
MODERNITY AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN MANIPURISHMEET KAUR CHAUDHRY &
LONGJAM LOYAANGAMBA MEITEICentral University of Gujerat
ishmeetsaini@gmail.com
loyalongjam123@gmail.comReceived: 25-10-2022
Accepted: 18-10-2023**ABSTRACT**

Cultural identity resonates with the categories of 'personal' and 'social' identity vis-à-vis the ideas of politics and culture. The emergence and evolution of the idea of social identity in any society's political, social, and cultural context are determined by imperialism. This imperialism may come in various forms in the vicinity, even overthrowing one language and culture over dominance. It is evident in the context of Indian history, partly and evidently. However, beyond the proximity of nationhood, few important insights, eras and events that took place in North-East India are so far neglected, especially in Manipur. Concerning this, we explored the role of imperialism in resolving a parcel of conflict on the cultural identity, language as one of the tools, and religion as the basis for cultural divides. In this review, we observed that language had shaped the foundation of historic and cultural identity in Manipur. Secondly, the tussle in religious practices, which, in turn, becomes a political tool for cultural identity and divides. Thirdly, the rise in the ethnic discontentment of various ethnicities and minorities settling in the State is due to the above two reasons.

KEYWORDS: Language, History, Religion, Culture, New Ethnicity, Nation, Manipur**RESUMEN** *Modernidad y política: Un estudio de la identidad cultural en Manipur*

En relación con las ideas de política y cultura, la identidad cultural resuena con las categorías de identidad 'personal' y 'social'. El surgimiento y evolución de la idea de identidad social en el contexto político, social y cultural de cualquier sociedad están determinados por el imperialismo. Este imperialismo sucede de maneras diferentes en las inmediaciones, incluso derrocando una lengua y cultura sobre la dominante. Esto es evidente en el contexto de la historia india de manera parcial y ciertamente. Sin embargo, más allá de la proximidad de la nacionalidad, son completamente ignorados algunos entendimientos, épocas y sucesos que ocurrieron en el noroeste de India, especialmente en Manipur. Con respecto a esto, exploramos el rol del imperialismo en resolver una parcela del conflicto con la identidad cultural, el lenguaje como una de las herramientas y la religión como base cultural que divide. En este análisis, observamos que fue el lenguaje el que había dado forma a la creación de la identidad histórica y cultural en Manipur. En segundo lugar, la lucha entre las prácticas religiosas se convierte a su vez en una herramienta política para la identidad cultural que genera divisiones. En tercer lugar, el aumento del descontento étnico de varios grupos étnicos y minorías que se está estableciendo en el Estado es debido a las dos razones mencionadas anteriormente.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lenguaje, historia, religión, cultura, nueva identidad étnica, nación, Manipur

INTRODUCTION

Social self is manifested by Culture into an intellectual pattern of intuitions rather than remaining a social practice of a community alone. Once it becomes an institutional query or concern, it traverses as community's political, social and cultural context determining neo-imperialism in the current trend. Though neo-imperialism may appear as a mechanistic view of the economy, it also functions in various forms and implies different meanings. The contemporary phase of imperialism had intensified monopoly in circulation leading to the production of unique social histories. The historical capital concentrations on sponsored corporates that control the wealth in building nationhood was evident. It is obvious in the context of Indian nationhood and historiography; however, for Manipur the case is different. The transitional or malformed insights of various important eras and events that took place in Manipur are so far neglected. This oligarchic imperialism eventually resulted in overthrowing of local cultures and the substitution of one language for another dominant one. This resulted in the rise of Hinduism and Christianity in Manipur that disturbed the culture of the state. Simultaneously, there was an enormous rise in religious hatred between different communities in different parts of India. This review explores how neo-imperialism insidiously results in the mechanism of division created by cultural structures and caste hierarchy. It also intends to observe how this divide led to ethnic rivalry that paved the way for xenophobia among the indigenous people of Manipur.

The paper focuses on:

- (1) the issues of language and identity; and the degeneration of historical institutions and scripts;
- (2) the role of religious politics played by the spread of Hinduism and Christianity in Manipur with regard to how the early nationalism around the independence of India negates the history and aura of Manipur after merging with India to build a united Indian nation, and
- (3) finding the reason or psychopathologies for cultural divides in vernacular politics and the growth of the armed revolution in Manipur.

Resistance Through Language: Language as History and Culture

The issues of language and identity and the degeneration of historical institutions and scripts for micro- minority tribes in North-East India, particularly the lost Manipuri script, need greater exploration, comprehension, and investigation. In India, more than half the population authenticates the Hindi language as nativity with its multiplicity of lexical word origins. Language could be treated as symbolic with the rise of Print Capitalism in the eighteenth century; globally. Often, base language speakers were wiped out from their historical imagined cultural community (for instance, the Australian Aboriginals) by mass globalization vis-à-vis communication through language trade.

Amidst the invisible imposition of hierarchies by the canon language, the concept of neoliberalism vis-à-vis neo-imperialism with language trade conquers and creates huge room for transcendence over aboriginals. In Postcolonial State factors like North-East India, language trade gradually boosted the monopoly since the tribes did not own the registered scripts, and their histories were not transcribed for generations. Oral ancestral folklore, folk dance, and folk songs hold the tribes together since times immemorial in Manipur. Language and its identity in Manipur united people of all communities and effectively divided them through language politics – policies.

