Partition of Manipur, Greater Nagaland and Contrived Tangkhul-Naga Identity: Role of Script and Lingua Franca

Kunal Ghosh
Vikas Kumar

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/vikas_kumar/19/
Documents adopted at Asian-African Summit

SREEDHAR
On the Demand for a Telengana State

BHARAT DOGRA
Social Security for Unorganised Workers

KUNAL GHOSH, VIKAS KUMAR
Partition of Manipur, Greater Nagaland and Contrived Tangkhul-Naga Identity: Role of Script and Lingua Franca

An Unforgettable Anniversary (May 9, 1945)

• Victory Day: ILYA EHRENBURG
• War Poems: NIKOLAI MAYOROV, YULIA DRUNINA, KONSTANTIN SIMONOV

FROM N.C.'S WRITINGS
• PAKISTAN: REPORTER'S JOTTINGS
Caught in a Bind

The BJP-led NDA’s decision to boycott the entire Parliament session has once again dealt a blow to parliamentary democracy. First, the Opposition tried to disrupt the proceedings of both the Houses by raising the issue of the government’s second affidavit before the Supreme Court on the defence deals during the tenure of the NDA Government; later the focus shifted to Laloo Prasad Yadav, the Railway Minister, on his being chargesheeted in the fodder scam case with the Opposition demanding his resignation. On both these issues the Opposition was fully within its rights to express itself as it did. But none of these two issues was such as to compel the Opposition to continually disrupt the House or boycott Parliament for days before announcing the decision to boycott it for the whole session. And to justify this the NDA used strong adjectives as “intemperate” against its political adversaries occupying the Treasury Benches; it was even suggested that the Opposition is regarded as the “enemy” by the government.

However, if one takes a dispassionate view of the whole affair one is at a loss to understand why this kind of attack on the UPA Government has been launched by the Opposition; for try as one would, one does not find any major step on the part of the ruling coalition that could generate such a reaction from the side of the Opposition. In fact the UPA Government and its leader went out of their way to accommodate the Opposition and tried their best see to it that the NDA leaders return to Parliament; but those efforts were in vain. [Lately the NDA leaders have been able to cite only two pronouncements—one by a Congress MP (not a Minister) and the other by the PM’s Media Adviser—that provoked them to decide on boycotting the entire session! This kind of response is expected from immature politicians and greenhorns, not from such seasoned, astute and mature parliamentarians as A.B. Vajpayee, L.K. Advani and George Fernandes.]

It is also unfortunate that the NDA constituents, primarily the BJP, targeted two senior parliamentarians, both of whom have substantially contributed towards upholding the dignity of Parliament and have never indulged in anything that could be even remotely construed as unparliamentary practice. They are PM Manmohan Singh and Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee. By attacking such personalities and charging them with “blatant partisanship” the Opposition stalwarts are not doing justice to their own standing in Parliament; rather they are exposing their subjective attitudes as well as prejudices. This too is anathema to the functioning of a parliamentary democracy.

One gets the impression that in their desperation to find an issue—a stick to beat the government with—the Opposition NDA leaders are caught in a bind. Even their steadfast ally for the past seven years, the TDP, deemed it necessary to break ranks and attend Parliament while articulating the NDA’s views inside the House. The NDA leaders themselves should have done so by returning to Parliament. But they stood on false prestige and unable to get a face-saving mechanism they adopted a more defiant posture and tied themselves up in knots by deciding to boycott the Budget session. This kind of infantile behaviour has no place in our democratic set-up. In the process the NDA would be rapidly losing public sympathy.

