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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal provided dedicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

THE MANIPUR VIOLENCE; FOUR MONTH UNENDING VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

The four-month-long violence in Manipur, which erupted in May 2023, represents one of the most severe ethnic conflicts in the state's recent history. Rooted in long-standing tensions between the Meitei and Kuki-zo communities, the conflict was triggered by demands for scheduled tribes status for the Meitei people leading to violent clashes, arson, and widespread displacement. The unrest resulted in over 200 deaths, thousands of injuries, and the destruction of homes, villages, and places of worship. Internet shutdowns, curfews, and heavy militarization followed as the government struggled to restore order.

The violence exposed deep-seated ethnic divisions, political instability, and governance failure. Allegations of bias against security forces, inadequate humanitarian aid, and the role of insurgent groups further complicated peace efforts. Women-led protests, international human rights concerns, and government intervention shaped the discourse, yet a lasting resolution remains elusive. This research paper examines the root causes, impact, and potential solutions to the conflict, emphasizing the need for reconciliation, inclusive dialogue, and policy reforms to prevent further ethnic strife in Manipur. Addressing economic disparities, political representation, and trust-building measures will be crucial for long-term peace and stability in the region.

This research paper contains 6-7 parts. The first part covers the introduction of Manipur conflict: four months of unending violence. The 2nd part covers the historical background, the 3rd part covers what actually happened in Manipur, the 4th part covers why ST status, the 5th part covers demands of the tribes, and the 6th part covers the impact of the Manipur conflict and the last or 7th part covers the conclusion or suggestion. Key words: Manipur violence, ethnic conflict in Manipur, Meitei scheduled tribes status, Naga, Kuki, Meitei conflict, political, government etc.

INTRODUCTION

Manipur is one of the seven sister's state of the north-east, it share the border with Myanmar. The culture of Manipur is very diverse. In the hilly area of Manipur Naga, Kuki, and Meithei tribes people live. Naga and Kuki both tribes population is 40%. There is also a Meithei group and their population is around 53%. The Meithei tribe population mostly concentrated (live) in Imphal. The Manipur violence, spanning (expand) four month of unrelenting violence, has became a tragic chapter in the state history deeply impacting its socio-political and cultural landscape. Manipur violence crisis is rooted long standing ethical tension, competing political demand and socio economic inequalities, has escalated onto widespread violence, leaving countless live disrupted. There are many disputes in Manipur between the tribes like, S.T. status demand, land dispute, violence, political, instability, and judicial intervention. In the Manipur conflict (2023), there were many people who died and more than 60,000 people were injured. People openly burnt the other tribe's houses. It was in the first time the world took notice of the gross human rights violation being perpetrated in Manipur, India, was in July 2023, when a video of Manipuri women from Kuki tribe who had been tortured, raped, and paraded around naked went viral on social media.¹ The turmoil has drawn national and international attention in the situation of Manipur and its urgent need to resolve the Manipur conflict.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Manipur a north eastern state in India, has historically been a mosaic of ethnic groups, including the Meitei, Naga and Kuki-Zo communities. These groups have coexisted for centuries, but disputes over resources, land, and political representation have often led tension. Manipur was historically an independent state, with Meitei community. There are 53% population of the Meitei people and 40% Naga and Kuki tribe's people. In 1949 led split in polity of Manipur. Political organization such as Manipur state congress actively campaigned for union with India while organization such as Praja Sangh and other parties opposed the union.² On September 21, 1949, the Maharaja signed the merger agreement, lending to Manipur becoming part of the Indian Union as a centrally- administered territory. The 1949 merger remains a contentious issue in Manipur's political discourse, with some groups advocating for greater autonomy or revisiting the terms of the merger. In 1971, the Pakistan army made a plan to separate north-east from India. This area is called Chicken Neck, because it is a very small area that connects

¹ For more information, Noor Anand Chawla, "Identity and Violence in Manipuri, India", October 31, 2023.

² Parrat, Johan; Johan, saroj Arambam. "Hijam Irabot and Radical Socialist Democratic Movement in Manipur". International Asienforum (in German). 31. (3-4). 275-288).