Though language could be used for verbal and non-verbal communication it can often lead to deliberate miscommunication too through feelings of racial and ethnic enmity. For instance, the imposition of Hindi and English as official and canonical languages in India subjugated the regional dialects and distorted the historicity of oral dialects of small, microscopic minority tribes like those of the Meitei community in Manipur. U.A Shimray in *Linguistic Matrix in Manipur* suggests:

The Constitution of India, in its Eighth Schedule, recognized certain Indian languages. However, no special provision protects vulnerable minor languages, especially tribal ones. Such minor languages could lose their identity vis-à-vis the dominant language. Language has immense social and political implications, and coercion by the dominant community to impose their language could invite political turmoil. (U A Shimray, 2000: 3007)

In the postcolonial era of globalization and the information world, the dominant language and culture became the weapon of political and psychological warfare. In all languages, words have a basic binary structure that differs from one figure of speech to another; for instance, almost every noun, verb, and adjective signify contrasting meanings. It devalues one term and privileges the other. For example, words like good/evil, love/hate, new/old, etc., have an equal

weightage of a complete oxymoron. Likewise, language is never neutral if one observes it from the contrasting socio-linguistics point of view since words have histories and cannot describe the exact articulation of the real world in a way. For instance, if abortion was to be called 'murder,' 'killing' or 'an act of terror, the public would react differently to it. Words or word phrases controls and influences one's emotion like anger, joy, motivation, fear, etc. Politicians, propagandists, and advertisers use their eloquence and generate mass power through their words.

In the contemporary world, war is not about killing alone; it is instituted in a variety of ways. War for oneness in a diverse country like India needs reform laws. When enforcement happens without understanding the sentiments of indigenous people, it leads to complete chaos and explosion. For instance, the *Dravidian Movement*¹ in Tamil Nadu shows a failed attempt at language hegemony. To escape the escalating 'anti-nationalist' dogmas of the 1950s, linguistic turnover, Hindi, is imposed on the non-native speaker. To devote more attention to the cognitive inertia of vernacular identity and a sense of sovereignty, Tamilians started their anti-Sanskrit, anti-Brahmin movement, that brought about the renaming of Madras, which became Chennai. The Purist movement succeeded with the revival of literary scholars and linguists. The growth of nationalism in the regional language led to the Dravidian Language zeal that further kindled a sense of pride among the native speakers. At the same time, Robert Caldwell, a missionary and linguist, published his work, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of languages*, in 1856.

In the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, as many as ten languages from the Aryan family and four from the Dravidian family were included. The Constitution makers claimed they had included official languages in the Eighth Schedule according to the number of people speaking the language. However, the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, rejected the inclusion of the Manipuri language in the Eighth Schedule on August 7, 1958, though its script had existed since 33 A.D. As regards the 1981 Census, it is spoken by around 13 lakh people. With the rising ethnic-based politics in India, the Sindhi language was included, since it is a family of Aryan languages though only nine lakh people barely speak it. The Constitution of India has registered 28 official languages. However, it still lacks any provision or ways of

¹ The Dravidian movement in British India started with the formation of the Justice Party on November 20 1916, in Victoria Memorial Hall in Madras, by C Natesan, along with T. M. Nair and P. Theagaraya Chetty, as a result of a series of non-Brahmin conferences and meetings in the presidency.

amendments in law to protect the vulnerable and indigenous scripts, as in the case of the Manipuri script. Various national movements organized by the pillars of our nation, like Gandhi and Nehru, widely encouraged the use of the Hindi and Urdu languages, ignoring and side-lining the wide variety of indigenous languages. After independence, Hindi was made the official language. Thus, after the Partition, even the Urdu language gradually became a victim, experiencing a consistent decline in the literary discourse and a lack of unanimity among the speakers. It was subjugated through hegemonic articulation, largely by the Hindi speakers' nationalist movement in terms of language.

The language politics implemented by nationalists seems to have subdued the minority language and brought about the disappearance of minority languages and dialects, especially those in North-East India.

U. A. Shimray pictured the hegemony of language, by means of language canons, exercising authority over the minority languages:

A language becomes a vital tool to subjugate a minor ethnic group by larger and stronger dominant groups. The languages of the dominant majorities are being forcibly imposed upon minorities. (U A Shimray, 2000: 3008)

In a similar view, Benedict Anderson depicts a notion as to how media perpetuates the stereotypes through certain images and the vernacular as a medium in the public sphere. For instance, the media demarcated the imagined communities through their targeted mass audience through the power of popularism in its systematic nuances. Anderson argued that the first European nation-states were thus formed around their 'national print languages'. (Anderson 1991:6) Similarly, capitalist entrepreneurs in postcolonial Manipur printed their books and media in vernaculars languages, like Bengali script, to maximize circulation. This was the reason why Manipuri script virtually vanished. As a result, readers speaking various local dialects were grasped with language politics with the rise of print discourse and Print Capitalism.

