

# Land Rights and Conflict in Manipur: A Critical Analysis

Ngaranngam Keishing

PhD Scholar, School of Development Studies, Ambedkar University Delhi (India)

---

## ARTICLE DETAILS

### Article History

Published Online: 13 March 2019

### Keywords

Manipur, Ethnic conflicts, Tribal, Land Alienation, Autonomy

### \*Corresponding Author

Email: ngaranngamk437[at]gmail.com

---

## ABSTRACT

For many years, Manipur has been in the throes of ethnic conflicts and violence. All these ethnic conflicts in one way or another related to disputes over land and resources. The hill areas- mainly dominated by the tribal communities and the valley areas- mostly dominated by the non-tribal have distinct land use and management systems. Each system has its own enforcement mechanism as well as codification of rules and norms. This diversity in property rights is considered by many social scientists as the main cause of conflict among different ethnic communities in the state. Ethnic conflicts in the state are not only rooted on the existing differences in land use and management between the hill and valley areas, but it is also a fall out of the systematic political manipulation by the politically dominant valley people to alienate tribals' land.

---

## 1. Introduction

Manipur, which is inhabited by different ethnic groups, has witnessed severe turmoil and ethnic conflicts<sup>1</sup> over the decade or so. All these ethnic conflicts in one way or another are believed to stem from the basic disputes over land and resources. The difference in land use and management system between the hill and valley areas not only increased the chances of ethnic divide but has been the centre stage of socio-economic and political contestation among the different ethnic communities in the state. The lack of a uniform land law between the hill and valley areas is seen by many social scientists as the main factor that created and fermented social tension among the different communities in the state (Shimray, 2009, Sharma, 2016, Kamei, 2017, Kipgen, 2018). In a state like Manipur, where there is a diverse social and topographic feature, ethnic conflicts, according to Shimray (2009) are often accompanied by systematic political manipulation of the ethnic population. In fact, out of 60 assembly seats, 40 seats are given to valley areas thereby enjoying an absolute majority in decision making (Panmei, 2010, Sharma, 2016). According to Kipgen (2018), the non-tribal who enjoy political dominant has been trying to control not only over the tribals' land and resources but even in the socio-economic realm as well. This paper argues that the various conflicts among the different ethnic communities in the state are not only rooted on the existing differences in land ownership and tenure system between the hill and the valley areas, but it is also a fallout of systematic political manipulation by the politically dominant valley people to alienate tribals' land using the existing political structure.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of the major ethnic conflicts that have taken place recently in the state include the Naga-Kuki (1992-97), Meitei-Pangan (1993) and Paite-Kuki (1997-98).

<sup>2</sup> As per 2011 census, the four valley districts namely- Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur- mainly dominated by non-tribal constitute only 9.97% of the total geographical area and accounts for 57.2% of the total population enjoys 40 Assembly seats out of 60, thus giving them overwhelming majority in decision making. While the five hill districts i.e. Chandel, Churachandpur, Senapati, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul which account for 90.03% of the total geographical area and

According to Sharma (2001), the history of India post independence is full with examples of exploitation, deprivation and marginalization of the tribal communities especially in the form of land alienation. Similarly, Xaxa (2005) argue that the problems faced by tribal communities during the colonial period in the form of loss of control over land and resources due to alienation of land to non-tribal has continued unabated in the post independence period. According to Verrier Elwin (1949) as quoted by Sharma (2001) "... the first cause of tribal depression is the loss of their land and forest. This had the effect so enervating the tribal organism that it has no interior resistance against infection by a score of other serious evils (p. 62)." Likewise, for the tribals' in Manipur, it is argue that the post-colonial regime has turned out to be more repressive in comparison with the colonial regime as the state government not only re-structured the socio-political structure but also failed to accommodate the existing traditional land use and management system of the tribals' communities which has been in practiced for many years (Kipgen, 2018). According to Yumnam (2014), the hesitant inter-group contests over power and particularly land and resources between the hill and valley people and even amongst the hill people (tribal) themselves using the ethnic fault line, further increases the notion of identity attachment among the different communities and shaped conditions for manifold ethnic contestation. And so, ethnic conflict in Manipur, whose main concern is over competing claims of over land and territory, is very much alive (Kipgen, 2013).

