

Understanding Conflict in Manipur: A Socio-Historical Perspective

Veronica Khangchian¹

Abstract

This paper intends to trace conflicts in Manipur that were prevalent during the pre-colonial (1759-1826) and colonial period (1891-1947). The numerous conflicts in Manipur where the people directed their grievances or hostility against a 'common enemy', also eventually manifested itself into violence and enmity amongst tribes and communities. In the beginning, the conflict was between the people of Manipur and its neighbouring state, Burma (Myanmar) which resulted in bringing the kingdom of Manipur under the Burmese rule for seven years (1819-1825) which is known in Manipur's history as, 'Seven Years Devastation'. The aftermath of this war with the court of Ava (Myanmar) was followed by even more uprisings and revolts against the colonial power. After the defeat of the Manipuris in the Anglo-Manipur war of 1891, an administrative system known as the 'Native Rule' started and the administration of Manipur was controlled through a British representative. The seeds of non-cooperation being sown between tribes; the beginning of hill-valley divide; along with other factors, the past conflicts provide us 'background knowledge' for understanding complex contemporary ethnic relations in Manipur.

Historical Background of Conflict

With the beginning of the involvement of external powers (Burmese and British) in the politics of Manipur, political consciousness which gradually developed amongst the people of the State particularly in response to the oppressive British policies turned significantly into ethnic conflicts over time. The ethnic identity thus recognised, gradually gave way to conflict among the various communities, against a backdrop of significant poverty and inequalities, dramatically influencing the economy and society. (Khangchian, 2017). In Manipur, almost all the communities or tribes have their 'armed outfits' with their respective demands as well as overlapping goals. In contemporary Manipur, ethnicity and consequently 'nationality' became the 'master identity' in the context of the various communities particularly the Nagas, Meiteis and the Kukis. Neither religion nor race nor

¹Veronica Khangchian (verokarujiliu@gmail.com) Assistant Professor at Department of Conflict Management and Peace Initiative at Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong

class is exclusively relevant to nation formation in the context of Manipur and that the minimum condition for a nation to emerge and exist are only 'common homeland' (ibid: 319). In this context, Eriksen's (1993), argument of looking at the majority of nationalisms as ethnic in character whose ethnic identification claims a collective historical destiny for the polity and/or its ethnically defined members proves relevant.

Ethnicity is interactional, a product of conquest, colonization and immigration and the consequent disengagement between culture and territory (Oommen; 1997). This can be seen in the history of Manipur where external powers or factors have played an important role; the Burmese and the British in handling the affairs of the state. British policies indeed laid the foundation of ethnic conflicts in the post-colonial Manipur who were otherwise more concerned about issues such as inter-village feuds.

The well-documented period of history of Manipur starts from the middle of the 18th century with the entry of the British in the politics of Manipur. It re-shaped the Manipuri society through its journey to the modern age. At the outset, the Raja Jai Singh *alias* Bhagyachandra (1759-98) invited the British by entering into alliance at Chittagong in 1772, primarily for help in their fight against the neighbouring Burmese kingdom, which had become very powerful and was threatening them. (Sharma, 2000). Historically, the state retained its independent political identity well after the British India had consolidated its position in the region. Manipur had consistently maintained a belligerent approach towards Myanmar (Ava). The resultant wars highlighted plunder, devastation of the land and dissemination of the population. The first recorded instance of armed Burmese incursions and wars dates back to 1562 and continued well up to the early part of the 19th century (Gopalakrishna, 1995).

From the middle of the 18th century onwards the history of Manipur is marked with palace intrigues, treachery and deceit due to greed and ambitiousness of the members of the ruling family to capture the throne. Frequent internal domestic quarrels in the Manipur royal family gradually weakened the strength of the kingdom. It was rendered vulnerable to the attacks by the Burmese who were seeking an opportunity to avenge their defeat during the regime of Garib Nawaz (1909-48) (Sharma *opcit*, 2000). Mackenzie writes: "The early history of Manipur was barbarous to the extreme. It was constantly marked by constant raids of the Manipuris into Burma and of Burmese into Manipur, but also by internal wars of the most savaged and revolting type, in which sons murdered fathers and brothers murdered brothers, without a single trait of heroism to relieve the dark scene of blood and treachery" (Mackenzie, 1884, 2001).

The period between 1754 and 1824 saw the state entrapped in power struggle.

