



UNRAVELLING THE RECENT RIOTS IN MANIPUR

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Abstract : *This article examined mainly the tension mounted in the hills of Manipur after a May 4 video surfaced showing two women from one of the warring communities being paraded naked by a few men from the other side. The Manipur Police on July 20 arrested four accused after the video of two tribal women being molested by a mob at a village in Senapati district surfaced on social media. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the alleged incident has shamed 140 crore Indians, asserting that law will act with its full might and no guilty will be spared. "My heart is full of pain and anger," he told reporters in his remarks ahead of Parliament's Monsoon Session, amid his criticism by Opposition parties for not speaking on the ethnic violence in the northeast State. Meanwhile, the Congress slammed the Centre after the video surfaced, with party president Mallikarjun Kharge accusing the Narendra Modi Government of turning democracy into "mobocracy". Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud summoned both Attorney General and Solicitor General, the two topmost law officers of the government in the country, to convey that the court is "deeply disturbed" by the visuals. The Chief Justice, speaking for the court, gave the Centre and Manipur government an ultimatum to either bring the perpetrators to book or step aside for the judiciary to take action.*

Keywords: *Cultural Heritage, Political Environment, Clashes and Protests*

Introduction

Manipur is a state in northeast India, bordering Myanmar to its east and south. It consists of the Imphal Valley, associated with the Manipur kingdom, and the surrounding hills populated by hill tribes. The Imphal Valley constitutes about 10% of the geographical area of the state with 57% of the population, predominantly Meitei, who are majority Hindus, with minorities of Muslims and native Sanamahism followers. The surrounding hills constitute 90% of the geographical area of the state with 43% of the population belonging to 34 tribal groups broadly categorized as Nagas and Kukis. The Nagas dominate the northern districts while the Kukis are predominant in the south. The tribal people have the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, whereas

the Meitei have been accorded Other Backward Class (OBC) status, with some classified as Scheduled Castes (SC) in certain areas. The hill regions are noted by scholars as forming part of Zomia inhabited by "non-state" peoples. They came to be administered only after the Kuki rebellion of 1917–19, by British administrators without the involvement of the Meitei state. After Indian independence, the hill tribes continued to enjoy a protected status. The Manipur and Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 prohibits transfer of tribal land to non-tribals except by special permission, thereby preventing Meitei and other people from expanding into the hill districts. The valley-based Meitei dominate the political establishment. Of the 60 Assembly constituencies, 40 are held by the valley and 20 are in the hill



districts. The tribal population is not prohibited from settling in the valley region. Kukis state that they do not want to come to the valley but they have to since there are no roads no schools or hospitals in the hills. Tribal groups have complained that the government spending is unduly concentrated in the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley.

Objective Of The Study

- The riots in Manipur are multifaceted, often stemming from a combination of socio-political, economic, and cultural factors.
- The reason for riots, clashes and protests in Manipur
- Riots and protests become a means to voice these concerns and seek tangible reforms.

Methodology

This study is based on the analysis of the secondary data and obtained the information from various journals, daily news papers and websites.

Descriptive research includes surveys and fact finding enquiries of different kinds. The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs as it exists at present. The researcher used secondary data for developing understanding of the background and trends in Manipur State.

Historical Background

Manipur's history is marked by a legacy of struggle for identity and autonomy. The state has a distinct cultural identity and has faced challenges related to its integration into the Indian Union since its merger in 1949. This integration led to protests and agitation, which laid the foundation for a complex relationship between the local population and the Indian government. Ethnic Diversity and Identity Ethnic diversity is one of Manipur's defining characteristics, with various communities residing in the

state, including the Meiteis, Nagas, Kukis, and other smaller tribes. This diversity has, at times, led to tensions over issues related to political representation, land ownership, and cultural recognition. The demand for safeguarding the distinct identities of these communities has often clashed with the overarching goal of national integration.

How did the violence start?

The violence erupted after the Kuki-Zo community protested against Meitei demands for reserved public job quotas and college admissions as a form of affirmative action and over long-held fears that they might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for tribal groups. At least 130 people have been killed and more than 50,000 have fled their homes since the violence began. Tens of thousands have fled to government-run camps. Homes and churches in dozens of villages have been torched. In a detailed report to the Supreme Court in June, the civil society group Manipur Tribal Forum said many gruesome acts of violence, including rape and beheadings, had not been investigated by state authorities.

How have authorities reacted?

The main suspect in the sexual abuse case, identified as Khuirem Herodas, a Meitei, was arrested. He was taken into custody hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi broke his nearly 80-day silence on the violence in Manipur by condemning the alleged sexual assault as "shameful" and promising tough action. Also on Thursday, India's Supreme Court said it was deeply disturbed by the viral video and asked the state and federal governments to inform the top court of the steps taken to catch the perpetrators. If authorities do not act, "we will", the



court said. Authorities in Manipur, led by Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said police had taken action as soon as the video surfaced on social media. A "thorough investigation" was under way, the state's chief minister, N Biren Singh, tweeted on Thursday.

Land Disputes

Land disputes have been a recurring issue in Manipur, with conflicts arising due to competition over limited resources. These disputes can be attributed to factors such as population growth, urbanization, and conflicting land ownership claims. The government's attempts to implement policies like the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system to regulate the entry and settlement of outsiders in the state have also generated debates and disagreements.

