

Demographical Variation and Internal Migration in the Tribal Belt of Manipur

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ABSTRACT

Manipur a tiny land-locked states of India's north East is a land predominantly occupied by ethnic groups of Meitei, Kuki and Naga people. However after the colonial rule and India's independence from the British yoke, the state witnesses certain demographic and structural changes in the state through internal migration and other developmental factors of centre and state policy. The state is divided into two region; the valley, inhabited by the Meitei group, and the Hills inhabited by the Tribal groups. The rise of population and identity consciousness led it to internal conflict intra-migration among the ethnic groups in the state. On the basis of historical development, the study tries to examine the roots of migration without strictly follow any conceptual or theoretical framework of methodology. As a result, the study shall remain rooted on secondary sources of information while primary sources are based on personal experienced and observation.

1. Introduction

Migration is a term used to denote a living social and non social creatures' moving from one place to another in search of a new and better livelihood for permanent or temporary habitation and settlement but distinguished conceptually from the term nomads or migrant seasonal workers. It is a worldwide phenomenon that has taken place millions of years back when human society survived with hunting and food gathering economy. Migration elsewhere in the world has become one of the most important aspects and the core issue in field of contemporary social science research due to the fast changing socio-economic and demographic changes that could adversely affects the developmental sphere of the local indigenous populace. Human Migration has been motivated with number of factors such as socio-cultural, politico-economic, education and forced population movement due to conflict and war within the area of habitation in the contemporary world. So far as definition of the term migration is concerned, scholar and writers elsewhere in the world could not arrived at definite and consensual conclusion. And thus this work will not strictly follow definite conceptual or theoretical framework of methodology. However, it may be suffice to pursue on the methodology of descriptive and historical analysis as it appears. As a result, the study shall be rooted mainly on secondary sources while primary sources are mainly based on own observation and personal experiences, as the researcher hails from the state.

Internal migration is a movement of population within nation state as labour migrates towards urban centre for economic purposes and such migrations has taken place elsewhere in India since 1947, and continue till today. These processes of human movement led it to urbanization and demographic changes in a very short span of time mostly in India's North East which becomes a threat to the local indigenous people who could become minority in their own territory as noticed in the state of the present Tripura.

Northeast India has numerous experiences of migrant traders, administrators, military, entrepreneur, farmers, workers, cattle farmer, etc. from outside the states since the

British time. The British brought these groups of people from Bihar, UP, Orissa, Bengal (Bangladesh) and Nepal mainly to serve their purposed that could enhance their socio-political and economic control over the region. With the help of the migrants the British could achieve their aspirations and annexed the whole region and control over the region occupied by different ethnic groups in north eastern region who had lived independently for many centuries.

2. Brief history of Manipur and the people

Manipur, a tiny and landlocked state in north eastern India, had maintained its identity as an independent princely state from time immemorial until the merger in Indian union on 20th September, 1949. The total geographical area of the state comprise of 22,327 sq Km, is a land of multi-ethnic groups in which the major groups are the Meiteis, Nagas and the Kukis besides these groups other small population of ethnic groups such as; Nepalese, Dravidian, and Marwari, Punjabis, also present both in the valley and the hill area after the British annexation of the state in the late 19th century. The three major groups were known as Mongolian racial groups of Tibetan-Burmese family by Anthropologists. They were kept under the same linguistic (Kuki-Chin linguistic groups) roof by linguists albeit practicing different traits, of socio-cultural and political system.

Manipur came under the British ruled in 1891 nevertheless the hill tribes of Manipur were not under the control of the Darbar or any Manipuri Authority, but ever since in 1892, the hill areas had been administered by a British officer under the special rules laid down by the Government. Until 1907 the whole administration of the State was in the hands of the British Officers, and later the President of the Darbar, who was an officer, of the Indian Civil Services, selected for the post of the Chief Commissioner [1]. In the wake of World War I, the British demand for recruitment of labour forces from various communities to go to Europe which was opposed by the hill Kuki tribes triggered the Anglo-Kuki War for more than three years (1917-1919). Later the Kukis were suppressed and brought the Hill areas under the civil authority till India's independence in which both the valley and the hill region of the

present state were blended as a single administrative unit and become the union of India in 1949 along with Tripura.

