And this is testified by the fact almost all ethnic groups operating in the northeast in general and Manipur in particular has an insurgent outfit organized on their respective ethnic lines. In Manipur alone, there are more than 30 insurgent outfits (SATP, 2017) all linked with one or another ethnic community. The absence of a political template to address and accommodate these differences has further facilitated ethnic mobilization in the region.

How do ethnic groups formulate their identity claims? How does such a claim of ethnic identity manifest? In other words, how does ethnic nationalism play out? And how does the State respond to such claims? The study is an attempt to understand these questions in the context of Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic nationalism. Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic nationalism is played out today in the most virulent form in the state of Manipur under the Kuki ethnic nationalism. There are contestations over the adoption of nomenclature among the various sub-ethnic groups. However, the collective term of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo is used in the study to underline the claims of a shared ethnic identity among the groups who inhabit different parts of northeast India and adjoining states of Bangladesh and Myanmar.

There were attempts to forge a collective identity based on their shared customs, traditions, and dialects. The Kuki National Organisation (KNO), one of the two organizations under whose umbrella numerous armed groups are under the Suspension of Operation (SoO) agreement with the Indian Government, Government of Manipur, and the Indian army, continues to harp on the objective of forming a

unified territory which they referred to as *Zalengam* by integrating the areas in South and Southeast Asia. The Chin-Kuki-Mizo is a conglomerate of ethnic groups that are spread across the national-territorial border. Such communities living in the bordering states of the northeast have ethnocultural affinities with people across the borders. The Chikim people are found today in India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.

In India's North East alone, they are scattered in almost all the states. They are known by different names; in Myanmar, they are called Chin. Those in different parts of North East India and Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh are known as Kuki while in Mizoram, they are called Mizo (Zou, 2012) and (Haokip, 2015, 21). Though separated by political boundaries between and within the state and called by different nomenclatures, the CHIKIM group considers themselves to be of a similar ethnic group with common myth of descent, historical memories, language, religious beliefs, and cultural practices (Dena, 2008, pp. 1-7).

The post-colonial process of making political boundaries divided the stretches of the same ethnic community who had previously lived in contiguous regions although there has been general stability in how British colonial laws applied to ethnic communities throughout the sub-continent. The border demarcating Mizoram and Chin State of Myanmar is of relatively recent origin—it is a creation of British rule—and significant migration between Mizoram and Chin State continues. Given the ethnic structure of the bordering societies in the region, sometimes the host communities favour such immigration from neighbouring countries to strengthen their identity claim and cultural security. The immigration of the Chins, Kukis, and Mizos exhibits that the respective communities residing on the Indian side are quite tolerant of such movements (Das, 2002). It is noted that 'the tribal immigration from Myanmar and Bangladesh (except the Chakma) is essentially a movement within the similar cultural space and hence invokes little resistance from the host communities (Das, 2002).

Sharing a common history, ethnic ancestry, and cultural practices, Chin State and Mizoram have had a long history of cordial border relations. For example, in the 1970s, an increasing number of Chins from Burma traveled to Mizoram to fill the growing demand there for cheap sources of labor. At this time, the Chin faced very few problems and, because they shared ethnic similarities, integrated easily into Mizo

society. Today, the largest populations of Chin continue to be divided between Chin State in Burma and Mizoram State in India (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p.16).

The Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic nationalism is premised on the demand for consolidation of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo communities in the adjoining regions of India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. The Chin-Kuki-Mizo mobilisation operates with different names, like the Zale'n-gam movement or the Zo Reunification Movement. Notwithstanding the difference in terminology, they converge on the same objective, i.e., unification of all the Chin-Kuki-Mizo inhabited areas into a single administrative unit incorporating areas in Northeast India, and Northwest Burma, predominantly, the Sagaing Division and the Chin Hills, and the Chittagong hill tracts in Bangladesh (The Kuki Nation, 2011). The Kuki ethnic nationalism, although aspires for a homeland within Manipur and even across the border by integrating areas of Kuki inhabited areas of South Asia and South East Asia, is played out in the most virulent form in the state of Manipur.

The problem of ethnic nationalism which has become an undeniable reality in the post-colonial world can be understood as a form of identity assertion. Ethnic nationalism refers to the epitomization of collective identity mobilization in culturally distinctive territories based on attitudes, memories, local attachments, and identities. It centers on constructing nationalism upon an ethnicist framework.

Nationalism in such a case is not the result of a pre-existing nation. The nation is a project, a 'nation of intent' (Dev, 1996. P.116). Ethno nationalism is also marked by the 'desire of an ethnic community to have absolute authority over its own political, economic and social affairs'. Therefore, it denotes the pursuit of statehood on the part of an ethnic nation. Ethno-nationalist movements signify the perception among members of a particular ethnic group that the group's interests are not being served under the given political arrangements. Ethno-nationalism plays out either by splitting or by consolidating into a larger ethnic identity. The next section discusses the concepts of ethnicity and ethnic nationalism.

1.2. Ethnicity and Ethnic Nationalism: A Conceptual Overview

Ethnicity and ethnic identity in South Asia have been crucial variables in the formation and consolidation of state structures. The states experience intermittent ethnic fragmentation and conflict of different scope, magnitude, and aims—from demand for autonomy to secession. The demand for recognition as a 'nation' based on ethnic self-determination has symbolized revolt against the state and its power structure.

The intra-regional and trans-regional dimensions of such movements have also diffused the boundaries of 'statehood' and 'neighbourhood' (Phadnis, Ganguly, 2001, p.18). The challenge of ethnic nationalism is the most perplexing phenomenon, both in theory and in practice, most of the states in the world today are confronted with. The challenge of ethnic nationalism manifests in different forms. A common form has been the ethnic revival and growing political assertiveness often ranging in demand from regional autonomy to outright independence and sovereign statehood (Phadnis, Ganguly. 2001:15).

Both the developed and developing states equally feel such challenges, though the phenomenon is acutely felt more in the developing countries which were once colonies of imperial rule. The rise of nationalistic feelings on the part of ethnic minorities often proceeded hand in hand with the growing assertion on the part of the majority or dominant ethnic communities for the promotion and in some cases the restoration of their political, economic, and socio-cultural privileges. This growing sense of deprivation and exploitation among the minority ethnic groups by the dominant groups within the state creates a growing sense of threat and insecurity among the minority ethnic categories within the state.

1.3. Ethnicity

There is a wide divergence among scholars regarding the meaning and interpretation of the term ethnicity. In the last few decades, there has been a growing literature on the subject and with that, other terms related to ethnicity have also emerged like 'ethnic communities', 'ethnocentrism, 'ethnic groups, etc. In recent times, the term ethnicity is also linked with 'nation building', nationalism thereby giving new concepts like ethnic nationalism or ethnonationalism.

The term ethnicity has both subjective and objective connotations. Objectively, it is seen as 'primordial affinities and attachments' and subjectively, as an 'activated primordial consciousness'. Combining the two connotations, some define an ethnic group as a 'collectivity whose members are linked by certain cultural characteristics—including the sense of sharing a common past—which they and others see as defining a social boundary between members and non-members of the group' (Coakley, 2012, 11).

In other words, the ethnic group refers to either a large or small group of people, in either backward or advanced societies, who are united by a common inherited culture (including language, music, food, dress, and customs and practices), racial similarity, common religion, and belief in common history and ancestry and who exhibit a strong psychological sentiment of belonging to the group (Phadnis, 2001, p. 19).

Ethnicity also refers to the phenomenon of the division into or relations between ethnic groups, but it may also refer to the question of affiliation to a particular ethnic group (Coakley, 2012: 10). Ethnicity is used in two different ways. In the narrower, popularly understood sense, ethnic groups are racial or linguistic groups. There is, however, a broader meaning as well. As Donald Horowitz (1985) suggests, all identities based on ascriptive (birth-based) group identities, real or imagined race, language, religion, tribe, or caste can be called ethnic. Ethnicity can be seen as a state of collective belonging based on common descent, culture, language, race etc (Horowitz, 1985).

1.4. Primordial versus Constructed views of Ethnic Identity

There are broadly two understandings of how ethnic identities are formed and why it persists. From the perspective of the primordialist school, ethnic identity is a biographically given or natural phenomenon. According to this view, ethnic groups constitute the kinship network into which human individuals are born and become members of, thereby coming to acquire with other group members, the group's territory and objective cultural attributes such as language, race, religion, customs, tradition, food, dress, and music.

Along with objective cultural markers, primordialist also stresses the psychological aspect of self and group-related feelings of identity distinctiveness and

its recognition by others as crucial determinants of ethnic identity selection and its persistence. Ethnic identity from the primordialist perspective is a subjective sense of shared identity based on objective cultural or regional criteria (Phadnis & Ganguly, 2001). Among the major proponents of the primordialist school, Anthony D. Smith is considered the foremost proponent of this view on ethnicity.

According to Smith, ethnicity mainly relies on myth, values, memories, and symbols and these form the bases of how the present is linked with a communal past. Myths also help unify classes by spreading ethnic culture through their symbolism. Smith (1986: 21–24) identifies the following six major features of ethnic nationality. They are 1. Ethnic groups must have a name to develop a collective identity. 2. The people in the ethnic group must believe in a common ancestry. 3. Members of the ethnic group must share myths (common historical memories). 4. Ethnic groups must feel an attachment to a specific territory. 5. Ethnic groups must share the same culture based on language, religion, traditions, customs, laws, architecture, institutions, etc. 6. Ethnic groups must be aware of their ethnicity.

In short, they must have a sense of their common ethnies. Ethnic community, according to Smith, is a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories and cultural elements, a link with a historic territory or homeland, and a measure of solidarity.' He further stresses that ethnicity is anything but primordial for the cohesion and self-awareness of that community's membership. According to him, ethnicity may persist even when "long divorced from its homeland, through an intense nostalgia and spiritual attachment" (Smith, A.D. 1991). Smith claims that ethnic differences and ethnic nationalism are unlikely to be eroded mainly because of the constantly renewed impact of ethnic myths and ethnic heritages on modern nations.

The primordial aspect of ethnicity is further emphasized in the formation of ethnic identity and nationalism. This approach is referred to as ethnosymbolism. The term refers to an approach that emphasizes the role of myths, symbols, memories, values, and traditions in the formation of ethnicity. The ethnosymbolic approach emphasizes the collective cultural identities and their continuity and how they are appropriated in the formation of modern nations (Özkırımlı, 2017, 154).

On the other hand, the constructivist school categorically rejects the primordialist argument that ethnic identity is a biologically natural phenomenon. Pointing out that the presumption of naturalness of ethnic and national identities obscures the human hand and motivations behind their formation and persistence, Jan Penrose (1995, pp.391-417) noted, 'the existence of nations is not a truth that human beings have discovered but a conceptualization of the world that we have created.

Part of the power of this creation is that it can be advanced convincingly as something natural. By conceiving of nations as natural and promoting them as such, the process of construction, of human intervention is obscured and the motivations behind such construction are removed from the realm of discussion. In this way, people whose motives have been fulfilled by a particular national construction are protected and disadvantaged people are denied recourse.'

Constructivists, therefore, contend that ethnic or national identity is socially constructed. They are essentially the product of processes that are embedded in human actions and choices rather than biologically given ideas whose meaning is detached by nature. Max Weber was one of the influential writers who stressed the social construction of ethnic identity and ethnic groups. He viewed ethnic groups as human groups whose belief in common ancestry, despite its largely fictitious origins is so strong that it leads to the creation of a community.

He regarded ethnic groups as based more on a set of beliefs and not on any objective features of group membership such as shared language, religion, and especially biological traits associated with the everyday understanding of race. He concluded that, unlike kinship groups, ethnic membership per se does not necessarily result in ethnic group formation but only provides the resources that may, under the right circumstances, be mobilized into a group by appropriate political actions (Jackson, 1982/83, pp.4-6).

Another prominent scholar in this school is Paul Brass who asserts that ethnicity is the creation of social and political elites by drawing upon, distorting, and sometimes fabricating ethnicity to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves (Brass, 1991) Brass concept of instrumentalism shall be discussed in the subsequent part of

the chapter to understand how ethnic nationalism in the state of Manipur can be looked at through this conceptual framework of instrumentalism.

1.5. Nationalism

The concept "nationalism" has different meanings relating to various levels of analysis: nationalism as an ideology, a movement, the process of "nation" and "nation-state" building, and an individual's political orientation. Despite its wide intellectual currency, the concept of nationalism is not easy to define or explain. To begin with, it rests on the problematical idea of ‘nation’. Nation, for Charles Tilly (1975), is ‘one of the most puzzling and tendentious items in the political lexicon. He preferred the most straightforward ‘state’.

Yet, he admits that ‘nation’ captures something that the state misses: a feeling, a passion, a legitimating power that the word nationalism possesses to an unequaled degree. Conceptual problems with the term ‘nationalism’ have been recognized since it first made its appearance, shortly after the French Revolution. Several social theorists have tackled the question of nationalism in search of a relatively simple or general explanatory mechanism. However, no single theory of nationalism has won wide acceptance and our understanding of the term remains undeveloped. Like ethnicity, there are two broad theoretical approaches to understanding nationalism—primordialism and modernism. Primordialist approach believes that nationalism is a natural part of human beings. Primordialists, however, do not form a monolithic category. There are four versions of primordialist approach: the nationalists, socio-biological, culturalist, and perennialist approaches. The common denominator of these approaches is their belief in the naturalness and/or antiquity of nations (Özkırımlı, 2017).

The modernist approach, however, believes in the modernity of nations and nationalism. According to them, both nation and nationalism are the products of modern processes like capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, secularism, and the emergence of the modern bureaucratic state. The modernist argument emphasizes the economic, political, and socio-cultural transformations for the emergence of modern nations and the idea of nationalism. These concepts emerged only in the last two centuries.

Hobsbawm highlighted the role of political transformations in understanding nationalism. According to him, both nations and nationalism are products of social engineering. What deserves particular attention in this process is the case of invented traditions by which he means a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of bahaviour by repletion, which automatically implies continuity with the past. Hobsbawm argues that the nation and its paraphernalia are the most pervasive of such invented traditions. Despite their historical novelty, they establish continuity with a suitable past and use history as a legitimator of action, and cement group cohesion. For him, this continuity is largely factitious. Invented traditions are responses to novel situations that take the form of reference to old situations.

Hobsbawm also distinguishes between two processes of invention, namely the adaptation of old traditions and institutions to new institutions and the deliberate invention of new traditions for quite novel purposes. He argues that nations belong to a particular historically recent period. It does not make sense to speak of nations before the rise of the modern territorial state as these two are closely related to each other. He argues that 'nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round. According to him, the origins of nationalism should be sought at the point of intersection of politics, technology, and social transformation (Hobsbawm and Terence, 2014).

Nations are not only the products of the quest for a territorial state; they can only come into being in the context of a particular stage of technological and economic development. Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality and in general an inescapable on social/cultural transformations.

1.6. The Relationship of Ethnicity to Nationalism

Writing on ethnic nationalism or otherwise called ethnonationalism, Daniele Conversi (2002, p.2) wrote that ethnonationalism 'denotes both the loyalty to a nation deprived of its state and the loyalty to an ethnic group embodied in a specific state, particularly

where the latter is conceived as a "nation-state". Walker Connor, writing on the subject in the early 1960s, emphasized the enduring power of the emotional depth of ethnonational identity. All nationalisms according to Connor, have an ethnic tone, even when they present themselves in a civic guise. The term ethnonationalism restores ethnic connotation to analytical primacy (Baruah, 2010, pp.1-2).

Ethnicity and nationalism are closely interrelated terms. Nationalism binds both the ethnicity and statehood (Varshney, 2007). We can look at the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism from both the modernist approach and ethnocentric approach. The modernist approach is broadly represented in Ernest Gellner's while the ethnocentric approach is emphasized by Anthony Smith. According to Smith, ethnic nationalism, is the result of ethnic mobilisation by ethnic groups using language, ethno-history, religion, traditions, customs, etc (Smith, 1998).

Smith argues that national identity could inspire ethnic communities to claim their rights as nations through the rediscovery of an ethnic past. Smith suggests that the desire to protect cultural heritage and tradition inspire a sense of superiority in ethnic group (Anthony D Smith 1998 cited in Isiksal, 2002, pp.8-9). Moreover, discrimination in terms of economic beneficiaries, and a sense of cultural oppression of a cultural group, could lead to ethnic nationalism. In such cases, the blame is always put against the centralized state. Thus, Smith argues that ethnic identity could cause nationalism because it has the power of convincing people. This convincing becomes much more effective when people think that their homeland is 'God-given', it is the place where their fathers and mothers lived, their heroes fought, their saints prayed and their forefathers laid down their lives for the freedom of their territory (Isiksal, 2002).

One can also analyse the impact of ethnicity and nationalism on politics. This means either how ethnic groups and nationalist movements seek their political goals, again leading to a microanalysis of the politics of ethnic nationalists; or the role of culture and ethnicity in creating states and influencing state systems, producing a micro-analysis of state and interstate formation. This view is primordialist and perennialists. It assumes that ethnies are primordial, givens of the human condition, and that nations are historical but immemorial. States, parties, bureaucracies, and

politics are regarded largely as the public expression of these pre-existing ethnic cleavages and cultural identities.