The Government of Manipur has made several attempts to change the law on land holding particular by amending the Manipur Land Revenue and land Reform Act of 1960 (Shimray, 2009, Panmei, 2010, Kamei, 2017, Kipgen, 2018). Such move of the state government have been met with stiff opposition from various tribals' organization as there has been a dialectical relationship between land and identity among the tribals' people of Manipur, beginning from the colonial period and continuing in the post-colonial period. According to Shimray (2001), such ethnic conflict or struggle against the

---

42.8% of the total population of the state is given only 20 Assembly seats, out of which one seat is de-reserved.

politically dominant and more powerful ethnic groups or communities have been a trend in Manipur. In fact, land for the tribal is not just a mere habitat or political boundary but it is the basis of socio-cultural and economic life of the people. Land and local environment particularly forest, remains as the most important physical possession of the tribals' that not only provides food security and livelihood but shaped the culture and identity of the people. In other words, the traditional knowledge of the tribal people, culture and economic activity are not only supportive but are intricately woven with the nature (particularly forest). And so, the renewed attempt made by the state government to change the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (MLR & LR) Act of 1960, not only re-opened hostilities and resentment among different ethnic groups in the state but also led to an increased assertion by the tribal communities for rights and control over land by ways of mobilization against tribals' land alienation by articulating greater political power in the form of autonomy. Such political ploy of the state government in general and by the politically dominant valley people in particular, to alienate tribals' land not only threatened the harmonious existence of the state but has widened the cleavages and increases the chances of ethnic conflicts between the different communities in the state.

## 2. Ethno-Demographic Profile

Manipur is a small state which lies in the north-easternmost part of the north east region of India. Geographically, Manipur is landlocked and has two distinct topographic features- the central valley also called as the Imphal valley and the hills surrounding it. Out of the total geographical area of 22,327 square kilometers, the valley region constitutes only an area of 2,238 square kilometers which is 10 percent of the total state area and the hill constitutes 20,089 square kilometers i.e. 90 percent of the total state area which is approximately 9 times the size of the valley area (Economic Survey, 2016-17, Govt. of Manipur). As per the 2011 census, the total population of Manipur was 28.6 lakhs, out of which the valley area shares 57.2 percent of the state total population whereas the hill areas account for 42.8 percent of the total population. Population of Manipur constitutes 6.24 percent of the total population of 8 (eight) north eastern states including Sikkim and 0.24 percent of the total population of India.

Even though, Manipur is a small state in term of geographical area, it manifests a diverse ethnic and topographical feature. Tribal communities<sup>3</sup> who mainly dominate 10 hill districts<sup>4</sup> of the state i.e. Senapati, Tamenglong, Churachandpur, Chandel, Ukhru, Kamjong, Noney, Kangpokpi, Tengnoupal and Pherzawl are broadly divided into Nagas and Kukis. The Nagas are again, divided into many sub-groups. In Manipur, there are eighteen Naga groups that basically dominate the hill districts of Ukhru, Kamjong, Noney, Chandel, Senapati and Tamenglong. On the

<sup>3</sup> There are about 37 tribal communities in Manipur, out of which 33 had been specified as Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution of India.

<sup>4</sup> Before 2016, there were only 5 hill districts. But 5 more hill districts were added as a result of the creation of seven new districts on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016 by bifurcating the existing 9 districts. Now, there are 10 hill districts in total.

other hand, the Kuki tribes are spread all over the hill districts with larger concentration in Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, Pherzawl and Senapati. Although, majority of the tribals' in Manipur follows Christianity, there are some sections of Naga tribes like Kabui/Rongmei who retain their traditional religions that were followed by their forefather. The 6 valley districts<sup>5</sup> i.e. Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Kakching and Jiribam are mostly inhabited by non-tribal (Meitei and Meitei-Muslims) where majority of the population follow Hinduism (mostly Vaishnavite) by discarding their traditional Sanamahi culture. The Meitei and Meitei-Muslims (also known as Meitei Pangals) not only occupy the fertile Imphal valley areas but they enjoy dominant position in the state's political, economic and administrative realm as well (Sharma, 2016).