It was expected that the Opposition would seek to corner the Congress and the Left when it participates in the Finance Bill. That is precisely what influential sections of the media had widely reported. But the
Partition of Manipur, Greater Nagaland and Contrived Tangkhul-Naga Identity
Role of Script and Lingua Franca

KUNAL GHOSH and VIKAS KUMAR

The June 14, 2001 ceasefire ‘without territorial limits’ between the NSCN (I-M) (Isac-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland) and the Central Government evoked massive, unprecedented protests in Manipur that turned violent and claimed many innocent lives. The Manipuris saw this prima facie as yet another instance of submission of the government to the proponents of ‘Greater Nagaland’ who are clamouring for division of Manipur along ethnic lines—the Meitei-dominated Valley and the tribes-dominated Hills. The geography of Manipur plays a central role in its economy, history and analysis given here: It consists of a central fertile valley, where the Meitei people live, surrounded by hills inhabited by various tribes. The capital town Imphal, located in the Valley, was also the seat of the Manipur kingdom through the ages. The Central Government corrected its position in July 2001 and declared that the ceasefire would be continued only within Nagaland. However, the NSCN (I-M) remains steadfast in its unjustified demand for the merger of the Naga-inhabited districts with Nagaland.

From the days of the Naga National Council (late 1940s) there has been a demand to bring “all Nagas” under one political and administrative unit. Since then the idea of territories inhabited by “all Nagas” has come a long way. Today the Indian part of ‘Greater Nagaland’ encompasses four whole districts of Manipur (Senapati, Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Chandel). [Ref: www.angelfire.com/mo/Nagaland/map.html, also Thapar and Karmakar 2001] The question of ‘Greater Nagaland’ is inextricably tied up with the traditional territory and lingua franca of Manipur. In the present article we examine the veracity of NSCN (I-M)’s demand in the context of Manipur.

Hill Tribes of Manipur

Language and Script

Linguistically speaking, the tribes of the Hills of Manipur can be divided into four broad categories— Tangkhul, Zeme, Angami-Pochuri, and Kuki-Chin (Northern and Central). [Ref: Ethnologue] Each of these groups includes many languages. At times even the dialects of the same language are mutually unintelligible. The villagers speak their language within themselves and Manipuri language with other tribes and Meiteis. [Ref: Arokianathan 1982, p. xi] The Manipuri language, written in the Bengali script, is used as the lingua franca in the State. Most of the tribes are bilingual in the Manipuri language and some of them use the Bengali script even for tribal languages along with the Roman script; the Church introduced the latter after the conversion of tribals to Christianity. The proficiency in the Manipuri language among the tribes varies with the distance from the Valley and the depth of intercourse with the Valley in the past. For example, the powerful Tangkhul tribe, which had close relations with the Valley, is highly proficient in Manipuri. [Ref: Ethnologue; also Arokianathan 1982, p. xi and Arokianathan 1987, p. 1] and the Kabui tribe reads the Manipuri Bible written in the Bengali script. [Ref: Ethnologue]

Why were the Tangkhuls traditionally close to the Meitei and not to the tribes of present Nagaland? The answer lies in geography. There is a formidable mountain barrier, which rises to 9500 feet at Mt Japvo and forms the natural boundary between the two States. The Tangkhuls live south of this barrier and access the Manipur Valley easily. Arokianathan (1980) says that the Tangkhuls are now emotionally attached to the Roman script because it is connected to the Bible and was given to them by Rev Pettigrew who gave them a new religion. [p. 80] Also concerted attempts are being made to supplant Manipuri with English as the lingua franca for inter-tribal communication.

The Tangkhul group, named after the dominant tribe of that group, is numerically the largest among the so-called Manipuri Nagas. The numerically

Dr Kunal Ghosh is the Head and Professor, Department of Aerospace Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. Vikas Kumar is an Engineer working at the Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, Trichy.
dominant Tangkhuls have defined the shape of Manipuri tribal politics since the pre-British period. Tangkhuls are found only in the Hills of Northern Manipur and the Somra Tract of Myanmar. [Ref: Sreedhar 1974, p. 29] Thoudam (2000) has reported a case of the Tanaon-speaking tribe claiming to be Tangkhul speakers because of fear of expulsion from Tangkhul-dominated territories.

The literacy in Manipuri language among the tribals is falling not only because of the pro-English/Roman policy of the Church-controlled schools but also due to the linguistic puritans of the Valley, who want to bring back a purified Manipuri language written in an archaic Meitei script. A detailed discussion of this linguistic shift is beyond the scope of this article. However, for the purpose of the present discussion it would be sufficient for us to know that traditionally Manipuri written in the Bengali script has been the only language understood in general by all peoples of Manipur and played the role of a shared linguistic medium. However, since the advent of Meitei ethnic nationalism in the 1970s, Manipuri language started losing its broad-based appeal and the process accelerated in the 1980s with increased emphasis on the archaic Meitei script and attempts to purge the Manipuri vocabulary of words loaned from other languages. The State Government in 1980 officially introduced the archaic Meitei script (Manipur Gazette No. 33 April 22 and No. 40 April 25, 1980), although the Bengali script continues to be visible everywhere even in 2004.