These standpoints, however, are not plausible or adequate. Primordialism as such is untenable since it fails to explain why particular ethnic communities emerge, change and dissolve, or why so many people chose to emigrate and assimilate to other ethnies. Nor can it explain why in some cases we witness a fierce xenophobic ethnic nationalism, and in others a more tolerant, multicultural national identity. Ernest Gellner argues that ethnicity is not a pre-requisite element for nations. Rather, it is the political and intellectual elites who impose a shared culture on a territorial population (Gellner, 1983, p.15). Gellner while explaining the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism, emphasises that 'ethnicity' enters the political sphere as 'nationalism' at times when the economic base of social life requires cultural homogeneity or continuity.

Gellner argued that nationalism could use existing cultures but nationalism cannot be caused because of ethnicity simply because there are too many ethnic cultures. What Gellner argues is that nationalism is the construction of a long process and nation-states are not the ultimate destiny of ethnic or cultural groups. As nationalism is a product of industrial society, ethnicity simply alone cannot cause nationalism even if they have territory and an energetic intellectual class (Isiksal, 2002, pp.8-9).

Gellner's modernist approach is further emphasized by Paul Brass. According to Paul R Brass, ethnic nationalism is one of the two fundamental processes of nation formation. Ethnic nationalism, according to him, was the transformation of ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic state into a self-conscious political entity. Another process of nation formation was the amalgamation of diverse groups and the formation of an inter-ethnic composition or homogenous national culture through the agency of the modern state (Paul R Brass, 1991).

In understanding the relationships between ethnicity, nationalism, and politics, we can look at two different ways of analyzing it. On the one hand, the politics of ethnicity and nationalism can mean the impact of politics on ethnicity and national identity. This analysis signifies either the uses of ethnicity and nationalism in the power struggles of leaders and parties, leading to a micro-analysis of ethnic politics;

or the processes by which states create ethnic groups and nations and their conflicts, producing a micro-analysis of national formation. This is primarily the instrumentalist and modernist standpoint of looking at the relationship. It assumes that ethnicity is plastic and malleable, an instrument for other ends, usually those of political elites; and that nations and nationalism are both recent and the product of specifically modern conditions like the modern state, bureaucracy, secularism, and capitalism.

However, instrumentalism and modernism are also inadequate. Instrumentalism fails to explain why ethnic conflicts are so often intense and unpredictable, and why the masses should so readily respond to the call of ethnic origin and culture. It also fails to address the problem of why some ethnies are so durable and persistent, and why so many people may be ready to lay down their lives for their nations. Modernism also suffers from a similar inadequacy because its account of nations and nationalism tells only one half, the recent half of the story. The fact that so many modern nations have been built on the foundations of pre-existing ethnies and so many ethnic nationalisms can draw on ethnic sentiments and shared memories, myths, symbols, and values, is omitted from the modernist accounts. One may add the post-modern perspective which seeks to show that ethnies and nations are simply cultural artifacts, constructs of cultural engineers who tailor pre-existing mythologies, symbols, and history for their ends.

This is also flawed in the sense that it exaggerates the ability of elites to manipulate the masses and fails to explain why millions of people may be prepared to die for a cultural artifact, and once again it disregards the premodern history of ethnicity. An extension of the instrumentalist and modern perspectives of looking at the relationships between politics, ethnicity, and nationalism translates into a state-centered approach which views that the modern state and political actions are responsible for forging ethnic groups and nations, and for the success of their nationalism which may be termed as the political variant of modernism. John Breuilly (1994) argues that nationalism is a political argument with a fixed and limited role, which only emerged in early modern Europe because of the growing chasm between society and the modern state.

By invoking the idea of ‘the nation’, nationalists can mobilize, unify and legitimate the goals of different sub-elites in their quest for power. Politics is about

capturing and holding power in the state—and nationalism is an argument for doing so. Nationalism is therefore a political movement, not a question of culture or identity. Nations are ultimately the product of a nationalism formed by and targeted at the modern state. This approach recognizes the role of culture and ethnicity in state-making but treats them as secondary. The state and political action play important roles in crystallizing ethnic sentiments and national identities, but ethnic ties and national sentiments are created by a variety of factors—ecological, social, and especially cultural and symbolic, such as religion, language, and the arts.

1.7. Factors of Ethnic Mobilization

In understanding ethnic mobilization, we can underline various factors. The following section discusses some of the important factors for ethnic mobilization.

1.7. a. Modernization and Ethnic mobilization

After the functionalist approach failed to account for the rise of ethnic nationalism in many developing as well as developed states in the 1960s and 1970, there arose a range of theories that linked the modernization process with the emergence and rapid diffusion of ethnic nationalism and religious sentiments.

Ethnic nationalism, according to these theories, was the way new urban middle and lower-middle classes responded to the physical disruption of the traditional way of life and cultural disorientation. Writing within the framework of the modernization paradigm, Karl Deutch (1961) developed the concepts of mobilization and assimilation to argue that modernization by producing greater socio-political mobilization and increasing assimilation of those mobilized, was the primary cause for the development of nationalism.

To Deutch, mobilization did not simply mean the entrance of large numbers of people into the arena of social, economic, and political competition, but rather it was a process that allowed individuals through intensive communication to create a public or nation, the desire to belong to a group and create a nation stems from the economic and psychological insecurity caused by the disruption of modernization. He, however, signaled the dangers of disruption of this integrative process by arguing that parochialism or regionalism with its concomitant instability and national fragmentation, may be caused in situations where the mobilization assimilation gap

created when mobilization outpaces assimilation is the root cause of ethnic nationalism, parochialism, and state fragmentation (Deutch, 1961, pp. 493-514).

Samuel Huntington (1971) and Daniel Lerner (1958), on their part, referred to the tension between the revolution of rising expectations and the revolution of rising frustrations caused by modernization in accounting for the rise of ethnic nationalism and disintegrative tendencies in developing states. According to Huntington and Lerner, the process of modernization in developing societies caused rapid social mobilization, the breakdown of the traditional order, and the expansion of communications and transport networks; this, in turn, led to an increase in the number of political participants who were sensitive to the poverty in which they lived.

Clifford Geertz explained the rise of ethnic nationalism by referring to the disorienting process of modernization and the failure of the state to draw ethnic groups into the national mainstream which increased the economic, cultural, and political divergence of the ethnic group from the rest of the state. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, a growing dissatisfaction emerged among scholars regarding the explanatory value of the existing theories that linked modernization to ethnic nationalism. The major shortcomings of these theories were that most of these theories failed to adequately explain the persistence and proliferation of ethnic nationalism all over the world. Most of these theories also viewed ethnic nationalism as undemocratic and extremist, a position that came to be increasingly challenged in the 1970s and 1980s. Again, the theories linking modernization and ethnic nationalism offered insights regarding the causes of ethnic nationalism mainly through implication and induction since their focus was primarily on the process of modernization and its associated problems, the question of stability and democracy in plural societies, and issues of violence and revolution.

With ethnic nationalism and ethnic political movements proliferating in the 1970s, the need for theories to analyze and explain this phenomenon became pressing. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, scholars who were not prepared to discard the salience of the modernization process behind the rise of ethnic nationalism developed two theories dealing directly with ethnic political mobilization: the developmental approach and the reactive ethnicity approach.

The central argument of the developmental approach is that ethnic identity and consciousness form the essential independent variable that leads to ethnic political assertiveness and militant separatism, regardless of the existence of inequality or dominance. Although the developmental approach puts more stress on cultural markers for the formation and consolidation of ethnic identity and consciousness, it continued to recognize the salience of the modernization process behind the rise of ethnic nationalist sentiments without, at the same time, accepting the basic argument of the modernization approach that ethnicity is a vanishing tradition.

Walker Connor (1979), an early exponent of the developmental perspective, contended that modernization helped to sharpen ethnic identity and ethnic nationalist sentiments in four main ways: first, material increases in social communication and mobilization by extending the political and administrative reach of government into outlying ethnic homelands previously enjoying substantial autonomy, tended to increase cultural awareness and exacerbate conflict between alien rule and ethnic groups desire to preserve their autonomous lifestyles.

Second, improvements in communications and transportation increased the cultural awareness and ethnic consciousness of minorities by highlighting the cultural distinctions between members belonging to different groups as well as the cultural affinity among members belonging to the same group.

Third, modernization by widely disseminating the message of national self-determination played a key role in the formation and justification of militant ethnic nationalist consciousness and sentiment in many parts of the world.

Finally, post-second world war global political developments such as the onset of the cold war and nuclear stalemate between the superpowers, making it more unlikely that a militarily weak power would be annexed by a larger power, allowed many small ethnic groups to seriously consider the option of independence; this, in turn, raises ethnic nationalist consciousness and sentiments (Walker Connor, 1979).

Another approach that emerged out of the dissatisfaction with the modernization perspective was the reactive ethnicity approach. The main advocate of the reactive ethnicity approach was Michael Hechter (1975). The essence of his argument was that exploitation characterized the relationship between members of the

dominant cultural group and members of peripheral ethnic groups in advanced industrial states. Such exploitation often results in a cultural division of labour whereby valued roles and resources get particularly allocated to the members of the dominant ethnic group.

This in turn creates resentment among the ethnic minority and heightens their ethnic consciousness. Faced with the pressure of infiltration of their areas by members of the dominant ethnic group, the stunted development of the ethnic homeland due to its treatment as an appendage of the national economy, and the destruction of the social fabric of the peripheral region due to economic exploitation caused by the cultural division of labour, peripheral ethnic groups may politically and nationalistically opt potentially destructive or divisive leaders from the peripheral ethnic group to weaken any political movement launched by it and to ensure the continuity of the cultural division of labour.

1.7.b. Resource Competition and Ethnic Nationalism

The resource competition approach posits that large-scale ethnic identity formation is promoted in multi-ethnic societies when various ethnic groups, especially ethnic elites, are forced to compete with each other for scarce resources and rewards. Such resource competition may lead to ethnic political movements and ethnic conflict if a group's previously acquired privileges are threatened or when underprivileged groups realize that the moment has come to redress inequality.

At such moments, ethnic groups may come to develop a perception of relative deprivation. Ted Gurr (1970) defined relative deprivation as the perceived discrepancy between value expectations and value expectancies in a society. In other words, ethnic groups are most likely to start a political movement when they receive less than they feel they deserve.

1.7. c. Paul R Brass and Instrumentalism

While conceptualizing ethnic mobilization or ethnicity based movements, intrumentalism argues that ethnic conflicts emerge from the economic interests and manipulations of the elites. It builds on the social constructivist view of ethnicity and suggests that ethnicity mobilizes ethnic communities through the common traits. Brass stressed the instrumental nature of ethnicity and nationality.

In this view, ethnic and national identities serve as convenient tools at the hands of competing elites to generate mass support in their struggle for wealth, power, and prestige. The study of ethnicity and nationality is in large part the study of politically induced cultural change. It is the study of the process by which elites and counter elites within ethnic groups select aspects of the group's culture, attach new value and meaning to them, and use them as symbols to mobilize the group, defend its interest, and compete with other groups (Brass, 1991).

Brass's theoretical framework is built upon several basic assumptions. The first concerns the variability of ethnic identities. For Brass, there is nothing inevitable about the rise of ethnic identities and their transformation into nationalism. On the contrary, the politicization of cultural identities is only possible under specific conditions which need to be identified and analysed carefully. Second, ethnic conflicts do not arise from cultural differences, but from the broader political and economic environment which also shapes the nature of the competition between ethnic groups. Third, this competition will also influence the definition of the relevant ethnic groups and their persistence.

This is because the elites use these cultural forms, values, and practices of ethnic groups as political resources in their struggle for power and prestige. They are transformed into symbols that can facilitate the creation of political identity and the generation of greater support; in other words, their meanings and contents are dependent on political circumstances. Finally, all these assumptions show that the process of ethnic identity formation and its transformation into nationalism is reversible (Brass, 1991).

Then, how does ethnic identity formation take place? Brass argues that an ethnic category with objective cultural markers or ethnic differences or competition for leadership among elites is not a sufficient condition for ethnic transformation. According to him, the existence of the means to communicate the selected symbols of identity to other social classes within the ethnic group, the existence of a socially mobilized population to whom the symbols may be communicated, and the absence of intense class cleavage or other difficulties in communication between elites and other social groups and classes are the sufficient conditions for ethnic transformation. According to Brass, the necessary and sufficient conditions for ethnic transformations

are also the preconditions for the development of a successful nationalist movement. He claims that nationalism as an elite phenomenon may arise at any time, even in the early stages of ethnic transformation.

1.8. Securitisation of Ethnicity

To understand the securitization of ethnicity, locating the sovereign territorial state and its assumed coexistence with the nation is important as most of the violent ethnic identification actualizes in this space. The sovereign state traditionally offers the instrumental solution for the challenge set forth by different forms of identity politics (e.g. class, gender, and ethnic claims) by providing a shared domain of meaning for groups located within its sovereign control and territory. The state, as a social and political practice and as a system of inclusion and exclusion par excellence, has tried to solve the problem of conflicting identity claims by producing precise distinctions and differences between citizens and aliens, domesticating particular identities, and creating a coherent sovereign identity (Tarja Väyrynen, 1997).

In the case of the Indian State, the nature in which nation-states were constructed in post-colonial history, the fragility of the foundation on which the Indian state rests necessitates the invocation of a sense of 'supreme national interests, in its citizens vis-à-vis other interests. The homogenizing trend, in interest and value, of the Indian nation-state, has increased all the more ignoring competing and contradictory interests that exist in societies.

Such homogenizing tendencies justify the use of 'violence' while dealing with ideologies or movements interpreted to be inimical to national sovereignty. While for the Indian state, violence is justified to maintain the security of the Indian nation-state, the political subjects in the northeast invoke ethnicity as the subject of security. To maintain the security of the ethnic political subject, violence of various kinds is ignited and often justified (Bhagat, 2008). Thus, the ethnic scenario of the region is held captive to State's grand security design.

1.9. Ethnic Mobilization in Northeast India

In the case of India's northeast, identities that shape conflict are not necessarily primordial but are a creation of political necessity and administrative convenience (Bhagat Oinam, 2003. pp.231-37). The current ethnic ferment in the northeast can only be understood against a background of historical changes like the withdrawal of

the old style of colonialism from the region, the rise of popular democratic forces that are yet to find appropriate political forms, and the neo-colonial intrigues of contemporary imperialism (Gohain, 2011).

An interesting aspect of ethnic mobilisation in the region is its transactional and transborder character. The rise of ethnic nationalism and the formation of ethnic political movements in many developing states can in large part be attributed to the legacy of western colonization and de-colonisation which created sovereign states incorporating many ethnic groups by ignoring existing ethnic and cultural division, and popular political aspirations.

Until de-colonisation was complete, this ethnic plurality was by and large manageable since the nationalist movements and organizations that existed in these states could and did generate a common political agenda of achieving independence from colonial rule; however, such feelings of unity were more of a function of colonial exploitation and dominance rather than expressions of a common political will of the constituent ethnic groups.

Once the colonial rule departed, fragmentation within the various ethnic groups emerged, competing for one against the other with no common agenda to bind the ethnic groups together. The focus of the study is one such ethnic mobilization with a transborder character. The next chapter shall try to situate the ethnic mobilization of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic groups and how they formulate and define their identity politics in the form of ethnic nationalism.

1.10. Research Objectives and Scope of the Study

The objective of the proposed study is to understand the ethnic dimensions of security in the context of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic community. The study also will look at how they formulate and defines their identity politics, in the shape of ethnic nationalism cutting across the national territorial border and spread across Myanmar, Bangladesh, and India. The study focuses on the Kuki ethnic nationalism and how it plays out in region, more particularly in the state of Manipur where the ethnic nationalism is in its most virulent form. It also analyses how the State engages and responds to such ethnic mobilization. The study, in particular, focuses on the process of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic movement based on a notion of shared ethnic identity and the state responses informed by its security logic.

1.11. Research Questions

How do the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic groups formulate and define their identity politics in the form of ethnic nationalism?

How does this ethnic group become securitized?

In what ways does the Indian state address the issue of security while responding to this particular ethnic-nationalist movement?

1.12. Methodology and Organization of the Study

The proposed study adopts a qualitative orientation and it is exploratory in nature. The study relies mostly on available historical records and other secondary sources like books and articles. Besides, reports published newspapers are also used. The study has three aspects. The study looks at the conceptual categories and theoretical framework of ethnicity and ethnic mobilization to understand the problem under study. Second, it focuses on the Chin-Kuki-Mizo mobilization and the inter-ethnic dynamics.

Third, it deals with the State's responses to ethnic nationalism. The study is organized in four main chapters besides the conclusion. The first chapter 'Introduction' provides a brief background of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic nationalism while locating it within the broad discussion of the concepts of ethnicity, and Ethnic Nationalism. The chapter also provides the framework of the study, the objective and scope of the study and also the research questions on which the study is being conducted.