Delving deeper into the issue, while not repudiating the above argument at the same time, the inclusion of the Manipur language in the Eighth Schedule without the actual script closely deals with the forms of power with obscure absurdity. The language carries the privileges of the lived experience of culturalism for every imagined minority community. The language trade, like the growth of Print Capitalism in the public sphere, becomes an agent of social change by recalling the historical amnesia of how the script was driven out of Manipur. The methodology

of representation in response to the language trade in Manipur focuses on the thematic assimilation of an invisible discourse of language imperialism, neo-liberalism, and neo-colonialism as a form of hegemonic indent over the microscopic minority tribes. For instance, the idea of nationalism is bound to culture, language, and ethnicity in a diverse country like India. For concerns of language in India there is no transparency or an equal distribution of exclusive ideology for marginal communities; hence, language becomes a trade phenomenon. The attachment of language as a cultural phenomenon in Manipur provokes unique contempt for self-positioning, reawakening, and self-questioning for the annihilation of cultural aura and historical consciousness against the forms of neo-colonialism in Manipur.

RELIGION AS AN AVATAR OF A POLITICAL TOOL IN CULTURAL IDENTITY

There could be no politics without religion in this present era of interculturalism and transculturation. Religious syncretism in Manipur gave rise to a new and unique essence in its language, culture, and identity. The traditional primordial religion became an important factor in the struggle for cultural identity after the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union. It is tempting to go quickly over the history of Manipur. For instance, the Kingdom of Manipur was resistance towards British colonial rule as the resistance inducted through hegemonic power functions from the feudal kings of Manipur. In the eighteenth century, Vaishnavism was adopted by the feudal kings of Manipur through the forced conversion of his people to Hinduism, without the unanimous consent from all sections of people. In his work, *Religious Syncretism among the Meiteis of Manipur*, India, Naorem Naokhomba explains:

The Meiteis have their system of religion, its myths and legends, gods and goddesses, priests and priestesses, rituals and festivals, etc. The religion centres around their belief in a supreme being, Taibang Mapu Sidaba, a formless divinity with myriad manifestations, and his two progenies- God Sanamahi and God Pakhangba. This primal religion of ancient Manipuris, known as Sanamahi, not only thrived and reached its zenith as a state religion during the reign of King Khagemba (1597-1652). This ancient kingdom, however, came within the fold of Hinduism at the beginning of the 18th century. Charairongba ascended to the Manipuri throne in 1697 and was the first Manipuri King initiated into Hinduism. His initiation to Hinduism was done in 1704, and he was given the first Sanskrit name, Pitambar Singh, among the Meitei Kings. (Naorem Naokhomba 2015: 24)

Likewise, the tribal communities inhabiting the hills of Manipur adopted Christianity when the British missionaries came in the twentieth century. A crucial concern about the monopoly played by the imported elite's religion in the 'State' (Manipur) came to forefront: What sort of

politics led to the loss of the primordial script of Manipur? The roots of histories and cultural identity before the growth of Print Capitalism were arresting emblems for an imagined community like that of the people of Manipur. Works of literature, historical, chronological consciousness, edicts on the iconography, and cenotaphs from before the advent of Hinduism in Manipur were ravaged and destroyed deliberately in the eighteenth century by the Hindu religious priest who came from Bengal. As many as 123 books were burned down, marked as *Puya-Meithaba* in the historical insights of Manipur. In *History of Manipur*, Gangmumei thoroughly cited the mass burning of the ancient texts of Manipur in 1729:

The first reference to the burning of books (popularly known as Puran Meithaba) was made by Khumanthem Kaomacha, a ballad singer turned historian in his 'Manipur *Ittibritti*' (1934), and the names of 123 books in manuscripts which were burnt are listed in this work. This is collaborated by the great Brahminical scholar Panditraj Atombapu Shanna in his *Pakhangba* (1952). He writes, "the Guru (Shanta Das) burnt all the religious books of the Meiteis to destroy the Meitei religion. (Gangmumei , 1991: 297-298)

The root problem in the developmental history and cultural identity for the growth of national belonging as a major influence on people malfunctioned with the destruction of the the sacred Manipuri script in the eighteenth century by the Hindu missionaries. The transcontinental association of the Bengali script replaced the vernacular script thus resulting in a loss of privilege in accessing the ontological truth offered through the aura of inseparable cultural truth in Manipuri Meitei Mayek script .

On the other hand, one probable reason for continuity in using the Bengali script to date, though the centripetal crux was in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, might be the growth of Print Capitalism worldwide. The massive proliferation of printing books and media in vernacular instead of arcane script led to the loss of the script (Iboyaima, 2017:20) for native speakers. The industries of the printing press came late in Manipur, although the writings continued after the forced burning of puranic texts. The conception of temporality nodded to access and the inherent form of permanency. The historical amnesia was revived in the twenty-first century through the vibe of regional nationalism. "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist."(Pitt-Rivers & Gellner, n.d.) In a more recent case, the national newspaper, *The Hindu*, recalled the long-lost script of Manipur as:

The Manipuri script, over 3,500 years old by some accounts and edged out by a Bengali import, is on a revival course, with street signs, newspapers, literature, and even records of Assembly proceedings adopting it. The script was lost to the speakers of the language when Shantidas Gosai, a Hindu missionary, spread Vaishnavism in the region in 1709, during the reign of Pamheiba. The King, who assumed the name Garib Nawaz, decreed its replacement with that of Bengali. (Iboyaima, 2017: 20)