In the Hills the three following processes are at work simultaneously: introduction of the Roman script for tribal languages; efforts to promote the use of English for inter-tribal communication; and the use of force to persuade marginal tribes to declare linguistic affiliation with the Tangkhuls. Taken together these are aimed at irreversibly changing the linguistic identity of the so-called Manipuri Nagas and associated tribes.

Religion

The American Baptist missionaries led by Rev William Pettigrew started Church planting among the Tangkhuls of Ukhrul in the mid-1890s [ref: Arokianathan 1982, p. xx and BMR 1932] and among other tribes of Manipur during the First World War. The British started to exercise control over Manipur through their representative to the royal court after the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824). The missionaries seem to have come in contact with the Tangkhuls as early as the 1830s. Rev Father N. Brown published short vocabularies of three major variants of Tangkhul in 1837. [Ref: Arokianathan 1995, p. xii] However, it was only after the Anglo-Manipur War (1891) that the Britishers could stamp out all pockets of resistance to their presence in the State. Is it a mere coincidence that the American Baptist Mission, that was active in Eastern Assam since the 1840s, 'providentally' got the permission to enter Manipur in 1894 and began its work among the tribals of Manipur in 1896? Was religion an instrument of politics in the hands of the British?

The nineteenth century Christian missionaries found a society steeped in Vaishnavism on their arrival in the Valley. They moved towards the Hills since the Meitei ruler declared the Valley out of bounds for the missionaries and with the Anglo-Manipur War just behind them the British administration was not keen in escalating the matter. However, Rev Pettigrew notes that the mission was generously supported by both civil and military British officers who rendered grateful service and financial help. [Ref: BMR 1932] Initially there was great resistance to the new religion among the Tangkhuls, who worshipped the Sun and Moon. But later all got converted. [Ref: Arokianathan 1982, p. xx] Ghosh and Kumar (2004) have discussed the resistance to introduction of Christianity in the Naga Hills.

Arokianathan (1982) has discussed the deep impact of Christianity on the Tangkhuls. He points out that now only Christ is referred to as Vararwa (God), and all traditional Gods and Spirits are Khumiyew (Devil). [p. xx] Christianity has supplanted the native faith along with its arrays of Gods, Spirits, Demons and pristine rituals. Arokianathan (1980) has discussed an instance of Christianization of the racial memory of the Tangkhuls. He draws attention towards an interesting legend among the Tangkhuls that in the remote past their language had a script of its own which got lost in course of time. Now the legend ends with the statement that God sent the script (Roman) back to them through Rev Pettigrew! [p. 80] In short, introduction of Christianity has irreversibly altered the religious and linguistic identity of the so-called Manipuri Nagas and associated tribes.

Pre-1947 Relationship with the Valley

Traditionally the Tangkhuls have enjoyed close relationship with the Meiteis of the Manipur Valley. Tangkhul folk tales and songs collected by Arokianathan (1982) have numerous references to interaction with the Meiteis of the Valley but no
reference to interaction with the Nagaland-based Naga tribes. The Meitei Kings and the Tangkhul Chiefs used to have marital relations [p. 240], the Tangkhul Chiefs used to host the King’s army in the Hills [p. 107], the Meiteis and the Tangkhuls participated in each other’s festivals and ceremonies [p. 113], the Meiteis visited the fairs and markets in the Hills for trading [p. 226], and the Tangkhuls used to work in the Valley to earn a livelihood. [p. 231] Because of the intense two-way interaction, described above, Manipuri words entered into the vocabulary of tribal dialects. [Also ref: Arokianathan 1995]

Unlike the tribes of Manipur the Nagas of Nagaland use Nagamese, an admixture of Assamese and commonly understood Naga tribal words and expressions, as the lingua franca and traded with the Brahmaputra Valley-based Assamese. They had a multifaceted interaction with the Assamese that included trade, political ties and religion. [Ref: Ghosh and Kumar 2004, Nag 2002, Sreedhar 1974, Misra 1998, Hazarika 1995] The Tangkhuls were not party to any of the pre-independence agreements between the Naga insurgents and the Government. The first agreement/memorandum where Manipur is explicitly mentioned was the ‘Supplementary Agreement to the Shillong Accord (Jan 5, 1976)’.