The second chapter titled 'Situating the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Ethnic Nationalism' specifically focuses on the case of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic nationalism, and how they formulate and define their identity politics in the form of ethnic nationalism, their claims, etc. It also traces the geneology of the Kuki ethnic movement from the colonial period till the present period, while also highlighting the ruptures, in faction within the group and their attempt to forge a collective identity.

The third chapter 'Securitization of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Ethnic Identity focuses on the ethnic issues and how such categories have increasingly become assertive, particularly in the Northeast region of India. It explores how certain ethnic groups become securitized in the context of various statist agendas and also other

ethnic groups' claims resulting in an ethnic feud among multiple ethnic groups as witnessed in the region.

The final chapter 'State Response vis-à-vis Chin-Kuki-Mizo Ethnic Nationalism and Rethinking Security' analyses how the state responds to such phenomenon and addresses the issue of security. State's response to particularly the Kuki ethnic movement in the form of Suspension of Operation agreement is also discussed. It also attempts to offer how State may reconsider its response options to such ethnic based movements. Lastly, the conclusion offers a brief summary of the study.

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Chapter -II: Situating the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Ethnic Nationalism

Chapter II

Situating the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Ethnic Nationalism

2.1. Introduction

The chapter focuses on the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic nationalism, and how they formulate and define their identity politics in the form of a pan-ethnic nationalism. The chapter, however, will emphasise the Kuki movement in Manipur while also discussing the growth of a collective Chin-Kuki-Mizo movement. Chin-Kuki-Mizo is a conglomerate of various tribes spreading across three adjoining countries: Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh. However, the nomenclature changes according to their inhabited regions.

They are referred to as the Chins in Myanmar. In the Indian states like Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, and Assam, they are referred to as the Kukis. In Mizoram, they are known as the Mizo. According to the claims of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo apologists, the people belonging to these communities inhabited the region spreading across present-day India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh in the pre-colonial period.

The ideological basis for the Chin-Kuki-Mizo movement is the unification of the entire Kuki people and restoration of their perceived ancestral lands divided by the British to form what they imagined as Zale'n-gam. The proposed Zalengam includes part of North East India, Burma (Myanmar), and Bangladesh. The motive behind the Zalengam movement was to reunify territorial integrity that was demarcated by British India.

The Chin-Kuki-Mizo is a collective term of various tribes in Southeast Asia and is also otherwise known as Zomi. They share an affinity for culture, tradition, language, custom, and also the traditional administrative system. As mentioned above, they are broadly called 'Kuki' in India and 'Chin' in Myanmar (Singh, 2016). There are various myths and legends as far as the origin of the term is concerned. The present study however is not focusing on these contested claims about various theories of their origin. As far as the use of the term in Manipur is concerned, it was first heard between 1830 and 1840 (Bhattarcharjee M, 1963, p.161).

This was reiterated by Sir James Johnstone when he discussed their large influx into the hill tracks of Manipur and drove away many early settlers. These new migrants were collectively referred to as 'Khongjais' by the Meiteis. The same was also given the nomenclature of 'new Kuki' by the colonial administrators to distinguish them from the early settlers (Singh, 2016). According to the Census of 1891, the population of the new Kukis was 17,204 (EW Dun, 1886, p. 32.).

Kukis were also known as 'forest tribes' or 'animists' in historical records (Zou, 2010, p.56). They lived a primitive and nomadic life until they started practicing agriculture. The policy of settling the Kuki-Chin immigrants in 1840, along the borders and even among the Nagas was adopted by McCulloch, the British political agent of Manipur (Dena, 1999, p.36). The term 'Kuki' is also considered to be of Assamese or Bengali origin and some antiquity. As Thomas C. Hodson quotes, Kukis define themselves as "we are like birds of the air. We made our nests here this year, and who knows where we shall build next year' (Hudson, 1996).

Before we get into the Kuki ethnic mobilization, it is appropriate here to discuss how the process of state-making during the colonial period, and the ethnicisation project of the colonial rule in the state of Manipur. The present ethnic divide and contestation can largely be attributed to the colonial policies.

2.2. Colonial State Making and Ethnicisation in Manipur

Pre-colonial political institutions in Manipur was one of the extreme duality in terms of a centralized state in the central valley and village-based autonomous authorities in the surrounding hills. The two existed side by side, under a variety of arrangements. Early state formation and primitive capital accumulation in the valley have also led to an integrated society structured broadly along class lines between the ruling class and the ruled. In the hills, with legitimacy fragmented and little signs of state formation, society was still largely localized as well as undifferentiated. On the whole, there was little sign of a single political or civil space emerging in Manipur (Hassan, 2012, p.296).

It was upon this initial condition of the divergent institutional terrain that the colonial state began its state-making exercise, a dynamic that would have profound implications for the politics of the state. Although the colonial state was both extractive and authoritarian, the extractive potential of the hill tracts of northeast India

was limited. The major rationale was to use the tracts as buffers against powers hostile to colonial interests, such as the Burmese.

This logic applied in the case of Manipur and Manipur had historically acted as both a bridge to and a balance of power against the powerful Burmese. As mentioned above, the Kukis, Nagas, and Meiteis were used as a buffer against the Burmese. They also introduced ethnicity and ethnic segregation as part of an administrative strategy (Agrawal. 1996:184). After the British defeat of the Burmese, a political agency was established in the state in 1835 to maintain friendly relations with the kingdom. After the 1891 formal annexation of the kingdom and colonial control restated, the state was restored to its 1891 status in 1907. This formal annexation was followed by administrative changes, most significantly in land revenue and judicial systems. Post-1891 reforms in the administration were confined to the valley (Hassan, 2010, 297).

Though the hills would be marked out and included in the Manipur state boundary, little was done to penetrate them even administratively. There were occasional shows of force in the form of annual punitive and tax collection expeditions. But no efforts were made to incorporate the hills into state-wide judicial or land revenue systems or to encourage hill communities to be represented in state-level governing institutions like the Manipur State Durbar. Villages were left to remain in autonomous self-containment, guided and governed by their own sets of customary codes and practices.

The establishment of separate administrative systems for the valley and hills by the colonial state reinforced the pre-colonial institutional duality in Manipur. The state, by following different policies for the hills and valleys sustained and created many fresh divides between hill and valley communities. It, thus, prevented the possibility of the development of a common civic space. This had serious implications for social cohesion in Manipur and eventually for the legitimacy of the state among the people.

In the hills, for many years, there was little presence of the State. Administrators relied on pre-existing power centers like the local chieftains whom they authorized to police territories, maintain order and collect taxes. The reliance on local authorities prevented the state from consolidating its territory and control in

society while it helped to reinforce the authority the chiefs already enjoyed (Hassan, 2012, p.298).

Another colonial project of ethnicisation in Manipur was through colonial knowledge production wherein there was appropriation and negation of local knowledge. Ethnicisation in the case of Manipur, especially the hill areas, was a conscious effort undertaken by the British to serve the colonial interest. Identities like the Naga and Kuki were built upon a previous body of knowledge. These identities were not created a new, but rather manufactured, or assembled, from an existing body of knowledge that consciously or unconsciously, included myths and symbols.

Such an ordering facilitated a new form of conquest (power) – for example, politics of control and subjugation, defining the groups with a neat boundary – and became an actual instrument that was something like a pre-emptive bid to prevent consolidation by the native power of its people to overthrow British rule. This involved anthropological categorization of the natives that perfectly fitted in cartographic landscaping and, above all, a humanist defense of colonialism itself (Thangjam, 2019, 28-29).

The interpolation of anthropological knowledge and appropriation of a local body of knowledge served the colonial economic interest. This relates to the naming of the natives in terms of belonging to a particular ethnic group. The naming became important to the British to classify and 'order' the natives in a logical or comprehensible arrangement to exploit optimal economic benefits.

Once classified, the next step involved immobilizing them into politico-administrative units. This is the genesis of the ethnicisation of the hill natives of Manipur to generic ethnic terms such as Naga and Kuki. Such extrapolations were also against the local knowledge of Manipur. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the Kukis were denoted as *Khongjais* by the Manipuris (Thangjam, 2019, 35).

As discussed above, it is important to understand the colonial policy of the administration to situate the identity formation of many ethnic groups which culminated in the form of ethnic nationalism in the post-colonial period. As part of the British divide and rule policy, there was the politicization of ethnicity and the creation of ethnic spaces. For example, the British used different ethnic groups like the Kukis,

Nagas, and the Meiteis as buffer groups in the Burmese war and introduced ethnicity and ethnic segregation as part of an administrative strategy (Agrawal, 1996, 184).

The British policy of forbidding the state Durbar and any Manipuri law court to interpret cases in which members of the hill villages were involved acted as a surrogate to the construction of otherness among the Manipuris, particularly between the valley dwellers and highlanders.

The king lost not only a large part of his jurisdictional area but also his symbolic importance as the source of justice in Manipur. The British were keen to keep the hill administration under the exclusive charge of the president of the Manipur State Durbar, i.e, away from the control of the Manipur administration represented by the king in Durbar.

The divided administration helped in the development of distrust among the people, who were more or less grouped under the different administrative zone, thus creating a psychology of disparity and disunity among the people (Thangjam, 2019, 39). The British thus introduced ethnicity as an element of governance by using linguistic criteria to classify peoples and differentiate political and administrative frameworks (Kipgen and Chowdhoury, 2016).

2.3. Chin-Kuki-Mizo Identity Formation

The societal and political actuality of Northeast India can be well apprehended through ethnicity-based identity discourse. Each ethnicity and clan claims as an independent entity with a long historical lineage evidencing its unique ethnic identity. The same is true for the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic identity who perceived themselves as an independent nation. They harp on their collective memory, myths, and histories to emphasise this national identity.

The collective memories of their fights against state control of what they perceive to be their ancestral land are reiterated. The first such memory traces to 1777 AD at Chittagong during the Governor-Generalship of Warren Hastings. Claiming ancestral land, the Kuki tribesmen attacked the British subject in 1777 AD at Chittagong (Reid, AS: Chin-Lushai Land, Calcutta, 1893. p.3).

This incident became a referral point for the first-ever anti-imperialist stance on the British subjects. In this regard, Col EB Elly (1978) recorded, “in 1845, 1847, 1849-50 and 1850-51 there were raids, encompassing 15 villages were burnt or plundered, 188 British were killed and 100 carried into captivity. This incidence is considered as the Great invasion of 1860 and was continued in 1866-67, 1868-69, 1869-70 and in 1870-71” (Elly, Col EB: Military Reports on the Chin-Lushai Country, p. 8).

In response to these atrocities, the British launched a series of retaliation expeditions to subdue and crush the power of the Kukis. The expeditions culminated in committed depredations in British yet circumstances brought within the sphere of British dominion and Kukis lose their positions in various regions (Confidential, 1891). However, the intrusion of the British into the ancestral domain of the Kukis and the subsequent British policy of sending them as Labour Corps in France resulted in the “Kuki Rebellion of 1917-19” which eventually led to the division of Kuki territory (Chisti, SMAW: 2004).

The Kuki rebellion/uprising was led by the Thadous and Zou tribes against the British as an attempt to thwart what they saw as external forces intruding on their ancestral land. There are various narratives on the cause of the Kuki rebellion. One narrative is that opposition to the labour Corps drive by the British for the war with the French was the major cause (Zou, 2012). The Manipur Labour Corps was raised by recruiting men from both the Naga and Kuki communities and they were sent ‘much against their will’ to France in May 1917 (Dena, 1991, p.126). They were used as labourers for digging trenches, carrying loads, and building base camps.

The question of recruitment came up with the urgency of sending more labour to war fronts in Europe. To discuss the matter, Higgins, the then political agent of Manipur, proceeded to the Hills in September 1917 to meet a deputation of Chiefs. The chiefs however appealed against the proposal. The refusal of the chiefs to comply with the drive resulted in Higgins burning down a village which led to the Kuki rebellion (Dena, 1991, p.127). The colonial explanation for the outbreak of the Rebellion was dictated by the perception of the failure to physically control the tribes. The colonial understanding negated accumulated grievances as the source of the rebellion (Henthoiba, 2019, p. 49).

Although the recruitment drive was the immediate spark, some of the policies enforced in the hills by the Britishers like the enforcement of house tax and forced labour caused discontent among the hill people and contributed to the outbreak of the rebellion. The Kuki Rebellion was a testimonial account of resistance from the hills of Manipur against colonial rule and its policy of expediency.

The resistance was against the domination and exploitation of the colonizer, an event of the anti-colonial movement, which was truly a manifestation of the perspective of the colonized (Henthoiba, 2019, 51). 'The Kukis were made to open up their country by constructing fair bridle paths through their hills connecting with points in Manipur and Chindwin valley (Burma), and also connecting with the various posts with each other' (Henthoiba. 2019. p.51).

Informed by the colonial understanding, towards the close of the year, in 1919, following the Kuki Rebellion, the hill people were for the first time brought under the intensified political and administrative control of imperial power. J.H. Hutton observed, that before the 'Kuki Rising of 1918-19, the administration of the hill areas of Manipur state was not very close' (Reid, 1884, p.79). It was only after the Rebellion of 1917-19 that the hill areas were put under intense administrative control (Henthoiba, 2019, 51).

After the rebellion, the Kuki-Chin people were brought under the British administration. The indigenous tribal polity which was marked by clan-based village identity in the beginning soon started showing signs of distinct tribes and the consciousness of pan-ethnic identities based on affinities of language and culture began to emerge (Zou, 2012).

2.4. Kuki Ethnic Nationalism in the Postcolonial Period

The seed of ethnic segregation initiated by the Britishers during the colonial period found expression in the form of ethnic nationalism during the post-colonial period. Since the last phase of the British colonial legacy in the South and Southeast Asian region, Kuki as a tribe tried to reunite through common anthropological and common origin in the late 1940s, resulting in the formation of the Kuki National Assembly (KNA) in 1946 to forge a common identity and creation of a single political unit of the Kukis. The KNA was constituted of many tribes which included the Thadous, Paites, Vaipheis, Gangtes, Simtes, Zous, Anals, Koms, Hmars, Guites, etc. (Zou,

2012, 317). Subsequently, a breakaway group emerged out of the KNA which was known as the Khulmi Union (KU) in 1947 (Zou, 2012).

An important factor in this fallout was the hegemonic attitude of the Thadous (Singh, p.58). The Khulmi Union could not last long, and as a result, many non-Thadou tribes began to form their organizations and started demanding recognition of their distinct identities. The creation of the Khulmi Union may be seen as a fragmentation of the Kuki identity. After the Khulmi Union fizzled out, many tribal groups earlier with the Khulmi Union started forming their independent groups. For example, the Paite National Council was formed in 1949. The Hmar National Union (HNU) was formed in 1962 to integrate the Hmar inhabited areas. Apart from these two larger organizations, smaller communities like the Zou tribes, the Gangtes, the Vaipheis, and other smaller groups started forming their organizations around the same time (Zou, 2012, 317).

The Kuki National Assembly, however, continued to project as a collective organization representative of all Kukis. The KNA, in a general meeting held at Thingkangphai village (Churachandpur) during 19–22 January 1960 resolved to submit a memorandum to the Government of India reiterating that 'if the British government left the country, then naturally the Kukis should be free'(Kipgen and Chowdhury, 2016, 290).

The memorandum stated that 'the only solution for the Kuki problem rests with the formation of a separate Kuki state where the Kukis would enjoy autonomy and be able to look after their needs within the Union of India' (Kuki National Assembly 1960:20–21). They further asserted that the demanded state would enable a space for Kuki minorities which would secure their lives and properties and ensure their due share of development. Thus, the KNA has endorsed their demand for a Kuki state since the 1960s (Kipgen and Chowdhury, 2016). The formation of the Kuki National assembly kept alive the sentiments and objectives of Kuki unity.

2.5. The Zomi Struggle for Identity and unified struggle for Territorial Integration

Zomi is a term which was been used to assert identity and mobilise and integrate all Chin-Kuki-Mizo people since the 1970s, along with the formation of the Mizo

National Front. In fact, ‘Mizo’ is synonymous with Zomi. The main aim of asserting Zomi's identity is to integrate and represent pan Kuki-Chin scattered across Indo-Myanmar tribes, by founding the Zomi National Congress (ZNC) on January 21, 1972, in Churachandpur district of Manipur (Zou, 2012, 321).

Unfortunately, the ZNC could not sustain itself for long however it gave a glare footprint on the ethnopolitical consciousness of the Zomi people. During the Mizo National Front movement, the initial signs of ethnic aspiration of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo for territoriality became visible when they raised the demand for integration of Chin, Kuki and Mizo inhabited areas in Manipur, Assam, Tripura, and border areas of Burma to be part of the Greater Mizoram.

The Mizo unification movement of 1960 spread across Manipur hills and was able to mobilize Kuki-Chin under their ethnic identity and cultural affinity among them. The Kuki-Chin groups also felt it important to wage a collective struggle. The Conference of 1963 held at Churachandpur district of Manipur took the resolution to integrate all the Mizo inhabited areas of Northeast into one administrative unit. As part of their collective struggle, the Mizo People’s Convention (MPC) was held at Kawnpui village, in Churachandpur District (Manipur), between 15 and 18 January 1965 in which they affirm their collective descent and agreed to unite under the common banner of the ‘Mizo Union’ (Singh, 2008) (Zou, 2012).