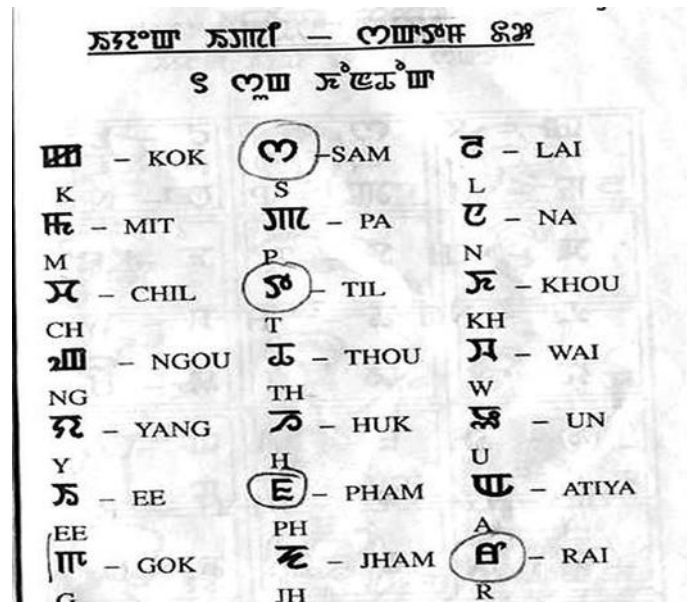


Figure 1: The Meitei Mayek (Iboyaima 2017), Manipuri Script²

REASONS FOR ETHNIC DISCONTENT

Since then, there has been a cultural divide among the same ethnic communities (between the people living in the valley and people living in the hills), and on the other hand, the growth of the armed revolution in Manipur. The togetherness of modernity and the associated politics after independence explains the rapid growth of 'the insurgencies group' in Manipur. The Modernity and its politics after independence were dispersed all around, and culture was central to all. There were possibly three decentred subjects, together with the uneven decline of these interlinked certainties, which engineered hatred among the same ethnic communities: a) the aftermath of the religious syncretism of Hinduism over the ethnic communities, b) British

² Source: [Iboyaima Laithangbam](https://thi.thgim.com/public/news/national/otherstates/article19743480.ece/alternates/FREE_1200/KIML-3), 'Banished Manipuri script stages a comeback - The Hindu', Sept 23, 2017; https://thi.thgim.com/public/news/national/otherstates/article19743480.ece/alternates/FREE_1200/KIML-3

colonialism in 1891, and c) the democratic discourse which was rolled out after independence in the princely states of India.

Manipur was one of the first states to have a free election with an adult franchise among all the princely states which merged with India. It would be worth mentioning that the constitution-making of the Province of Manipur (July 1947) was completed before the 'independent India' fully drafted its Constitutions (Indian Constitutions). In *The Politics and the Government of Manipur*, L. P. Sinha says:

The Raja announced the formation of a constitution-making body in December 1946; this led to the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947, and the Manipur Hill people (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947. The Maharaja inaugurated an Interim Council on August 14, 1947, with a Chief Minister (the younger brother of the Maharaja)*, four ministers from the plains, and two from the hills. The State of Manipur merged with India on October 15, 1949. The Manipur State Legislative Assembly and the Council Ministers were dissolved, and Manipur became a Chief Commissioner's Province. Under the constitution of the Indian Republic (1950), Manipur was initially placed in category 'C' of states. An Advisory Council was formed in 1950 to advise the Administrator. Manipur was made a Union Territory on November 1, 1956. (Sinha. 1987: 497)

However, this furore on the forcible integration without the consent of stakeholders led to the birth of 'insurgencies' (an active armed revolt and uprising in Manipur) in the state as a political response.



Figure 2: A representative image of the insurgency group of Manipur covered in E-PAO, Manipur³.

The repository of histories is to lay witness to the fact that insurgency emerged in Manipur as a merger agreement was signed with the Government of India and kept under the Part-C state group, even though it was an ancient Kingdom. There were several anecdotes with regard to how Manipur was forcibly merged with India in the mid-twentieth century after independence, through false consciousness, contextually or historically. In all-out, ignoring the existing conventional interim government and the regional constitutional monarchy. For instance, one infamous incident was when the then Chief Commissioner (V. P. Menon), assigned to the post under the Part-C category in Manipur, called over the then King, Bodhachandra, to sign the merger agreement in 1949.

Following the instructions of Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Maharaja Bodhachandra was kept under house arrest. Should it have been deemed necessary, Patel even asked the Chief Commissioner to call upon the Brigadier from Assam to tackle Manipur and the then King Bodhachandra. Gradually, the policy and code of conduct of the Indian Constitution wiped out the autonomy of instant independence in Manipur until the further process of statehood in 1972.