north east India. North- east is surrounded by the two states, Myanmar and Bangladesh so it's very important for India. The Pakistan media has already shown that Manipur is separate from India. India's entry expanded the existing conflict with Indian and Pakistani force engaging on both eastern and western fronts.³ Thirteen days after the war started, India achieved a clear upper hand, and the Eastern command of Pakistan military signed the instrument of surrender.⁴ Approximately 93,000 Pakistani servicemen were taken prisoner by the Indian army, which included 79,676 to 81,000 uniformed personnel of the Pakistan Armed forces, including some Bengali soldiers who had remained loyal to Pakistan.⁵ The remaining 10,324 to 12,500 prisoners were civilians, either family members of the military personnel or collaborators.⁶ During the 1971 Bangladesh war for independence, members of the Pakistani military and supporting pro-Pakistani Islamist militias called Razakars raped between 20,000 and 400,000 Bangladeshi women and girls in a systematic campaign of genocidal rape.⁷ From 2009 through 2018, the conflict was responsible for the violent deaths of over 1000 people.⁸ There are many protest happening in the Manipur between the Meitei and Kuki tribes, but in 2023 the most wrist conflict happened in Manipur. In this protest many died and many people got injured. The current conflict can be traced back to historical grievances, compounded by political marginalization and developmental disparities. Over time, issues such as land ownership, the demand for Scheduled Tribes status by the Meitei community, and concerns over the autonomy of tribal regions have deepened divisions.

WHAT ACTUALLY DO IN MANIPUR

It happened that Manipur High Court told the state government that people of Meitei group to be considered in scheduled tribes. People of the Meitei community say that in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar from these countries illegal immigrants arrive and they settle in Manipur and the land of Meitei community cannot get the government job. Gradually it will happen. Today's existing 55% Meitei population will decrease and become a minority in their own state. If Meitei people get status in scheduled tribes, they will get some reservation in

³ For more information "India: Easy victory, uneasy peace". 27 december, 1971 from the original on 13, June, 2017.

⁴ BY Ramanada Sengupta, "1971 War. 'I will give you 30 minute'" on 6 December 2010.

⁵ Burke, S.M. "Manisprings of Indian and Pakistani Foreign Policies. (1974)

⁶ Shakhawat Liton "Jamaat claims denied by evidence" The daily star, feb 28, 2008.

⁷ Sharlach, Lisa. "Rape as Genocide: Bangladesh, the Former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda". *New political science*.22 (1):92-93, (2000).

⁸ State wise Indian fatalities, (1994-2013) 15 July 2014. At the Wayback Machine Militancy and Terrorism Database, STAP, New Delhi.

education in government jobs. Which helps tribes to save their culture. Some people say that Meitei people attack first, and some say that Naga and Kuki tribes attack. February 2023, In the month of February, churachandpur and in other districts the government started removing encroachment in the forest areas. Similarly on 11th April, three churches were declared illegal and razed. On 20th April 2023, Manipur High court suggested that Meitei community be included in S.T. list. Due to this, people of both Kuki and Naga tribe are very disappointed. On 28th April, the Chief Minister was to come to churachandpur district, to inaugurate an open gym. On 23rd April 2023, the protesters set fire to the gym a day earlier. After that, five days section 144 was imposed. People were told not to protest and gather in a large group. Curfew was imposed in 8 districts of Manipur. The violence in Manipur began last May with clashes between the majority Meitei and the minority kuki-zo tribes over the removal of special minority privileges for the kuki community⁹. On 3rd May 2023, All tribal student's union Manipur, organized the tribal solidarity March. More than 60,000 participated in this rally. A rumor spread among the people protesting in churachandpur that the people of the Meitei community have set fire to one of their villages. Out of rage, they started to set fire surrounding Meitei settlements. There are many on social media in which samples see civilians walking with AK-47s on streets. This type of video is viral on social media also. The truth of this video was not revealed. 4th May 2023, the violence spread to different districts of Manipur. The shops began to burn. The clashes between the police and protesters started to increase. The state government called for the army's help. The internet was suspended and was out of control.

WHY SCHEDULE TRIBE STATUS:

Understand the aspect of the story first, we will know how S.T. status affects the people of the Meitei community. The tribal demand committee of Manipur had demanded from the court in 2012 to give them the status of a scheduled tribe. Manipur became a part of India in 1949. Then, the Meitei people were kept out of the ST list. In 1999, the first was a state or Union territory, and sent a proposal to the tribal affairs ministry and office of the register general of India. If ORGI approves this inclusion, then the proposal reaches the National committee or scheduled tribes and if they also approve, then through an amendment in our constitution, the ST List is modified. Now the question is Exactly to which stage the Meitei community reaches? The answer is not even top the first stage.

⁹ Aakash Hassan in Manipur and Hannah Eillis Petrsen in Delhi, "unregulated vigilante armies push Indian state in Manipur to brink of civil war", sun 11 August 2024.

Manipur High Court gave the state only direction, gave a suggestion, that these people be considered and that too, on the basis of the petition submitted in 2012. As per current law, people from the Meitei community can't buy land in the hilly areas of Manipur. Meitei people say that in Manipur which is just not possible to happen naturally these people are coming from somewhere, and most probably from the neighboring country Myanmar. They say that they are illegally settling in forest areas. Their point of view is that, due to them the poppy plantation in the hilly areas in case, and even drug problem start.