The loosening of Manipur's control over Imphal valley and the surrounding hilly periphery along with the decline of the Ahoms in the Brahmaputra valley became the threshold point in the regional activity. It signaled the significance of intervention and the role of extra regional powers. This transformed the traditional relationship and equations and introduced elements that encouraged potential destabilization tendencies. Revival of Ava-Burma's forward policy in 1750s was important as this power began to expand southwards to incorporate with the Arakan and the coastal regions and then towards the west in Manipur. They penetrated Imphal valley and devastated the territory. This expansion coincides with the British East India Company expansion in the Indian sub-continent. (Gopalakrishna, 1995). It was obvious that the British were ambitious to promote their influence and control wider areas of the sub-continent. They were keen in the northeast region first, to use the land route through this region for trade with China and secondly, to curb the increasing influence of the Burmese who had intruded into a large area of Assam and were challenging the supremacy of the British regime (Sharma, 2000). The frequent war of attrition between Manipur and Burma and the former seeking the company's assistance to repel were all-conducive for the power in the west to establish its presence in this part of the region. The Burmese expansion in the beginning of the 19th century, the internecine power struggle, decline of the Ahoms in Assam Valley and the inability of Manipur to check the Myanmar expansion all combined to give prominence to the destabilization tendencies in the region.

In 1819, the Burmese force invaded and occupied Manipur. A powerful Burmese army under the command of General MingiMahaBandula routed, defeated and ravaged the Manipuris forcing King Margit Singh and his supporters to flee to Cachar. A large portion of the population after having been vanquished were unable to bear the torture and harassment by foreign invaders fled to Cachar, marking the dark period in the history of this once tiny independent kingdom (Tarat, 2003). During this period the history, the population of Manipur was reduced to less than half due to fleeing or massacre of people by the Burmese forces. In such invasion the Burmese forces used to capture people from Manipur and take them to Burmese territory and employ them as labor force. The Burmese forces were notorious for brutality and massacre of civil population of their enemies during their invasion. They appear to be following an old Burmese saying, "*Chupenkukchungoumachane*", which means, when you cut Chupen (a wild thorny plant), never leave the stem behind. The Burmese had also branded the Manipuri forces equally notorious in this regard. (Sharma, 2000).

From 1819 to 1825 was the period of devastation. During this period the Burmese also invaded the various parts of the northeast and put their puppet ruler at the throne of Manipur, bringing the kingdom under their rule for seven years (1819-1825), which came to be known in Manipur's history as 'seven years devastation'

(*chahitaretkhuntakpain* Manipuri) (Tarapot,2003). The Burmese then entered Assam and further invaded Cachar posing a serious threat to the British paramountcy in the northeast region. Such widespread invasions by the Burmese in this area forced the British to directly involved themselves and encounter the advancing Burmese forces. The westward expansion also involved the inhabitants of the hill and the mountain section of the region that supported one or the other contenders. It was this situation that introduced the European element in the regional politics. (Gopalakrishna, 1995)

Finally, in 1825, a Manipuri prince Gambhir Singh supported by the British forces pushed out the Burmese forces from Imphal and further chased them to vacate Kabow valley (highland valley in northern Burma (Myanmar), Western Sagaing division). According to historical account, the British found that Prince Gambhir Singh, the youngest son of Raja Bhagyachandra (Jai Singh) was bold, brave and a courageous fighter who could prove useful to them against the Burmese. They decided to give him the support to raise a contingent of army at Sylhet. (Sharma, 2000). As Burmese decided to strengthen its grip, more reinforcements arrived in Manipur sometime in November 1820. While the state was in turmoil and chaos with Burmese forces ransacking, ravaging and devastating the country, Ghambir Singh with whom the British government had negotiated an agreement, raised among his supporters a body of 500 men which was raised to 2000 in 1825. They contributed to the British troops in driving out the Burmese forces from Cachar. It was paid, accounted and supplied with ammunition by the British government. (Mackenzie,1884,2001). Ghambhir Singh marched from Sylhet on 17th May 1825 accompanied by British officer Lieutenant Pemberton and reached western limits of the valley of Manipur on the 10th June 1825. By then, the Burmese forces had fled from the valley and thus Manipur territory was retrieved from the Burmese possession. Later in a second campaign during December 1825 and January 1826, Gambhir Singh with the help of the British forces pushed out Burmese from the Kabow valley also (Sharma, 2000).

The British forces advanced further, occupied Yandaboo only 25 kms from Ava, the capital of Burma. As the chances of defense diminished, the war came to a close by the treaty of Yandaboo signed on 24th February 1826. Under the treaty the British and the Burmese agreed for 'perpetual peace and friendship', with the king of Ava (Burma) renouncing "all claims upon and will abstain from all future interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies and also with the continuous petty states of Cachar and Jaintia". (Tarapot,2003). The treaty also recognized Gambhir Singh as Maharaja of Manipur. With this treaty the open conflict between Manipur and Burma ended for all times to come.

The British Influence

After freedom from the Burmese possession, although Manipur remained an independent state, it functioned under stifling British influence, which they exercised through their excessive 'Political Agents'. According to the statistical account of Manipur by a former British official, Robert Brown, on the conclusion of the Burmese war by the treaty of the Yandaboo in 1826, Manipur was declared independent. Thus Manipur restored her independent kingdom after the Yandaboo treaty. (Tarapot, 2003).