## 3. Land Ownership Pattern- An Overview

During the colonial period, the British regime in Manipur imposed dual administration system- the hill and valley areas (Shimray, 2009). The Hills areas were under the direct administration of the British Crown through the President Manipur State Darbar (PMSD) and were taken care of by a British Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer. Unlike the hill areas, the maharaja (king) of Manipur controlled the valley areas. According to Guite (2000), before the application of any land laws in the valley areas of Manipur, the Raja (King) of Manipur has the complete control of all land within his territory from the early times and collected land revenue. Later, the Chin Hill Regulation (CHR) was applied to hill areas of Manipur, where a house tax of Rs. 3 per year per household was imposed. In 1947, the Assam Land Revenue and Land Regulation (ALR & LR) Act of 1886 was introduced as the Manipur State Hill People's Regulation (MSHPR) Act. Later, the Manipur State Hill People's Regulation Act of 1947 was replaced by the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act of 1960, which extend to the whole Manipur 'except the hill areas thereof'. In short, the land use and management in the valley areas is regulated by the Manipur Land and Land Reforms Act of 1960 but not in the hill areas.

In marked difference to the valley areas, the hill areas which is mainly dominated by the tribal communities- Nagas and Kukis is regulated by the traditional customary land usage and management of each tribe (Shimray, 2009, Kamei, 2017). Again, there exists a line of difference in the way traditional land ownership system functions for both the Nagas and Kukis (Panmei, 2010, Kamei, 2017, Kipgen, 2018). Even though, the tribal communities (Nagas and Kukis) have a system where the land is owned and governed by community with un-written custom and tradition; where chieftainship and traditional village authorities continue to exist with their rights and privileges, there are, however, some basic difference between these two tribals' communities in terms of land use and management.

In case of the Nagas, even if the chief of the village is the nominal owner of the village land, he cannot replace the occupancy as well as the inheritance rights of land, as

<sup>5</sup> Before 2016, there were only 4 valley districts. But two more valley districts were added as a result of the creation of seven new districts on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016 by Government of Manipur. Now there are 6 valley districts in total.

practically, land belong to the whole community (Hungyo, 1987, Ruivah, 1987, Shimray, 2009). Land rights and ownership among the Nagas can be broadly divided into - land that belonging to an individual household; and land that belong to the whole community. Traditionally, land that belong to an individual household can be sell to anyone from their village (among the villagers' themselves) but selling of land to people outside the village is strictly prohibited. However, there may be some slight differences in terms of land use and management system even among Nagas tribes' as well (Panmei, 2010). In case of the Kukis, the chief of the village enjoys more power and authority over land use and access; and traditionally, he is the custodian of the whole village land (Kipgen, 2018). Unlike the case of the Nagas, the individual household among the Kukis has no rights over land and resources, and cannot lay claim to any of the village land. The other unique feature of land use and management of Kuki tribes is that the chief of the village distributes the land for paddy cultivation as per the needs of the household, and in return, the household have to give a portion of the harvest to the chief. Moreover, the chief of the village and his councils make rules regarding forest management and land use where they ensured that land is distributed equally to the villagers for making homestead and for paddy cultivation considering the size of the family (ibid.).

#### 4. Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (MLR & LR)

##### Act of 1960<sup>6</sup> and It's Controversy

On 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1960, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act came into force by replacing the Manipur State Hill People's Regulation Act of 1947. The MLR & LR Act was introduced with the aims to consolidate and amend the law relating to land revenue in the state of Manipur and also to provide for certain measures of land reform. Even though, this Act especially sub-section (2) of Section 1 and Section 158 provides certain right over land and resources to the tribals' communities living in the hill areas of the state, there are certain defects and limitation as well. And so, this Act has been and still remains as the bone of contention between the hill people (tribal) and valley people (non-tribal). In fact, the valley people who enjoy the upper hand in decision making has made several attempts to extend this Act even to the hill areas with the intention to alienate and control tribals' land and resources.

