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## **Movement for inner line permit system in Manipur: A threat to communal harmony**

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### **Abstract**

Since attainment of statehood, influx of peoples from other states continuous in Manipur till today. The incessant influx of traders and labourers from other states of India has created fear among the indigenous people. For fear of possible threat to the demography and economy of the state as once in Tripura, valley dwellers of the Manipur have started demanding implementation of ILP in the state since 1980. ILP movement reached its highest peak in 2015, resulted in the passing of three Bills i.e. The Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015, The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2015 and Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill, 2015 in the State Legislative Assembly on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2015. ILP movement has posed a great challenge to communal peace and harmony among indigenous people of the state.

**Keywords:** Agitation, immigrant, outsiders, tribal, peace

### **Introduction**

Manipur has a geographical area of 22,327 sq km which constitutes 0.7% of the total land surface of India. 92% of the total geographical area of the State, i.e. 20,089 sq km is covered by a chain of hills and the remaining area is a small valley covering only 2,236 sq km. According to 2011 Census, the overall population of the State is 28.56 lakhs approximately. The density of the population of Manipur as per 2011 Census is 128 per sq km against 103 per sq km in 2001 Census. Manipur state is mainly inhabited by Meiteis and tribal groups since time immemorial. Besides, other smaller groups or communities consisting of Meitei-Pangal (Muslims), Punjabis, Biharis, Bengalis, Nepalese, Jains, etc. are found living in Manipur. Excluding Meitei-Pangal, these smaller groups are mostly traders, business men and labourers. They are considered as non-indigenous people of the state. The population of immigrant business men and workers had been tremendously increased thus creating a demographic imbalance in the state. In other word, the population of non-indigenous communities continuously rises in Manipur threatening the population of the indigenous communities. According to a source from United Committee Manipur (UCM), the population of migrant workers in Manipur reached about 7, 04,488 in 2011. If this figure is based on fact finding, the population of immigrant workers and businessmen outnumbered the indigenous tribal population (6, 70,782) of the state according to 2011 census.

According to K. H. Ratan, former convener of the Joint Committee on ILPS (JCILPS), the population of Manipur in 2011 is 28 lakh. Out of this, only 17 lakh (1.7 million) are indigenous people and 10 lakh (one million) are outsiders (non-Manipur people). The continuous influx of outsiders has created fear among the locals over employment and the limited natural and other resources of the state. Fear of the continues increase in the population of immigrant workers and traders, valley dwellers of Manipur had started demanding ILP in the Manipur since decades ago and its movement reached the highest peak in the middle of 2015. The demand for implementation of Inner Line Permit system is going on in the Manipur. The paper is a study of ILP issue in Manipur. The study finds that movement for implementation of Inner Line Permit in Manipur posed a great challenge to peace and communal harmony among the indigenous communities of the state. The material used in constructing this article is mainly base on primary sources.

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### **Demand for ILP in Manipur**

The Inner Line Permit (ILP) is an official travel document issued by the Government of India to grant inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected area for a limited period. It is obligatory for Indians residing outside those states to obtain permission prior to entering the protected areas. However, IPL is not valid for central government employees and security forces. Currently, the Inner Line Permit is operational in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. The document has been issued under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 and the conditions and restrictions vary from state to state. It can be issued for travel purposes solely. Visitors are not allowed to purchase immoveable property in these states.

Demand for Inner Line Permit System in Manipur is not a new one. It has been started since decades ago. It was initiated by All Manipur Student Union (AMSU) by carrying out the first stir to send back outsiders (non-Manipuris) to their respective states in 1980. Subsequently, an organisation called Federation of Regional Indigenous Society (FRIENDS) had taken up the matter seriously and submitted a memorandum to the Manipur State Government for introduction of Inner Line Permit on June 30, 2006. However, the Manipur government was silent about matter. Therefore, peoples settled in and around Imphal valley enforced demand for implementation of ILP in 2012 by carrying out repeated general strikes and agitation which compelled the Manipur State Cabinet to take a decision to adopt the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 in Manipur. It was on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2012 the State Cabinet had taken a decision to adopt the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 in Manipur. In this connection Manipur State Assembly had passed a resolution to implement the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 (Inner Line Permit System) in Manipur on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2012. Manipur state government had submitted a copy of the resolution to the Union Home Minister, Government of India on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2012.