Figure 3: This particular incident was recorded in the print media, *Shillong Times*, in 1949.⁴

³ Source:

http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.opinions.Opinion_on_Effects_of_Insurgency.Movement_Impossible_by_Hejang_Misao

⁴ <https://kapilarambam.blogspot.com/2016/08/manipur-merger-agreement-1949-full-text.html>

NEW ETHNICITIES AND THE CULTURAL DIVIDES

The close of independence and statehood processing on successful nationalism movements in the larger states of India coincided with the awakening of regional nationalism in the northeast states of India. The psychoanalysis of race factors like physical and biological differences such as skin, eye, colour, and facial looks was an anti-essential philosophy of constructivism on this subject. In blithe disregard for race, ethnicity is bound up with social and cultural differences. Neo-imperialism is splendidly linked with new ethnicity⁵ to understand the cultural construction of difference, and not based on the subjectivity that is fixed in our genes. New ethnicity would refer to the shifted histories, language, and culture, which, in turn, took discursive positioning. The new ethnicity would have significant historical conjuncture as an identity, adapting to re-position a label of identification. For instance, Hinduism, which has never been a genealogy for the people of Manipur, has become an apprenticed new ethnicity in the aftermath of religious syncretism.

The new ethnicity has left different scholars reinventing or reinvigorating the location of the Mahabharata Manipur as well as the origin of the Meitei in the early twentieth century. A keen example to look at is Jaiminiya's Ashvamedha Parva- in an ambiguous phenomenon described a land named Manipur, where the land of Manipur has didactically portrayed the worshippers of Vishnu known for using wheeled carts, also for having a high architect for building great houses. In his review of Jaiminiya's Aswamedha Parva, Wahengbam Ibohal states:

In the hilly regions of Manipur, people whom the Aryans called Rakshasas lived, and they used bones as their ornaments. They used trees as their dwelling houses; hence, he gave the name Briksha-Desha, meaning 'tree country', to the hilly regions where those people lived. In the text of Aswamedha Parva, it is also stated that the sacrificial horse of Arjuna went to the Kingdom of Mayura Dhaja from Manipur. There are different sets of scholars who interpret the location of Mahabharata Manipur. One set of scholars asserts their views that Manipur's present kingdom is the Mahabharata's very Manipur. In contrast, some scholars subscribe to their views that the kingdom of the Mahabharat Manipur was in Orissa, and so on. (Ibohal, 1986: 414-415)

Atombapu Sharma relooks the philosophy of Manipur in *Manipuri Etahas*, 1942. He interpolated the Ancient Indian Histories with the expansion of the Aryan culture towards the integration of religion in North-East India; The Aswamedha sacrifice is a case in point, where the Hindu epic Mahabharata portrays a loosely defined place in Manipur.

⁵ In the context of Manipur, the force conversion of religion, discussed above, would eventually pave the way to New-Ethnicity.

The cultural conquistadors or the jeopardized adoption of distinctive intra-cultures and languages in an inappropriate context escalated after the State merged into India's main Hindu belt region. Manipur merged with India to contribute to livening the Indian nation into a composite chain of culture and identity. But the lack of rapport and understanding between different indigenous ethnic groups with mainstream cultures and religions led to the emergence of the Hindu religion as dominant, paving the way for the caste system in Manipur. Propagating different kinds of psychological thresholds in histories and cultural anthropology. For instance, in *Religious Syncretism among the Meiteis of Manipur*, India, Naokhomba declares:

Unlike in other regions, after conversion to Hinduism, all the converted Meiteis, including members of the King's own family and other royal dynasties, were declared to belong to the Kshatriya caste. It had made one unique feature in Manipuri Hinduism where only two castes, viz. Kshatriya and Brahmin coexist; descendants of immigrant Brahmins belonging to the Brahmin caste and the rest Meitei population belonging to the Kshatriya caste, particularly Surya Vamsa of Shri Ramchandrajai of the Ramayana. (Naorem Naokhomba, Singh 2015: 23)

At its most literal conception of apprenticed historicism, for instance, the relocation of mythological Manipur in Mahabharata and assimilation of multiculturalism, considering Manipuris as decedents of Vishnu from the Hindu myth features a drift in the cultural economy of Manipur. The logic or sense of policing questions like 'when was Independence?' after the post-war period enhanced the identity concerns. Hypothetically, the question 'when was Independence?', was diagnosed through the reference after British colonialism ended, in the case of India. However, the issues of partitioning India and Pakistan arise from various forms of nationalisms, merging into unity and diversity with multicultural factors for safeguarding all sections of cultural identity in different states. 'When was Independence?' doesn't mean the term independence, but it rather brought clarification to some subjective queries like 'what is all about neo-imperialism?' Neo-imperialism would possess a clarity, if placed 'under erasure', to indicate the silencing of various problems or rapid institutionalization, through blurring boundaries, from the actual forms of colonialism / colonized / postcolonial / and neo-Imperialism. The arguing clarity is that these terms of colonials or postcolonial lost their specificity, in fact, by being universalized, like the criticism of post-constructivism in the later phase. For instance, the implementation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in 1958 in Manipur, after independence, sublimates the power of constitutional rights to live as a democratic citizen in Manipur. Nevertheless, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) is a parliamentary act that relies upon granting special powers to the Indian Armed Forces to maintain public order. The British colonial government first passed the ordinance on August

15 1942, to suppress the Quit India Movement.⁶ The act was installed and implemented in the disturbed areas of India; gradually, the act was applied to Naga Hills and then parts of Assam, and one by one to all the seven states of Northeast India. Oinam Jitendra Singh, In *Armed Violence in Manipur and Human Rights*, Oinam Jitendra Singh says declares:

[That] Manipur society today is highly prone to violence is undisputed. To understand the day-to-day violence in Manipur, one has to delve deeper and discern the structural violence built inside the society's social, economic, and political structures. The structural violence in Manipur has led to various forms of secondary violence. Gross human rights violations, including torture, extra-judicial execution, rape, and enforced disappearance, have become endemic. [The] Security Forces routinely violated many non-derogable rights under [the] Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act, 1958. The situation in Manipur is a clear case of an 'internal disturbance' or non-international armed conflict requiring [the] invocation of Article 355 and not of a 'public order problem. In such a situation, both the parties to the conflict should, at the minimum, follow the [sic] common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and strictly follow the rules of engagement under the relevant international humanitarian laws. (Oinam Jitendra, Singh 2011: 997)

With this law, anyone could be shot dead at first sight on the mere charge of suspicion, without producing a warrant. At any point in time, the police or the army could pick up anyone, whether at 2am or 11pm. In the world's largest democracy, the case of India, this is a dark side. It is happening even after 75 years of independence. This violates *The Indian Constitution*, Article No. 21, states: "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law." (Madhav Khosla, 2012: 26) It would be more useful to suggest and move on to sense a difference, sorting the binary opposition between the anti-colonial and postcolonial conceptions of hegemony. For instance, the imposition of such fatal laws to submerge the feelings and context of insurgencies and revolution without understanding the aura of regional self would mean re-repeating imperialism into neo-forms. The evaluation and recognition of such involvement of neo-forms in politics and modernity would emerge from understanding the slippage of the context in regionalism.

THE SLIPPAGE OF UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES

The key to situating the historical imagination, crediting national heroes, emerges in the meantime with anti-colonial movements. It reconstructs society, forging unity and resistance between minority communities. The cultural literacy of nationalism was brought up through various reformed national education policies in India. The naturalization of willed nationalism developed from learning the cultural development after and before the struggles of national

⁶ The Quit India Movement was a revolt by the All India Congress Committee, demanding that British rule be abandoned in India during World War II.

heroes like Gandhi and Nehru, and in reaction to the popular national movements proliferating in all states as regional nationhood. Unfortunately, the covalence is perturbed, not a single chapter with correct and adequate information in the syllabi of Indian history about Manipur has been included. Though Manipur had a long history before its merger with the Indian State, it has been completely ignored. Such dominance in marking and upbringing in one identity led to the typical indigenous people's mindset, falsely believing and trusting the intentions of the law. Lack of understanding of minority histories and identity led to various racial attacks and prejudice in different regions. The ethnic revolutionary fighters took the law in their own hands, causing various communal clashes. The articulation of such facades to suppress ethnic identity in Manipur was often observed as the New Left elsewhere.

The lethal nature of neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism lingers if the context and the aura are ignored, though the merged states were ancient kingdoms before independence. The constitutional law serves as a divine weapon to resist the whole process of reactionary and secondary modelling of otherness; multiple resistance emerges in the shape of practising 'vernacular' politics, for instance, the rise of different insurgent groups in different States. Though it is subject to correction, one might argue that the self-styled contradiction between followers of Nehru and Gandhi led to resistance emerging from South Indians, North-east Indians, and especially Kashmir in the northern part of India. Jangkhomang Guite, In 'Monuments, Memory and Forgetting in Postcolonial North-East India', Jangkhomang Guite asserted the following "The rise of historical events to prominence in public spaces is two-way traffic. What was vernacular in the colonial period becomes official today, and what was official memory then has been cast into oblivion now." (Guite, 2011: 57)

Imperial Britain's colonialism ended long ago, but our nationalism starts appearing more prolifically by remembering our heroes now. The arresting emblems of historical consciousness exist no more than the historical monuments, museums, and war memorials of unknown warriors. Thus, Indian history would be incomplete for the people of Manipur, without reference to Rani Gaidinliu and Hijam Irabot.



Figure 4: Rani Gaidinliu, a princess and the first woman warrior, of Manipur.⁷

The historical contingency or vernacular ineluctability was aware in the regional growth of nationalism as the slippage of many valuable strong insights. For instance, Rani Gaidinliu, whom Nehru awarded the title 'Rani', was the only Indian woman who was detained for the longest time period in a British prison, that is for 14 years. Rani Gaidinliu's unforgettable history served as a long lasting impression in vernacular memory of the people of Manipur. Few things are better suited for 'public space memory' incorporating the representation of the role of women in Manipur. Rani Gaidinliu was one such woman.

In the same vein, the cultural literacy rate and cultural education to bring oneness and unity in the nation would need an understanding of regional discourse for national integration. The truth of negating and ignoring 'the otherness of history', as in the case of Gaidinliu, would mean acknowledging the entangled role of women. There was a unique propriety regarding the role played by women in Manipur from time immemorial. The social status of Manipuri women is uniquely marked as a cohesive link between gender issues and the inseparable history of the

⁷Source:https://1.bp.blogspot.com/DQSonfATHjk/YHP3qx82XLI/AAAAAAAAADvY/3se6QMqIOdkYGJXhVAIR-RiQRp1IHFm5ACLCBGAsYHQ/s647/Rani_Gaidinliu.jpg