Even though, sub-section (2) of section 1 of the Act states "it extend to the whole State of Manipur except the hill areas thereof", it further says "Provided that the State Government may, by notification in the official gazette, extend the whole or any part of any section of this Act to any of the hill areas of Manipur also may be specified in such notification". This means that the State Government have the provision whereby notification in the official gazette, can extend the whole or any part of any section of this Act to any of the hill areas of Manipur also may be specified in such notification. This provision within the Act in fact, not only curtailed-off the protection of tribal rights over land and resources but provides certain legal power to the State government, where the government can alienate tribals' land by using the existing political structure. Accordingly, the state government has made several attempts

<sup>6</sup> The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms act, 1960 (No. 33 of 1960), available at <https://satmanipur.nic.in/downloads/1/LandLaws.pdf>.

to extend this Act to the hill areas where it was observed that gradually some parts of the hill areas have been alienated.<sup>7</sup>

Again, Section 158 of the Act is the other special provision given to tribal's communities in regards rights over land and resources but this provision as well is not free from controversy. It says "No transfer of land by a person who is a member of the Scheduled Tribes shall valid unless- (a) the transfer is to another member of the Scheduled Tribes; or (b) where the transfer is to a person who is not a member of any such tribe, it is made with the previous permission in writing of the Deputy Commissioner, provided that the Deputy Commissioner shall not give such permission unless he has first secured the consent thereto of the District Council within whose jurisdiction the land: or (c) the transfer is by way of mortgage to a co-operative society". Similarly, even though under this provision, transfer of land to non-tribal is restricted to a certain extent; again, there are certain flaws within this provision. As per this provision, whenever tribals' land is transfer by way of mortgage to any co-operative society, the permission of the Deputy Commissioner and thereto the consent of the District Council are not required. Moreover, the sub-section (c) of Section 158 does not clearly define the 'co-operative society' to whom tribals' land can be transfer. With this provision, there have been some cases<sup>8</sup> where poor tribal's land has been used by some non-tribal individual and co-operative society. So, this provision still remains a threat to an economically poor tribal people who can be lured easily and fall prey to valley based organization.

The valley people have been against the MLR & LR Act of 1960 considering it as a discriminatory Act on two reasons. First, the hill areas which comprise 90 percent of the total geographical areas constitute only 42.8 percentage of the total state's population; while the valley areas with 57.2 percent of the total state's population have only 10 percent of the total geographical area. The other reason which the valley people against the Act is that the valley people cannot buy land and settle in the hill areas whereas the hill people can buy land and settle in valleys areas. With all these issues, the valley people who dominates the state legislation has been trying to amend the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act of 1960 by introducing many land laws and policies to gain access and to alienate tribals' land. For instant, the state government through the Sixth Amendment Bill sought to amend by repealing the Section (1) and Section (158) of MLR & LR Act, 1960 (Sharma, 2016). According to Shimray (2009), the state government under the Sixth Amendment Bill tried to insert new section: 'power to regulate and control jhum cultivation'- where the state government may make rules for controlling jhum cultivation for protection of environment, catchment areas of irrigation, hydro-electric and water supply project and prevention of landslides in the state and national highways and other major roads'. Again, on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2015, the Manipur Legislative Assembly

<sup>7</sup> According to Devi (2006) as quoted by Panmei (2010), 89 villages of Churachandpur district and 14 villages each of Tamenglong and Senapati districts had also been covered by the Act.

<sup>8</sup> According to Panmei (2010), some non-tribal individual and co-operative societies has been lured the village chairman and village authority to offer some areas of land of Tharon village in hill district of Tamenglong.

unanimously passed the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2015<sup>9</sup>, which the tribal communities considered it as a strategic political ploy to gain access and to control their land and resources. Such systematic political moves of the state government not only shows the intention to alienate tribals' land by using the existing political structure but increases the chances of ethnic conflict within the state.