On 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2012 Joint Committee on Inner Line Permit System (JCILP) had sent a memorandum to the prime minister of India demanding implementation of ILP in Manipur followed by a meeting between a delegation of the Joint Committee on Inner Line Permit System and Union Home Minister on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2012 vis-a-vis ILP. Subsequent to this, a delegation of All Political Parties of Manipur under the leadership of Shri O. Ibobi Singh, the then Chief Minister of Manipur met the Union Home Minister at New Delhi on the matter on 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2013. However, there was no positive response from the central leaders.

On March 16, 2015, Manipur State Legislative Assembly passed the Manipur Regulation of Visitors, Tenants and Migrant Workers Bill 2015. The bill proposed to list all visitors, tenants and migrant workers with the directorate of regulation of visitors and tenants, which will be set up under the proposed act and state labour department. However, the bill was later withdrawn for it failed to satisfy the valley people.

In the aftermath of the passing of MRVTMW Bill 2015, Joint Action Committee for Inner Line Permit System (JCILPS) started carrying out different forms of agitation in the valley of Manipur against the bill because the bill failed to fulfil the aspiration of JCILPS. JCILPS had demanded inclusion of five points to include in the Bill. The five points

were (1) issuance of permits to outsiders/immigrant workers and not allowed their permanent settlement (2) marking 1950 as the base year to differentiate migrants from original settlers (3) denying land holder to outsiders/migrants (4) setting up of full-fledged Labour Department to regulate entry of inter-state workers and (5) commencement of detection of migrants/outsideers.

From the middle of June 2015, mass movement spearheaded by JCILPS involving students and women wing started in the valley of Manipur demanding implementation of ILP or similar regulation in the state. People's movement for implementation of ILP was so strong that the government could not control. The mass movement lasted for three months. Unable to control or suppress the mass movement, the Manipur government constituted a five-member committee on 20 July, 2015 to draft a bill which could fulfil the aspiration of the people. Members of the drafting committee includes Law and Legislative Affairs minister Th. Debendra as chairman of the committee, Special Secretary (Home) M. Yaikul as convenor, Manipur Pollution Control Board chairman Manipur Dr. Ng Bijoy, MLA N. Biren and MLA RK. Anan. The drafting committee had presented the proposed Bills for the protection of indigenous people of Manipur to the state legislative assembly on 28 August, 2015. After a thorough discussion with members of JCILPS, the State legislative assembly had finally passed three Bills on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2015 for the protection of the indigenous people of Manipur. The three Bill are (1) The Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015 (2) The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2015 and (3) The Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill, 2015. However the three Bills passed by the State Legislative Assembly are strongly opposed by the indigenous hill people of the state.

### **Reasons for Opposition of the Bills**

Since the passing of the three Bills on 31<sup>st</sup> September 2015, there has been mass movement against the three bills in the hill areas of Manipur. The Bills are opposed on the following grounds.

Firstly, in the first bill i.e. The Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015, a phrase

“it shall extent the whole state of Manipur” is found in clause (1) of section 2 (*PMP Bill 2015, www.satp.org/...Manipur/...documents*). Formerly, there are nine districts in Manipur out of which four are in the valley and the remaining five districts are in the hills. It can be clearly observed that demand for implementation of ILP or similar law in Manipur is carried out by indigenous Maitais alone or in other words, ILP movement in the state is started and anything related to it were carried out by valley people alone since its beginning till today. This simply indicates that ILP is needed in Meiteis settlements in the state. Therefore, Protection of Manipur People Bill 2015 should be confined to the valley districts of the state. However, the mentioned phrase has encompasses all the districts Manipur. In short, PMP Bill 2015 affects the hill areas of the state. According to the Hill Area Committee (HAC) Order 1972, anything that could affect the hill areas wholly or partly need consultation and recommendation of Hill Area Committee. As such, consultation with HAC is required for passing a bill other than money bill which could affect the hill areas of Manipur. However, there is no available document or report that The Protection of Manipur People

Bill 2015 was passed by Manipur state legislative assembly in consultation with the Hill Area Committee.

Secondly, clause 2 (b) of The Protection of Manipur People Bill, which defines “Manipur People” as persons of whose names are in the national register of Citizens, 1951, census report 1951 and village directory of 1951 and their descendants who have contributed collective social, cultural and economic life of Manipur” (*PMP Bill 2015, www.satp.org/...Manipur/...documents*). The criteria to be Manipur people or indigenous people laid down in PMP bill affect the tribal communities of the Manipur. If the bill is enacted into law, a person needs to have been enumerated in the all three register-The National Register of Citizen, 1951, the Census Report 1951 and village directory of 1951. Therefore, only those who are fulfilling the mentioned criteria are to be considered as Manipur person. Conversely, being register in just one or two register/directories means he or she may not met the criteria. Hence, if the bill becomes a law and is implemented strictly, many people in the hill areas face the prospect of being excluded. In 1951, many of the remote hill areas were cut off due to lack of proper communication and transportation system-still the case for many far flung areas of the state. Since Manipur attained statehood only in 1972, there is a possibility that many hill people may be listed as outsiders because of their inability to provide the required documents.