'Women War' (NupiLan)⁸, which broke out in 1904 as a retaliation against the British order to send their sons and husbands to build up camps in Kabaw Valley. The second women's war broke out in 1935 and lasted till the end of World War II to agitate against the British Commission's decision to export rice from Manipur. The agitation, which saw a tremendous participation on the part of women, was "an active engagement aimed at exploring the real lives of women which deserve a prominence in the histories of India." (Yambem, 1939) Sanamani Yambem reviewed the circumstances and the role of women in Manipur In his article "Nupi Lan: Manipur Women's Agitation":

The Nupi Lan can perhaps be better understood if we have some idea of the position of women in Manipuri society. Women in Manipur hold a high and free position and manage all internal trade in the country. The practice in Manipur is to have bazaars at convenient spots by the roadside where a group of women gather either in the morning or in the evening and sell rice, vegetables, fish, tobacco, salt, oil, baskets, and other things. In Imphal, the capital of Manipur, there is a market believed to have been founded by King Khagemba in 1580. In this market, known as Khwairamband Bazaar, over two thousand women occupy regular stalls while an even larger number are seated outside. Women have always managed the whole market; this practice is continuing. Apart from economic activities, the market is also important for social and political interaction. This aspect of the Khwairamband Bazaar played a crucial role in the outbreak of the Nupi Lan in 1939. (Sanamani Yambem, 1976: 326)

John Parratt correlates the story of the integration of the Indian states by observing the freedom fighter Hijam Irabot's poem on Nupi Lan. Hijam Irabot was a freedom fighter who fought against the British's established authorities and the King's monarchy in the 1930s. To date, he is remembered by the people of Manipur as a political scientist. In *The Second 'Women's war' and the Emergence of Democratic Government in Manipur*, Parratt states:

The night has passed,
The whole day has gone,
Lady, tie up your hair,
The hair so dishevelled:
On December 12 has passed,
Another December 12 has come.

⁸ The Nupi Lan, which started as a strategy of agitation by Manipuri women against the economic policies of the Maharaja and the Marwari monopolists, later changed its character to become a movement for constitutional and administrative reform in Manipur. The original demands of the women were confined to banning rice exports, but later their demands also included changes in the Darbar and the administrative setup. The importance of the Nupi Lan lies in the fact that it prepared the ground for the leading role played by the women of Manipur in the emergence of a new Manipur after the end of the Second War.

Have you forgotten?

Did you believe that your hair could be tied?

Did you believe that this day would ever return?

(a poem by Hijam Irabot) (Arambam & Parratt, 2017: 906)

However, Parratt observed that the justification of V. P. Menon's euphemistic concept of "Integration" of all Indian States further needs fruitful academic attention incorporating the national unification. He extends from the historiography of Manipur that even before the drafting committee of the Indian constitution were formed, Manipur had conducted democratic elections and drafted its constitution. The notion of his inference is fit in the proximity of how Manipur was merged in a condemnable way just for few sections of people.

The existence of an autonomous historical dyadic power of the 'masculine model' and 'feminism' in Manipuri women, derives from a 'romantic relationship' between the male and the female counterpart. More radical elements were composed that led to a romantic relationship, without undermining patriarchy, this could be highlighted by measuring the relative educational economy, employment, and earnings. Manipuri women had credible personalities. Popular or common women shape events, like the 'Women's War', so visible in the public sphere, which became an icon for generations to come. After the *Reign of Terror* of seven years, from 1819 to 1826, between Burma (now Myanmar) and Manipur, there was a sudden decline in sex ratio (male depopulation) as an effect of the war. Women had no choice but to remain only in domestic chores. Unquestioned metamorphosis led to the formation of the collective identity of women. Today, Manipuri women run a unique market called 'Ema-Keithel' (The Women's Market), a market where only women can trade. The transfer of indigenous feminism into traditional Manipuri society boldly forms the fourth dimension of culture, adding to economic independence.



Figure 5: A picture of Ema-Keithel, licensed to women exclusively⁹

In a patriarchal society, the relationship of male and female could be pictured as a place where women were treated as commodified, being 'goods'. Women lose themselves and instead become male property. The treatment of women as 'goods' in male-dominated canonical society was largely reformed in literary discourse globally. Patriarchal trading in one society passes as commercial trading from generation to generation or man to man. Institutional set-up limited women even further, reducing them to objects being traded. To wipe off patriarchal families from their existence, there should be economic independence and self-definition for women. Manipuri women strengthen their self-definition by alienating male-centred politics from the public domain. For instance, the sex ratio for females exceeds the male sex ratio in Manipur (births of a female child are highly encouraged). The respect for the female sex established claims from a cultural, ethnic identity based on religious worshipping of the female Goddess.

⁹ Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/imphal/this-500-year-old-all-women-market-is-the-heartbeat-of-imphal/articleshow/69288450.cms>

In the Meitei religion, sacred books, and worshipping of the female Goddess were conceived as equally superior to the male God. Since the ancient classical authors were exclusively male writers, women became the consumer of their intended writings in the whole world. However, women's social experience and practice in representing their identity were marked in the history of Manipur, starting from historical epics. Historical consciousness and cultural literacy are the walls that block the political turmoil in a diverse country like India. An extinct cultural literacy cannot be brought back the same way. Thus, the slippage of regionalism in making histories and education only on the national concept would heavily change the modernity of politics in later circumstances of nations.