The British influence and interference is evident from the manner in which the British made over vast forest area of Kabow valley to the Burmese king of Ava in 1834, without obtaining consent of Raja Gambhir Singh. The Kabow valley, a rich agricultural tract lying between the present eastern border of Manipur and the Chindwin (Ningthee) river, or more narrowly defined 1200sq. km strip of territory, was the principal bone of contention between Manipuri rulers and the court of Ava, having been with Manipur of and on from the first half of the 15th century. (Verghese, 1996). The British kept their imperial interest foremost while sacrificing Kabow valley in favor of the Burmese king. They were primarily guided by the desire to avoid any future war with Burma and second they intended to seek favor from the Burmese government to allow them use their sea-port at Pegu and Shapuree. In lieu of this loss, the Raja of Manipur was given a monthly "stipend" by the British (Verghese, 1996). The Kabow valley which was considered as the traditional and national frontier and by location in the predominantly hill and mountain region was economically very important and this loss of the valley was etched in the psyche of the population of Manipur. This then forms one of the repeated claims of the insurgents in Manipur today. (Gopalakrishna, 1995).

Till the effective British consolidation of the Northeastern region was achieved, Manipur was supervising the intermediary territories occupied by the Naga Confederation of Tribes. Right from the early part of the 1870s, colonial administration gradually extended their political control and administration and this was completed with the annexation of upper Burma in 1889. This coincided with the worsening of relations between British India and Manipur. This formally led to the Anglo Manipur war of 1891. (Gopalakrishna, 1995). The Manipuris lost the two successive battles of Thoubal on 8th April 1891 and the final battle at Khongjom on 26th April 1891. Further, on 26th April 1891, the British forces reached Imphal and on 27th April 1891 morning, the flag of the Raja of Manipur was pulled down from Kangla fort and the Union flag was hoisted. The Kangla fort was then occupied by the British forces and was converted into a British cantonment. In this way the British colonial regime annexed Manipur. The independence and sovereignty of Manipur was lost forever and it became a part of the British colonial rule.

After annexation, the British decided to keep Manipur in the fold of their control in the form of an administrative system known as the 'Native Rule'. Under it, a suitable king was placed on the throne with limited powers and the administration controlled through the British representation.

Uprisings During British 'Native Rule'

Revolts and rebellions have taken place in Manipur in the 20th century at almost regular intervals. Such anti-British tribal uprisings, like the Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919), the Zeliangrong Naga Uprising (1930-32) and the anti-feudal and anti-monopolist *Nupilan*, the great women's agitation of the 1939-40 broke out in the colonial period. (Kabui, 1984).

The period (1891-1907) was well utilized for introducing several changes in the form of administrative reforms in the state. During this period, the system of 'Lallup', under which every adult male of the state was required to work for the king for ten days every month without remuneration, was abolished (Sharma, 2000). Despite the abolition of slavery or 'Lallup' system, the British rule was unwelcomed and the people were hostile to it in the beginning. (Tarapot, 2003)

Raja Churachand was handed over the charge of the state on May 1907. A new system of rule was introduced by the British government in which the Raja was made the president of Manipur Durbar consisting of the other members including a British officer to function as Vice president. The administration was carried out mainly by the 'Manipur State Durbar' (MSD) formed under the 'Rules for the General Administration of the State' (RFGAS). In a strategic move, the administration of the hills of Manipur inhabited by the Naga, Kuki and other tribes was separated from the valley and was kept under the charge of the Vice President of Darbar leaving little scope for Raja to interfere in its administration. This new arrangement was made with reasoning that the people of the hill tribes were different from the valley-based Manipuris and were having entirely different customs and languages. This change in the administrative system of Manipur created a deep-rooted alienation between the people of valley and the hills which widened with the passage of time (Sharma, 2000). Placing of hill and valley under different sections of the RFGAS thus created a chasm among its inhabitants after the state came under the native rule.

The Kuki Immigration

The Kukis and the Nagas of Manipur share a bloody history of ethnic conflict, reaching deep into the British colonial era, and beyond. The animus was widely manifested through the 1990s (1992-1997), when over 1,000 people were killed in Kuki-Naga clashes in the Hill Districts of the state. The Nagas believed that they had the right over the land, as they were the original settlers in the Manipur

Hills, while the Kukis migrated into the region after they were driven out from Myanmar's Chin Hills, their ancestral land, in the 19th century. Many a time in the past, these conflicts have been played out on the State's highways, affecting thousands of people. The economic blockade has, in fact, become part of the 'culture' of the State.(Khangchian, 2011)

The Kuki exodus and their settlement in Manipur, North Cachar Hills and Naga Hills was a phenomenon of great economic, social and political importance in the nineteenth century. The kukis moved into the Naga areas in the after the British conquest. There were a large number of Kuki raids on the Naga villages leading to death and destruction. But the British political agents and the Maharaja of Manipur or his Darbar followed a policy of non-interference, a biased policy of neutrality toward the Naga Kuki feuds. Taking advantage of this attitude of neutrality, the Kukis moved into and established many villages in Manipur Hills before their rebellion. This policy of leniency and accommodation followed by the British in the nineteenth century was contrary to the aggressive policy followed by them towards the Nagas and Lushais (Mizos) as also towards the Kamhao and Paite and their chiefs (Kamei, 2004).