The Manipur Constitution Act, 1947 established a democratic form of government with the Maharajah as the executive Head and a legislative constituted by election on adult franchise. The Legislative Assembly so constituted functioned till it was dissolved on the integration of the state with the dominion of India in September 1949. Manipur was given a status of Union Territory in 1956 and the status of the Administrator was raised from that of the Chief Commissioner to that of a Lieutenant Governor in December 1969. Manipur then achieved full statehood on 21st January, 1972.

The state itself is divided into two regions, the Plain and the Hills. The valley constituting 10 % of the total area is inhabited by the Meitei ethnic groups of Meitei Hindu, Meitei Muslim, Meitei Scheduled Caste and migrants groups like Malwari, Bihari, Punjabi, Nepali and Bangladeshi as traders and farmers while the Hill areas of 90 % of its geographical area is inhabited mostly by the ethnic group of Kuki and Naga tribes. Sizable population of other communities like Nepali, Malwari, Bihari, Punjabi, Tamil and Bangladeshi groups of people were also found in the urban business centers, district Head quarters and in border areas of the hill region as traders, small and big business, construction workers, farmers, etc.

TABLE I. Undivided District-wise distribution of Population (2011)

Districts	Population
Senapati (Hill district)	479, 148
Tamenglong (Hill district)	140, 651
Churachandpur (Hill district)	274, 143
Ukhrul (Hill district)	183, 998

Chandel (Hill district)	144, 182
Bishnupur (Valley district)	237, 399
Thoubal (Valley district)	422, 168
Imphal West (Valley district)	517, 992
Imphal East (Valley district)	456, 113
Total	28, 55, 794

Sources: Census 2011

The table shown above indicates the total population of Manipur as 28, 55,794 as per 2011 census. Out of which 42.79 % (12, 22,122) of the population inhabited in the hill regions mainly dominated by the Naga and Kuki tribes, where as 57. 21 % (16, 33,672) people lived in the plain areas with a variation of 14. 41% (4, 11,550).

3. Tribes of Manipur

The tribal group of people on the other hand is divided into two main groups, i.e. Kuki groups comprising of 24 tribes who are known and recorded as Old and New Kuki and the Naga tribes comprising of 9 tribal groups originally. However, a wind of changed appeared in the demographic structure of tribal groups especially among the Kukis in the late 1960s, when the breakaway groups of Naga National Council (NNC), of Nagaland disseminate Naga sovereignty by integrating the various Naga inhabited areas elsewhere in North east and Myanmar, paved many Old Kuki tribes of Manipur such as Anal, Maring, Mayon, etc. willingly or unwillingly enfolded into the Naga fold that changes the demography of tribal groups in the state of Manipur.

TABLE II. Tribe-wise distribution of Population (2011 Census)

Rank	Community	Population	Rank	Tribal Community	Population
	All Tribes	11,67,422		-----	-----
1	Thadou	215193	18	Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes	8064
2	Tangkhol	178568	19	Lamgang (Old Kuki)	7770
3	Poumai Naga	127381	20	Simte	6728
4	Kabui	103908	21	Koirao (Old Kuki)	4476
5	Mao	93343	22	Chothe (Old Kuki)	3585
6	Kacha Naga	66158	23	Aimol (Old Kuki)	3190
7	Paite	55542	24	Mayon (Old Kuki)	2516
8	Hmar	48375	25	Monsang (Old Kuki)	2427
9	Vaiphei	42957	26	Koireng (Old Kuki)	1873
10	Any Kuki tribes	28342	27	Kharam (Old Kuki)	1145
11	Maram	27524	28	Tarao (Old Kuki)	1066
12	Maring (Old Kuki)	26424	29	Suhte	804
13	Zou	24294	30	Purum	278
14	Anal (Old Kuki)	23509	31	Angami	95
15	Gangte	17178	32	Sema	40
16	Kom (Old Kuki)	14528	33	Ralte	17
17	Chiru (Old Kuki)	8599		Total	11,67,422

