



**Research Article**

**CIVIL VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS' ROLE IN RESOLVING THADOU-PAITE CLASHES (1997-1998) IN MANIPUR**

**Aheibam Koireng Singh<sup>1</sup> and Gangam Malangmei<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Manipur Studies, Manipur University

<sup>2</sup>Department of Social Work Indira Gandhi National Tribal University-Regional Campus Manipur  
Senapati District

**ARTICLE INFO**

**Article History:**

Received 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2017

Received in revised form 12<sup>th</sup>

September, 2017

Accepted 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2017

Published online 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2017

**Key words:**

Accord, Churachandpur, Council, Inpi, Kuki, Naga, Paite, Thadou, Zomi

**ABSTRACT**

Human rights vigil group, students' organization, ethnic based association, youth forums, other non-political and nongovernmental organizations and religious bodies like the Churches are, for the purpose of this paper, considered as Civil Voluntary Organisations (CVOs). Insurgency to the people in Manipur is a social fact and the people in the state had to live with it. There are about forty insurgent outfits in Manipur. Insurgencies in the hills of Manipur are organized on ethnic lines. Since these civil bodies were always in the forefront, they took the role of a mediator as and when there was a standoff between the insurgents and the civil populace as well as within and among the different insurgent groups operating in the state of Manipur. The two warring groups racially belong to the same kindred tribe of Chin-Kuki-Mizo-Zomi (CHIKIMZ) group. Examining the ethno-genesis and the crisis of identity prevailing in this group gives interesting insights of their trouble relationships on the eve of the conflict. Fragmentation and continuing conflict among the CHIKIMZ also could be attributed to the colonial policy of abruptly drawing administrative boundaries or categorizing people, and also classifying and naming the people with whom they came into contact and eventually governed and its continued legacy in post independent India. Despite their socio-cultural and racial affinities, the tribes in the Kuki-Chin group were still not able to come under the fold of a unified common nomenclature. The Thadou-Paite clashes in the year 1997-1998 has led to large-scale displacement and impoverishment has resulted to the loss of 352 lives, 136 cases of serious injuries and the burning down of 4670 houses. Though there were condemnation and appeals to end the fratricidal war right after its eruption, reconciliation effort began to promise some hope only after the Church bodies, civil society organizations from and across ethnic lines apart from group(s) involved in the clashes came together in a common platform to find ways and means of reconciling the clashes with active patronage from the government and its various departments and machineries. The said common platform functions under the name of 'High Level Committee. It achieved its first successful breakthrough when two of the member organizations of this committee Kuki Inpi Churachandpur (KIC) and the Zomi Council (ZC) obviously the apex body of the Kuki including the Thadou and the Zomi are authorized by their respective armed outfits on their behalf in the event of peace talks. It subsequently culminated to the signing of peace accord on 01 October 1998 after which a surface calm has been won and endured till date.

Copyright©2017 Aheibam Koireng Singh and Gangam Malangmei. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

**INTRODUCTION**

Civil Voluntary Organisations (CVOs) exist in the form of human rights vigil group, students' organization, ethnic based association, youth forums, other non-political and nongovernmental organizations and religious bodies like the

Churches. The operation of Armed forces Special Power Act. 1958 has in a large scale led to violation of human rights and excesses committed in the form of extra-judicial killings by the state security personnel. Most of these civil bodies while discharging their duties as upholder of civil rights and virtues basic for the dignified state were unambiguously critical of such Black laws and sought for its unconditional repeal. Insurgency to the people in Manipur is a social fact and the people in the state had to live with it. There are about forty

\*Corresponding author: **Aheibam Koireng Singh**  
Centre for Manipur Studies, Manipur University

insurgent outfits in Manipur. Insurgencies in the hills of Manipur are organized on ethnic lines. Since these civil bodies were always in the forefront, they took the role of a mediator as and when there was a standoff between the insurgents and the civil populace as well as within and among the different insurgent groups operating in the state. Usually considering it as the pulses of the people, their voices were not ignored. This led the state establishments and its machineries to suspect that they had a nexus with the armed ethnic outfits.