The problem was that of land which was vast and used by both Nagas and the Kukis, but the Kuki chiefs sent out many small batches of immigrants in different villages of the Nagas, in whose vicinity they established small settlements which were given recognition by the state authorities. As long as there were enough land, there was no problem, but the organized Kuki penetration caused the alienation of the Naga community land- which was greatly resented by the Nagas (Kamei, 2004). During that time, there was no tribal solidarity of the Zeliangrong people nor was there organized resistance. The Zeliangrong villages were more concerned with inter-village feuds than resisting the Kuki immigration, though there was a feeling of apathy towards the Kukis.

The Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919)

The Kuki Rebellion was a widely studied historical event both by the British official writers and the historians including the scholars of the country. Colonel L.W Shakespeare's *A History of the Assam Rifles* (1929) gives the account of the campaign against the rebels. Colonel Shakespeare was the Deputy Inspector General of the Assam rifles and was a participant in the Kuki punitive measures which were regarded as part of the World War 1. Sir Robert Reid's *History of the Frontier areas bordering Assam (1883-1941)* gives a comprehensive picture of the political and administrative aspects of the rebellion including the inquiry report of Dr. J.H Hutton who was appointed to examine why the Kukis rebelled. In the post-independence period, historians like J. Roy, R.K Jhalajit Singh and R.K Sanahal Singh deal with the event as anti-British and an imperial movement. An

attempt is made by K. Kipgen in his 'ThadouKukis, their history and culture', to give a historical interpretation of the Kuki rebellion.

The Kuki rebellion is undoubtedly a great watershed in the history of Manipur. Though short-lived, it successfully exposed the shallowness of the British control over the hill territory of Manipur. Prompted by the urgency of the First World War, the state authority donated Rs, 13,400 as war loan. In addition to this the Manipur labour corps was raised and 2000 Nagas and Kukis were recruited and sent much against their will to France in May, 1917. They were sent as laborers for digging trenches, carrying loads and building base camps. The proximate cause of the rebellion was the objection of the Kuki chief in allowing their subjects to be sent to war fronts with the labor corps, which had been raised earlier. Driven by the urgency of the task, Higgins, the Political Agent, proceeded to the hills in September 1917 to meet a deputation of chiefs declined to give coolies, but offered to give money instead. (Lal Dena, 1991) Frustrated with the outcome of the meeting, Higgins flatly told the chiefs that they had to either supply recruits within a fixed period or to submit to punishment. As a challenge to this stern warning, Ngulkhup, chief of Mombi, sent around message the Kuki inhabiting villages that if they sent coolies their village would be burned and their women and children be killed. Arrogant as he was, Higgins took this as an issue of prestige and proceeded to Mombi to punish the reluctant chief on 17th October 1917. On failure to arrest the chief he burned the village to the ground (Lal Dena, 1991).

Meanwhile, ChingakhambaSanajaoba Singh, who lived with some disciples at Kuki village near Moirang and who was believed to possess some supernatural power joined with the hands of Kuki people and played an important role for the outbreak of this rebellion. He spread among the Kukis that the power of the British government had been reduced and was coming to an end and wanted his people to be killed at the same place with them (Thongkhochon, as cited in Joy Kumar Singh, 1991). Then he went to Wakha, called ten Kuki villages and looted the forest toll station at Ithai on December 19, 1917 (Lal Dena,1991). This attacked is considered 'as a mark of open declaration of war against the colonial authority'.

The outbreak of the Kuki rebellion in the year 1917 is closely related with the political, economic and administrative changes which were introduced gradually since the occupation of the country by the British in 1891. Since then, the Kuki people began to face a lot of hardships in the hands of the alien ruler. So the grievances faced by them under the colonial rule were mainly responsible for the outbreak of the movement (Kigpen, as cited in Joy Kumar Singh, 1991). Their secured economic relations with the people of the plain areas were disrupted by the colonial policies which also got worsened due to their inter-village feuds and warfare.

The introduction of the hill house tax at the rate of Rs. 3 per house per annum gave a severe blow to the economy of the Kuki people. This imposition was a great burden to them. It mentioned that ‘persuading a chief to pay one’s own house tax by offering him a jar or *ju* record, the tribesmen had contributed about Rs. 70,000 a year in the form of house tax but in return received nothing, either financially or in development works’(Singh, 1991).