### 5. New Land Use Policy of Manipur (2014)<sup>10</sup> and the Dissent

The Government of Manipur initiated the New Land Use Policy, 2014 with an objective of inclusive development through effective land resource development and improving the livelihood of the people by adopting both on-farm and off-farm economic activities. The NLUP considered jhum cultivation and unregulated land use system as the main factors that caused destruction to both forest and productivity of the land. So, one of the main objective of NLUP is to change the practice of both jhum and non-jhum cultivation in the hill areas and nudge towards better and sustainable land use in the hill as well as the valley areas of the state. So, the New Land Use Policy explicitly undermines the traditional land use practice and livelihood system of the tribals' communities which has been followed by the tribals' for many years. So, the hidden agenda of the state government to regulate the jhum land and unregulated land (community land) which is the main source of livelihood for the tribal people living in the upland areas is to privatize such land. Such policy of the state government to regulate jhum and community land will not only impact the traditional customary rights over land and resources but would leads to social and cultural fragmentation of the tribal societies. According to Kipgen (2018), the New Land Use of Manipur clearly shows the intention of the state government to privatize the community land and forest and to deprive the source of survival of the tribals' by alienating to non-tribal. And so, the policy to delegitimize jhum- an age old traditional agriculture system that has been practice by the tribals' for many years is born out of exclusive processes and due to reinforcement of alien perception of land use system in Manipur.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the NLUP initiated by the state government fails to appreciate the traditional institution of the tribal, its' unique land use and management system and livelihood practice that has been practiced for many years.

This NLUP of 2014 initiated by the state government was strongly opposed by the tribal communities. United Naga Council (UNC) which is an apex body of several Naga civil organization of Manipur felt that the policy will not only deprived the tribals' rights over land and resources but will roped the

<sup>9</sup> The bill which failed to get the Presidential accent was strongly against by the tribals' as they alleged that the Bill was passed without consulting the tribals' minister, civil organization and the District Councils.

<sup>10</sup> New Land Use Policy/Project of Manipur, 2014 (An approach paper), available at <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/file/Approach%20Paper%20on%20NLUP%20Manipur%202014.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Hiten Yumnam (2014). New Nuisance: Manipur's New Land Use Policy 2014, available at <https://cramanipur.wordpress.com/author/cramanipur/>

village committees and will abolish the traditional village republic system of the tribals'.<sup>12</sup> As a marked of protest against the communal driven action and policies of the state government to usurp tribal land and to destroy their customary traditional institution, the United Naga Council (UNC) called a 48 hours bandh in the Nagas inhabited areas of Manipur. Similarly, the Kuki Inpi- the apex body of Kukis' civil organization too opposed the move of the state government where they felt that by bringing such policy, the state government is not only trying to alienate tribals' land by forced but such unabated communal policies are all in contravention with the culture and traditional set-up of the tribals' societies.<sup>13</sup> Even though, the state government claims that the New Land Use Policy will not only bring inclusive development through effective land source development and management but also improves the livelihood of the people, the policy was strongly opposed particularly by the hill people as they are fully aware it as an covert agenda by the state government to alienate tribal's land in the guise of development.

### 6. The Three Bills<sup>14</sup> and the Politics

On 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2015, the Manipur Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the famous Three Bills which led to mass protest and violence in the hill areas. The Three Bills namely the Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2005, and the Manipur Shops and Establishment (Second Amendment) Bill, 2015, were passed in a special session of the assembly in response to the demand of the valley peoples' for the implementation of an Inner Line Permit (INL) system in Manipur. The Three Bills were passed as a result of the talks between the Government of Manipur and Joint Committee on Inner Line Permit System (JCILPS) - a committee that spearheaded the two-month old agitation demanding implementation of Inner Line Permit System in Manipur to save and protect the indigenous people of the state.

The passing of the Three Bills was followed by large scale protest and opposition mainly from the tribal communities i.e. Nagas and Kukis not only in Manipur but even in the National Capital- Delhi as well. In Manipur, the mass protest led to burning down of many MLAs houses and killing of 9 civilians, including 11 years old boy in Churachandpur district. Moreover, a number of civil organization and students bodies strongly opposed the all-party decision to press the Central Government for early enactment of the Three Bills passed by the Manipur Legislative Assembly considering the Three Bills as anti-tribal.<sup>15</sup> According to Kipgen (2016), while the valley people

<sup>12</sup> Times of India, July 6, 2014. UNC slams Manipur Land Use Policy, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/UNC-slams-Manipurs-land-use-policy/articleshow/37888086.cms>

<sup>13</sup> Eastern Mirror, July 13, 2014, Kukis to oppose New Land Use Policy in Manipur, available at <http://www.easternmirrornagaland.com/kukis-to-oppose-new-land-use-policy-in-manipur/>