Manipur's physical features can broadly be divided into geographical categories, i.e., the hills and the plains. The area of the plain is approximately 2,230 square kilometers and the remaining 20,126 square are hills. The valley of Manipur in terms of demographic composition has a cosmopolitan character though the Meiteis and Muslims are numerically preponderant. In addition to the native population, people of different groups including the 'Mayangs' and the Nepali inhabit it. The state's land law does not allow the Meiteis and other Non-Tribal to buy land in the hills. That is nine-tenth of the state's area has been reserved for the scheduled tribes. The tribal population comprises 36 recognized scheduled tribes. The Constitutionally recognized 36 scheduled tribes in Manipur are: 1) Aimol, 2) Anal, 3) Angami, 4) Chiru, 5) Chothe, 6) Hmar, 7) Gangte, 8) Kabui, 9) Kacha Naga, 10) Koirao (Thangal), 11) Koirang, 12) Kom, 13) Lamkang, 14) Lushai, 15) Maring, 16) Maram, 17) Mao, 18) Monsang, 19) Moyon, 20) Paite, 21) Purum, 22) Ralte, 23) Sema, 24) Simte, 25) Sahte, 26) Tangkhul, 27) Thadou, 28) Vaiphei and 29) Zou, 30) Poumai Naga, 31) Tarao, 32) Kharam, 33) Any Kuki tribes, 34) Rongmei, 35) Inpui, and 36) Mate. In addition to it, there are also some smaller sub-tribes demanding constitutional recognition as separate tribes. The tribal population is mostly Christian with some traces of Rongmei, Purum and few others practicing their tribal religions. Manipur is divided into nine districts. Five of them are Hill districts. They are - Chandel, Churachandpur, Tamenglong, Senapati, and Ukhrul. The remaining four are valley districts. In Chandel, the major groups are Anal, Maring and Thadou and the minor groups are Lamkang, Zou, Gangte, Mizo, Tangkhul and Kom. In Churachandpur, the major groups are Hmar, Paite and Thadou and the minor groups are Anal, Chothe, Kabui, Kom, Vaiphei, Zou, Mizo, Gangte, Simte and Ralte. In Tamenglong, Zeliangrong is the majority group and the minor groups are Thadou and Gangte. In Senapati district the scheduled tribes that constitute the major groups are Mao, Maram, and Thadou. The minor groups are Kabui, Tangkhul, Maring, Chiru, Kom, Koirang, Vaiphei, Kacha Naga, Sema and Koirao. The major groups in Ukhrul district is Tangkhul and the minor group is Thadou.

In fact, Manipur has several ethnic communities and tribes found all over the state either exclusively confined or scattered or co-existing. Manipur can aptly be described as a 'miniature India' considering the substantive similarities it shares with the kind of equation mainland India has with the rest of the country both in terms of multiplicity in ethnic composition and demographic variation.

Chains of violent conflicts have occurred in Manipur in the last decades of the twentieth century. In view of the prolonged ethnic clashes occurred in the soil of Manipur. It is once described as *India's Bosnia*. The latest in the chain of event is the Thadou-Paite clashes in 1997-1998. The said clashes which led to large-scale displacement and impoverishment has

resulted to the loss of 352 lives, 136 cases of serious injuries and the burning down of 4670 houses.

#### ***Ethno-genesis and Discord over Common Nomenclature***

These two warring groups racially belong to the same Chin-Kuki-Mizo-Zomi (CHIKIMZ) group. Examining the ethno-genesis and the crisis of identity prevailing in this group gives interesting insights of their trouble relationships on the eve of the conflict. There are too many conjectures and theories about the origin of the word 'Kuki'. Some believed that it has been derived from the Baluchistan word 'Kuchi' meaning wandering people. And some say that it comes from the British word 'Kooky' meaning peculiar or unusual people. It is also believed that it was a derogatory name given by the outsiders to an ethnic group of people living in Western Burma, Northeast India and Bangladesh. The first reference to the term Kuki was made in 1777 AD in connection with the tribesman who attacked the British subjects in Chittagong when Warren Hastings was the Governor of Bengal. According to Grierson, Kuki is an Assamese or Bengali term applied to various hill tribes such as the Lushais, Thadous, and etc. Laldena, himself a distinguished scholar from the same community contends that all the oral traditions and local sources point to the Mainland China as the original home of the CHIKIMZ. The term Kuki was first heard in Manipur between 1830 and 1840 though tribes of the same race have long been subjects to the ruler of Manipur. The British ethnographers, in order to distinguish them from those who were already there before them, use the term *New Kuki*. The Census of 1891 gave the total population of *New Kuki* in Manipur as 17,204. The *Old Kuki* constitutes Aimol, Chothe, Chiru, Koirang, Kom, Purum, Anal, Lamkang, Moyon, Monshang, Gangte and Vaiphei. The recognized tribes during the colonial period in Manipur that were known as Kuki included Aimol, Anal, Chothe, Chiru, Gangte, Koirang, Kom, Moyon, Monshang, Paite, Thadou, Vaiphei, Zou, Purum, Lamkang, Lushai, Simte, Sukte and Ralte. The tribes who were identified as belonging to the Kuki-Chin have started disowning the term Kuki and people identified themselves willy-nilly as Chinor Kuki or Lushai in order to be accepted in military service before India and Burma got independence. But after independence, the Government of India recognized the various tribes of Kuki-Chin group and they could get their services as members of recognized tribes in India without mentioning whether he was a Kuki or not. The term Kuki or Chin is used only in reference to outside world but not in use among and within the group. The ethnoses belonging to the Kuki-Chin no longer have a common name after it was disowned by the ethnoses who were once known as Kuki. Other tribal groups, who at one point of time identified themselves as Kuki have been disillusioned and prefer to sever all ties with it because of the hegemonistic tendencies of the Thadous. Some of the Thadou leaders also disregard other Non-Thadou Kukis as *Kuki-Siki* and *Kuki-Makhai*.