From the above discussion on the historical, social, political and commercial relationship between the Hills and Valley peoples of Manipur it is clear that despite the constraints, imposed by hilly territory and natural ethno-linguistic differences, there was a sustainable interaction between the two groups.

Post-1947 Relationship with the Valley

Before acceding to the Indian Union Maharaja Buddhachandra [vide Manipur Constitution Act (1947) and Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation (1947)] constituted a 60-member Legislative Assembly (Apr 18, 1948). Eighteen of the 53 seats were reserved for the Hills. Likewise, two of the seven nominated seats were set-aside for the Hills. A Tangkhul Naga was the first Minister-in-charge for the Hills. [Ref: Koijam 2001] It is therefore not surprising that the famous 13th point of the 16-Point Agreement (1960) that called for unification of Naga territories did not evoke a positive response from the so-called Nagas of Manipur. Later, when Manipur was granted Statehood in 1972, 19 of the 60 Assembly seats and one out of the two Lok Sabha seats were reserved for the Hills peoples. [Ref: Koijam 2001] In addition, the State Assembly has a permanent inner chamber called ‘the Hill Areas Committee’ [vide Article 371 C (1) of the Constitution of India], which vets and approves all the laws pertaining to the Hills before they are considered in the Assembly. All the legislators from the Hills are the ex-officio members of the Committee and its Chairperson enjoys the status of a Cabinet Minister. [Ref: Koijam 2001 and Basu 1981]

No wonder that large numbers of Nagas living in Imphal were not touched during the June 2001 unrest in the Valley. [Ref: Prabhakara 2003a] This, according to Chhibbar (2001), is one of the unique features of the unique culturally diverse fabric of Manipur’. The elaborate arrangement between the Hills and the Valley and the delicate balance between different communities that has evolved over centuries of coexistence is under serious threat from the proponents of ‘Greater Nagaland’. Finally, it would be worth reminding that more so-called Nagas have adorned the seat of Chief Minister of Manipur than any other community.

Disruptive Role of NSCN (I-M)

The NSCN (I-M) has a strong base among certain sections of so-called Nagas in Manipur. In fact, a large number of cadres and senior NSCN (I-M) leaders like Muivah hail from the northern districts of Manipur known as ‘Southern Nagaland’ in the parlance of the NSCN (I-M). Failure to include these parts of Manipur in the proposed Greater Nagaland will be a loss of face for the senior leadership of the NSCN (I-M). This facet of the NSCN (I-M)’s Greater-Nagaland-mania cannot be overestimated.

We will end our discussion on the Naga-Meitei interaction with a quote from Bhattacharji (2002) where he traces the history of this interaction and the threat to it from the proponents of ‘Greater Nagaland’.

Those in the hills are mostly Nagas and some Kukis. The valley is dominated by the Meiteis. There is a history of mutual tolerance between the two sets of people. The Meitei king used to be crowned in a Tangkhul Naga dress, near Ukhrul in the village of Hundung. The chief of the village and king of Meiteis had close ancestral ties. Even today some Tangkhuls organise phiroy, a Meitei memorial feast for the dead. The cordiality is under strain on account of the Naga insurgents demanding a Greater Nagaland that will include most of the hills that surround the Manipur Valley. [p. 208] (emphasis ours)

Kukis and the Contrived Pan-Naga Identity

THE NSCN (I-M)’s fight for a sovereign ‘Greater Nagaland’ has brought the Nagas of Manipur at loggerheads not only with the Meiteis of the Valley but also with other tribes, like the Kukis, with whom they share territory. Numerically the Kukis are equal to the Nagas in the Hills of Manipur. The Kukis are
spread across Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Nagaland and Myanmar (where they are known as Kuki-Chin). They speak different languages that are broadly classified as Kuki-Chin.