<sup>14</sup> Kangla Online, September 3, 2015, Three Bills Passed by Government of Manipur, available at <http://kanglaonline.com/2015/09/the-protection-of-manipur-people-bill-2015/>

<sup>15</sup> Times of India, May 13, 2016, Manipur tribals against 3 Bills, available at

(non-tribal) who are predominantly Meiteis, viewed the Bills as a mechanism to protect the state and its people from the outsider, the hill people-Kukis and Nagas see the Bills as a threat to their rights over land and identity. There was an apprehension among the tribal people that state government would use the Three Bills as a strategic ploy to alienate tribals' land. Such systematic political move of the state government in fact will not only leads to loss of tribals' rights over their land and resources but would also undermine the socio-cultural and political life of the vulnerable tribal societies.

The Three Bills which failed to get Presidential accent were all introduced by non-tribal ministers. The Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015, was introduced by the Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2015, was tabled in the assembly by the Revenue Minister Th Debendra Singh and the Manipur Shops and Establishment was introduced by Minister of Labour and Employment Irengbam Hemochandra Singh.<sup>16</sup> Kipgen (2015) also observed that the three ministers who introduced the bills were from the politically dominant Meitei community. Even though, the ruling Congress government claims that the Three Bills were drawn up after a thorough consultation with all the MLAs, tribal civil organizations and representatives; the Nagas and Kukis deny the claims made by the state government. The Nagas and Kukis alleged that they were not consulted and was carried out by systematic political manipulation. Such move of the politically dominant regime was strongly against by the tribal communities as they felt that it will lead to an encroachment of their land by non-tribal (Dasgupta, 2016). To put it precisely, the controversial Three Bills were passed by the state government without prior consideration and vetting by the members of the constituencies and by the Autonomous District Councils.<sup>17</sup> But the Three Bills which were passed by the Manipur State Legislative Assembly with much political manipulation fails to get Presidential accent and perforce had to be reverted back by the Union Home Ministry (MHA) to the state government for reconsideration. Such political manipulation by dominant regime will escalate the ethnic difference between the hill and valley in a socially and politically sensitive state like Manipur.

## 7. Creation of Seven Districts and Its Fallout

The Government of Manipur on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016 issued a gazette notification of creating new seven districts by bifurcating 7 districts of the state's existing 9 districts. So, in total there are now 16 districts in Manipur. Before the creation of seven new districts, there were 9 districts; out of which 4 districts namely Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur were valley districts mainly dominated by the Meiteis

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/imphal/Manipur-tribals-against-3-bills/articleshow/52248422.cms>

<sup>16</sup> Business Standard, August 28, 2015 Three Bills introduced in Manipur Assembly session, available at [https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/three-bills-introduced-in-manipur-assembly-session-115082801455\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/three-bills-introduced-in-manipur-assembly-session-115082801455_1.html)

<sup>17</sup> Even though, the Autonomous District Councils of Manipur which was created under the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971, were endowed with powers over a list of functions, unlike those under 6th Schedule, the District Councils in Manipur do not have legislative and judicial powers; their functions are executive in nature and the thrust economic.

and Muslim-Meities. The other five districts i.e. Chandel, Churachandpur, Senapati, Tamenglong and Ukhrul which are mainly dominated by the Nagas and Kukis were in the hill areas. The seven new districts according to Manipur Government were created considering the long standing demands of the people and for administrative convenience.

The seven new district are: (a) Kangpokpi district- carved out from the parts Senapati district which is a Nagas predominant district and a long standing demand by the Kukis for a separate Sadar district, (b) Tengnoupal district- again, carved out from the Nagas predominant district of Chandel, (c) Pherzawl district- carved out from the Kuki dominated district of Churachandpur, (d) Noney district- carved out from the Nagas predominant district of Tamenglong, (e) Jiribam district- carved out from Imphal east district, (f) Kamjong district- carved out from Nagas predominant district of Ukhrul, and (g) Kakching district- carved out from Imphal valley by including some parts of Chandel district as well. Even though, the Nagas fraternity voiced their resentment and dissent over the creation of the new seven districts, the majority Meiteis people and Kukis minority welcomes the move of the state government.