The Kuki National Assembly was formed in 1946 with the primary objective of fostering consciousness of common identity and making a single political unit of the Kukis. The constituent tribes affiliated to Kuki National Assembly were Thadous, Paite, Hmar, Guite, Chiru, Monsang, Koirang, etc. The fragmentation of Kuki polity started with the formation of Khulmi National Union (KNU) by the breakaway faction of KNA in 1947 because of Thadou arrogance. Thus another generic group *Khulmi* constituted by the Vaiphei, Gangte,

Paite, Simte, Zou and other Non-Thadou tribes from the Kuki-Chin group who claimed to originate from Khul meaning cave came into existence. In 1951, the unification of different Non-Naga tribes under the nomenclature 'Khulmi' received a fatal blow as it was not granted recognition by the Government of India. The Government of India notified the Scheduled Tribes list of Manipur as - 1). Any KukiTribe; and 2). Any Lushaitribe without mentioning the ethnic names of different communities. Though pan-tribal concept of Khulmi disappeared, none of its member tribes except *Mate* returned to the Kuki fold.

Another attempt of the Kuki-Chin kindred to find an acceptable nomenclature as the formation of Aizawl based Mizo Union' in 09 April 1946. It was initiated by those who wanted to replace the word 'Kuki' by Mizo'. The term Kuki was disowned on the ground that it was a name given by the outsiders. The Mizo Union submitted a memorandum to the Constituent Assembly of India on 22 April 1947. In the said memorandum, Hmar, Paite, Kom, Thadou, Chiru, Anal, Purum, Vaiphei, Gangte were among the tribe mentioned as 'Mizos'. The Lushai speakers who were formerly parts of Kuki-Chin had completely succeeded in disowning the term Kuki and Chin by adopting the nomenclature Mizo for their identity. But many of the kindred tribes of Kuki-Chin group felt betrayed when the leaders of the Mizo Union were satisfied with the granting of Lushai Hills as it fell short of their dream for unification of other kindred tribes outside it into one political unit. Those who did not enjoy the fruits of their hard bitten movement began to feel ashamed to call themselves 'Mizos'. The attempts made by Aizawl based Mizo Union to unite the Kuki-Chin-Lushai tribes under the banner of a common name Mizo was ignored in Manipur except the Hmars who launched a boycott movement in 1947 for the integration of their areas into the former Lushai Hills. Some section wanted to adopt the term *Zomias* the common nomenclature of the Kuki-Chin Lushai tribes. It came into prominence during the period from late seventies to mid-eighties. One Zomi National Council was also there about this time which stood for the unity and reunification of all those who belonged to the Kuki-Chin-Lushai. Another group proposed a new ethnic appellation which they claimed to be accommodative, and the most compromising formula. This group proposed the phraseology Chin-Kuki-Mizo'. Exponents of this phraseology gave the acronym CHIKIM as common nomenclature that literally means whole *tribes or nationalities*. This also has not gained much currency so far. Despite their socio-cultural and racial affinities, the tribes in the Kuki-Chin group were still not able to come under the fold of a unified common nomenclature.