Another factor for the rebellion or the long-standing cause of the rebellion was the administrative policy of the British authority towards the hill people. The hill territory which formed the ninth-tenth of the total area of Manipur with practically no roads, and in most part consisted only of jungle tracts passable only by travelers on foot, had been placed in the hands of the vice president of the MSD who was a British I.C.S officer. Separate rulers for the administration of the hill tribes were framed but adequate provision for the administration of the hill areas was not mentioned in the said rules. This officer who was already burdened with his duty in the durbar failed to keep himself in touch with the people in the hills. The ultimate cause was the attempt made in the past to administer a vast tract of hills with a wholly inadequate staff which resulted in the British officers getting out of touch with the hill tribes and being unable to take control over the situation when the crisis arose or either to appreciate the gravity of the situation or to take effective steps to ally the panic (Lal Dena, 1991). This led to the growth of a serious lack of understanding between the rulers and the ruled. This administrative pattern was the main character of the British colonial administration (Lal Dena, 1984). The contact between the hill and British administration was made through an official known as *Lambu* whose position in the Pre-Colonial period was not more than a peon. They felt that the *Lambu*’s, who are not more than a peon in the pre-British period, treated them as their subordinate. Therefore, those chiefs who always tried to maintain an equal status resented the concept of *Lambu*’s superiority.

The *pothang* system or forced labor system was another cause for the discontentment of the Kukis. This system was already abolished in the year 1913 but the same practice was still going on in the hill areas. According to this system, the concerned villagers had to carry baggage of the government officials, whenever they visited their village. In order to remove this unbearable harassment, the people made a number of petitions to the government in the year 1915-1916 and requested the authorities to exempt from this system. (Singh, 1991). Then came the policy of the labor recruitment. The village chiefs thought that the recruitment of labor forces from the hill areas itself was a mark given to their tribe by the authority. Therefore, to keep their identity the Kuki people declared war against the British (Singh, 1991).

Though the labor recruitment was the immediate cause of the conflict between the British and the Kukis, we see that there are other causes which led them to revolt.

The British were not the only forces whom the Kukis fought with during the rebellion. Up to March 1918, the activities of the rebellion were directed solely against the British authority. After this they committed a series of outrages against the surrounding neighboring villages. In three months they raided 19 villages and it brought the loss of 193 persons and 21 missing (Administrative Reports of Manipur 1919, in Singh, 1991). The causes of the raids were old feuds and other reasons were that the villages either had refused to help the rebels or suspected of having helped the government. In October 1918, 20 Kabui Naga villages were raided and burned with a loss of more than 85 lives. Tingdong mostly carried out these raids, chief of Layang who declared war on the Kabui Nagas in retaliation against the latter's raid on the Natjang Kuki village. No wonder the Kabui Rebellion of 1930-32 was directed both against the British and the Kukis (Lal Dena, 1991). The attack on the Kabui Nagas was the opening of new front of the Kuki Rebellion. The creation of a new enemy was rightly regarded as the unwise act of the rebels. This situation had compelled them to fight a number of lonesome battles against the British. Thus, the Kuki rebel leaders unnecessarily opened many fronts against them (Singh, 1991).

The Zeliangrong Movement (1930-1932)

The Zeliangrong movement was a counter product of British colonial rule and their apathy towards the Zeliangrong Naga tribes of Manipur during and after the Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919). This movement covered three tribes-Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei; the prefixes of each of these names were taken and combined into one name, Zeliangrong (Ze+Liang+Rong). The Zemeis and the Liangmeis were sometimes known as the Kacha Nagas and the Rongmeis as kabui (Kabui, 2006)

The movement started by a Kabuileader named Jadonang and continued by 'Rani' Gaidinliu has been described by the British officials and historians by different names. Robert Reid, a Governor of Assam called this phenomenon of Jadonang and Gaidinliu as the rebellion of the Kabui and Kacha Naga (Reid, 1942). A historian described it as a Kabui rebellion because the leaders of the rebellion belong to the Kabui (Roy, 1958). The chief secretary of Assam Mr. Crograve called it a Naga Raj movement based on political Agent J.C Higgins' telegram that a Kabui Naga Raj was proclaimed at Kambiron (a village in Tamenglong district). Another writer describes it as a Naga struggle against the British (Yunuo, 1982). Yet another certain historian prefer to adopt the term, "The Zeliangrong Revolt" to mean the momentous and historic movement of the Zeliangrong people with significant impact on the social and political development of the people (Kamei, 2004). The movement covered the Zeliangrongs of the state of Manipur and the province of Assam.

The Zeliangrong movement in the early phase is a classic example of a millenarian

movement. It initially was purely a non-violent movement launched under the dynamic leadership of Jadonang, a young Kabui Naga of Manipur. The outbreak of this movement was renaissance of the Zeliangrong people because it has touched almost all aspects of the collective life of this tribe. (Singh, 1991). On the other side, of it was an alien challenge posed by the British colonial rule and apathy towards the Zeliangrong people during and after the Kuki rebellion of 1917-1919. Gangmumei Kabui writes; “The Kukis who had migrated into Manipur in the 18th century had forcibly sometimes with government connivance occupied the land in the Zeliangrong” (Kabui, 2006)

The movement was carried out through the several stages with different objectives. At the first part, this movement was carried out on the line of a millenarian with an objective to generate the old religion of the Zeliangrong people against formidable approaching force of Christianity. Then in the second stage, it assumed a radical political overtone, the reason for this second step was closely related with the negative attitude of the colonial British rulers towards the Zeliangrong people. They strongly felt that during that during the movement of 1917-1919, they suffered a lot at the hands of the rebels. At that time, they had a strong loyalty to the ruler and hoped that the authorities would extend their protection, but contrary to their expectation, they did not receive any type of protection from the British government despite their loyalty to the colonial authorities. So it created a great disappointment among the people. And after this incident, their mind was highly colored by anti-imperialist and anti-colonial tendencies and the character of the movement also became more militant and political. Then gradually they became more concerned to the question of their self-identity. Later on, the objective of the movement was inclined mainly to the cause of social unity, cultural resurgence, economic upliftment and political integration.