CONCLUSION

With inference from the discussion on the ideas and issues behind radical change in the regional mode of institutionalizing histories while constructing modernity and politics after postcolonial *de facto* in Manipur, it is not logically valid to conclude between the equation of progressive culture and deficiency culture. Hence, the subject-citizen produced by the State through recourse to the discourse of deficiency in cultural literacy resulted in absolutizing the past in cultures. However, it has been left open-ended for a while. The concept that the past had to settle all accounts, without having studied the contextual aura, would fall back while moving on towards the future. In all neo-forms, the negation of resistance and circumstances above would be condemned as organized and engineered violence. The reformed policies on cultural literacy rates, such as print media, journalism, the education system, societal institution, etc., should not be organized by tacit theories on regional historicism. Thus, the choice is to be cognitively based on good modernity and principled politics for a diverse nation like India.

For instance, the emergence and evolution of the idea of social identity in the political, social, and cultural context of any society are determined by imperialism. This imperialism may come in various forms. It translates into various consequences leading to overthrowing one language and culture to another dominance. It is obvious in the context of Indian history; however, the most important eras and events in the North-Eastern part of India are so far neglected, especially in Manipur. From the above discussion on ideas and philosophies, events, and consequences, it can be concluded that there was resistance from the people of Manipur that shapes language as history and cultural identity. Secondly, the religion prevailing in the State becomes a political tool for cultural identity. Thirdly, due to the above two reasons, there was a rise in the ethnic discontent of various ethnicities and minorities settling in the State. There

was a rapid evolution of new ethnicities and cultural divides. Moreover, these divides led to the slippage of unforgettable memories; history was distorted, buried, undervalued, even though new awakenings and nationalist feelings have arisen in the twenty-first century. Thus, there is a tussle between modernity and politics resulting from this cultural identity crisis.

WORKS CITED

- ANDERSON, B. R. O. (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Rev. and extended ed.): London: Verso.
- ARAMBAM PARRATT, SAROJ N. and PARRATT, JOHN (2001). "The Second 'Women's War' and the Emergence of Democratic Government in Manipur." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2001, pp. 905–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/313195>. Accessed 24 Dec. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X0100405X>
- GELLNER, E. (1964). *Thought and Change*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- JANGKHOMANG, GUTE (2011). "Monuments, Memory and Forgetting in Postcolonial North-East India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 46, no. 8, pp. 56–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41151794>. Accessed 20 Jan. 2021.
- KABUI, G. (1991). *History of Manipur*. New Delhi: National Pub. House.
- KHOSLA, MADHAV (2012). *The Indian Constitution*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- LAITHANGBAM, I. (2017). "Banished Manipuri Script Stages a Comeback". *The Hindu*, Sept. 23, 2017. https://thi.thgim.com/public/news/national/otherstates/article19743480.ece/alternates/FREE_1200/KIML-3_a Accessed 17 Jan. 2021
- SARANGI, A. (2009). *Language and Politics in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- SEN, S. K., BHATTACHARYA, P., JAIMINI, (2008). *Jaiminiya Ashvamedha Parva: Mahabharata*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop.
- SHARMA, S. (2016) *Ethnic Conflict and Harmonization: A Study of Manipur*. New Delhi: Vivekananda International Foundation.
- SHIMRAY, U. A. (2000). "Linguistic Matrix in Manipur." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 35, no. 34, 2000, pp. 3007–08. < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4409646.htm>> Accessed 19 July, 2021.
- SINHA, L. P (1987). "THE POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT OF MANIPUR." *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 487–93. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41855332>.> Accessed 22 August, 2021.

SINGH, NAOREM. NAOXHOMBA. (2015). 'Religious Syncretism among the Meiteis of Manipur, India'. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 4 (8), 21–26. <www.isca.in > Accessed 22 Jan. 2021

SINGH, OINAM JITENDRA (2012). “Armed Violence And Human Rights In Manipur.” *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2012, pp. 118–31. JSTOR, Unnecessary.] <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48504941> Accessed 24 Jan. 2021.

SUBRAMANIAN, K. S. (2015). *In State, Policy and Conflicts in Northeast India*. Oxon: Routledge.

WAHENGAM, IBOHAL (1986). “The Religion” in *The History of Manipur*. Imphal: Manipur Commercial Co.

YAMBEM SANAMANI (1976). “Nupi Lan: Manipur Women’s Agitation, 1939.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 11, no. 8, 1976, pp. 325–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4364388>. accessed 24 August. 2021

LONGJAM LOYANGAMBA MEITEI is a Research Scholar pursuing a Ph.D in English at the Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar. He is working in the area of post-colonial studies in Manipuri Literature. His interests are studies of genre, history and archives. He has taught at Adani University, Ahmedabad and is presently teaching at SGT University, Gurgaon.

DR ISHMEET KAUR CHAUDHRY’s latest works are related to issues of violence, its after-effect and matters of representation. Her interests are Post-Colonial Literatures; Women Studies; Literatures from the Margins; Sikh Studies and Translation Studies. She did her Ph.D from H.P.U Shimla. She was nominated as “Inspired Teacher” for President of India’s In-Residence Programme, June, 2015. She was awarded the GIAN Programme on “Marginality and Literature” in 2016 by Ministry of Human Resource Development, India. Most recently, she was invited to deliver the Doirean MacDermott Lecture at the University of Barcelona on 20 April 2023.