### **Conflict and Causes of Escalation**

There were comments and observations from those affected by the conflict that the dispute between them is over nomenclature issue. The Paites wanted to adopt *Zomi* nomenclature in opposition to the term 'Kuki' preferred by the Thadou. Majority of the ThadouKukis displaced by the Kuki-Naga clashes since 1992 were accommodated at Churachandpur district and Sadar Hills area in the Senapati district of Manipur. Law and order problems relating to flesh trade, extortion and burglary were on the rise as those displaced came to Churachandpur district in a pauperized state. The emerging demographic complexities arising out of heavy influx of ThadouKukis generated a fear among the Paites that

they will be outnumbered by the ThadouKukis in the bargaining for having access to the power and resources of the state decided by the number game. The Kuki insurgents in the name of Kuki Homeland imposed house tax at the annual rate of R s. 100 per family, levied forest royalty and road tax and other form of extortions on all non-Naga tribes of Manipur. The Zomi Reunification organization (ZRO) prohibited imposition and collection of such taxes from those who claimed to be Zomi. The Kuki insurgents see this as a threat to their flourishing exchequer and challenge to their might.

The non-ThadouKukis looked upon the demand for Kukihomeland by the Kuki insurgents with suspicion as they already have experienced inconvenience regarding the imposition of Kuki homeland tax. They don't want to be a part of Kuki Homeland under 'Thadou hegemony'. Simultaneously, there also exists an aspiration for *Zoland* or *Zomiland* among some section of the non-ThadouKukis. Such surreptitious intertwined with strong venom of spite and vengeance found a spark in the killing of ten Paite civilians at Saikul village of Churachandpur district on 24 November 1997. It continued till the signing of peace accord on 01 October 1998.

Whereas, in the case of Kuki-Naga clashes that erupted in 1992, it has shown tremendous enduring potential. It even outlasts the Thadou-Paite clashes as instances of Kuki-Naga violence continues to be heard even after the former was successfully reconciled. Civil Societies also have found their wings clipped in dealing with the clashes engineered by the ethnic armies. The ethnic armies, though they are micro-level actors, have shown their capacity to influence micro-level phenomena as their actions continue to determine certain collective praxis. Ethnic based civil organizations more or less echoes the voice of the ethnic armies, as civil societies in Manipur hills were and are more or less fragmented on ethnic lines. Despite the speculations that the Kuki and the Naga ethnic outfits involved in the clashes agreed to have a cease fire in 2000, peace agreement for the logical conclusion is still eluding.

### **The Negotiation Process**

Churachandpur district, a place where the Thadou-Paite clashes occurred has more or less been overwhelmingly inhabited by the CHIKIMZ. The contents of the final peace accord signed on 01 October 1998 jointly by the chairman of the Zomi Council and the Kukilnpi Churachandpur with the Chief Minister of Manipur and other Ministerial delegates, government officials and other community leader as witness(es) agreed upon the following points- that the nomenclature Kuki and Zomis shall be mutually respected by all Zomis and Kukis. Every individual or group of person shall be at liberty to call himself or themselves by any name and the Kuki and Zomi nomenclature shall not in any way be imposed upon any person or group against his/their will at any point of time: that any person who have occupied or has physical possession of any land, private building, houses and quarters wrongfully and illegally during the period of the clashes shall return and restore to the rightful owners, such lands and buildings; that no Kuki or Zomi militant shall indulge themselves in a forcible collection of funds, taxes, etc. against their counterpart nomenclature be it from the government officials, individuals, contractor or business establishments that all points of MoU between the Kukilnpi and the Zomi

Council shall be operative and binding to all concerned persons and parties including the Government.

Ashutosh Varshney points out that inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic network of civic engagement plays very different roles in ethnic conflict. He articulates that inter-ethnic networks are agents of peace as they build bridges and manage tensions. However, ethnic violence is quite likely if communities are organized only along intra-ethnic lines and it is true to some extent in the case of Thadou-Paite clashes too. For instance, already two peace agreements were signed between the warring ethnic outfits involved in the clashes. i.e. the Kuki National Front-P (KNF-P) and Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA). The first agreement was signed as early as 07 July 1997, in which both sides agreed, among others, to shun all forms of violence, henceforth. The second one was signed on 11 August 1997 in which both sides agreed to cease all offensive activities including killing, kidnapping, burning of houses, wanton destruction of properties, extortion of money, threatening and intimidation of any kind for a period of thirty days from 11 August 1997. However, even after the signing of these two peace agreements, situation doesn't return to normalcy and there was no respite because of the continuing violence and wanton killings. The situation became even more alarmed with the prospect of involving another armed outfit, Kuki National Army (KNA) in the clashes loomed large. Though there were condemnation and appeals to end the fratricidal war right after its eruption, reconciliation effort began to promise some hope only after the Church bodies, civil society organizations from and across ethnic lines apart from group(s) involved in the clashes came together in a common platform to find ways and means of reconciling the clashes with active patronage from the government and its various departments and machineries. The said common platform functions under the name of *High Level Committee*. It achieved its first successful breakthrough when two of the member organizations of this committee Kuki Inpi Churachandpur (KIC) and the Zomi Council (ZC) obviously the apex body of the Kuki and the Zomi are authorized by their respective armed outfits on their behalf in the event of peace talks.