Sources: Census 2011

4. Tribal Settlement

The tribal in Manipur is predominantly lived in the hill region with 94.3 percent rural and 4.7 percent urban population as per 2001 census. However distribution of population among the tribal is totally different for the past three decades due to internal migration on number of factors. The tribal groups of both Kukis and Nagas occupied all the hill regions and lived independently without any interference until the British entered the region in the late 19th century. It is a fact that numerous villages still lived in far flung areas and most importantly in the border areas of adjoining states like Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Myanmar that are far from modern civilization due to the non availability of facilities such as hospital, educational institution, transportation, and marketing place. More than eighty percent 80% of the different tribal groups were still engaged in shifting cultivation and permanent forms of agricultural practices. The Naga groups of tribes are mostly concentrated in the district of Senapati, Ukhrul, Tamenglong and some pockets of Chandel while the Kuki groups are mostly found in the district of Churachandpur, Chandel, Senapati, Tamenglong, and some pocket of Ukhrul district. Sizable number of both the communities were also found settle in the capital city of the state for different purposes from the time when Manipur became union of India in 1949.

5. Land holding system among the tribal

The land holdings in the Hill Areas of Manipur are neither governed nor control by the State but rather control over by the community or the chiefs as per customary practices. Matters related to the land system is possessed and controlled by the tribes themselves inhabiting in it. Tribal in Manipur is divided into two categories, the Kukis and the Nagas and they both claimed absolute ownership over land but different in its holdings. D. P Pamei in his writings of 'Land Rights of Tribal and State Land Laws of Manipur' stated that the one who established the village is the first owner in Naga society where he dole some portion of land to any of his villagers in exchange of animals like dog, pig, mithun, rice-beer, for used in his ritual performance and the later becomes the owner of that portion who also becomes the second owner [2]. Generally Land ownership among the Naga is controlled by the concerned community or council of village chief. On the contrary land ownership among the Kuki groups is directly related with the Chieftainship institution. Thus, the lands occupied by the Kuki tribes are owned by their respective Chiefs. Lewin states that, 'in Kuki custom everything in the village belonged to the Chief who could demand anything he required' [3]. It has to be noted here that the Chief has a right to claim tributes only from his subjects (village commoners). He has no authority to demand tributes from other neighboring villages. All the land that falls within the Chief's territorial jurisdiction belonged to him [4]. The Kuki Chiefs till today enjoy the right to ownership of land in all the villages they inhabited. He is the sole authority of the land which is one core reason where many of the commoners migrated to more advance urban places. There is no private right and demarcation by private individuals in the forest belt. Every household however, has the right to collect firewood, thatches and other materials for domestic purposes. Every household has the right to cultivate the land as long as they

live in that village. Thus, under the Chieftainship system all lands in the village belonged to the Chief and he lets out to the villagers year to year for Jhum purposed. P. Hungyo's study on Land Tenure system of the *Tangkhu-Nagas* and the *Thadou-Kukis*, pointed out that, '*In the case of Thadou, there is no room for dispute over the boundary as the whole village land is owned by the Chief and land is distributed for cultivation.... Once harvested, the land does not belong to the individual*' [5]. But in the real sense of the term, the village commoners are the victim of land ownership system as they have no rights over the land.

6. Migration into tribal belt

Migration from one place to another is natural and inevitable in all human society. To pass a particular stage of civilization or development one has to move from the present situation to next stage of development through migration. In the course of transition migration through internal and rural-urban migration become necessity due to the push and pull factor. Other factors of migration witnesses through industrial growth, development of new territorial creations, establishment of educational institution, health facilities, easy movement through transport and communication, social change etc, has led to the forcible migration of people from the places of their birth to different directions that led to rural-urban migration. Since India's got independence, communities like Malwaris, Punjabis, Biharis, Tamil, Nepalese, etc coming from different states of the country for trade, commerce and business purposed and controlled the whole economic system from the smallest to the biggest form of business enterprises in every nook and corner of the state that cannot undertaken by the local indigenous people.