Many of the like-minded tribes of Manipur supported Mizo National Front (MNF). After the convention of Kawnpui, Kuki representatives were sent to the MNF movement. Thus, there was an ideological appropriation of the Chin-Kuki movement with the MNF’s goal for a greater Mizoram (Ray, 2007, p.22).

However, beginning in the late seventies, the MNF had weakened and subsequently, in 1986, a peace agreement was worked out which led to the granting of statehood to the Lusai Hills. This accord, however, did not take into consideration the greater Mizoram issue and the CHIKIM groups particularly from Manipur who were harbouring the hope of territorial integration felt betrayed.

2.6. The Hmar Struggle for a Separate Homeland

The Hmar, who are considered to belong to the Kuki-Chin tribe, inhabited three states in northeast India: Manipur Mizoram and Assam. Like other tribes, Hmar also took part in the territorial homeland struggle initiated in Mizoram and later spread into areas of Manipur and Assam. The Hmar inhabited areas of Manipur and Assam in the Lushai Hills district were excluded during the initial demarcation of the territorial boundary of the Lusai Hill district in 1948 by the Mizo Union, the frontal body of the Mizo movement (Goswami, 1979, pp. 72, 74). Hmars also felt disappointed like other Kuki tribes with the Mizo Peace Accord of 1986 because it failed to integrate the Hmar inhabited areas in Mizoram, the Cachar district of Assam, and Churachandpur areas of Manipur. In response to the betrayal, they started their own Hmar Convention (HPC) in Mizoram for the protection of Hmar territorial integrity (Zou, 2012).

They were granted official recognition in Mizoram and subsequently in 1994, signed a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) at Aizawl to establish the Hmar Autonomous Council or 'Sinlung Development Council'. However, ('Hmar People') the settlement did not satisfy the cadres of HPC and formed another outfit under the name of the HPC (Democratic) faction in 1995. Now they demand a separate 'Hmar state' consisting of the Hmar inhabited areas of Mizoram, Manipur, and Assam (Zou, 2012).

2.7. Kuki Ethnic Nationalism in the 1980s

As discussed, the Kuki had experienced a huge setback from the act of MNF in the formation of Greater Mizoram. They felt betrayed during the whole event. Coupled with this betrayal, it was also perceived that the state administration was negligent and indifferent to the plight of the Kukis. In the 1980s, the Kukis embarked on a new form of ethnic nationalism in Manipur. Jurisdiction and territoriality were the center point of the Kuki armed struggle.

This was an important factor for Kuki mobilization. The Kuki armed groups give the justification of their movement as a response to deprivation of resources, benefits, and opportunities suffered by them. The Kuki ethnic nationalism during the period can be explained by their perception of disparate distribution of economic resources and political power between the three major ethnic groups in the state (Kipgen and Chowdhury, 2016).

There was a strong perception among the Kukis of neglect and suffering under the state and national governments which have rendered the Kukis economically, socially, and politically underdeveloped. Politically too, many believed that their aspiration of self-determination by way of creating a state through peaceful means has been denied but extended to other major ethnic entities in Northeast India such as Nagas (Nagaland), Mizos (Mizoram), Khasis, and Jaintias (Meghalaya), and Bodos (Bodoland Autonomous District Council) (Haokip 2008:398). The absence of any form of autonomy in this line created a deep sense of neglect.

Another armed militant group called the Kuki National Front (KNF) was formed in 1987 at a village in Myanmar to demand a separate 'Kuki state' (Kukiland) within the Indian Union by integrating all Kuki-inhabited areas of Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Chandel, and Churachandpur districts as well as the Sadar Hills sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur (Kipgen, 2013).

Their anger was also directed toward the Indian state for not fulfilling their demands. So, the emergence of armed Kuki militant groups in the 1980s can be looked at as a continuation of the unfulfilled aspiration of the KNA. According to T.S. Gangte, the KNF was established to accelerate the demand raised in the 1960s for a Kuki state (Gangte 2000, 44). The other group – the Kuki National Army (KNA) founded in 1988 has been fighting to carve a separate homeland for the Kukis living in Myanmar and some portions of the Thoubal, Ukhrul, and Chandel districts of Manipur (Kipgen and Chowdhury, 2016).

Apart from the sense of perceived neglect and indifference by the state, the Kuki armed movement of the 1980s was also compounded by the growing tension and conflicts with other ethnic groups like the Nagas. The revival of the Kuki Inpi, an apex forum of the Thadou-Kuki tribe was an immediate outcome of this ethnic clash. A detailed study of the factors for Kuki ethnic nationalism and how their identity becomes a 'securitised' identity shall be dealt with in the next chapter.

According to Haokip, (2008) the first Kuki armed movement began with the sole objective to regain their ancestral land after the drawing of the international boundary between India and Myanmar. The Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and the Kuki National Army, its armed wing, were founded on February 24, 1988, somewhere along the Indo-Myanmar border in Manipur with the proposed objective

of unifying what they claim as their lost territory. KNA, its armed wing also shares the objective of the earlier Kuki National Assembly, i.e. to carve out a Kuki state (Zou, 2012, 320).

Haokip claimed that there has been a concerted effort in Myanmar by the government to alter the demographic composition of the Kuki areas by way of transplanting ethnic Burmese populations from Rangoon and Mandalay. He also stressed that apart from altering the boundaries of their ancestral land, the traditional forms of tribal governance were also abolished (Haokip, 'Zalen-Gam', pp. 378–379.)

2.8. Factions within the Kuki Tribes

As discussed in the above section, the first breakup of the Kuki polity started in 1947 with the formation of the Khulmi National Union (KNU) from Kuki National Assembly due to the perceived Thadou arrogance. Khulmi comprises the non-Thadou tribal groups like the Vaiphei, Gangte, Paite Simte, Zou (Singh, 2016). Even after the Khulmi Union faded into political insignificance following the 1951 Government of India notification of Scheduled Tribes in Manipur, many tribal groups refused to join the collective Kuki fold (Vaiphei, 1995, 126).

Again, Manipur witnessed intra-ethnic clashes in the form of the Hmar-Kuki conflict during 1959 -1960. When the Government of India introduced the scheduled list of tribes that recognized the various tribes under the earlier broader category of the Kukis in 1956, the Thadou political leadership pushed for a collective nomenclature of the Kukis and also attempted to bring forth other tribal groups within the Kuki fold. The Hmar-Kuki clash can be seen as direct fallout of this attempt (Singh. 2016). The then Manipur Government also, perhaps given the rising Naga movement during the period, felt it important to regroup the hill tribes of Manipur into two categories the Nagas and the Kukis. However, the Hmars strongly protested against the move.

2.9. The Thadou-Paite Clash, 1997–1998

The Thadou and Paites also known as Zomis belong to the same Chin-Kuki ethnic group. The two tribal groups were at the center of a violent ethnic conflict between 1997 and 1998. The tribal groups predominantly inhabitat in the Churachandpur district of Manipur, although the Paites are dominant in the district. The Thadou Kukis are spread in the hills of Manipur. The animosity between the tribal groups

traced back to the issue of inclusion of various tribes in the Government Scheduled tribes list of the Constitution of India in 1956. As discussed above, many of these tribes were earlier listed under the broad nomenclature of 'any Kuki tribes'.

Following the 1956 Notification, many such tribes began to identify themselves as separate tribe. The Thadous however continue to identify themselves as Kukis and also tried to bring other tribes within the Kuki fold. When such a move was resisted by tribes like Paites and Hmars, it created a rift with the Thadous. The Hmar-Kuki conflict in the 1960s as discussed above was an immediate outcome of such a move by the Thadous. The issue of nomenclature these tribes want to identify with, for example, the Hmars associating with the Mizos and the Paites with the Zomi.

The difference and the animosity heightened during the violent Kuki and Naga clashes which affected many hill districts of Manipur. The cause of the conflict and subsequent impact on the ethnic relations in the state shall be discussed in the next chapter. This section however shall look at how the violent ethnic clash between the Nagas and the Kukis had an immediate implication on the Thadou and Paite clashes.

The Kuki National Front (KNF) took it upon itself to protect the Kuki. As the conflict intensified, the Kuki tribes entered into Churachandpur district. Despite the ethnic similarities with the Paites, such a mass influx of the Kukis was resented by the Paites who were the dominant tribal group in Churachandpur. In 1993, the Zomi Unification Organisation was formed to unify the tribes under the Zomi nomenclature. This move further strained the already strained relationship with the Thadous. This animosity turned into a full-scale violent conflict in 1997 when the cadres of KNA killed 10 Paites suspected to be cadres of NSCN (IM). The Paites rejected the claim and retaliated which led to the violent clashes which lasted for a year with the Churachandpur district as the theatre of the violent clash.

The violence left more than 35 people killed and many injured. As per the government's report, 50 villages and 4670 houses were destroyed or gutted to ashes and some 13000 people ran for their lives as refugees in Mizoram and Chin Hills of Myanmar (Siamkhum, 2017). Finally, on 8th July 1997, representatives of the two warring ethnic groups, the KNF (P) and ZRA signed a peace agreement. However, the agreement was rejected and violence continued. It was only after the Government of Manipur intervened that a final peace agreement was signed on March 26, 1998.

After the conflict, two distinct identities emerged from within the larger Kuki-Chin fold, the Kukis and Zomis. Each of these two groups controls certain territorial areas for militant operation. The fight for a predominant political position within the tribes ruins the integrity and Unity among Kuki-Chin tribes. By realizing the repercussion of the clan's rivalry within the tribes, KUKI tries to reunite under pan Kuki identity where they justify: the only identity that they have shared at one time in the past.

2.10. Proliferation of Kuki Armed Groups

After the peace accords between Zomi and Kuki, the violent ethnic clash between the tribes stopped. However, it led to mushrooming of armed groups and factional clashes. According to Gurinder Singh, 'these armed groups were largely based on ethnic lines and voiced the interest of their respective ethnic communities'. The continuous ethnic struggle for local protection, political extortion, and crime further trigger the proliferation process (Gurinder Singh, 2008. 1118). For example, the Kuki National Front (KNF) split into two factions due to growing internal disagreement. The Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) was established as a new faction out of KNF in December 1999 (Zou, 2012, 323).

The KRA besides infighting with the KNA was also engaged in continuous fighting with Karbi militants United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) of Assam during 2003 and 2004. Another outfit, the United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF), was formed in March 2000 in Chandel district. They were demanding an autonomous Khulmi (Kuki-Chin) Development Council in line with the Bodo Territorial Council of Assam. Many tribal groups started forming their armed outfit. For example, the Hmar National Army (HNA) and the United Komrem Revolutionary Army (UKRA) were floated in the years 2005 and 2006 respectively (Zou. 2012).

On the other side, within the Zomis also, two main groups emerged. The Vaipheis move out of ZRA and formed the United Socialist Revolutionary Army (USRA) in 2005. Further ZRA got defragmented due to another Paite group forming the Zomi Revolutionary Front (ZRF) (Zou, 2012, 323). Many of these outfits subsequently joined the KNO fold. As many as 15 Kuki-Chin armed groups in Manipur whose credibility is a big question and the ideological moorings have been

dictated more by the necessity for self-defense and personal interest of the ethnic entrepreneurs.

2.11. Unification of Kuki Armed Groups

Many attempts of unification and regrouping among the various tribes were started after a long-torn faction within the Kuki-Chin tribes. The first attempt was the Indigenous People's Revolutionary Alliance (IPRA) with the initiative of KNO on May 27, 2000. Organisations like the ZRA, KNA, KNF (MC), KNF (P), HPC (D), etc were brought in to protect from other militant ethnic groups. However, the IPRA could not last long. Soon in 2002, Kuki National Council (KNC) was formed as an umbrella organization but it also didn't last long.

Moreover, KNO has made strong efforts to Unite Kuki militants by 2008. They manage to unite 11 different armed groups besides KNA under the arms wing of KNO. These include i) Kuki National Army, ii) Kuki National Front (Military Council), iii) Kuki National Front (Zogam), iv) United Socialist Revolutionary Army, v) Hmar National Army, vi) Zomi Revolutionary Front, vii) United Komrem Revolutionary Army, viii) Kuki Revolutionary Army, ix) Zou Defence Volunteer, x) Kuki Liberation Army, xi) Zomi Reunification Army (Centre for Development and Peace Studies).

Under the United People's Front (UPF), seven militant outfits have been brought together. The regrouping of Kuki armed groups under KNO and UPF, which initially was largely based on the threat perception of one group by another, is a significant development in the history of the Kuki armed movement (Kipgen and Chowdhury, 2016). With this, one main obstacle to forging unity has been resolved, as they have slowly stopped training their guns on each other. Whether it is informed by the realization of a common ethnic goal of land and ethnic nationalism remains to be seen.

2.12. The Signing of Suspension (SoO) of Agreement

After a three-decades-long struggle of differences and turmoil, many Kuki-Chin armed groups came together under two main groups i.e. the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and United People's Front (UPF). The KNO and the UPF with these groups under their banner signed the Suspension of Operation (SoO) with the central security forces first in August 2005. Later on, a tripartite peace agreement was

signed between the representatives of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, the government of Manipur, and Kuki-Chin militants in New Delhi on May 20, 2008 (Zou, 2012).

Some of the important ground rules of the agreement were avoidance of violence including the unlawful imposition of taxes by the armed groups. It was also agreed from the government side that security forces and the state police will stop any offensive operations against the UPF and KNO. Both the groups have since provided lists of their respective cadres to the Indian security forces and are stationed in their own designated camps. The Suspension of Operation has been extended every year since then. One thing is that the Kuki outfits by signing the SoO with the Governments under the KNO and UPF have achieved. Yet, in terms of political goals, there is still a division among the Kuki outfits (Zou, 2012, 325).

For the KNO, the statehood or Zalen-Gam in India and Myanmar remains their inspiration. The UPF however, has not indicated any specific goal for various organizations within the UPF have separate and differentiated demands. For example, the ZRA seeks the reunification and creation of autonomous territory, the HPC (Democratic) has been fighting for a Hmar state, the UKLF for a 'Kuki Development Council', and the KNF (President group) demands a Kuki state. These different organizations although under the common banner have not been able to arrive at a consensual political objective.

An important issue is again the question of the territorial integrity of Manipur. As part of the agreement, the militants agreed 'not to break up the territorial integrity of Manipur'. The entire range of demands very much poses a threat to the territorial integrity of Manipur and therefore, it remains difficult to predict the future outcome of this political dialogue.

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Chapter -III: Securitization of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Ethnic Identity

Chapter III

Securitization of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Ethnic Identity

3.1. Introduction

Ethnicity is often invoked as the subject of security by the political subjects in northeast India. Ethnicity and ethnic-based nationalism are thus articulated in the backdrop of any conflicts between the ethnic groups having overlapping interests and demands over political representation or resource sharing, more particularly, over land as capital. When ethnic groups feel threatened, they oftentimes invoke ethnicity as the subject of security and justify violence in the garb of maintaining their security.

In such a process, a form of existential threat among various groups is established which has substantial political effects requiring emergency measures outside the bounds of normal political procedure. Securitization is an inter-subjective establishment of such threats. Here, violence as an emergency measure is often justified. Furthermore, the ethnic elites harp on such feelings of insecurity among their groups and try to forge an emotional integration in their respective communities to counterbalance other ethnic groups. Typically, ethnic conflicts crop up when ethnic groups are mobilised to confront each other based on such feelings of (in) security.

In the Northeast in general and Manipur in particular, such a phenomenon results in conflictual politics involving a cycle of mobilisation and counter-mobilisation of ethnic groups. The chapter discusses how certain identities become securitized, i.e how they began to perceive themselves to be threatened that maintaining (or, rather, constructing) their identity becomes an issue of their survival. Here, ethnicity often becomes the source of violent conflicts among different groups, especially when the elites/leaders begin to talk about other groups posing as some kind of existential threat against their communities.

In the light of the above understanding, the chapter begins with a general discussion on securitization as a concept, how identities get securitized, and ethnicity as the most virulent source of violent identity mobilization. In the subsequent section of the chapter, an attempt has been made to look at some of the sources of ethnic securitization of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo groups.

3.2. Concept of Securitization

Securitization is a concept first developed by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies around the late 1980s and 1990s. According to Buzan and Wæver (1998, 2003), securitization is a speech act or a discursive process "through which an inter-subjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as a threat to a valued referent object and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat".

Securitization can be understood as an extreme form of politicisation. Here, it is important to understand how certain things/issues become politicized when they become a matter of public debate and dispute and enter the realms of public funding or civic governance. There are various levels of politicization, and securitization is at the end of the continuum. When issues get securitized, or when there is a perception about some valued referent object being existentially threatened, they rise to the top of the political agenda, requiring emergency measures including forms of violence to counter such threats and even justify overriding normal political procedures.