Most of the newly created districts were mostly carved out from the Nagas dominated districts. So, the Nagas perceived the strategic move of the state government as an attempt to divide the Nagas people and to alienate their land to other communities. Moreover, the Nagas alleged that the constitutionally mandated process of prior consultation with the tribal members of the state assembly and Hill Council under Article 371C of the constitution on matter affecting administration in the hill region has been bypassed (Sen, 2016). Similarly, Sharma (2017) also pointed out that the December 9 announcement of the state government was strongly against by tribal communities' particularly the United Naga Council- a conglomerate of the Manipur Naga civil societies and organizations on account of two reasons- first, the Manipuri Nagas felt that the creation of new districts by the state government is a political attempt to divide the Naga people by merging them with non-Naga areas; and secondly, they also argued that the state government did not consult the Hill Area Committees which empowered by the Constitution of India to monitor law making for and administration of the hill areas under Article 371C. Moreover, there was also a foreboding among the Manipuri Nagas that the non-Nagas like the Kukis would eventually dominate in newly created district like Kangpokpi- where presently there is a peaceful co-existence of Nagas, Kukis and Meities (Sen, 2016). So, the creation of seven new districts not only added fuel to ethnic resentments but increased the ethnic differences and distrust among the different communities of the state.

Even though, Chief Minister Ibobi Singh reiterated that the creation of seven new districts was done as a response to the longstanding demands of the local people and for administrative convenience, some political analyst considered it as a calculated political move to strengthen its political support base in the run-up to the forthcoming state election (Sen, 2016, Sharma, 2017). Here, it is important to argue that even if the state government claims that the new districts were created for administrative convenience, it was all done in haste without any

basic infrastructure. Even though, the creation of new districts has met the popular aspiration of the Meitei and Kuki population, the further break-up of the Nagas areas in Manipur remain a challenged for the Nagas as it will not only leads to loss of their land and resources (to other communities) but will also affect the ongoing political talk between the Nagas and the Government of India. Such unilateral and non-consensual action of the state government would not only triggered ethnic conflicts and political unrest within the state but inter-tribal differences and distrust would become more pronounced.

## 8. Conclusion

According to Dasgupta (2016), in case of Manipur, while the tribals' have land; the Meitei people have political power-40 assembly seats out of the total 60 seats are Meitei seats. Whereas the tribal have only 20 assembly seats, out of which 1 seat is de-reserved. So, the existing political structure which gives an overwhelming majority to the Meiteis in decision making is seen by the Nagas and Kukis as an instrument of continued domination by the valley people over the hill people politically, socially and economically. The usurp acts of the state government to alienate tribals' land has been resisted stiffly by the tribal people as they are aware that such systematic move of the state government will not undermine

their traditional and customary rights over land and resources but will impinge their culture and identity as well. Even, if the State government feels that the change of land laws is essential, the traditional customary practices and rights of the tribal should be acknowledged and needs to be taken into consideration.

Land laws should be updated instead of being replaced. Otherwise, such systematic political manipulation by the dominant regime to alienate tribals' land is bound to create further ethnic conflict and turmoil in a state like Manipur where there is a great social, economic and political diversity. The other major issue which is often voiced by the tribal communities is that the Meitei-dominated Manipur Government has been neglecting the developmental and other socio-economic needs of the hill people. With this backdrop, the tribal of Manipur have been demanding the implementation of Sixth Schedule in the hill areas of Manipur. Implementation of such constitutional provisions in the hill areas of Manipur will not only give certain autonomy where the tribal can protect and safeguard their history, culture and tradition, land and identity but will help in addressing the increasing inter-ethnic difference and distrust.