The Bloody Conflict
According to some, the Kuki-Naga conflict started during the British period when the administration tried to use Kukis against the Nagas. [Ref: Ghosh 2001b, p. 106 and Bhattacharjee 2000, p. 217] There has not been any major incident of clash, after the end of British rule, between the Nagas and Kukis prior to the ascendance of the Tangkhul lobby within the Naga underground movement. For the last two decades the Kukis have been targeted so as to ensure that the people of the territory, proposed to be a part of ‘Greater Nagaland’, are demographically homogenous or supportive. The NSCN (I-M) has indulged in ethnic cleansing in the hills of Manipur. The Kukis have been their prime target in the 1990s. More than 1000 lives have been lost [Ref: Bhamuk 2002], mostly Kukis, as the NSCN (I-M) unleashed calculated violence to ensure demographic homogeneity in the hills and control over the illegal border trade at Moreh on the Indo-Myanmar border. Kuki refugees fled southwards and came in conflict with the dominant local tribes like the Paites of Churachandpur with whom they had a serious conflict in 1996. [Ref: Swami 2004] Both Kukis and Paites belong to the same ethno-linguistic block. [Ref: Ghosh 2001b, p. 128] Since the NSCN (I-M)’s ceasefire with the Centre in the late 1990s, there has been an uneasy calm between the Naga and Kuki militias, interspersed with sporadic incidents of violence.

According to Kukigamcha (2003), the Kukis may be trapped in “a situation similar to that of the Hindus in the present day Pakistan”, that is, as second-class citizens in a theocratic and ethnically intolerant ‘Greater Nagaland’. This has pushed the Kukis to devise survival strategies ranging from demands for a separate Kangpokpi district [Ref: rediff.com 1998] to a separate state called ‘Kukiland’ within India [Ref: Subir Ghosh 2001, p. 128]. Which should include all Kuki-inhabited regions of India and Myanmar. [Ref: Hazarika 1995, p. 243 and Nag 2002, p. 292] Many Kuki organizations in the state have expressed solidarity with the Valley-based organisations and have opposed the division of Manipur [Ref: The Hindu 2003a, also Nag 2002, p. 310].

Naga-Kuki Relationship: Confusion of Identity
Anyone who knows about the post-independence Naga-Kuki rivalry would be amazed to know that one of the twenty signatories to the Naga Club’s historic memorandum submitted to the Simon Commission (on January 10, 1929) was a Kuki interpreter named Lengjang Kuki. Tangkhuls were not a party to this memorandum. The memorandum reads as follows: We the undersigned Nagas of the Naga Club at Kohima (emphasis ours)... Angamis, Kacha Nagas, Kukis, Semas, Lotha and Rengmas [Ref: NSUD 1996, Appendix II]

Interestingly, the Kuki language is recognised in Nagaland for schooling [Ref: Sreedhar 1974, p. 12] and the Kohima station of AIR broadcasts programmes in Thadou, a language of the Kukis. [Ref: Sreedhar 1974, p. 14] It needs to be noted that Tangkhul does not enjoy similar status in Nagaland. The authors are not aware of any serious ethnic crisis involving the Nagas and the Kukis in Nagaland. Many so-called Naga tribes of Manipur are, in fact, linguistically and culturally closer to the Kukis. Dr J.H. Hutton, “one of the best British friends that they (Nagas) have ever had” [Ref: Elwin 2001, p. 285], brings out the confusion in this regard very eloquently in the following words:

It is generally assumed in a vague sort of way that those tribes which are spoken of as Nagas have something in common with each other which distinguishes them from the many other tribes found in Assam and enables them to be regarded as a racial unit in themselves. The truth is that, if not impossible, it is exceedingly difficult to propose any test by which a Naga tribe can be distinguished from other Assam or Burma tribes which are not ‘Nagas’.