DEMANDS OF TRIBES:

In Manipur, the tribal communities, particularly the Kuki-zo groups, have articulated several key demands in response to ongoing ethnic tensions and violence. Their primary concerns is the position to the Meitei community demands ST status, fearing that granting ST status to the Meitei would weaken tribal land rights and reservation benefits. These tribes say: that the people of the Meitei community are already in the majority. Many assembly constituencies are in this area, where Meitei people in majority. They believe that political representation is already high with them. They think that if the people of Meitei community are included in the ST list, then through reservation, they will get government jobs and people of the Naga and Kuki tribes will have nothing left. The Meitei community has already got the OBC status. They say that why do you need ST status? Both tribes believe that Meitei community already a lot of discrimination against them. Another major demand is greater autonomy or a separate administrative region for tribal areas, particularly from the kuki-zo community. They see them as illegal immigrants, because of cultural and religious difference, clashes keep happening between them and if the Meitei people gets the ST status, then they keep getting dominant even in these hilly regions, and they remove Kuki and Naga tribes from there too. These demands underscore the complex interplay the ethnic identities, historical grievances, and political aspirations in Manipur. Addressing these issues necessitates nuanced and inclusive dialogue, aiming to foster mutual understanding and sustainable peace among the diverse communities of the region.

IMPACT OF THE VIOLENCE:

The ethnic violence that erupted in Manipur in May 2023 has had devastating consequences, deeply affecting the state's social, economic, and political landscape. The prolonged conflict between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities has resulted in over 250 deaths, displacement of

nearly 60,000 people, destruction of homes, and loss of livelihoods. The violence has not also created long-term instability that could take years to resolve.

Humanitarian Crisis and Displacement:- The four month long ethnic violence in Manipur, which began in May 2023, has triggered a severe humanitarian crisis, leading to the displacement of nearly 60,000 people from both the Meitei and Kuki-zo communities. Entire villages have been burned down, forcing thousands to flee their homes and seek refuge in overcrowded relief camps across the state. These camps, however, suffer from poor living conditions, with storage of food, clean water, medical supplies, and proper sanitation, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks and malnutrition, especially among children and elderly. Women and children have been disproportionately affected, with reports of sexual violence, human rights violations, and psychological trauma. Many families have lost their livelihoods, pushing them into extreme poverty. The ongoing curfews and internet shutdowns have further restricted access to aid and communication, making it difficult for relief organizations to respond effectively. The crisis has also created deep ethnic segregation, as people fear returning to their original homes due to ongoing hostilities. The prolonged displacement threatens long-term instability in Manipur, as mistrust between communities grows. Without urgent humanitarian intervention and reconciliation efforts, the humanitarian crisis could worsen, leaving thousands in permanent displacement and despair.

Breakdown of Law and Order:- The four month long Manipur conflict has exposed a severe breakdown of law and order, with the state struggling to control the escalating violence. Despite heavy deployment of security forces, curfews, and internet shutdowns, ethnic clashes between the Meitei and kuki-zo communities continued unabated, resulting in over 250 deaths and thousands of injuries. Armed militias, vigilante groups, and insurgents have taken advantage of the lawlessness, leading to widespread arson, looting, and targeted killings. Security forces have faced allegations of bias and inaction, with reports suggesting that police and paramilitary forces failed to protect vulnerable communities. The circulation of illegal firearms, looted from police armories, has further intensified the conflict, making violent attacks more frequent and deadly. The judiciary and administrative machinery have also been paralyzed, with inconsistent law enforcement failing to restore normalcy. As result, Manipur has witnessed a near-total collapse of governance, with residents losing trust in the authorities. The absence of a strong and impartial response has allowed the conflict to persist, leading to mass displacement, economic disruptions, and humanitarian crises. Without urgent intervention, the lawlessness in

Manipur risks spiraling into a prolonged ethnic war, further destabilizing the region.

Economic Disruption: The four month long conflict in Manipur has caused severe economic disruption, crippling businesses, agriculture, and daily wage activities. The violence, which began in May 2023, led to the destruction of markets, shops, and public infrastructure, forcing many businesses to shut down indefinitely. Transport routes, including key national highways, have been blocked, resulting in shortages of essential goods and skyrocketing price of food, fuel, and medicines. Thousands of people, especially daily wage earners, farmers, and small traders, have lost their livelihoods due to prolonged curfew and instability. Many displaced families who relied on agriculture have been unable to cultivate their lands, leading to a potential food crisis in the state. The education sector has also suffered, with schools and colleges remaining shut, affecting the future workforce. The government response has been inadequate, with limited financial aid and relief measures reaching affected communities. Investors and industries have withdrawn, fearing political instability and lawlessness, further deepening Manipur's economic crisis. Without urgent restoration of peace, reconstruction efforts, and financial support, the state's economic decline will have long term consequences, pushing more people into poverty and unemployment while delaying Manipur overall development.