### **Signing of Final Peace Accord**

Subsequently, a MoU was signed between the ZC and KIC on 26 March 1998. It mutually agreed to stop all forms of violence including arson, kidnapping, killing, extortion, fabrication of false rumors, and even using harsh words against other communities. It also agreed that during the operation of this MoU, the leaders will resolve the difference between the two communities and sign a peace accord. It also agreed that two sides shall jointly tour different parts of Churachandpur district to campaign for peace and to convince the people to accept a permanent peace settlement. It also decided to urge the minister and MLAs hailing from the district to station at Churachandpur from time to time. Just after the signing of this MoU, prompt follow-on of several peace campaigns were launched at different parts of the affected district and ultimately led to the signing of final peace accord between the Kuki Inpi Churachandpur and the Zomi Council on 01 October 1998 for the restoration of peace and normalcy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Whether the same voice of the civil society has been heard and their collaborative effort brought fruitful results or was it more so over because of the conflict fatigue by the contesting ethnic outfits may still be a point interesting enough to retrospect. As it has been stated, two earlier peace agreements signed between the warring groups broke down without having any significance. But one thing is crystal clear that since the signing of final peace accord between the Kuki Inpi Churachandpur and the Zomi Council, no violent incidents which could potentially re-ignite the clashes have occurred since then. It, thus, cannot be denied that CVOs have played a role, that also, very ably in bringing peace and normalcy by facilitating to arrive at a logical end.

## **References**

- Mayangs are people coming from other people of India, like, Bengali, Marwari, Bihari, Punjabi, etc.
- Gangte, T.S. (2003). *The Kukis of Manipur - A Historical Study*. N. Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, P.34-35.
- Poknafam*, Vernacular Manipuri Daily, Imphal, 20 May 1999.
- Vaiphei S Prim. 'The Kuki', in N. Sanajaoba (1995). ed., *Manipur: Past and Present*, vol. 3, N. Delhi: Mittal, P. 126.
- Kamei, G (2002). *Ethnicity and Social Change*, Imphal: PC Jam & Co... P.25.
- Grierson, GA (1967). *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. III. Part III. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas.. P. 1.
- Laldena (1999). The Kuki-Naga Conflict: Juxtaposed in the Colonial Context. eds.. Aggarwal, Kailash S., *Dynamics of Identity and Inter-Group relations in North-East India*. Shimla: IAS. P. 185.
- Dun, E.W. (1992). *Gazetteer of Manipur*. Delhi: Manas, P. 32.
- Ibid*.
- N. 3.
- Vaiphei, S Prim (1986). Who are We. eds.. *In search of Identity*, Imphal: Kuki Chin Baptist Union, P.22. 'Kuki-Siki' and 'Kuki-Makhai' are fractional denomination of the Indian Currency, Rupee, equivalent to quarter of Rupee and half a Rupee respectively.
- Nabakumar, W. The Inter ethnic Appraisal of the Dilthrent Communities of Manipur— A Critical Appraisal, *The Orient Vision*, vol. 2. Issue 1, Imphal. October-November-December 2004, Pp. 20-32.
- Kamei, G. N.4. *The Kuki-Zomi Conflict: A Synopsis*. Churachandpur, Publisher not mentioned and not dated.
- ZRO is armed ethnic outfit which protagonised Zomi identity. An overwhelming majority of its cadre are Paites.
- MoU signed between the Zomi Council (ZC) and the Kuki Inpi Churachandpur on 01 October 1998.
- The Freedom*, Popular English Daily, Imphal, 08 July 1997.
- Ceasefire Agreement, Dt. 11 August 1997, signed by the South Command KNF (P) on behalf of KNF (P) and VK Joshua, Commander, ZRA, Northern Zone on behalf of ZRA.
- Zomi Council was authorised by the Zomi National Volunteer (ZNV) and ZRA/ZRO, on the other hand, Kuki Inpi Churachandpur (KIC) was authorised by the KNF (MC), KNA, KNF(P) and Kuki Inpi Manipur
- MoU signed between the Zomi Council and the Kuki Inpi Churachandpur, dt. 26 March 1998.