7. Tamil Migration

The Tamil people migrated from Tamil Nadu to neighbouring Burma (Myanmar) in the late 19th century mainly for rice cultivator and trade purpose. As the British Empire came to declined and Burma got independent in 1948, the fortunes and the aspiration of the Tamil people also came to an end when the Military coup the Burmese government in 1960s and the Tamils came back to India where they found no room in their own land. The Tamils have no other choice but return to Burma through Moreh where Burmese immigration at international gate at Moreh stopped them and settled there as migrants. However within a short span of time the Tamilian population rouses in a very large number, which also trigger communal clash with the local inhabitant Kukis in 1992. Today the whole economy of the border market is under the control of the Tamilian and the Meiteis on one side and the small and petty business belongs to the Kukis on other side. As a result communal clashes and tension prevail from time to time between the Kukis and the Meitei.

8. Nepali/Gorkhali

The origin of Nepalese (who a kin to called themselves as Gorkha/Gorkhali) in the state of Manipur is shrouded due to lack of records. However, as per information given in local news article, the Gorkha/Nepali communities might have been arrived at Manipur in 1833, during the reign of Maharaj

Chandra Kriti. However, the writer is of the opinion that the Nepalis arrived in the state back in 1885 [6]. It is a known fact that Nepali people were transported by the British from Sylhet district of Bengal (now Bangladesh) and North Bengal to serve British Indian Army (now Assam Rifles) as cattle grazers, agricultural workers milkman (dairy farmer) and cook in Army battalion. Later the British let them joined as para-military force of Assam Rifle owing to their simplicity, truth, brave and courageous. In other word Ethnic Nepali people entered into Manipur through military services who later settled down as agricultural farmer, cattle rarer occupying a huge forest reserved land of the hill people. I was told by elders in the village that Nepalese, in and around the hill region of Senapati, Kangpokpi, and Keithelmanbi areas arrived for settlement under the behest of the local chiefs or tribes in and around the hill top of these areas during and after India independence, with a bunch of one sacked (cloths and utensils inside the sack) and a paired of bull and cow and starts settled in these area. As per 2011 census the Nepali/Golkhali populations is 50,000. Out of these, around 30% of the total population is concentrated in the Kangpokpi Assembly constituency, where as 50% had been spreading in Saitu, Tadubi, Karong assembly constituency and other areas of the hill region. Sizable amount of Nepalese also found settled at Mantripukhri in the capital. The then Governor of Manipur (British-Indian administrator) allotted a piece of land for settlement for retired Army personnel at Kanglatongbi (Kanglatongbi Military Colony) under Sadar Hills district council. Thus the Nepali population becomes the highest in the electoral Roll of 50th Kangpokpi Assembly Constituency. However the statuses of Nepali/Gorkha in Manipur has become controversy during the Assembly Election in 2017, where the status of the Congress candidate's, Mr. Khadga Bahadur Tamang in 50th Kangpokpi Assembly Constituency, was raise and protesting to revoke his candidature from the Party by the Meitei organization on the issue of foreigner. The congress then revoked his candidature for the same reason even though they have won the Assembly election for many times and today the status of Nepalis becomes neither foreigner nor indigenous as far as identities of peoples in Manipur are concerned.

Rural-Urban migration:

Rural-urban migration happens due to the poor conditions of economy, transportation and communication, people from rural areas migrated unto the urban areas in search of their livelihood and for survival. People shifted due to the availability of opportunities in government, public private and other sectors. The educational institutions in the rural areas are very much inverted compared to that of the urban areas. The state owned educational institutions such as high schools and primary schools met deterioration. Majority of the government established schools becomes shelter to refugees than learning centers. It is also observed that people migrated to urban regions not necessarily for economic purpose or for Government services. But partly due to the bad conditions of transportation and communication to meet their daily needs. It is believed that people are migrated for government services in which various governmental departments are established in the urban areas. The educational institutions which are set-up mostly in the urban areas have attracted the rural community and moved to the towns and cities for educational

opportunities. Establishment of religious centre in urban areas for convenience of administrative system, and engagement rural people in government and mission work needs to settle in the urban areas for expediency, better opportunities in service and business sector are some important factors that furnished migration among the tribal people.