How does then the process of securitization operates and who are the securitizing actors or agencies? There could be a wide range of actors ranging from historians, politicians, public intellectuals, or ethnic-nationalist entrepreneurs who can utilise historical myths or use history to support their securitizing moves. Apart from these actors, a convinced audience is equally important to complete the process.

While terming securitization as the extreme version of politicization, once successful and complete, it can also have de-politicizing consequences by justifying extra-legal and political measures beyond the 'normal' including the limitations on fundamental freedoms and violations of human rights. Thus, securitization has problematic consequences and is something not desirable. Accordingly, 'security/ securitization' is understood as a failure to deal with issues as normal politics. The alternative, therefore, is desecuritisation, meaning, a process of taking the issues out of the 'threat defense binary or sequence and into the ordinary public sphere (Väyrynen, 1997).

3.3. Securitization and Identity

While discussing securitisation, the notion of identity needs to be prioritized which we may refer to as 'identity security, meaning, the security of not just a state, or population, or a group of people, but the security of the community that might be characterized as 'we'-identity (Buzan et al., 1998). The main referent objects in this context are collective identities like ethnic groups.

Identity can be understood in general terms as the self-consciousness of an individual or a group that is founded on a particular relation to 'others'. The 'other' is primarily a discursive phenomenon, a constructed concept or image, by which and through which consciousness of the individual or the group is formed, and it can affect identity both in contradiction to the 'alien' and in connection with the community of belonging.

The notion of 'other' has been accentuated by the modern concept of national identity. Ernest Gellner (1983) considers national identity as being founded on culture, that is, common language, history, and folklore. He asserted that a nation is a product of human beliefs and inclinations, thus people belong to one nation only if they recognize one another's belonging to this nation. Those who are beyond these references of recognition are considered 'others'.

Conversely, Jürgen Habermas (1992) thought of the 'other' not as an opposition but as just a difference and depreciated national identity. Accordingly, to him, identity is not belonging to the community integrated on a basis of common ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but a practice of citizenship in a communicative society with a democratic constitution. As, such, political identity is inseparably linked with the realization of the practices of inclusion of the 'other'. In similar thought, Neumann, Iver B. (1997) argues, that identities exist in the context of each other because the self-image is always founded on the image of the 'other'.

Further Raymond Taras (2009) affirmed that our understanding of what is good and evil creates a virtue thereby creating prejudices that form the basis of constructing identity at the individual level. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the use of the 'other' as opposition can be a powerful constructive instrument at the societal level. Bo Petersson (2003, p.106) terms this phenomenon 'scapegoating' – a specific kind of image construction aimed at solidarizing society against the 'alien'.

It is built upon a negative rejection of the ‘scapegoats’ and that is much easier to create than positive criteria of belonging to the community. Therefore, ‘scapegoating’ becomes the precondition of solidarization in society.

Securitization as the construction of insecurity involves manipulation between the sides of good and evil contributing to the formation of identity ‘against-something-and someone insecure. The creation of ‘we’-identity calls for rejection of the ‘other’. Securitization requires a threat embodied in another group's identity. Securitization with its emphasis on threats and the struggle against the ‘other’ becomes a powerful instrument of constructing identity.

Hence, identities are rejected in the process of securitization which is considered potentially threatening to societal security. Thus, enhancing security is in direct proportion to a rise in violence and insecurity. Eliminating the ‘others’, perceived to be threats forms the pre-condition of their security. The discourse of exclusion of others thereby eliminates an opportunity for interaction between the included and the excluded – internal and external groups. Thus, securitization involves depoliticisation putting an end to all possible political interaction, recognition, and understanding of the ‘other’. In the process, it constructs contradictory identities of ‘we’ and ‘they’ and even justifies the use of emergency measures against the ‘other’.

3.4. Ethnicity as a Basis of Mobilisation

Everyone is born into a socio-cultural world which is a pre-constituted and pre-organised world whose particular structure is the result of a historical process and is therefore different for each culture and society. The meaning of the elements of the social world is taken for granted by those living in the world. There are cultural patterns that are peculiar to social groups and which function as unquestioned schemes of reference to members of a group.

In Alfred Schutz's words, "any member born or reared within the group accepts the ready-made standardised scheme of the cultural pattern handed down to him by ancestors, teachers, and authorities as an unquestioned and unquestionable guide in all situations which normally occur within the social world" (Schutz, 1964, p. 49).

Being a member of a community is tantamount to being supplied with guaranteed, 'objective' criteria of relevance and knowledge which is taken for granted. The criteria of relevance and knowledge (cultural pattern) give a sense of security and assurance to those belonging to the social group. The reference of the social group in terms of which both the physical as well as the socio-cultural world is interpreted is provided through the framework of ethnicity.

It is an ethnicity that guides one's interpretation and action in the social world. In other words, ethnicity is a way to typify the world, others, and one-self, and as such it implies roles and ways to act. According to Schutz, the existence of an ethnic group means nothing but the mere likelihood that people will act following the general framework of typifications in which ethnicity, as a reference to certain criteria of commonality (e.g. language, history, 'race'), is considered to have high relevance (Schutz, 1964, p. 49).

Although ethnicity can be a part of the relative natural conception of the world of the social group, it is not a stable element. On the contrary, its meaning and content are constantly negotiated in the social interaction between social actors. In other words, it is continuously negotiated in political encounters. Furthermore, ethnicity is employed to draw boundaries as to who belongs to the group and who does not.

An ethnic group is about boundary maintenance; ethnicity is a way to structure interaction that allows the persistence of differences. Ethnic 'commonality' is, therefore, always an artifact of boundary-drawing activity: always contentious and contested, glossing over some differentiation and representing some other differences as powerful and separating factors (Barth, 1969, pp. 9-38).

The meaning and content of ethnicity are constantly negotiated and contested in the realm of the politics arising from human encounters, but that does not imply 'violent ethnic identification.' Thus the question, of what gives rise to the move from the realm of political 2to the realm of violence, remains. It needs to be asked, therefore, why ethnic identities become securitised in a way that they are perceived to be a threat to the 'survival' (whatever that term means to form the point of view of the actor) to an extent that violence is assumed to be a suitable means or institution to secure the identity.

3.5. State and Violent Ethnic Identification

The sovereign territorial state and its assumed coexistence with the nation are of vital importance in understanding ethnicity because it is the space within which ethnic identification--and especially violent identification -- often takes place (Väyrynen, (1997). The sovereign state has traditionally tried to offer the instrumental solution for the challenge set forth by different forms of identity politics (e.g. class, gender, and ethnic claims). In other words, the state aims at providing a shared domain of meaning for groups located within its sovereign control and territory.

The state, as a social and political practice and as a system of inclusion and exclusion tries to solve the problem of conflicting identity claims by producing precise distinctions and differences between citizens and aliens, domesticating particular identities, and creating a coherent sovereign identity. As Bauman describes that modern nation-state promotes 'nativism' and construe their subjects as 'natives.' They laud and enforce ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural homogeneity. They are engaged in incessant propaganda of shared attitudes. They construct joint historical memories and do their best to discredit or suppress such stubborn memories that cannot be squeezed into a shared tradition--now redefined in the state-appropriate quasi-legal terms, as 'our common heritage.'

They preach the sense of common mission, common fate, and a common destiny. They breed, or at least legitimize and give tacit support to, animosity towards everyone standing outside the holy union" (Bauman, 1991, p. 64). This state has become a more and more contested space. As Appadurai (1990, p. 304) notes, the 'nation-state' is a battle of imagination with 'state and nation seeking to cannibalise each other'.

Groups with ideas about nationhood seek to capture or co-opt state power and states simultaneously seek to capture and monopolise ideas about nationhood. Here is, thus, a platform for separatism and micro-identities to become political projects within nation-states. Ideas of nationhood appear to be steadily increasing in scale and regularly crossing existing state boundaries. States, on the other hand, are seeking to establish the monopoly of producing distinctions and differences -- a task in which they are never fully successful. From the perspective of the 'nation-state,' an ethnic

group claiming a right to produce difference and make distinctions that transcend the official state ideology is seen as an 'enemy within' (Appadurai. 1990, p. 298).

The media also contributes to ethnic identification as well as to the creation of assumed unified nation-states. As suggested above, ethnic identification consists often of a utopia as a construction of the future state of affairs in which all differences are reconciled around a unified body politic. The media works towards this utopia by producing networks of signs and images representing 'oneness' and 'otherness.' 'Mediascapes' provide large and complex repertoires of images, narratives, and 'ethnoscapes' to viewers throughout the world. They help to constitute narratives of the 'other' and proto-narratives of possible lives which can produce a platform for the desire for acquisition and movement. Furthermore, media helps groups spread over vast and irregular spaces stay linked together and create political sentiments based on intimacy and locality (Väyrynen, 1997).

In the case of the Indian State, the nature in which nation-states were constructed in post-colonial history, the fragility of the foundation on which the Indian state rests necessitates the invocation of a sense of 'supreme national interests, in its citizens vis-à-vis other interests. The homogenizing trend, in interest and value, of the Indian nation-state, has increased all the more ignoring competing and contradictory interests that exist in societies. Such homogenizing tendencies justify the use of 'violence' while dealing with ideologies or movements interpreted to be inimical to national sovereignty (Bhagat, Oinam, Homen Thangjam, 2006).

The emergence of movements in the form of ethnic nationalism in the North-East is a revolt against the hegemonic domination and cultural impoverishment by the dominant of these margins. The inability of the State to provide a political template to accommodate differences and the imagery of a quiet equilibrium celebrating homogeneity has been the basis of ethnic nationalism in the region (Dev, 1996, 115-120).

While for the Indian state, violence is justified to maintain the security of the Indian nation-state, the political subjects in the northeast invoke ethnicity as the subject of security. To maintain the security of the ethnic political subject, violence of various kinds is ignited and often justified. The emergence of many insurgent groups on ethnic lines in the region testifies to this.

3.6. Securitised Ethnic Identity?

The articulation of ethnicity and ethnic nationalism has undergone a process of securitization informed by multiple factors which created a sense of fear and threat to their survival. All forms of ethnic conflicts in the state of Manipur, informed by fear and threat to survival, are linked to the question of land. The increasing demand for ethnic homeland and ethnic identity formation has its basis in the contestation over land as capital.

The process of identity formation and subsequent conflict is not just a result of the emergence of political consciousness. Territoriality of homeland demands that cross each other has conflict built into them. The Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic nationalism also is premised on such demand for a homeland that they believe will assuage the sense of fear and threat to their survival.

3.7. Ethnicity, Identity and Territoriality

There has been an increasing realization and awareness among the communities of (home) land as the only long-term reliable capital (both political and economic). This realisation triggers an atmosphere of conflict and contestation over land among various communities. Underlining the political claims of ethnic nationalism is the idea of territoriality wherein land, more than economic capital, becomes a political capital as well.

Though land as 'economic capital' is felt undercover, so far the debate on migration and settlement is carried forward to justify claims over land. The idea of the nativity by and large carries legitimacy in the debate on the issue of ownership. Dismissing the issue of land-as-capital will only involve rational arguments based on economy and compromise which none of the ethnic groups at present is ready for.

Adopting a method of adjustment is considered suicidal at the moment, more so for the winning group. Instead of sloganeering land as economic capital, the right of the peoples and nations to sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources (UN General Assembly Resolution 1803) has been projected as the starting point for political campaign. Though this projection is close to realising the land as economic capital, the two are not synonymous either.

So far, claims seem to confine to their political overtone. Projecting possession of native land as inalienable rights not only unifies tribes under pan-ethnic identity because of the common practical interest of inheritance of each tribe, but this strategy also serves as a good ground for wiping out the enemy. This is a case of implicit use of land as political capital. Thus, the land has over the decades of modernity discourse through practice, acquired new meanings.

The meanings and values associated with land are no more confined to the ancestral memory of being associated with birth and death. There are elaborate rituals practiced by different ethnic communities in the region at the time of death of their clan siblings. In recent times, the shift is towards converting land into capital, both in the political and economic sense. The idea of territoriality plays a crucial role in this discourse. The shift in this discourse has led to redefining the meaning of land. Presently, land as political capital has become a bargaining chip among ethnic nationalities. Identification and possession of territoriality as co-relate of collective self is fast emerging in the region (Bhagat and Homen, 2006).

In the context of India's northeast, the contentious rights claim to land made by different communities has become the primary source of conflict between various ethnic groups. The supremacy of community is oftentimes reflected in its exclusive claim to land or homeland. Land or homeland had always been an integral part of nationalist imagination. The longing for the land they can claim as their own, unencumbered and autonomous from others has resulted in many conflicts. The modern state's claim of embodying a nation and how they correspond with each other is reflected also within a determinate territory. 'Land turns into a territory only in so far as it is 'monopolised' and 'captured' by any state and/or nation' (Das, 2009, p.38). Elaborating on what characterises a territory and distinguishes it from land, Das (ibid.) identifies four attributes of a territory and their bearings on ethnic or clan communities.

First, territory implies an object of ownership and colonization, whereas land is not. Lands are transformed into territory as resources to be owned and supervised. The necessity of delineating and demarcating land for the preservation of one's identity and life was felt in the region in the early part of the twentieth century, first in the plains and much later in the hills on the eve of independence. This was manifested

in many ethnic groups asserting their ethnicity was linked with territoriality. The Kuki ethnic nationalism with demand for a territorial homeland may be seen as one such reflection. Secondly, while the notion of land is highly uneven and discontinuous, territoriality levels off such distinctions. Differences are disregarded and bracketed out.

The common territory binds everyone into nationals. Thirdly, what distinguishes land from territory is that land is sharable while the territory is not. Land can be shared without dominating and being dominated by each other. On the other hand, territoriality conceptualizes in exclusive and zero-sum terms. Either I win the territory or lose it. In other words, territoriality works on exclusivity, achieved in three mutually related ways-one, by getting rid of areas with a concentration of non-ethnics; two, by reunifying the areas where members of a community remain scattered for historical reasons under one administrative unit; and three, by cleansing the areas of the others on the ground that they are outsiders to the homeland. Finally, as a community feels that it has been depleted in strength in a manner that it becomes impossible for it to regain its numerical supremacy, it resorts to ethnic cleansing almost as a last resort (Das, 2009).

There is a strong belief that their land or territory is the vanguard of their sustenance and livelihood as a community. Their identity is tightly bound to their lands. Land provides the greatest security for the preservation of their identity and survival. The issues of ethnicity, identity, and land ownership are built into the psyche of the tribal people (Kamei, 2009, p.101).

The contest for exclusive ownership rights over land results in serious conflict among the different communities. What we witness in the hills of Manipur is a classic example of such contestation and conflict. Inter-ethnic relationships between the two got disturbed with the emergence of a contest for exclusive ownership over the land. Contest for exclusive ownership rights over land has been one of the basic factors which led to the ethnic clashes between the two major ethnic groups in the 1990s.

Against the backdrop of the above proposition, one can understand the conflict among ethnic groups in Manipur. The infamous Naga-Kuki clash is one such example. The overlapping and far-fetched territorial claims of both the Nagas and the Kukis in areas comprising Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong, and Chandel districts were

the basis of the violent conflict between the two communities. The following section will discuss some of the significant issues and events that accentuated the securitisation of the Kuki ethnic identity.

3.8. The Naga Movement as Referent Threat

The contest for exclusive ownership rights over land as homelands created a strong security threat among the ethnic communities. According to the Kukis, the problem with the Nagas began with the demand for a sovereign Nagaland in the then Naga Hills and the inclusion of Naga inhabited areas. The Naga movement was felt most conspicuously in Manipur in the later part of 1956. By the 1960s, the Naga undergrounds became very active in the hill areas of Manipur.

This created lots of apprehension among the Kukis who were in the Naga-dominated areas. The fear of the Kukis was further heightened when the Government of India signed a peace agreement with the Federal Government of Nagaland in 1964. With the formation of NSCN (IM) in the 1980s, the situation got aggravated when the Nagas started consolidating claims over the hill areas. PS Haokip alleges that as the Naga movement grew stronger, the Nagas became increasingly aggressive toward the Kuki inhabitants of Ukhrul and Tamenglong districts and were driven by the sole objective of uprooting the Kukis from their land. Altogether, during the period from 1956 to 1987, the Kukis claim those 79 Kuki villages, 26 from Tamenglong, 46 from Ukhrul, one from Tengnoupal, and six from Senapati district were uprooted by the Nagas (Mangi, 161). The Kuki Inpi Manipur alleges that, earlier, 'there was only a threat to clear the Kukis from the northern tips of Manipur, the second stage was the imposition of unauthorized taxes, restriction of movement to the Kukis and the last stage to drive the Kukis from their long-established habitation is now in progress (Mangi, 161).

The Naga's contention on the other hand was that Kukis were nomads and due to their nomadic existence, they were dependent on the Nagas who owned the land. In the process of their migration, the Kukis do not normally establish their ownership over the land as they seldom settle down at any place for permanent occupation. The UNC Executive Committee meeting held in 1992 decided to distinguish Kukis based on the year of their settlement.