The root cause of the revolt lay in the oppressive nature of the colonial British rule, the hill house taxes, which the poor people could not pay annually, as it was a back breaking colonial taxation. From the very beginning, the Zeliangrong people did not welcome the British rule. They did not pay the house tax of three rupees willingly. It was forcibly imposed and collected by the British government. Though they had declared that they have abolished the feudal service called *Lallup* in Manipur, the forced labour was imposed on the Zeliangrong people. They had to render free labour for repair and maintenance of the government road, the Cachar road from Bishnupur to Jirighat. It was a continuation of the feudal service imposed by the rulers of Manipur. Then the British imposed a levy on the villages to meet the cost of local hospitality for the officials touring the hill villages and carry the baggage of the officials. The system was known as Pothang Begari, “forced labour” and Pothang Senkhai, monetary levies for the feeding of the Government officials. The people detested the house taxes, and despised the forced labour and the monetary subscription.

The British rule at the village level was the rule of the *lambus*, road muhorris and the peons. Their attitude and the action were very oppressive. The oppressive rule of the *lambus* was responsible for the alienation of the common people from the Government. The British partiality towards the Kukis was quiet well known, so also the Meitei friendliness towards the Kuki immigrants. The Kuki settlement in the Naga areas was resented and not wanted by the Zeliangrong people because the real conflict lay in the possession of the land. The land and the forest, which were once used by the Zeliangrong people alone, had to be shared by two, the original settlers and the migrant settlers. The productivity of the land also decreased, and the rotation of the Jhum cycle also decreased. Moreover, the Kuki polity controlled by their hereditary chiefs was autocratic. Their attachment was transitory while the Zeliangrong attachment to their village and land was deep, strong and emotional. There was not enough land for the two. The Zeliangrong Nagas blamed the Meitei kings and the British for this serious land question. The agriculture was also unpredictable and unproductive. (Kamei, 2004)

Another writer (Bimola Devi as cited in Tarapot,2004) puts it, “the Kukis encroached on their lands and the British did not prevent this although they collected the house tax subject to the condition that the British would protect the interest of the Kabui Nagas”. During the Kuki Rebellion, the Kuki rebels attacked the Zeliangrong villages, killed men, women and children, and resorted to head hunting. The Zeliangrong Nagas expected the British authorities to give them protection. The Manipur Government not only failed to give them protection but also ignored the request of the people for protection. Only when the Assam Rifles took up a full-scale campaign, the Kuki rebels were defeated in the Zeliangrong Area.

Jadonang knew that the Zeme, Liangmai, and Rongmei tribes of Tamenglong were not united. He found that the people were deeply rooted in the social and religious orthodoxy while Christianity had come to the hill and started challenging the traditional religion, its old values and ideals of the Zeliangrong people. Being religious minded, he wanted to save the religion from the onslaught of the alien religion and reform and revitalize the religion of his people (Kabui,1991). But they were quite helpless to check this silent invasion of the Christian religion, because at that time there was no social or political unity among them. With this understanding he made a successful attempt to bring the three different groups of people together which was latter on framed under ‘Zeliangrong’ in the mid-forties (Joy Kumar Singh,1991).

The Naga Raj: *Makam Gwangdi*

The concept of the “Raj” was new to the Nagas. It was developed out of the

popular slogan “*Makammeiru Gwang Tupuni*” (Makam people will be the rulers, king) given by Jadonang. The idea of the Makam Gwangdi (Makam Kingdom) was a “fresh idea and attractive to his people who had been oppressed, persecuted and victimized by the alien rulers. This political ideology made Jadonang clash with the colonial authorities. And the British called it a ‘Naga Raj’. The Makam Gwangdi was romanticized by Ursula Graham Bower as ‘a sort of Naga heaven, ‘a millennium on earth where there would be prosperity, no wants and no suffering (Bower, 2003). Jadonang insisted that people should worship God so that “the villages might have prosperity. This aspect of the Jadonang movement has led the sociologist and historians to describe it a tribal millenarian movement (Singh, 2006). Jadonang was trying to achieve the political integration of his people under a “kingdom” after the attainment of the social unity through religion. His movement was not directed against the Christians. It was more an imaginary fear of the Christians rather than the real danger. It was also not anti Kuki. “The Meiteis have their King, the Indian! (Tajongmei) have their rulers, why should we not have our own King? The white men and we are all human beings. Why should we be afraid of them? All men are equal. We are blessed people. Our days have come. We shall pray and worship God. With his grace we shall become the rulers. He was regarded by his followers as the messiah (deliverer), for whom they were waiting for. No one knew what the tradition of the Messiah (deliverer). But it was a popular feeling engrossed in the psyche of the Zeliangrong, a psycho social phenomenon of a “mass fantasy to escape the suffering of the contemporary social, economic and political hardship (Kamei, 2004).