9. Intra-tribal migration

Intra-migration within and among their own tribesmen area had taken place in the wake of the Kuki-Naga feud in the early 1990s. Besides development factors and facilities available in the urban areas, forced migration also carry out due to ethnic conflict between the two Hill communities. The Nagas and Kukis were living together in most part of the hill regions for many centuries as buddy and pal upholding one after another even in times of pleasures and hardship albeit some inter-village clashes between Naga-tribesmen and Kuki-Naga clashes found existed before India's independence. However as stated earlier, when the breakaway group of the Naga insurgent (NSCN IM) extended their supremacy in most part of the Hill region in Manipur, tension had escalated between the Naga Kuki communities. As a result communal tension starts in flare up in the early parts of the 90s when the Naga insurgent groups killed a group of Kuki villagers who visited their maternal families in Chandel district. Consequently many Kukis and Naga innocent people become homeless in their own land and leaving their original birth land to other safer places for survival. As a result more than 1000 souls lost their life and around 450 villages burnt down and more than 1.20 lakhs of both Kuki and Naga common man rendered homeless during of communal conflict from 1990 to 1998. As per reports given by the United Naga Council (UNC) and Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM), the Apex organizations of the two communities may be cited though different from one after the other. According to UNC report an estimates of both the communities who lost their life recorded as 607, while 402 people suffered injury and 5452 houses gutted into ashes to both Naga and the Kuki communities [7], which is totally concocted to the Kuki perspective. According to the KIM report, 900 Kukis were killed and butchered, 366 Kuki villages uprooted into ashes and 80,000 Kuki people were rendered homeless and displaced permanently [8]. Consequently these groups of people migrated from their original homeland to other urban and rural areas where their own groups of people are settled and thus highly affected the demographic structure of rural-urban settlement in the state.

10. Conclusion

It is substantiated to conclude from the fact that, internal migration in the state of modern Manipur starts mainly from the colonial ruled when the British administration extended their supremacy over the north eastern regions of India after signing the treaty of Yandaboo with the Burmese on 24 February 1826. The colonial administrator brought constructor workers and other labourers from different parts of India and Bengal gave a big space to serve in the army company and other administrative services. Economic blindness of the indigenous people of the state of Manipur paved a great advantage to the more advanced business communities such as Malwari, Punjabi, Bengali, Bihari, and other petty businessmen controlling over the state's economy created insecurity to the

indigenous people. As a result, internal migration witnesses a bunch of frenzied law and order situation in the state since the early 1980s, when the local Meitei insurgent groups who are fighting for restoration of independent Manipur from Indian administration, threaten the immigrants to leave the state by levying huge amount of money as tax and forced them to leave in the form of kidnapping, killing and murdering brought chaotic and social tension in the state. The domination of the Meitei people and step-motherly treatment over the tribal groups on the socio-political, economic, and education and other developmental sphere forced the tribal groups forming their own forces demanding a separate administrative set-up of hill region from valley begot communal tension in the state. The indigenous tribal groups on the other hand, asserting the land they occupied as something given as a gift from Heaven, like the promised land of Israelites in the Old Testament era had a cold war since long time back that triggered the shot of communal conflict in the 1960s, and more noticeably in the 1990s, which claimed hundreds and thousands of innocent life forced them to vacate their settlement area to other safer

places brought the demographic changes the tribal belt since 1991. The increasing population of the major indigenous groups (Meitei, Kuki and Naga), within a decade or two had generated jealousy, mistrust, cynicism and insecurity within the general populace in the state. The rise of migrants and immigrants from different states of India, and neighbouring countries of Myanmar and Bangladesh compelled the Meitei populace demanding an imposition of ILP in the state had created dysfunction and statelessness for quite sometimes in 2017-18, due to an imposition of economic blocked and other forms of agitation. The tribal people on other hand had given no heed and not supported the demands made by the Meitei groups, for ILP had nothing to do with the tribal in the state, as Article 173C of Indian constitution has given a Special provision to safeguard the tribal and their rights. But how long these provisions will safeguard the tribal and their land rights is a matter of concerned to the tribal in the state as far as politics of Meitei dominant groups take a crucial role in the politics of the state.

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