Those who had settled before 1972 were allowed to reside on the condition that they give an undertaking to the Naga village authority that they recognize the Nagas' ownership of land. Those who had settled after 1972 were asked to vacate their land and settle in Naga areas by 1992, December. Quit notices were served in several Kuki villages in Senapati, Tamenglong, Ukhrul, and Chandel districts of Manipur. The Naga Lim Guards also accused the Kukis of demanding a greater Kuki land comprising Churachandpur, Kamjong and Kuki inhabited areas of Myanmar and also demanding a Kuki homeland in Manipur. They also alleged Kukis of inviting Kukis from Myanmar into Manipur (Mangi).

The claim for integration and demand for a Greater Nagaland has many complexities. Not only is the idea of creating an ethnic state flawed, but many of the areas they claimed to be a part of Greater Nagaland, are also not exclusively inhabited by the Nagas. Those parts of Assam which they claim to be are also occupied by ethnic communities like the Dimasas, Karbis, Cacharis, and Kukis among others also occupy the areas they claim to be part of Greater Nagaland. Also in Manipur, many parts of the claimed territories have the Kukis. Similarly in Arunachal Pradesh, communities like the Mishings, Mikirs, etc. inhabit these territorial areas. Regarding the issue of Kuki homeland demand, the KIM says that the Kukis have made this demand because of the demand for the political unification of Naga inhabited areas.

Nagas also harbour a long desire to take revenge on the Kukis, as they considered the Kukis to have helped the Meiteis in their subjugation and forced them to pay tribute to the Manipuri King. Such a desire for revenge culminated in the mid-1950s and 1960s when around 60 Kuki villages were removed by armed Nagas, in Tamenglong and Ukhrul subdivisions, in Manipur (Goswami, 1979, p. 72-74).

Many Kuki historians also attributed this incident as an important watershed in the rise of Kuki consciousness and their desire for a ‘Kuki State’. The Naga-Kuki clash in the 1990s which added to the securitization of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes had its beginning in the contestation over land. The clash initially started in the early 1990s between the Maring and the Thadou in the Chandel district of Manipur and then spread out to other parts of Manipur as well as to parts of adjoining states (Kipgen, 2013, pp.21-38).

The violence of all forms was enacted and justified by both communities in the name of security. Many were killed, houses burnt and many were left homeless. Oinam (2003, 37) argues that the Naga-Kuki conflict started over the control of the town of Moreh on the Indo-Myanmar border. Moreh town, being a lucrative commercial hub and destined to be an international gateway under the "look east policy of the government of India, became a major bone of contestation between the Nagas and the Kukis. According to Oinam (2003), there was three important immediate cause of the violent clash: (i) control and occupation of Moreh; (ii) tax on Kuki residents in Naga territory by the Naga militants and refusal to pay by the Kukis; (iii) refusal to renew the land agreement by the Nagas to the Kukis.

Similarly, the point about land being the source of conflict is emphasized by Kamaroopi (1993, p. 2972-73) when he accorded the cause of the conflict to the expulsion of Naga business establishments from Moreh and the Kuki's refusal to pay tax to Naga militants. The demarcation of five Hill districts into some percentage of Naga and Kuki landholdings (Memorandum submitted by the KSO to the GOI, 2001) also is indicative of how the land has become the major issue of contestation among various groups in the state. What followed the initial conflict between the two tribal groups was a series of violent incidents leading to the death of over 1000 people, hundreds of villages uprooted, and more than 100,000 people rendered homeless (Tarapot (2003: 201), Shimray (2004: 4,640).

The Naga-Kuki conflicts further led to the proliferation of numerous Kuki armed militia groups such as the Kuki Defence Force (KDF), Kuki Independence Army (KIA), Kuki International Front (KIF), Chin-Kuki Resistance Force (CKRF), Kuki Liberation Organisation, and its armed wing Kuki Liberation Army (KLO/KLA) to protect the Kuki people, their land, and villages from the raids of the NSCN (IM) and the Naga Lim Guards (NLGs). With the end of the conflicts, some of these Kuki militia groups emerged as independent armed groups with no centralising and co-coordinating authority often resulting in competition and conflicts between them for territorial control, support base, financial and other resources.

Within their initial years of formation, splits occurred both in the KNF and KNO. On 12th October 1993, Nehlun Kipgen, the founding President of KNF was killed in armed clashes with the security forces at Motbung village in Sadar Hills.

After his demise, a leadership crisis ensued within KNF. This led to the formation of the KNF (Military Council) under the leadership of S.K. Kipgen while Semtinthang Kipgen popularly known as S.T. Thangboi led the KNF. Further, due to this ensuing leadership crisis in the KNF, two more factional groups KNF (Zougam) and KNF (Samuel) also emerged from the KNF.

In 1994 Thangkholun Haokip, the founding president and Commander-in-Chief of KNO/KNA was also killed by his dissenting cadres at Moreh. This led to the formation of the KNA (Military Council). However, through the initiatives of P.S. Haokip, the incumbent President of KNO, and other Kuki chiefs and leaders, differences between the two factions were resolved. In its struggle for territorial control and supremacy with the KNF, KNF (MC) emerged as the more powerful group of the two controlling Sadar Hills, Churachandpur, and parts of Kuki inhabited areas of Tamenglong district.

3.9. Security Dilemma of the Kukis Post-Mizo Accord

The fear of the Naga domination was further accentuated subsequently with the rise and growth of valley-based insurgent organisations such as the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Peoples Liberation Army (PLA), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), etc., to restore the pre-colonial independence status of Manipur. With this increasing ethnic competition and conflicts with the Nagas over issues of identity, land, and territory and the rise of valley-based Meitei insurgency movements, KNA began to devise a strategy of survival for the Kuki people and began to identify themselves with the Mizo movement.

Thus, in 1964 KNA and the Manipur Mizo Integration Council (MMIC) agreed that Kukis were Mizos and vice-versa and resolved to achieve a single administrative unit for the ethnic (Kuki-Chin-Mizo) group. Various Kuki-Chin tribes accepted Mizo as their collective identity and resolved to secure a 'Greater Mizoram'. In line with this resolution, many Kuki tribes supported the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement for securing 'Greater Mizoram'.

However, with the signing of the Mizo accord between the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Government of India in 1986 which brought an end to the Mizo movement, the Kukis felt betrayed, for it could not address the issue of Greater

Mizoram. This created a 'security dilemma' for the Kukis and with this, various Kuki chiefs and leaders began to feel the need for starting an armed movement of their own. This also contributed to the birth of the Kuki militant movement in Manipur in the latter half of the 1980s.

On 18th May 1987, the Kuki National Front (KNF) was formed to create a separate 'Kukiland' comprising some parts of Ukhrul, Tamenglong, the whole of Sadar Hills Sub-Division of Senapati, Chandel, and Churachandpur districts of Manipur. Besides, the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and its armed wing Kuki National Army (KNA) were formed on 22nd February 1988 to form an imagined ancestral land of the Kuki called Zale'n-gam (Kipgen and Chawdhury, 2016, pp. 291-92).

3.10. Perception of threats from State Policies

Various policies, Acts, and legislations of the State Government of Manipur were perceived to be discriminatory and against the interests of the Kukis. The section will discuss some of the major issues which triggered a heightened sense of insecurity among the Kuki tribes. In 1967, the Government of Manipur passed the Acquisition of Chief Rights Act to introduce democratic elements in the administration of tribal villages in Manipur. The Act was opposed by KNA and various Kuki chiefs as they saw it as an attempt to take away the rights of the chiefs over their land, and hence as a threat to their customs, culture, and traditions.

Again in 1971, when the Government of India enacted the Northeastern States (Re-organisation) Act 1971 to meet the increasing autonomy aspirations in the region which led to the formation of the States of Manipur, Tripura, and Meghalaya and the Union Territories of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, the Kukis felt left out and the Act failed to meet the autonomy aspirations of the Kuki people.

This resulted in creating a sense of alienation among the Kukis. Along with the granting of statehood to Manipur, the Government of India had also proposed the creation of six Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in the hill areas of Manipur to meet the autonomy aspirations of the hills people under the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act' 1971. In line with this proposal, the State Government of Manipur constituted six ADCs in the hill areas of Manipur. However, the hill tribes

subsequently boycotted the District Councils and instead demanded implementation of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule in the hill areas of Manipur.

Further, under the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act 1971, Sadar Hills was one of the proposed ADCs along with Churachandpur, Senapati, Ukhrul, Tamenglong, and Tengnoupal. However, Sadar Hills was left out and placed under the Senapati district while others were declared as full-fledged districts. With the failure of the Government of Manipur to declare Sadar Hills a full-fledged district, the Kuki Chiefs Zonal Council (KCZC) in July 1971 placed the demand for a separate district to the then Home Minister, Government of India. In response to this demand, the Nayal Commission was appointed in 1974.

The commission recommended the creation of Sadar Hills as a full-fledged district and also suggested the inclusion of some parts of Senapati and Ukhrul districts for administrative convenience (Haokip, 2011). In 1982 the Government of Manipur decided to create the Sadar Hills as a full-fledged district along with Thoubal and Bishnupur. However, Sadar Hills was left out again while Thoubal and Bishnupur became full-fledged districts. It however became a full-fledged district in the year 2016.

3.11. The Tribal Land System and the Issues around the Land

As discussed above, ethnicity is deeply intertwined with the land system. During pre-colonial Manipur, the traditional polity formed on ethnic lines was recognised by the Meitei state. The Kings of Manipur did not impose direct administration over the hill villages. They only had political control over the villages in the foothills and on the trade routes. The land ownership was not interfered with by the Kings. When the Kukis migrated in the 19th Century, the kings and the British political agents settled them in the hills of Manipur wherein the Kuki Chiefs were allowed to practice their polity and feudalistic land system without state interference (Kamei, 2009, 105).

During the colonial period also, the British did not impose any land tax on the tribal lands, except for the imposition of a hill house tax of rupees three per household. The British, like the rulers of Manipur, did not interfere in the tribal polity and the land system. In the post-independence period, the Manipur Hill People's Regulation Act, 1947 was introduced providing for the administration of justice through the village authorities. Again in 1956, the Manipur (Hill Areas) Village

Authorities Act was introduced by the Government of India for the administration of the hills. The introduction of these Acts, however, did not dilute the traditional polity and the land holding system (Kamei, 2009. 105).

What triggered the fear and apprehension in the minds of the tribal people was the introduction of the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act (MLTR& LR) in 1960. The Act says that it extends to the whole of Manipur except the hill areas, meaning the topographical hill areas. This means the Acts apply in plain areas, either in Hill districts or tribal areas. The Act has thus been extended in the Chandel district, the Khuga Valley of Churachandpur district, Khaupum valley of Tamenglong district, and the Imphal river basin of Senapati district. The Act somehow disrupted the traditional land system (Kamei, 2009, 106).

3.11.a. The Acquisition of the Chiefs Rights Act 1967

The Government of Manipur made another attempt to introduce land reform in the hill areas by passing the Acquisition of Chiefs Rights Act in 1967. This Act provided for i. abolition of the Chiefship among the Kuki Chins, ii. payment of compensation to the Chiefs for the loss of their rights and ownership of the land and, iii. visualizes the introduction of the MLR and LR Act. The Act was however opposed by the Kuki-Chin people who took it as an infringement on their rights, customs, and tradition. The protest against the Act of 1967 was also directed against the MLR and LR Act of 1960. Another attempt was made later in 1989 to introduce the land reform in the hills through amendment, but it was again rejected and withdrawn after strong opposition from the tribal people (Kamei, 2009, 106-07).

The state legislation on the tribal land system that triggered a sense of threat among the Kukis was the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Amendment) Act 1975 (MLR and LR Act). The Act was to implement uniform land laws both in the hills and valley areas of Manipur. Earlier, Section 33 (60) of the MLR and LR Act, 1960 exempted the hill areas from its purview. However, Section 1(3) of the MLR and LR Act, 1975 ‘empowered the State Government to extend, by notification in the official gazette, the whole or any part of this Act to any hill areas of Manipur as also may be specified in such notification’ (The Manipur Land Revenue And Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1975 (Manipur Act No. 13 of 1976).

This legislation was seen by many hill tribes as a move to do away with the rights of the tribal chiefs over their land ownership and therefore, was opposed by them. Subsequently, in the year 2015, the State government, under tremendous pressure from the public for the introduction of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system in Manipur, passed three bills namely, i. The Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015, ii. The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2015 and, iii. The Manipur Shops and Establishments (2nd Amendment) Bill, 2015. When the three Bills were passed, there was strong opposition from the tribal communities, particularly in the Churachandpur district which is a Kuki majority district. Many questioned 1951 as the base year of defining who is a "Manipur People".

Questions were also raised regarding the bills not being debated and consulted widely with all cross-sections of people of Manipur and communities living there and many felt that it was a move by the state to appease the majority community against the tribal populations of Manipur. They also felt that the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform (7th Amendment) Bill, 2015, was an attempt by the state government to take away the tribal lands and thus threaten the very identity and survival of the tribals. The contention is that the bill will only ensure that the tribals will lose their lands thereby making the tribal areas accessible to all including the non-tribals. What ensued was a long period of violent protest leading to the death of as many as nine people and the destruction of public properties.

Despite the state government's clarification issued on 1 September 2015 that the "3 (Three) Bills do not infringe on the existing rights of tribal communities in Manipur. The present amendment of Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act which was passed in the Assembly does not extend to Hill Areas and in no way it will affect or alter the present status of tribal land…" the violent protest continued for many months. The Bills were subsequently withdrawn to assuage their fear.

As discussed above, the state of Manipur has two distinct physiographic divisions having different land systems and productive organizations of economic activities which have historically emerged. The valley area constituting roughly ten percent of the area is where there is large concentration of population mainly the Meiteis. As per the 2001 census, the valley area has population density of 632 per sq. km against 44 persons per sq. km in the hills (Singh E. B., 2009).

The hill areas constituting ninety percent of the land is inhabited by tribes broadly categorized under the Kuki and the Nagas. The hill areas, though politically under the suzerainty and the control of the valley monarchy, enjoyed a high degree of freedom in the matter of economic organisation of land. It is in the hill areas that the issue of land, identity and development become a heady mix wherein debates for development and social change get blurred. Land and land systems are sought to be sacrosanct and inalienable, in fact traditional land rights and tenure systems are construed to be the very basis of tribal village polity and identities (Singh, 2009).

The ongoing demand by section of Meeteis for Scheduled Tribe status under the banner of the Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM) is also seen as an attempt to transgress the tribal land ownership system. In fact, the demand for ST has opened the existing misgivings between the hill and valley dwellers and has been linked to the question of ethnicity. The demand for Scheduled Tribe status by the Meetei is also seen by the hill tribals as an attempt to subdue the demand of the tribals for upgradation of Autonomous Distrct Councils (ADCs) in the hill districts of Manipur.

3.12. Delimitation of Assembly Constituencies

The state of Manipur constitutes a valley and hills. The valley areas account for 10 percent of the state's area but 60 percent of the population. The Manipur Legislative assembly has 60 assembly seats. The existing number of reserved seats for the ST population of the State of Manipur is 19 out of this total of 60 Assembly seats. As per the 2011 census, the total population of the state stands at s 2,570,390 out of which the total scheduled tribe population is 902740. Of this, 791126 are in rural areas and 111614 in urban areas.

This constitutes 35.1 % of the total population. The proportion of the ST population in the 2001 census was recorded at 34.2%. There has thus been an increase of 0.9 % during the last decade. The highest proportion of Scheduled tribes was recorded in Tamenglong district (95.7%) and the lowest in Thoubal district (0.4 %). The Scheduled Tribes population in absolute numbers increased by 161599, constituting a decadal growth of 21.8 percent (Manipur Census 2011 Executive Summary).

The status quo as it stands, the population of the STs and their reserved seats in the Assembly, according to the tribal population, is unfair and defeats the representative character of the assembly seats. As a result, there has been a growing demand for reconfiguration and redrawing of the assembly segments. The basis of the demand for delimitation of assembly seats in Article 332(3) of the Constitution of India which lays down that "the number of seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly of any State shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of seats in the Assembly as the population of the SC/ST in the State or part of the State, as the case may be, in respect of which seats are so reserved, bears to the total population of the State". Further, sub-clause (iii) of the provision of the Guidelines and Methodology for Delimitation provides that the number of seats to be reserved for the SCs and STs in the House of the People and State Legislature Assemblies shall be re-worked out based on the 2001 census.

This implies that the number of seats reserved for STs in the Manipur State Assembly shall have to be increased from the existing 31.6% to around 37.77%. In numerical terms, the existing 19 seats reserved for STs need to be increased to either 22 at 36.6% or 23 at 38.33%. In simple language, a minimum of three more seats should be added to the seats reserved for STs. The issue of delimitation of Assembly Constituencies in Manipur has been one significant issue having implications on the so-called 'Hill-valley' political dynamics.