Insurgency and Militancy

The history of Manipur is also intertwined with insurgency and militancy. Various insurgent groups have operated in the region, demanding greater autonomy or complete separation from India. These groups have at times resorted to violence, leading to a cycle of conflict and instability. The state's geographical location, bordering Myanmar, has also played a role in facilitating cross-border activities.

The Recent Riots

The recent riots in Manipur can be attributed to a combination of factors. The contentious issue of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) has sparked concerns among various communities about potential demographic changes and the dilution of their distinct identities. These concerns have led to protests and demonstrations, some of which escalated into violence.

How has the public reacted?

The video of the naked women sparked protests across India on Friday with demonstrators calling for the state's chief minister to step down over the delay in taking action. Women in Manipur, meanwhile, attacked the house of the main suspect. "Local women pelted stones and burnt some parts of the house belonging to the prime accused in a village," said Hemant Pandey, a senior police official in the state capital, Imphal. Protests were planned in several parts of India by rights groups demanding justice and swift investigations into the latest incident to raise questions about the safety of women in India.

Government Response

A curfew was imposed across eight districts, including non-tribal dominated Imphal West, Kakching, Thoubal, Jiribam, and Bishnupur districts, as well as tribal-dominated Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, and Tengnoupal districts. The Manipur government issued a shoot at sight order on 4 May. By the end of 3 May, 55 columns of the Assam Rifles and the Indian Army were deployed in the region and by 4 May, more than 9,000 people were relocated to safer locations. By 5 May, about 20,000 and by 6 May, 23,000 people had been relocated to safe locations under military supervision. The central government airlifted 5 companies of the Rapid Action Force to the region. Nearly 10,000 army, paramilitary and Central Armed Police Forces were deployed in Manipur. As of 14 May, the total military build up in Manipur stood at 126 army columns and 62 companies of paramilitary forces. On 4 May, it was widely reported that the Union government had invoked the Article 355 of the Indian Constitution to take over the security situation of



Manipur. However, no notification was issued to this effect. Nevertheless, the Home Ministry appointed a security advisor to the Manipur chief minister, Kuldip Singh, who previously headed the CRPF, and an overall commander for the law and order situation, Ashutosh Sinha. The insertion of troops led to several engagements between hill-based militants and the Indian Reserve Battalion, resulting in at least five militant deaths. In a separate encounter, four militants were killed. By 6 May the situation had calmed down to a degree. According to journalist Moses Lianzachin, at least twenty-seven churches were destroyed or burned down during the violence. As of 9 May, according to the Manipur government, the death toll was over 60 people. The situation was described as "relatively peaceful" on 10 May, with the curfew being relaxed in places, though unknown militants fired on Indian troops in an incident in Manipur's Imphal East district, injuring one.

Implications and Consequences

The recent riots in Manipur hold several implications for the region and the country as a whole. Firstly, these disturbances have the potential to disrupt the socio-economic fabric of Manipur, impacting trade, education, and daily life. Businesses suffer, and educational institutions are often forced to shut down during periods of unrest, affecting the livelihoods and aspirations of the people. Furthermore, the image of Manipur on the national stage can be tarnished due to the negative publicity generated by riots. Potential investors might become apprehensive about investing in the region, leading to a stalling of economic growth and development. Additionally, the law and order situation could deteriorate, requiring significant

resources to be deployed for maintaining peace and stability.

Internally, the riots can exacerbate tensions between various ethnic and tribal groups, potentially leading to long-term inter-community strife. This could hinder the prospects of peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding among the different sections of Manipuri society.

Social Media and Communication

The role of social media in shaping narratives and mobilizing people cannot be ignored. Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter have played a significant role in disseminating information and galvanizing public sentiment. While these platforms can be used to raise awareness and organize peaceful protests, they can also contribute to the spread of misinformation and incite violence.

The Way Forward: Addressing the complexities of the recent riots in Manipur requires a multi-faceted approach.

Dialogue and Inclusivity: Initiating open and inclusive dialogues involving all stakeholders, including government officials, community leaders, and civil society representatives, is crucial. This can help build bridges of understanding and find common ground.

Educational Initiatives: Promoting education and awareness about Manipur's history, culture, and diversity can foster a sense of pride and belonging among its citizens. This could potentially reduce mistrust and tensions among different communities.

Economic Development: Focusing on sustainable economic development can create opportunities for the youth and reduce the allure of joining militant groups. Investments in infrastructure,



healthcare, and education can improve the quality of life for Manipur's residents.

Media Literacy: Promoting media literacy can help citizens critically assess information, reducing the influence of misinformation and propaganda. This can contribute to a more informed and responsible public discourse.

Conflict Resolution: Establishing effective conflict resolution mechanisms can provide a peaceful outlet for addressing grievances. Engaging in talks with insurgent groups and addressing their concerns can be a step toward lasting peace.

Conclusion

The recent riots in Manipur reflect the deeply rooted complexities of the region's history, culture, and political dynamics. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves understanding the concerns of all stakeholders and working collaboratively toward a more harmonious and inclusive future. By embracing dialogue, education, economic development, media literacy, and effective conflict resolution, Manipur can pave the way for sustainable peace and progress. By understanding the objectives behind these events, policymakers can work towards addressing the root causes and fostering a more inclusive approach to governance. It is essential to encourage open dialogue and promote peaceful avenues for expressing concerns, in order to prevent further escalation of conflicts. The implications of the riots highlight the need for concerted efforts to maintain harmony, stability, and progress in this culturally rich and diverse state.

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