By 1929, his movement had gained momentum and took a semi-military, semi-religious and political character. In 1930, Jadonang plan had been well informed to all the villages. What he promised was a ‘Naga Heaven’ a ‘Millennium on Earth’ where there would be no want; it would be a land plenty (Kabui,1991). He repeatedly declared that ‘the days of the Kabuis and Kacha Nagas had come at least and the days of the government, Manipur and Kuki are over. He instructed that the villages should stop paying taxes to the government; they should disobey the unjust laws of the state (his program of action coincides with the civil disobedience movement in India). Then, the Raj would be proclaimed; the people should pay tributes to the new kingdom; then all able-bodied men should be ready to fight against all foreigners who would be driven out (Kabui,1991).

With the movement gaining popularity, Kukis settling either in North-West of Manipur, Cachar or in Nagaland became panic. Frequent gatherings of the Nagas at several villages also disrupted the cultivation of Kukis who on several occasions abandoned their fields, stayed away from cutting crops and took refuge in jungles for days for fear of attacks. The Kukis fear the Nagasmight do the same thing they did on them before or during the Kuki rebellion.

As the movement spread to interior smaller villages, various Naga villages, which had earlier differences of opinion and were locked in tribal warfare made peace with one another. To some extent Jadonang brought together mutually quarrelling and independent Kacha Naga villages (Tarapot,2003).

After the execution of Jadonang by the British, the leadership of the movement was taken over by Gaidinliu, a Kabui Naga girl and a close associate of Jadonang. Under her leadership, the activities of the movement were further spread over a large area. The character of the movement became more militant (Singh,1991). Indeed her only desire was to materialize the objectives of her master Jadonang. Gaidinliu told the people, "We are free people, the white men should not rule over us, we will not pay house tax to the government, we will not obey their unjust laws like forced labor and compulsory portorage subscription" (Kabui, 1991). Her political program was the translation of Jadonang's idea. It is mentioned that she told the people that the British would soon be driven out by Gandhi, and she began to praise him. Thus she made an attempt to bring the Zeliangrong movement as a part of the Indian national movement (Singh,1991).Gaidinliu went underground to direct the rebellion. The people gave money for the cause and a large number of fighting men volunteered for the cause and for the fight against the British (Kabui,1991). The British government then decided to suppress the rebellion and capture Gaidinliu which they succeeded on 17 October 1932 through secret information about her activities and movements. After her arrest, some of her followers tried to sustain the movement. But they were not able to carry the movement. As a result of this, the vigor and intensity was completely lost. Latter on this movement was again activated in an institutionalized way by forming the KabuiSamity in 1934, the Kabui Naga Association in 1946, the Zeliangrong Council in 1947, etc.Zeliangrong religious ideas were later crystallized in the Heraka cult led by 'Rani' Gaidinliu (Kabui, 2006)

In the more recent period, we also see the formation of armed group, the Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) which vowed to carry forward, the ideals of their leaders Jadonang and 'Rani'Gaidinliu in 'protection' of their tribe (Khangchian,2011).

The Zeliangrong movement was indeed an epoch making event in the colonial history of Manipur. The outbreak of this movement may be marked in the beginning of the struggle for the political emancipation from the hands of the British imperialist. Apart from this, it also played a great role for bringing a unity among the different groups the people. This movement had completely wiped out all the differences among the different villages and inter-village feuds and rivalries and brought sense of solidarity and unity among the Zeliangrong people and helped the growth of national consciousness among the people (Singh, 1991).

The Women's Agitation of 1939-41

The Women's agitation is considered a serious agrarian crisis, which encouraged widespread protest movements in the state. This agitation is known as *Second Nupilan*, the first one being in 1904 which was against the British Policy of 'forced labor' imposed on Manipuri male population. After the two tribal movements, the state witnessed a great mass movement against the colonial and feudal authority of the state. It was carried on solely by the women folk. It broke out in 12th December 1939 (Singh, 1991). The nature of the movement in Manipur emphasized for the upliftment of the economic condition of the state and thus the leaders of the movement challenged the colonial economic policy of the British.

Khwairamband bazaar, located in the British reserved area, was the center of the economic activities of the state. Most of the traders had their godowns and shops at the Sadar and Maxwell bazaar located in this complex. Inside the market complex, there were a large number of women vendors dealing in varieties of local products (Singh, 1998). The most important trade/industry of the women of Manipur was the rice trading business where their involvement was enormous (Singh, 1991).