When the issue of delimitation of assembly constituencies was brought about, it was stalled by a stay order of the Imphal Bench of the Guwahati High Court based on a writ petition filed by the All Political Parties, Manipur (APPM) (ref.) However, the Supreme Court impugned the stay order of the lower court and set the stage for the Delimitation Commission to complete its task in respect of the State of Manipur after several hearings on a writ petition filed by Indo-Myanmar Tribal Development Association (IMTDA) on behalf of various tribal organizations in the State. There is a strong feeling among the tribes that the state government is consciously delaying the process to deny the tribals of their political representation.

There is a perception that the valley people are enjoying complete political power, taking all the economic benefits and thereby marginalizing the tribes. Allocation of funds by population size, according to them, hinders development in the hills. Many tribal organizations strongly perceive that many of the problems facing the hill areas in terms of infrastructure development, poverty, education, and health services, are due to valley people holding political power. Many attributes these issues of the hills-valley divide as the basis of the re-emergence of Kuki nationalism in the 1980s that became politicized to demand an ethnic homeland (Kipgen and Chowdhury, 2016, p.291-92).

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Chapter -IV: State Response vis-à-vis the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Ethnic Nationalism and Rethinking Security

Chapter IV

State Response vis-à-vis the Chin-Kuki-Mizo Ethnic Nationalism and Rethinking Security

4.1. Introduction

Numerous ethnic movements have over the years confronted the state in India's multicultural democracy. Such ethnic-based movements and their demands from autonomy to self-determination are common in multicultural democracies, and more so in what Atul Kohli (2010, p.461) refers to as 'developing country democracies' like India.

Kohli argues that the fate of these movements, that is the degree of cohesiveness these groups forge; whether they are accommodated or whether their demands escalate into secessionist movements; their relative longevity, largely reflect the nature of political context, through group characteristics around which movements emerge and the resources these groups control are also consequential. More specifically, two dimensions of the political context appear to be especially relevant, namely, how well central authority is institutionalized within the multicultural democracy and the willingness of the ruling groups to share some power and resources with mobilized groups.

Since the time of independence, the issue of accommodating diversity has been engaging the national policy framers. On the one hand, there was a compelling need for maintaining the unity and integrity of the nascent Indian nation-state through a strong state. Also, the vision of an idea of India which is inclusive and tolerant of differences required affirming and giving institutional recognition to socio-cultural diversities. Kohli considers this as a 'stateness-democracy' continuum and, it serves as an important variable in explaining how successful a multicultural federal democratic mode of accommodating deep differences would be.

4.2. Political Incorporation and Ethnic Nationalism

In the 1970s, there was a growing disillusionment with the modernization paradigm and there emerged many theories that offered ideas regarding the different ways ethnic groups could be politically incorporated and accommodated in a multi-ethnic state to create a stable and democratic polity. One of the systematic theories in this category was the plural society approach first developed by JS Furnivall (1948).

The main premise of this approach was that multi-ethnic states cannot remain both stable and democratic. To Furnivall, an essential feature of plural societies is unrestrained economic competition between ethnic groups who live close to but separately from each other. Since inter-group relations remain confined to the competitive marketplace, these states fail to develop a sense of common political identity and loyalty that could overcome the cultural and ethnic differences between the various groups (Furnivall, 1948).

Contrarily, the unrestrained economic competition generates competition for ethnic nationalism, which in turn causes society to fragment. Furnivall believed that the only way plural societies could be held together is through the application of the external force of colonialism. Even though the plural society approach painted a bleak picture regarding the viability of stable and democratic multi-ethnic states, some scholars continued to express grave doubt about the incompatibility view of ethnic relations within a single sovereign state. This led to the development of an alternative theoretical approach addressing the issues of stability and democracy in multi-ethnic states.

Arend Lijphart (1984) provided the consociational framework that could create a stable and democratic multi-ethnic state. He suggested that in multi-ethnic states, stability and democracy can be maintained by creating a consociational polity that allowed and encouraged i.e elite cooperation, executive power-sharing, and formation of grand coalition governments, ii. Formal and informal separation of powers and checks and balances between the various branches and levels of government iii, balanced bicameralism through special minority representation in the parliament, iv. The existence of multiple political parties representing different ethnic groups, v. proportional representation in parliament, vi. Territorial and non-territorial federalism and decentralization of power, vii, ethnic groups to veto legislation affecting their vital interests, viii, high degree of autonomy for each ethnic community to run its affairs, and ix. creation of a written constitution with elaborate procedures for amendment and which explicitly lays down certain fundamental rights that cannot be violated by the government (Lijphart, 1984).

The multicultural path of India's democracy which Mahajan (2002) refers to as a 'constructive constitutional model' affirms the liberal commitment to uniform citizenship rights while recognizing communitarian rights as a means of protecting socio-cultural diversity in India. This is done by differentiating communities based on caste, language, religion, and tribe. The future unity and integrity of the Indian state on the one hand and the stability, durability, and success of its democratic structures on the other would depend on its ability to hold together these diverse communities. This would, in turn, depend upon its creativity in devising public institutional structures which would celebrate and recognize the specificities of diverse communities' aspirations and demands (Suan, http://www.forumfed.org/libdocs/IntConfFed07/Volume_5/IntConfFed07-Vol5-Suan.pdf).

In terms of State's response to ethnicity-based movements, States generally adopts one or combination of the four major types of approaches of repression, concession, toleration and combination of the first two approaches. At the operational level, State's responses can be looked at in three broad approaches. They are direct approach, outside-in approach and inside-out approach (Franklin, 2009). The first is the conventional method that uses coercive measure using military tactics. The second is more an indirect approach that counter the insurgents by attacking the peripherals of the group and also work at the centre through political and economic concessions. The third approach works on targeting the leaders of the groups. These approaches however hinge on the more repressive response measures and there is an increasing realization that coercive measure does not help address the complexities of ethnicity and ethnic movement. There is a visible shift towards dialogue and peace agreements. Such prolonged peace process can serve as a tactic to weaken insurgencies while simultaneously making them subject to social changes and shift public opinion (D'Souza, 2017).

Kanti Bajpai (2012, 21) argues that the Indian state uses a package of instruments to manage ethnic relations. Such package consists of three major elements: first, a political order consisting of liberal constitutionalism, state-back secular nationalism, and state-led social modernization and economic development; second, power-sharing in terms of group rights and devolution of authority to ethnic-based lower levels of government; and third, coercion and force when the first two elements fail to contain or solve ethnic problems. The most effective of these

strategies has been power-sharing. Force or coercion, on the other hand, may work in wearing down militant opponents but they have also led to ethnic alienation. In places where the government relies more on coercion and force, it gets caught in unending cycles of violence and alienation. Another important variable to understand the state's response to ethnic challenges is the "state capability" i.e the ability of the state to provide a legitimate basis of authority and act as a central force in society determining social, political, and economic interactions.

If we take the state to represent a particular balance of power that emerges from conflicts between different forces in society, then in situations of late development that balance may still be forming, with serious implications for the welfare and security of citizens. In a situation of 'conflicts of authority, authority is translated into different claimants to authority representing different social forces vying with each other over power in society. The unstable social basis of the state and the competition it faces from the non-state actors results in compromising the autonomy and the ability of the state to act to govern society and provide security both for itself and its citizens.

Understanding the state capability requires understanding the process of state formation i.e. how social groups have, over the long run, struggled with each other over power and authority. Successful states have emerged where state leaders could build inclusive political organizations and mobilize collective identities to hold together different sections of the population to the state. This also means that State is the sole provider of rules in the society, as opposed to the non-state entities who generally have their legitimacy on local resources, symbols, and organizations.

Many believe that in the context of the Northeast, it is the poor and inefficient performance of the political institutions in India, particularly the violation of the federal principle by the Central state, the emergence of the national state's centralizing tendencies, and its overriding power to cut-up the sub-national territories- that explains why rebellions occurred frequently in the region. Hassan (2012, pp. 53-86) argues that many of Northeast India's ethnonational conflicts are not fundamentally about identity. They are rather because of the Indian state's inability to provide a legitimate basis of authority.

4.3. Nature of Challenges in Northeast India and the State Responses

The major challenge in the region as far as the Indian state is concerned is the challenge of insurgency largely guided by ethnic nationalism. There are hardly any outfits that are free from ethnic nationalism. There may be a difference in degree in terms of their national aspirations, ideological predilection, and operational pragmatism. But, none of the outfits can shed the community or ethnic interest and operate beyond the imperatives of ethnic bounds.

This very characteristic of the challenge also informs the way how the state responds to such challenges. For example, many organizations may be driven largely by the pragmatics of bargaining for arm operation and material benefits more than ethnic nationalism (Oinam, 2003). It, however, does not mean that they do not represent one or another specific ethnic group or section. Such organizations are easy to be appropriated by the state. There are examples of such groups, which were formed to fight against Indian imperialism going to a tacit understanding with the Indian army and undergoing a ceasefire. This is true of the KNA, KRA, and KLA who all have accepted an informal ceasefire with the Indian army. Subsequently, both KRA and KLA formed a front under the aegis of the United Peoples Front (UPF) and entered into a cease-fire agreement with the Government of India.

A detailed discussion of such appropriation by the State will be made in the subsequent section of the chapter. Entering into a negotiation with the army, although driven by the immediacy of pragmatism, de-legitimises the organizations and gives extra legitimacy to the army. As far as the state's response to the challenges of insurgency is concerned, it is varied. However, what is characteristic of the state's response is the lack of clear understanding of the problems, waiting for the incubation period, and finally a knee-jerk reaction at times of crisis. In principle, the state governments are responsible to look after the state of affairs within the respective state jurisdiction, there are complications in the exercise of power.

State governments have limited powers not only in the constitutional allocation of responsibility but also in the real exercise of power in matters of political decision-making. This is evident from the fact that the Centre can intervene and bypass the state governments on the subject of law and order which otherwise is a state subject. For example, the center can declare an area as a "disturbed area" or

through the Governor of the state and impose the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), an Act applied in most parts of the region (Oinam, 2008).

The response of the state to the challenges in the northeast region had been largely informed by the idea of 'national security. The threat to the nation is invoked by the state which legitimizes and sanctions the use of violence as a response. This very logic of national security comes out of a sense of threat to the national and territorial integrity of the country. Perception of threat is borne out of the memories of the violent past of the partition, wars with Pakistan and China, and the creation of Bangladesh.

Such a perception of threat is marked by violence and the state often takes a militaristic stand to counter almost every dissent in the region, be it insurgency or any form of protest (Oinam, 2008, 13). When state policies are framed based on such a perception, violence is bound to follow for violence constitutes the structure of such perception.

The response of the regional state governments is far more complex because of their dubious involvement in insurgency politics (Oinam, 2008.14). They are not clear in their stand as to what informs their response-national security or democratic discourse. This inability to have a clear stand resulted in an ambivalent response, showing concerns over the repercussions of violence, and calling for talks with the insurgents on the one hand and, tow the same line of argument taken by the central government and its militaristic outlook on the other hand.

Until the end of the 1980s, the Indian state, as well as the regional states, responded to organized violence and insurgency as a law and order problem. This is largely to do with seeing the issue of national security as a law and order issue rather than a political issue. There had been periodic attempts at political negotiations, which in most cases are short-lived. However, such political negotiations do not go with the withdrawal of military offensive. Largely, the state oscillates between the two forms of responses or tactics depending on convenience and situations.

Another strategy that the state uses in response to the challenges of insurgency in the region is the discourse of development in which development is projected as a remedy for the insurgency. This leads to the thinking insurgency arises because of the

lack of development. This thinking about development is however outside of the discourse political, with the idea of empowerment and human rights (Vizard 2003).

In India, the state's response to contain armed conflicts and autonomy movements has been very much on a similar trajectory as discussed in the above section. In the initial stage, the state generally employs coercive measures (Lacina, 2009). When the aspirants do not give in to the state and start taking to arms, it employs conciliatory approaches. In the 1980s, when the secessionist movements escalated, Manipur was declared a 'disturbed area' and subsequently, the AFSPA was imposed. Subsequently, the strategy of economic inducement is used by the Indian state by extending economic packages to wean people away from insurgent activities. Under the state government's special scheme Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation, one-time grants, monthly stipends, and incentives for weapons they bring at the time of surrender were offered to those who gave up arms and opted to join the mainstream. Slowly, it became an employment avenue for unemployed youths and it was misused by politicians. The central government has also been using the development discourse thereby pumping funds for physical infrastructure and for social and rehabilitation packages to contain conflicts. Unfortunately, a very negligible share of it reached the target, while some of the social groups and leaders benefited from the high levels of subsidies paid out by the Government of India (Hariss, 2002).

For instance, at present, most of the contract works are jointly carried out by the leaders of insurgent groups, politicians, bureaucrats, and contractors (Shivananda, 2011, 170). This nexus and localized autocracies hampered the development activities, infrastructure, and livelihood of the people (Lacina, 2009). In another rehabilitation programme, the surrendered militants were recruited into the state forces and deployed in counter-insurgency operations (Rammohan, 2002). Unfortunately, when they were engaged in counter-insurgency operations, several heinous crimes and unethical activities were perpetrated. Consequently, they were targeted by their former cadres.

4.4. State Response to Kuki Ethnic Insurgency

State response to the Kuki ethnic nationalism followed a similar strategy of the central government overriding the state governments. The state government was left completely unaware when the 'cessation of operation' was signed between the Kuki

armed groups under the umbrellas of the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and the United People's Front (UPF) and the Indian Army. The negotiating table of the Indian Army became the first platform for all major Kuki ethnic insurgents to enter a political dialogue (Haokip, 2015). The then incumbent Chief Minister, O. Ibobi, 2006 expressed a total lack of knowledge of the development. It testifies the above-mentioned point about the Centre exercising real power to intervene and bypass the state governments even on matters of law and order. It also becomes evident that the agreement of ceasefire between the outfits and the Indian army was dictated more by what Oinam (2008) referred to as 'operational pragmatism'.

It was only on October 7, 2005, that the Ministry of Defence, Government of India divulged the informal ceasefire with the Kuki militant groups (Singh, 2016). The state government did not accept the ceasefire on the ground that it was devoid of the state government's consent and argued that the modalities and concrete ground rules for holding dialogues with insurgent groups operating in the state would be decided by the state government (O. Ibobi's statement in the IFP, 25 February 2006).

Although it may sound too far-fetched a statement to say that the state becoming a party to the subsequent signing of the 'Suspension of Operation' (SoO) in 2008 was under the pressure from the ethnic outfits, there were, nonetheless threats from the outfits that the Congress I, the major party in the ruling government shall have no room in the Kuki dominated hills in the state. They even put threats on candidates contesting from the Congress I party and carried out attacks at the residence of prominent congress Ministers. This largely was because the insurgents felt that the then Manipur government led by Congress was refusing to recognize the ceasefire agreement (IFP, 12 August 2006).

For whatever reasons known to itself, the Government of Manipur signed the Suspension of Operation (SoO) with the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) representing eleven various outfits and the United People's Front (UPF) representing another eight groups on 22 August 2008 at Delhi. As part of the agreement, meetings of a Joint Monitoring Group have been held at various times, involving stakeholders, such as the KNO/UPF, representatives of the police, the army, Assam Rifles (AR), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF) and leading officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Manipur state government.

Under the initial agreement, 11 different armed ethnic outfits came under the KNO. They are Kuki National Army (KNA), Kuki National Front Military Council (KNF-MC), Kuki National Front-Zogam (KNFZ), United Socialist Revolutionary Army (USRA), Zou Defence Volunteer-KNO (ZDV-KNO), United Komrem Revolutionary Army (UKRA), Zomi Revolutionary Force (ZRF), Hmar National Army (HNA), Kuki Revolutionary Army (Unification), Kuki Liberation Army (KLA-KNO) and United All Kuki Liberation Army. While the UPF represents eight outfits which include Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), Kuki National Front-P (KNF-P), United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF), Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA), Hmar Peoples Conference/ Democratic (HPC-D), Kuki Liberation Army (KLA/KLO), Kuki National Front-S (KNFS), etc. (Singh, 2016).

Under the terms of the agreement, the insurgent outfits have had to surrender all their weapons and the armory is supposed to be double-locked by their representatives and the army. The designated camps where they must stay are not located in the vicinity of an international border, highways, or villages. The cadres are isolated and kept in virtual confinement. They have to refrain from extorting taxes and fines, kidnapping for ransom and ambushing the police and security personnel. Significantly, the agreement does not include a clause that forbids militants from killing members of other factions (Haokip, 2015).

The most debated agenda on the set ground rules that arose during the signing of the SoO was ‘Maintaining Territorial Integrity of Manipur’. The issue of the territorial integrity of Manipur as a pre-condition for the agreement that the state government brought in was criticized by the Kuki outfits as a hurdle to the interest of the outfits. However, the Kuki insurgent outfits signed the agreement while reserving the right to raise political demands once the dialogue starts.

As a regular recipe characteristic of the Centre’s strategy of economic inducement, the Government of India, under the agreement, would pay a monthly stipend/allowance of Indian Rupees 3,000 each for armed cadres and 65,000 for leaders as incentives to abide by the agreement. The KNO was given to understand that there would be two designated camps at Churachandpur, one at Ukhrul and two in Chandel district, whereas the UPF was promised six designated camps, two in

Sadar Hills, three in Churachandpur, and one in Chandel district respectively. Meanwhile, a lot of money has been spent on these camps (Haokip, 2015).