[Ref: Elwin 2001, p. 285] (emphasis ours)

The Naga-Kuki conflict seems to be a purely Manipuri phenomenon, where the NSCN (I-M)-led extremist Tangkhuls are trying to bolster their demand for the merger of the Hills of Manipur with Nagaland. The Naga-Kuki conflict has spilled over to other areas of common interest like Karbi Anglong and the NC Hills of Assam where the Kukis are locked in a territorial conflict with the front organisations of the NSCN (I-M). An amorphous identity to begin with, which later hardened and narrowed down, explains how a Kuki could be a party to an important Naga memorandum mentioned above.

Ever Changing Contours of Naga identity
According to the NSCN (I-M), the ‘Naga Nation’ consists of at least 40 tribes (www.angelfire.com/mo/Nagaland). However, to begin with, the Naga National Council (NNC) consisted of only 29-members, representing various tribes on the basis of proportional representation. [Ref: Nag 2002, p. 61] Commenting on the exaggerated demographic claims of the NSCN (I-M) the Editor of The Hindu says:

In the land of numerous tribes, notions of the ethnic identity of the Nagas are often loose, and the identity of some of the tribes claimed by the NSCN (IM)—for instance, the “Old Kukis” in Manipur—is subject to dispute. Ethnic identity is often mixed with political affinities.

[Ref: The Hindu 2003b]
Commenting of the fluid character of ethnic labels within the Nagas, Prabhakara (2003b) says:

Historically, the Naga people are divided into various tribal communities... whose numbers as well as nomenclatures have undergone some interesting changes over the years. Official records of the State Government at present identify 14 separate tribal groups; however, there can be no finality about this number. At least one of these, the Zeliang-Kuki, is a self-evidently artificial construct, while another, the Chakesang, is a sort of portmanteau construct whose members were not so long ago categorised under three different denominations.

On the origin of the usage of the term Naga to identify diverse tribes settled in the Naga Hills, Misra (1998) draws attention to the fact that colonial records show, there is no evidence of the use of that term by the Nagas themselves for self-identification. [Also ref: Sreedhar 1985, p. 169]

She further says that the term 'Naga' was a colonial construct that was used to isolate the Hills from the Plains. Whereas in his introduction to the nineteenth century writings on the North East Frontier Agency Elwin (1959) warns that generic terms like 'Naga' can be quite misleading.

Some confusion may be caused by the indiscriminate use of tribal names by the earlier writers (European—addition owns), who used words like 'Abor' or 'Naga' as if they meant 'hillman' or 'tribesman'. This is specially true of the word 'Naga' which they applied to a number of tribes which do not classify as Nagas today. [Ref: Elwin 2001, pp. 202-3]

When the colonial administrators and missionaries first visited the Naga Hills the tribes used to identify themselves with a particular tribe and not as a Naga. [Ref: Mishra 1998] Elwin (1961) testifies the above point based on his personal experience in the Naga Hills. He says:

The derivation of the word ‘Naga’ is obscure...the name, however, was not in general use among the Nagas until recently. It was given to them by the people of the plains and in the last century was used indiscriminately for the Abors and Dafass as well as for the Nagas themselves. Even as late as 1954 I found the people of Tuensang rarely speaking of themselves as Nagas but as Konyaks, Changs, Pongs and so on... Gradually, however, as the Nagas became more united they began to use the name for themselves, until today it has become widely popular. [Ref: Elwin 2001, pp. 284-5] (emphasis ours)

In consonance with the above mentioned disunity in the early phase of proselytisation churches were established for particular tribes, for example, Phom, Sema, Lotha, Ao etc. [Ref: Nag 2002, p. 56], and not for Nagas. The formation of the Naga Club, the first pan-Naga organisation, triggered the formation of sub-tribal associations like the Lotha Council and the Ao Naga Council. [Ref: Bhattacharji 2002, p. 179] Even now it is difficult for a candidate of one tribe to win Assembly elections from the stronghold of another tribe [Ref: Nag 2002, p. 350] since mutual suspicion across different ethnic/linguistic boundaries still exists. [Ref: Sreedhar 1985, p. 33] Even the NSCN (I-M) is organised internally along tribal lines [Ref: www.angelfire.com/ma/Nagaland]