Thirdly, insertion of new section 14A of the Manipur Land Revenue & Land Reform (Seventh Amendment) Bill 2015, clause (1) says “Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, Non Manipur persons, firms, institutions or any other similar entities who intend to purchase any land in the State of Manipur shall submit an application to the Deputy Commissioner of the district concerned where the land to be purchased is situated for obtaining the prior approval of the State Government before such purchase is made by him” (*MLR&LR Seventh Amendment Bill 2015, www.satp.org/...Manipur/...documents*). It indicates that the legislature can bar anything that has been in the provision of statute book. Land belongs to ST cannot be sold to or purchased by non ST in the existing law under section 158 of Manipur Land Revenue & Land Reform (MLR &LR) Act 1960. Further, the sentence “purchase of any land in the state of Manipur” has affected the hill area. Any matters related to the tribal land and forest in Manipur are protected by article 371 (c) of the Indian constitution. Hence, if the bill is enacted into law, any person can purchase land in the hill area. Therefore, it can be said that, MLR&LR Bill 2015 has violated article 371 (c) of the Indian constitution.

Lastly, insertion of new section 14B of the Manipur Land Revenue & Land Reform (Seventh Amendment) Bill 2015 says “Allotment of land to a Non Manipur Person, Firms, Institutions or any other similar entities shall be made by the Government after obtaining prior approval of the State Cabinet” (*MLR&LR Seventh Amendment Bill 2015*). This means that the government has a power in matter related to purchase of any land in the whole of Manipur after obtaining prior approval of the state cabinet. Transfer of power related to purchase of land to the government in the whole state of Manipur is contravention to the existing law. In the existing law under Manipur Land Revenue & Land Reform Act 1960, the state government has no say in matters related to purchase and sold of land in the hill areas.

### **IPL Movement Challenge communal harmony**

As the topographical division of Manipur into hills and valley, the indigenous people of the state may also be categorised as Meiteis and the tribal. Meiteis mainly occupied the valley portion of the state while the tribal occupied the hill areas. Meiteis though occupied the smaller portion of the state constitute majority whereas the tribal mainly occupying the larger portion of the state constitute the minority. Meiteis and the tribal are living together in peace and harmony in the present Manipur state since time immemorial. In other word, the Meiteis and the tribal are intermingle at different places both in the hills and the valley of Manipur with peace and communal harmony. There are many tribal communities settled in and around the state capital. In the same way, there are many Meiteis found settled in all the hill districts headquarters and other important towns in the hill areas.

However, many issues have threatened the primordial peaceful existence and communal harmony between the two main indigenous community of the state (Meiteis and the tribal) since a few decades. One of the most important issues is demand for implementation of ILP in the state. In the beginning ILP was a means targeting the non-indigenous people of Manipur or simply called Mayangs. However, demand for implementation of ILP turn out to be a means that target the indigenous tribal communities of the state during its highest peak in the history of ILP movement in the state in the middle of 2015. Mass movement demanding implementation of ILP in Manipur in 2015 had led to the first ever inter-community clash (Tribal-Meitei) among the indigenous people of the state.

The first Meitei-tribal clash broke out during the mass movement demanding implementation of ILP or similar mechanism in Manipur in the middle of 2015. A clash took place between Kukis tribal community and Meiteis in the border town of Moreh on 18 August, 2015. Moreh town is an international business hubs situated at Indo-Burma border. The town is inhabited by different communities consisting of Kukis, Tamils, Meiteis, Muslims (Meiteipanga I), Nepalese, Punjabis, Malwaris, etc. They are living together peacefully since many decades. The Kuki tribal communities being original inhabitants of the town constitute about 70% of the total population of the town.

A resident of Moreh has said that The Meitei Council had proposed to carry out a mass rally vis-a-vis ILP in the town. The Hill Tribe Council Moreh (HTC) had formally requested the Meitei Council Moreh (MCM) not to carry out procession for the sake of communal peace and harmony among the different communities living in Moreh town. Despite the request and directive released by Hill Tribe Council Moreh, a large number of Meiteis came out in the morning of 18 August and forcefully shut down many shops in the town. Then the leaders of Kuki Students Organization and their volunteers went around and open the shops which are shut down by the Meitei protestors. After sometimes they started shouting and pelting stone to each other. Two people are seriously injured and many properties were destroyed in the course of the Meitei-Kuki tribal clashes at Moreh town. In the aftermath of the clash, the Meiteis who are settled or living in and around Moreh town are filled with fear and insecure.