## Reference

1. Devi Yumnam Nirmala (2014). Conflict and Peace in Manipur (North east India), Scholarly Research Journal for Humanity Science & English Language, Oct-Nov., 2014, Vol.-I, Issue-VI
2. Dimchuilu Pr. (2013). Customary Land Use Pattern of the Tribal In Manipur: A Case Study of the Zeliangrong Community in Tamenglong District, IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 11, Issue 1 (May. - Jun. 2013), PP 57-63 e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845
3. Dasgupta Kumkum (2016). Manipur: Unrest Over Three Controversial Bills Refuses to Die Down, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/unrest-in-manipur-over-three-controversial-bills-refuses-to-die-down/story-voiuBxF2rRbYmWMkjKnCYM.html>
4. Economic Survey (2016-16), Government of Manipur, available at <http://desmanipur.gov.in/files/NewsFiles/26Oct2017021733Economic%20Survey,2016-17.pdf>
5. Government of Manipur (n.d). The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act of 1960 (No 33 of 1960), available at <http://manipurrev.nic.in/notes/MLRLRAct.pdf>.
6. Guite, K. C. (2000). Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 and Sixth Schedule in Relation to Hill area. In M. Horam, (Ed), the Rising Manipur (pp. 235-248). New Delhi: Manas Publications
7. Kipgen Nehginpao (2015). The Hindu, Manipur on the Brink, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/manipur-on-the-brink/article7604306.ece>
8. (2013). Politics of Ethnic Conflict in Manipur, South Asia Research 2013 33: 21, and DOI: 10.1177/0262728013475541, Vol. 33(1): 21-38, SAGE Publications.
9. Hungyo P (1987). Land Tenure System in the Hills of Manipur: A comparative study of Tangkhul Nagas and Thadou Kuki. In B.B. Dutta and M.N.Karna (Eds), Land Relations in North-East India (pp.65-70). New Delhi: Peoples' Publishing House.
10. Kipgen Ngamjahao (2018). Land Laws, Ownership and Tribal Identity Land Laws, Ownership and Tribal Identity: The Manipur Experience in Asmita Bhattacharyya Sudeep Basu (Editors): Marginalities in India Themes and Perspectives, Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd, ISBN 978-981-10-5214-9 ISBN 978-981-10-5215-6 (eBook) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5215-6>
11. Kamei Richard (2018). Tribal Land, Customary Law, and the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, May 12, 2018 Vol. LIII No. 19, Economic & Political Weekly.
12. New Land Use Policy/ Project of Manipur (2014) (An Approach Paper) Planning Department, Government of Manipur available at <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/file/Approach%20Paper%20on%20NLUP%20Manipur%202014.pdf>
13. Panmei D P (2010). Land Rights of Tribal and State Land Laws: Manipur- Part 1, E-Pao, 10th January, available at [http://epao.net/epPageExtractor.asp?src=features.Land\\_Rights\\_of\\_Tribal\\_State\\_Land\\_Law\\_1.html](http://epao.net/epPageExtractor.asp?src=features.Land_Rights_of_Tribal_State_Land_Law_1.html).
14. Ruivah K (1987). Land Ownership and Its Problem Among the Tangkhul Nagas. In B.B Dutta and M.N.Karna (Eds), Land Relations in North-East India (pp. 54-64). New Delhi: Peoples' Publishing House.
15. Shimray U A (2009). Land Use System in Manipur Hills: A Case Study of the Tangkhul Naga. In Walter Fernandes and Sanjay Barbora (Eds), Land, People and Politics: Contest Over Tribal Land in Northeast India, North Eastern Social Research Centre and International Workgroup for Indigenous Affairs, Guwahati, pp 88-112
16. (2001). Ethnicity and Socio-political Assertion: The Manipur Experience, Economic and Political Weekly 36(39), 3674-3677.

17. Sharma Sushil Kumar (2016). Land Right and Conflicts in Manipur: Issues and Recommendations, Occasional Paper, Vivekananda International Foundation, 3 San Martin Marg, Chanakyapur, New Delhi- 110021
18. (2016). Ethnic Conflict and Harmonization: A Study of Manipur, Occasional Paper, Vivekananda International Foundation, 3, San Martin Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi-110021
19. Sen Guatam (2016). Political Fallout of the Creation of New Districts in Manipur, available at [https://idsa.in/idsacomments/political-fallout-of-the-creation-of-new-districts-in-manipur\\_gsen\\_161216](https://idsa.in/idsacomments/political-fallout-of-the-creation-of-new-districts-in-manipur_gsen_161216)
20. Sharma Chandan Kumar (2001). Tribal Land Alienation: Government's Role, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 36, No. 52 (Dec. 29, 2001 - Jan. 4, 2002), pp. 4791-4795