Pan-Naga Solidarity: A Reality Check

Among the Tangkhul extremists there is a deep-seated unwillingness to live with the numerically dominant Meiteis of the Valley and therefore they look forward to join Nagaland. But they are not unconditionally welcome in Nagaland. A large number of Nagas of Nagaland still consider the powerful Tangkhuls to be 'outsiders'. When S.C. Jamir, the erstwhile Chief Minister of Nagaland, labelled the Tangkhul-dominated NSCN (I-M) as 'outsiders' [ref: Thapar and Karmakar 2001], perhaps he had the above constituency in mind. The NSCN (I-M) does not command any meaningful support within the numerically dominant Konyaks, who are closer to the NSCN (Khaplang). Banerjee (2003) has pointed towards the limited acceptability of the NSCN (I-M) among different Naga tribes. Hazarika (1995) observes that even within Manipur the NSCN (I-M) does not command the support of all Nagas and depends on the Tangkhuls and Analns. [p. 242] At the most the NSCN (I-M) can be considered to represent a section of Nagas belonging to the following groups—Ao, Sema, Mao, Tangkhul and Zeliang. Even this conservative statement of the NSCN (I-M)'s strength has serious problems. A section of Zemes is campaigning under the banner of Zeliangrong People's Conference for a separate State including areas of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. [Ref: Misra and Misra 1998] And the educationally and otherwise advanced Aos and Angamis do not like the dominance of 'outsiders' like the Tangkhuls and Myanmarese Nagas of the NSCNs. Tangkhulisation of the NSCN (I-M)'s cultural propaganda material [Ref: www.angelfire.com/ma/Nagaland] reflects the urge of the geoculturally marginal Tangkhuls to project themselves as culturally central among the Nagas.

Who is a Naga?

It is clear from the above analysis that the Naga identity is a new and evolving construct. The words, Naga and Nagamese, came into vogue at the same time in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Nagamese, a pidgin of Assamese enlivened by tribal words, is what the Nagas spoke with the plains people of Assam for centuries, which eventually became the lingua franca over a loosely defined territory. It is this territory, known as Naga Hills during the British period, which demanded independence in 1947 and later became a State of the Union, called Nagaland. After a long search, the present authors have come to the conclusion that the language, Nagamese, is the

MAINSTREAM  ●  May 6-12, 2005  17
only common institution among the diverse tribes of Nagaland, none of which called itself Naga only a half-century ago. Even the Naga Ho-Ho, a gathering of tribal representatives, is a new institution, which came much after the formation of the NNC in 1946. [Nag 2002, p. 61] But what must be conceded is that the words Naga and Nagamese are a natural growth, and the State of Nagaland follows from that.

However, the Naga identity for the Tangkhul people (who live in the Hills of Manipur, traditionally speak Manipuri as their lingua franca, and do not speak Nagamese) is a more recent and artificial construct. It is comparable to the recently contrived artificial Gorkha identity for the Bhutia, Lepcha, Sherpa, Norbu, Tamang peoples of Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal [ref: Ghosh 2001a], whereas the true Gorkhas are a war-like kshatriya ruling clan who originally hail from Western Nepal and gave Nepal its royal family. It is time to call the bluff of the NSCN (I-M). It is no wonder that one of the Chief Ministers of Nagaland is on record, calling the Tangkhul-dominated NSCN (I-M) as "outsiders".

Ghosh and Kumar (2004) have pointed out that the NSCN (IM)'s perspective on the vital elements of identity—language and religion—is in dissonance with the ground realities within the Naga communities of present Nagaland. It is time, therefore, to freeze the definition of who is a Naga and clearly recognize the stratagem of the secessionist forces. This consists of an ever-expanding circle of Christianity and Naganness.

Conclusion

We observe that the demand for 'Greater Nagaland' is based on false premises vis-a-vis the Hills of Manipur. It has been shown in the preceding section that those who claim to speak for the Nagas of Manipur do not enjoy a broad-based support in the Hills and therefore are given to ignoring the substantial presence of other-Nagas and non-Nagas, who are against the division of Manipur. The Tangkhul extremists have tried ethnic cleansing of the Kukis to bolster their illegitimate demand for merger with Nagaland, that shows up their sectarian outlook.