However, as has been the fate of many of such agreements in the region, the SoO soon started showing signs of increasing disquiet about the lack of progress and dissatisfaction in the negotiation among the insurgent groups. It was however easily maneuvered by the Government of India and the Kuki groups were taken into confidence. The Kuki outfits withdrew the plan to boycott the agreement after an assurance from the Centre. Thus, the agreement has been on extension every time it gets expired. As of the latest report, there are 2,266 cadres recognised under the SoO agreement, of which 1,207 belong to the KNO and 1,059 cadres are from the UPF outfit.

All recognised cadres are at various designated camps set up across the state. There are seven designated camps for KNO cadres –four in Churachandpur, two in Kangpokpi, and one in Tengnoupal. Similarly, there are seven designated camps for UPF outfits — three in Pherzawl, two in Kangpokpi, and one in Churachandpur and Chandel. Altogether, 25 armed Kuki groups are operating in Manipur, of which 17 are under KNO and eight under UPF (the Indian Express, October 3, 2021). As far as the fate of the Suspension of Operation with the Kuki insurgent outfits, there has been a growing disenchantment.

Even the Chief Minister of Manipur, in one of his public addresses, alluded that the Suspension of Operation (SoO) with various militant groups in the state is a failure. One of the reasons is the 'ignorance of those in authority and the lack of seriousness on the part of the security forces in their undertakings, particularly as far as dialogues were concerned'. The Chief Minister also expressed concern over the frequent violation of agreements by militants and said many of them who are part of SoO roam at their will, do not stay in their designated camps, and are not properly monitored.

Looking at how the state responded to the Kuki ethnic insurgents is indicative of three characteristics. First, responses are dictated by considerations of national security and therefore, seeing the problems from the prism of high security. Second, responses are packaged in development discourse, resulting thus, in the misinterpretation and false prognosis of the problem as a developmental problem.

Lastly, the state responds in the form of peace talks, which simply prolongs the problems without a solution. The state oscillates among these responses depending on convenience and situations. There is also opinion that the Suspension of Operation (SoO) was a move by the Indian army to use the Kuki groups to counter against the UNLF [the Meitei insurgent group, the United National Liberation Front], particularly in the Kuki dominated Churachandpur district (Bhaumik, 2009).

4.5. Rethinking Security and Plea for Alternative State Response

The present responses of the Indian state to the crisis in the Northeastern region dictated by the security paradigm have largely failed to address the challenges. It is therefore imperative to reconsider how the state responds to the problems, responses premised on India's democracy as lived experience. Oinam (2008) offers three possible alternatives—demilitarization of the region, respecting the aspirations of self-determination, and empowering civil societies through active democratization.

Demilitarization of the Region: The region has become militarized when you have a huge presence of defense forces operating in the domestic space. Such militarization has far serious consequences in the sense that the region is transformed into some sort of a war zone where every citizen within becomes a suspect of a potential enemy. The empowering acts like the AFSPA which is in operation in many parts of the region allow the army to operate beyond the purview of the civil laws and legal code of conduct. Such militarization has resulted in the further perpetuation of violence not only from the state and the non-state forces but even from the so-called civil organizations. The state can consider demilitarization as a step towards the settlement of political issues in the region. As such, militarization has not so far solved the problems. Rather, what we witness is the escalation of conflicts and violence in the region.

Reconceptualising Self Determination: The idea of self-determination is not synonymous with secession, although it could be one of the many consequent manifestations. The state, by adopting the principle of recognizing differences of multiple linguistic, religious and cultural groups in the country and accepting that the country consists of different nations, can provide a new understanding of the conception of self-determination. Under such an understanding, various claims of autonomy can be worked out under the constitutional arrangement.

Many of the ongoing negotiations are already premised on broader constitutional provisions. As long as the precondition of secession is removed, the state should not be too alarmed about its national and territorial integrity and can have more open negotiations transcending the idea of national security. This approach may be facilitated with a proper form of federal arrangement where peoples maintain their differences and dissent within a larger paradigm. Such rethinking of the concept of self-determination, incorporated with economic empowerment could provide a new template for State in its response to the challenges in the region.

Engaging the Civil Societies: The credibility of civil societies in the region is a big question now. It is mainly because of the politics of appropriation and delegitimisation among the contending parties in the conflict-ridden region. There is an attempt by the non-state actors to infringe and dictate terms with the functioning of civil societies. Also, the state machinery delegitimizes them as frontal organizations of a few unlawful elements. Civil societies, in a conflict ridden society like Manipur, rather than act as peace agents, they often are engaged in what Baruah terms as, war by other means'. The space of civil society is deeply fractured on sectarian division such as Hills and valleys, tribals and non-tribals (Phanjoubam, 2009, 69). Different civil societies often find themselves at the crossroad, thereby, ', accentuating problems rather than solving problems. For example, the United Naga Council, The United Committee Manipur, All Manipur United Clubs Orgaanisation and the Kuki Inpi Manipur, all have entirely different objectives (ibid, 2009, 71).

However, civil societies can play a much more significant role as a catalyst to bring about 'communicative dialogue' among the contending parties. For this, the parties to the conflict should allow civil societies to gain autonomy and legitimacy of their own. The form of engagement of civil societies through dialogue and negotiation as representatives of ethnic communities may be the initial starting point. Civil societies subsequently should be able to transcend from ethnicity to individuality thereby respect for individual human dignity is ensured.

While the role of the Indian state as an arbiter of the conflict seems to come up quite naturally, the Indian state's responsibility as a rational and just arbiter requires additional qualifications. Indian state ought to acquire, based on its history, normative concern to create just solutions to the conflicting communities. However, the record

of the state operations in the region is not encouraging. Like most developing countries, the role of the states in South Asia in conflict resolution has been controversial. And India is not an exception.

The idea that sovereignty resides with the people in a modern democracy is often forgotten. The people-centric definition of democracy and sovereignty is derived from the normative concerns in our day-to-day collective living. And state as an institute of governance has to take note of this concern while engaging with individual citizens. To emphasise this point, the praxis of the Indian state must be guided by this normative concern. Many of the problems in the region have arisen due to the lack of this ethical dimension in statecraft.

Most of the State crisis of India is due to the misappropriation of the modern state in the Post-colonial phase of history. The shaky groundwork and hurried formation of nation-building just after independence necessitate the invocation of a sense of supreme national interests in its citizens vis-à-vis other interests. This is the outcome of a deeply wounded memory of partition and subsequently, wars with its neighbours. One of the unfortunate fallout of these events is the collective majority psyche that treats the minorities with eyes of suspicion.

What follows is the denial of alternative voices and interests. The homogenizing trend, in interest and value of the Indian nation-state, has increased all the more ignoring competing and contradictory interests that exist in societies. Such homogenizing tendencies justify the use of violence while dealing with ideologies or movements interpreted to be inimical to national sovereignty.

That in recent times there is a constitutive relationship between politics and violence that has become more glaring. Homogenization proposed by the Indian state, despite its entire slogan for respecting the diversity of values and worldviews of different ethnic communities, comes in the form of coming to terms with the Indian mainstream. Though this term is extremely amorphous to find a corresponding value or people, it represents the very conception of mainstream hints at a concern and desire to homogenize the possible differences. This is derived from the inherent spirit of the nation-state.

Politics of representation and development set by the modernity discourse has not fully been internalized by the natives to whom the discourse was provided as an external adjunct by the colonial rule. The organic lives in the developing world, particularly in the northeast region of India, have not yet been able to shed the primacy of community identity over the individual identity as a citizen. The inconsistencies in the adaptation and assimilation of technologies, ideologies, and worldviews lead to the crisis of values of existential nature among the tribes and communities. This existentially-generated crisis enkindles politics of conflicts marked by physical violence.

The nature of the crisis is two-directional. One, conflict is between marginal communities and the Indian state. And two, conflicts could be among the marginal communities themselves. What are marginal in the case of the Northeast are the ethnic communities and tribes. The crises are directional in the sense that these are directed towards the other and are inherently violent.

This violence is associated with the notion of security. In the case of Northeast India, security is the most often used concept to promote and retain violence. But the question is security for whom? For the marginal communities, the nationalist aspirations among them are naturally dependent on an ethnic basis and must exclude the other. The security is of the collective ethnic self. In a similar vein, the Indian nation state's security is in terms of maintaining its territorial integrity and the national narrative (Oinam, 2008).

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Conclusion

Conclusion

The study attempted to understand the politics of ethnic mobilisation and identity formation by taking the case of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo communities. As discussed above, the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic group spreads across the national territorial border. Although scattered in different parts, they consider themselves to be of a similar ethnic group with common myths of descent, historical memories, language, religious beliefs, and cultural practices. By invoking such shared commonalities, they conceive the objective of creating a Kuki nation which they term 'Zelingam' by integrating all the Kuki inhabited parts.

The Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic nationalism can be well explained with the Instrumentalist framework wherein ethnic nationalism is looked at from as social construct wherein and ethnicity mobilizes ethnic communities by invoking the common traits of language, custom, etc. The ethnic elites or otherwise the 'ethnic entrepreneurs' use these markers as convenient tools to generate public support for their wealth, power, and prestige.

They also attach new meanings and values to such markers and use them in mobilizing the group. But it will be wrong to suggest that only the elite interest is the driving force for ethnic nationalism. The rise of ethnic nationalism can very well be attributed to various other factors. For example, The Kuki-Chin-Mizo struggle can be seen as modern ethnic identity constructed vis-à-vis the newly created nation-state of India (Zou, 2012).

However, such a political project of the Kukis is fraught with many challenges and remains at best a dream. Given the overlapping claims of homeland by Kuki and Nagas, their spatial distribution and settlement, such demands for exclusive territories based on ethnic identities is impossible to attain. But such a project is always fraught with dangerous and serious implications for societies in the Northeast which are marked by plurality and diversity of ethnic groups. Such ethnic movement with claims of territoriality is the reason for the bloody clashes that was witnessed among ethnic groups in the state of Manipur. The Kuki-Naga clash in the 1990s was a classic example of such overlapping ethnic territorial claims. As discussed above, the territorial aspirations and ethnic competition are closely mixed up in Manipur today.

There was a serious attempt during the Mizo movement to make it a collective movement of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo groups.

However with the formation of Mizoram as a constituent state of India after the signing of the Mizo Accord, the Kukis in other parts and more particularly those in Manipur felt betrayed by the movement after investing their efforts and commitment. If we look at the forms in which the Kuki ethnic nationalism is played out, it seems more informed by the exigencies of power positioning vis-a-vis other ethnic groups like the Nagas and the Meeteis in Manipur.

The study proceeds intending to understand the ethnic dimensions of security in the context of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic community which formulate and defines their identity politics. The politics of identity also shapes the nationalist aspirations of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic groups. The study, in particular, focuses on the process of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic movement based on a notion of shared ethnic identity and the state responses informed by its security logic.

The basis of the claims of homeland by both the Kukis and Nagas, though rooted in the historical process of migration and settlement, was abetted by the antipathy of the government towards these ethnic groups. After India got independence, the state policies and program created a sense of insecurity amongst the Kuki community regarding their land and settlement. The demand for homeland is premised on such fear and insecurity. Such demand was later carried forward by the Kuki insurgent groups (Takhellambam, 2009, 145-146).

For example, the birth of the demand for the Kuki homeland can be attributed to the passing of the "the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956. There was a strong opposition and discontentment among the Chin-Kuki-Mizo groups. As discussed, it was seen by these ethnic communities as an attempt to do away with the rights of the Chiefs over land. They feared of being cornered out of their habitation. Thus, the insecurity over their land was what compelled the Kuki National Assembly to demand a Kuki state in the 1960s (Takhellambam, 2009, 148).

When this demand didn't materialize, coupled with the growing demand from the valley based groups to extend and enforce the Manipur Land Revenue and Reform Act, 1960 in the hill areas of Manipur (Memo no. CM-20/GS-M/MR &LR/89 dt.

September 19, 1989 in (Takhellambam, 2009, 148), the militant Kuki insurgent outfit, the Kuki National Front (KNF) was formed in 1988. Added to the objective of forming the Kuki Homeland was also the objective of defending the Kukis from the Nagas. Thus, ethnic nationalism in the state including the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic mobilization is largely as product of securitized ethnic identities.

At present, there is a discussion on the need for the introduction of an appropriate land law for the tribal hill areas, a law with the endorsement of the Hill Areas Committee of the State Assembly, to regulate the land system, taking into consideration the tribal traditions and the democratic ethos of the Constitution.

As we have witnessed in the past, there had always been opposition and resistance to any attempts towards land reforms in the hills of Manipur. And introducing such reform is easier said than done. But, considering the changing developmental needs, a reform is the need of the hour. Such legislation should take the confidence of the tribals, prevent alienation and exploitation and ensure that tribal farmer has access to the land.

Another issue which has implications on the Kuki ethnic nationalism is the unaccounted migration from Myanmar into Manipur. As discussed above, the ethnic constituency transcends the national boundary of many South and South-East Asian nations. This is true particularly of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic groups who inhabit the border areas of both India and Myanmar.

For example, as recent as June, 2022, there was report of as many as eighty illegal migrants from Myanmar apprehended in Churachandpur district in Manipur (The Print, June 28, 2022). The identification of the illegal migrants is made more difficult because they can easily mingle with the ethnic brethrens in the other side of the border. Also the porous border made it easier for them to get into the Indian side. Although, there has been an increase after the military takeover, the migration has been happening even before that.

The unaccounted migration has potential implication on the ethnic dynamics in the state of Manipur. For example, there is an abnormal growth rate in population mostly in the hill districts of Manipur and unrecognized villages in these hills. Such claims, though, contested by Kuki organizations, definitely creates tension in the

ethnic dynamics of the state. The State, on this issue, need to pay attention, which otherwise may emerge as an important flashpoint for ethnic tension.

As discussed, in the case of India's northeast, identities that shape conflict are not necessarily primordial but are a creation of political necessity and administrative convenience. The same is true in the case of Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic nationalism. The current ethnic ferment in the northeast can only be understood against a background of historical changes like the withdrawal of the old style of colonialism from the region, the rise of popular democratic forces that are yet to find appropriate political forms, and the neo-colonial intrigues of contemporary imperialism.

An interesting aspect of ethnic mobilisation in the region is its transactional and transborder character. It is an open knowledge that many such ethnic insurgents, including many of the Kuki insurgents have their base in the adjoining areas of Myanmar and operate from there.

The challenge before the Indian nation-state in terms of its response is not in prolonging violence by propounding the security of its territory and nation narrative. If the Indian state perceives itself as an encompassing multi-nation state, it must look at the security of each ethnicity as well as the marginal community. This can be meaningfully done only by pushing the normative concern to address the varied voices of the periphery. It is only through engaging in such an enterprise that the Indian state will shed violence in its political self. It will be encompassed in its history since its inception.

To locate the above normative paradigm, one needs to look at how certain peace initiatives are undertaken in the region. The agents of the state, rather than approaching the affected people as citizens, treat them as subjects adopting strategies applicable in international relations. Thus, military and paramilitary forces are deployed for the maintenance of peace and order in the region. The ongoing peace agreement between the Kuki insurgents and the State was also initiated by the army.

Such an approach writs large of an interventionist policy in an alien space. While not questioning the merit of such approaches, rather the very premise of treating the people of the region as aliens is itself questionable. Equally important is the need to alter the differentiation among the citizens. That is to proceed with the

spirit of accommodating multiculturalism and plural identities in the country. The normative role of the Indian state thus lies in initiating a dialogue intervention with the communities and protesting groups. The role of the state in these dialogues is both as a contender as well an arbiter. The shift in the role will depend on the context in which the state is located. But one mode of dialogue is categorically undesirable in conflict situations of a complex kind.

The bilateral dialogue between the Indian state and one or other protesting groups is highly individualized and limited. It must be seen that conflicts are at times multi-cornered. The role of the Indian state as arbiter ought to involve all the warring groups in such a case. The dialogue has to be then multi-lateral. The absence of such a mode of dialogue creates room for doubt in the mind of those who keenly observe the moves of the Indian state.

A conflict-less society or a state is a utopia, but a society or a state with minimal conflict can be envisaged and strived for. The past achievements of groups, and how such achievements are gained, cannot remain the same anymore. The world has changed, technology has had its newer inventions, state and politics have taken new shapes and forms, and so has our perception of society and individuals have gone major shifts. Many of our dreams associated with the assertion of identity should cohere with global changes and universalisable values. It is in this context that the ethnic elites have to see beyond the narrow ethicist worldview of my territory, my identity.

Otherwise, we shall remain victims of the petty divisive politics of inventing as many shades of others within its own habited world. A dialogue among conflicting groups or possible conflicting groups is the most durable solution to overcome conflict. Two pre-requisite axioms have to be positioned: one, dialogue must presuppose equal partners, and two, dialogue must address the sharable discourse for which historically captured socio-political grounds have to be commonly and meaningfully addressed by both the conflicting parties. There is also a need to foster the estranged ethnic relations in the state.

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