Impact on Education and Healthcare:- The four month long conflict in Manipur has severely affected education and healthcare, disrupting the lives of thousands of students and patients. Since the violence erupted in May 2023, schools, colleges, and universities have remained shut in many conflict hit areas, depriving students of regular learning. Examination have been postponed, and online educations has been nearly impossible due to internet shutdowns. The prolonged disruption threatens to create a lost generation of students, especially for those preparing for competitive exams and higher studies.

The healthcare system has also collapsed, with hospitals and clinics struggling to operate amid the violence. Many medical facilities have been damaged or abandoned, and the shortage of doctors, nurse, and medical supplies has worsened the crisis. Displaced people in relief camps face unsanitary conditions, malnutrition, and lack of proper medical care, leading to disease outbreaks. Pregnant women, elderly individuals, and those with chronic illnesses are the most affected, unable to access critical healthcare services. The conflict has exposed weaknesses in Manipur public infrastructure, making urgent intervention necessary. Without immediate steps

to restore education and healthcare, the long-term well-being of the state's youth and vulnerable populations remains at serious risk.

Political Ramifications and National Security Concerns:- The four month long violence in Manipur has had serious political and national security implications, highlighting deep-rooted governance failure and ethnic tensions that threaten India's stability. The ongoing conflict between the Meitei and kuki-zo communities has led to allegations of political bias and incompetence. The demand for a separate Union Territory for kuki-zo areas has further intensified, raising concerns about territorial integrity and ethnic separatism. At the national level, the conflict has exposed India's vulnerability to ethnic insurgencies in Northeast. The porous border with Myanmar has allowed insurgent groups and armed militants to infiltrate Manipur, worsening the violence. Reports of sophisticated weapons smuggling and illegal arms circulation have raised alarms about potential links between ethnic militias and foreign rebel groups, posing a major national security risk. The ongoing violence also threatens India's Act East Policy, which focuses on economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asia. Without urgent political intervention, ethnic tensions, insurgency activities, and governance failures in Manipur could escalate into a wider regional conflict, further destabilizing Northeast India.

Deepening of Ethnic Divisions:- The four month long violence in Manipur has further widened ethnic divisions between the Meitei and kuki-zo communities, making reconciliation increasingly difficult. What began as a dispute over the Meitei demand for scheduled tribe status has escalated into full-blown ethnic conflict, leading to widespread killings, arson, and displacement. Both communities now live in separate, segregated areas, as fear and distrust prevent them from returning to their original homes. This forced separation has deepened social and political rifts making coexistence seem nearly impossible. The rise of ethnic militias and vigilante groups has fueled the violence, with both sides accusing each other of orchestrating attacks. Misinformation and hate speech on social media have further escalated tensions, spreading fake news and communal propaganda that incites further violence. The conflict has also disrupted inter-community relationships in politics, business, and education, creating a deeply polarized society where cooperation is minimal. Without immediate through peace talks, political negotiations, and reconciliation efforts, Manipur risks long-term ethnic fragmentation. If left unresolved, the situation could lead to more separatist demands, prolonged insurgency, and continued violence, threatening the overall stability of Manipur and Northeast Indi. Restoring trust and rebuilding inter-community relationship will be crucial for

lasting peace.

CONCLUSION

The Manipur conflict is a deeply rooted ethnic and political crisis that has severely impacted the state's social fabric, governance, and economic stability. The prolonged violence, particularly between the Meitei and Kuki-zo communities, has exposed historical grievance, land disputes and concerns over identity and representation. The continued unrest, loss of lives, mass displacement, and destruction of property highlight the urgent need for a sustainable resolution. A long term solution requires a multi-pronged approach that includes inclusive dialogue, fair governance, and socio-economic development. The central and state government must priorities trust building measures, ensuring that all ethnic communities feel heard and protected. The role of security forces must be balanced- ensuring law and order without exacerbating ethnic tensions. The demand for greater autonomy or restructuring of administrative boundaries must be addressed through democratic discussions, considering the aspirations of all communities. Additionally, economic opportunities, education, and infrastructure development in tribal and valley regions should be prioritized to bridge disparities. Civil society organizations, women-led peace movements, and international human rights bodies can also play a crucial role in facilitating reconciliation. The future of Manipur depends on fostering unity while respecting diversity, ensuring justice for victims, and creating a governance framework that promotes coexistence. Without a collective commitment to peace and inclusivity, the cycle of violence may continue, threatening the stability of not only Manipur but the entire northeastern region of India.

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