Their demand for division of Manipur, which ignores the long shared history, is rooted in the unwillingness to cohabit with the demographically dominant theo-linguistic others (Meiteis). They are also against the Kukis, one of the largest non-Naga tribes that reside in the territory proposed as 'Greater Nagaland'. The exclusion of the Kukis from the pan-Naga identity and the consequent persecution is the consequence of their unwillingness to yield and join the 'Greater Nagaland' bandwagon as yet another 'Naga' tribe. The size of the Kuki tribes makes them difficult to be ignored and that explains the intense antagonism of the Naga extremists towards them.

Bifurcation of Manipur will be 'its undoing' according to Rosem (2004), an Andhra cadre IAS from Manipur. He says:

"Even in hill areas where there are restrictions, Meitei settlements increased and they are rather welcome, not surprisingly. There have never been tribal and non-tribal conflicts in Manipur's history and the population is so mixed that bifurcating the State will be its undoing." (emphasis ours)

There are three contending scripts—Bengali, Meitei and Roman, and two contending lingua francas—Manipuri and English. The civil society must choose wisely. The Manipuri language, which is the lingua franca of all peoples of Manipur, is under assault from the extremists in the Hills and the linguistic chauvinists in the Valley as well. The Manipuri language is the key to the future of a syncretic multicultural Manipur. We end with the exhortation to the civil society of Manipur to stand united against the attempts, both in the Hills and the Valley, to reduce the Manipuri language as the language of Meiteis alone. They should remember that the Manipuri language written in the Bengali script is the lingua franca of the whole of Manipur whereas the same language written in the archaic the Meitei script belongs only to the Valley. Introduction of Meitei script carries the seeds of partition of Manipur. If the civil society there fails in its duty it will not be the undoing of Manipur alone. The event of division of Manipur will push the whole of the North-East into turmoil.

REFERENCES

BMIR/The Baptist Missionary Review (1932): Vol. XXXVIII, November, No. II.

Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com


Ghosh, Kunal and Kumar, Vikas (2004): "NSCN (IM) and the Roots of Naga Identity: Religion and Language”—Part I (April 10, p. 11-17), Part II (April 17, pp. 27-30) and Corrigendum (May 15, p. 35), Mainstream (New Delhi).


The Hindu, (2003):


b. May 31: Split over unification, Editorial.


Rosem, Lal (2004): "It is not too late to save Manipur", The Hindu, August 17.


FOOTNOTES

1. Unless otherwise specified Meitei stands for the Meitei language written in the archaic Meitei script and Manipuri stands for Meitei language written in the Bengali script.

2. Rev. Pettigrew introduced the English and Roman script along with Christianity in Ukhrul, the heartland of Tangkhuls. He published a grammar and dictionary of the Tangkhul language in 1918.

3. The NSCN (I-M) is fighting for a Christian, Socialist Nagaland whose official language shall be English. [Ref: Ghosh and Kumar 2004, also Prabakara 2003a]

4. Predominantly Christian Analns, who are ethno-linguistically Kukis, declared themselves Naga in 1963. [Ref: Ethnologue]

---

BOOK REVIEW

Furthering the Discourse for Dalit Liberation

A. RAMBABU


The book under review brings out the perspectives of the Dalit masses in presenting the social facts. It is a revised and enlarged version of the author’s earlier work, “Casteism is More Horrendous than Racism: Durban and Dalit Discourse”, with broader objectives of the Dalit discourses.

This book consists of six chapters preceded by a clear, comprehensive and critical introduction and also includes eight appendices providing very useful supplementary details. The author focuses upon many historical as well as day-to-day issues that affect the Dalit communities. Such issues as caste atrocities/discrimination committed on the Dalits, identity formation and assertion among Dalits etc. are dealt here. The six chapters are presented in such a manner that a coherent understanding of the themes and perspectives taken for consideration in this work is made possible to any reader.

The first chapter focuses upon the theoretical framework of the terms such as “Caste Discrimination” and “Social Exclusion/Segregation” in their socio-historical contexts. In order to bring out the socio-cultural agenda of these concepts and their various forms, the author deals extensively with Dr Ambedkar’s views and analyses of caste discrimination and untouchability. However, his analyses of contemporary works highlight concrete cases substantially.

In the second chapter, while spelling out the