In regard to the role of the women of Manipur, some writers tried to analyze it from two different directions. One was the pre-occupation period, and another was the post-occupation period. In comparison with the post occupation period, the women of Manipur got better advantageous position in the field of their economic activities. During this period in Manipur, there emerged a strong conscience for having a self-sufficiency in the economy and every household became a great center of production. The responsibilities for these economic activities were entirely on the shoulders of the women folk of the state. But from the year 1891, i.e. after the introduction of direct colonial rule, the whole system was changed. Very soon they began to exploit the whole traditional economy of the state in order to get advantageous position in the introduction of their colonial system (George Rudenko in Singh, 1991).

In order to implement their desire very successfully, they utilize the service of the big traders from outside the state. This new economic trend degraded the importance of the women folk of Manipur in the economic life of the state. Then the outside traders gradually began to capture the monopoly of trade, which at one time was under the management of the women folk (Singh, 1991). The British authority introduced a free trade policy, which ultimately gave a great economic benefit to the colonial economic policy; the British officials began to control the trade and industry of the state.

Till the year 1925, the export policy began to assume a peculiar character and

the Marwari traders began to take over the monopoly of export industry from the local traders (Singh,1991). The immediate cause for the outbreak of women's movement was directly related with prevailing export policy of the authority and milling activities of the Marwari traders. The serious economic problem created by the colonial authority was further intensified by the shortage of food grains. It was caused by several factors. Excessive rains during July–August 1939 severely damaged the standing crops in various parts of the valley. Again heavy rain coupled with a severe hailstorm in mid-November adversely affected the harvest of the 'early paddy' and the incoming grain was less than what was expected. The Marwaris took advantage of the situation and bought up the entire paddy that they could find (C. Gimson in Singh,1998). Realizing the unusual market situation, the MSD passed a resolution on 13th September, banning the export of rice. But the MSD, on 25th September, reversed the former order and allowed the export of rice to Kohima(Nagaland) civil station and further liberalized the export policy on 24th November (N. Lokendra Singh,1998). The *imas*(mothers)particularly the grain dealers and paddy huskers, many of whom were thrown out of their jobs, were very much disturbed. With the installation of rice mills, the rice dealers too, who were mostly females, lost their jobs because both the common people as well as the rice exporters started buying rice from the mill owners (Singh,1998).

According to Administrative Reports of Manipur on December 1939, one AribamChaobiton Devi from Tara Keithel, took the initiative of protest by organizing a small group of about four or five women of her own business circle and tried to stop the bullock carts which carried paddy for Marwari traders. The colonial authority regarded the outbreak of this movement as the most important event of the year event 1939. Some writers regarded this movement as a dividing line between the oppressive economic and administrative policies followed by the Maharaja and the political agent and the new Manipur emerged out of the *Nupilan* (Singh, 1991). The movement of women known as 'Nupilan' which had started to stop export of rice was later joined by other social leaders and organization. The character of this movement also changed as it was diverted towards the major political issues relating to the constitutional and administrative reforms in Manipur (Sharma, 2000).

Added to the existing woes of the state,from the year 1942–45, Manipur was completely under the smoke of the Second World War. The MSD, which was seriously considering the issue of certain basic administrative changes as a necessary response to the demands of the agitators, again got its attention diverted to the wartime mobilization works when the Japanese forces occupied the neighboring Burma and its invasion of Manipur was becoming almost certain. (Singh,1998).

Conclusion

Over the period of time, the nature of conflicts in Manipur have been transformed. Hostility toward a common force during the colonial period, have turned into war between 'its own' in contemporary Manipur. Conflict understood as between tribes is now shifted majorly to study of ethnic groups in the post-colonial period as also against the classical anthropologists' interests of focusing in single 'tribal societies'. Unity amongst kindred tribes was brought about leading to formation of ethnic groups. The question of ethnicity certainly is not proved redundant despite the 'modern social order', in the context of Manipur. Genesis of contemporary conflicts in Manipur, can be traced to the revolts during the colonial period that we have discussed. The origin of the widely known Naga-Kuki conflict particularly in the 90s and which lingered on till date can be traced to the period of kuki rebellion and the Zeliangrong movement against the British. The Zeliangrong Nagas were then unhappy about the lenient policies of the British in allowing the Kuki immigrants of Myanmar to settle in Naga Lands. In this context, we also saw in 2016, the creation of new districts (which include exclusive Kuki district) in Manipur in the wake of much protest by the United Naga Council who oppose the creation of new districts as 'it encroach the ancestral land of the Nagas'. Also, it would not be inappropriate to deduce that the 'insider' and 'outsider' issue has a long history which goes back to the women's agitation or *Nupilan* of 1939. In the light of all these, it can well be concluded that contemporary conflicts in Manipur has its origins in various colonial policies where ethnic consciousness and accordingly the struggles for 'rights' or more specifically of 'homeland' of each ethnic groups became even more pronounced in recent times.

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