In the aftermath of the passing of the three bills i.e. The Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015, The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill,

2015 and the Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill, 2015, the indigenous hill people of Manipur carried out mass protest and agitation in the hill areas against the bills. The mass agitation in the hill areas against the bills lasted for three months. Nine people have been killed by Manipur state police forces and several others injured during mass protest against the three bills in churachandpur district headquarter and their dead bodies are lying in the district hospital's morgue for almost two years. The house of Mr. Thangso Baite, Member of Parliament representing outer Manipur parliamentary constituency, the house of MLA T Manga Vaiphei, the house of Health Minister Phungzathang Tonsing, the house of MLA TN Haokip and the house of Thanglianpau Guite, ZRO/ZRA leader are set fire by the protesters during mass protest against the three bills in churachandpur district headquarter. During the mass protest and agitation against the bills, Meitei community settled in and around churachandpur district headquarter are filled with full of tension, fear and insecure.

Likewise tribal communities living in and around the state capital are filled with full of tension, fear and insecure during the mass movement in the valley of Imphal demanding implementation of ILP or similar regulation in the state. ILP movement 2015 had resulted to loss of ten indigenous people and caused irreparable damage to properties belongs to individuals and government. During the three months long pro ILP movement in the valley, a student of Ananda Higher Secondary Academy (Robinhood) have died and several other injured. Mass movement in the middle of 2015 demanding implementation of ILP in Manipur had nearly resulted in bloodshed among the indigenous people of the state. In other word, pro ILP movement in 2015 had threatened communal peace and harmony by inviting possible bloodshed among the indigenous communities of Manipur.

### Conclusion

Many questions can be raise on the study of demand for implementation of Inner Line Permit system in Manipur. Why do demand for implementation of ILP in Manipur is carried out by valley people alone since its beginning? Is 1951 as cut off year is possible for detection of outsiders or foreigners and indigenous people of Manipur? Will the demand for ILP be success without the support of all section of the indigenous communities of the state, are some of the important question that can be raise.

Demand for ILP in Manipur is not for the valley portion alone but it is for the whole of Manipur because the impact or possible impact due to incessant influx of people from other states equally affect or will affect the whole areas of the state. Therefore, it is necessary for all the indigenous communities to support implementation of ILP in the state. However, it may be observed that demand for implementation of ILP is not supported by the hill people since its beginning. People's awareness and consultation is required to get support from all section of the indigenous communities before its (ILP) demand have been made or started. It was very unfortunate that AMSU had failed to organized public awareness about the impact or possible impact of continuous influx of outsiders on the demography and economy of the state before the demand for implementation of ILP was started 1980. Likewise, JCILP too failed to consult all the section of indigenous

communities before carrying out mass movement demanding implementation of ILP in the state in 2015. Therefore, a certain section of indigenous communities who are not aware of the impact or possible impact of outsiders did not support the demand for implementation of ILP.

The mass movement spearheaded by JCILP in the middle of 2015 had led to the passing of the three bills with 1951 as cut off year for criteria to be a citizen of Manipur. In other word, Protection of Manipur People Bill 2015 set 1951 as a cut off year for detection of indigenous people and non-indigenous people of Manipur. If the PMP bill 2015 is translated into law, there is possibility of many indigenous people from both the valley and the hills to be pulled out from Manipur citizenship. In the contrary, there is a great chance for outsiders to be included in the indigenous people of the state because there might have been many outsiders living in Manipur even before India's independence. Will those outsiders living in the state before 1951 be possible to include into indigenous people of Manipur? Non-Manipur people never and cannot be included into indigenous people and they will remain as outsiders. For instance, however there are many Bhutanese, Tibetans and Nepalese in Indian cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Shimla, Darjeeling, etc. since along time, they are never considered as Indians but are known as Bhutanese, Nepalese and Tibetans.

As long as the valley Meiteis alone continue to carry out ILP movement in Manipur without the support of the indigenous tribal communities, the demand for implementation of ILP will never success. In other word, demand for implementation of ILP needs collective support from all the indigenous people of the state otherwise it is dangerous to primordial peaceful co-existence and will continue to pose a threat to peace and communal harmony among the indigenous population of the state.

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