

# The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

July 2023



***“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”***

*– The Mother*

Year 14

Issue 4

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## SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

*Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella*

*Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels*

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## **A Declaration**

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

– The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

## FACETS OF MANIPUR CRISIS

The conflict and violence that has engulfed Manipur since the last few months has assumed increasingly severe proportions. The prime cause of violence lies in the inter-community conflict between the majority Meitei community which inhabits the Valley area of Manipur around Imphal, and, the minority tribal communities belonging to Kuki-Zomi groups who inhabit the reserved Hill areas of Manipur. With over 35 communities in Manipur and with a history of ethnic violence and insurgency, the genesis of the present conflict lies in several endemic differences between the two communities, mainly centering around claims to land and tribal status in the state.

Snowballing into a national crisis in the wake of the severe humiliation of two women belonging to the Kuki tribe by a local mob, the Manipur crisis has shown no signs of abating, with every instance of conflict leading to chains of counter-reaction from both sides. The Opposition has made this issue a key political plank, while the Office of the Prime Minister has refrained from detailed comments on the developments in Manipur where the BJP government, led by Meitei Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, is in power.

The immediate trigger for the present crisis was an order passed by the Manipur High Court on March 27<sup>th</sup> asking the state government to recommend Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the majority Meitei community. Tensions were already simmering prior to this order, as the state government had embarked on an eviction drive in Hill areas of the state (occupied by minority tribal groups such as Kuki-Zomi, Nagas etc.) to remove illegal village settlements from reserved forest lands. The state government had also launched a concerted

war against illegal drug cultivation and trade. Further, the latter aspect had become worsened since 2021 in the wake of the military coup in neighbouring Myanmar which led to massive illegal immigration of Kuki-Chin communities from Myanmar to neighbouring Indian states, particularly Mizoram and Manipur.

Thus, a combination of issues centering around security and ethnic identity, simmering over the past one year, have contributed to the precipitation of the present crisis.

## **A FRAUGHT HISTORY OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE**

The state of Manipur has been riven by multiple ethnic tensions since the time of the British rule. It became a protectorate of the British government in 1891 and has been riven by many revolts led by Kuki and Naga tribes during its history as a princely state under the British government. Historically, the borders in the north-east region of India were not clearly demarcated. The entire region consisted of several tribal communities spread across the hills of India and Burma. What constitutes the present-day hill areas of Manipur were also not clearly demarcated. After the British annexation of Manipur in 1891, these hill areas were integrated into the Imphal Valley, ruled by the King of Manipur, by the British government in an indirect administrative arrangement. The British sliced out portions of various hill ranges such as the Naga Hills, Chin Hills, Lushai and Cachar Hills, which were contiguous to the Imphal Valley. Done mainly for administrative and military efficiency, this process resulted in the division of the communities in the region by various administrative boundaries (Piang, 2019). After the Kuki rebellion of 1917-1919, the hill areas were annexed and directly administered by the British.

However, despite the integration of hill areas into Imphal Valley by the Britishers, the British ensured that the hill areas were ruled directly by them through a separate administrative machinery, rather than placing the hill areas under the princely state of Manipur. *This Valley-Hill arrangement of “living together separately”, born under the administrative machinations of the colonial government, has continued even in the post-Independence period, after the princely state of Manipur became a part of Indian Union in 1949.* It has contributed to a progressive widening of an already deep cultural chasm between the Kuki and Meitei communities.

## **Political Contestations**

Being a tribal territory in the North-east, the achievement of statehood in Manipur occurred under several phases. In 1949, Manipur became Chief Commissioner’s Province and was placed in category ‘C’ of Indian states, which were directly administered by the central government through a chief commissioner appointed by the President of India. In 1956, Manipur was made a Union Territory and in 1957 its administration was placed under a Territorial Council composed of 30 elected and 2 nominated members. Subsequently, the representative capacity of the state was further expanded when, in 1963, a Legislative Assembly of 30 elected and 3 nominated members was established. In 1969, the Chief executive was designated the Lieutenant Governor, and, finally, in 1972, Manipur was granted full statehood, thereby making it a state under Indian Union.

However, despite this journey as an integrated state in the Indian Union, the key political contestations in Manipur reflected the divide between the Valley and the Hill areas



right from the time of Independence, and indeed before that. It was a baggage of the British policy of separation between Valley and Hills which had become a permanent fixture. Since Manipur was placed under the in category ‘C’ of Indian states which were directly administered by the Union, therefore, the Constituent Assembly did not consider it necessary to make separate provisions on tribal autonomy for the Hill tribes in the state. However, separatist demands from the Hill tribes have been a persistent feature in the state. In the Constitution Making Committee of Manipur in 1947, the representatives from the hills demanded the right to secession of the hill areas from Manipur after a period of five years. Their demand was not incorporated, and several tribal leaders who were supporting the “secession” from Manipur were arrested in 1948.

The hill tribes of Manipur were also not included as part of the special protective measures under the Constitution viz. the Fifth Schedule which was provided for tribals outside the north-east, and Sixth Schedule which was provided for preserving tribal identity and culture within the North-east. The subcommittee of the Constituent Assembly, the Bordoloi Committee, which drafted the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, had completed its work by the time Manipur’s integration into India was complete. Ever since then, many recommendations and demands have been made to include the Hill tribes of Manipur in the Sixth Schedule, but to no avail. However, separate administrative machinery for the hill areas was allowed.

The land Act of the state, enacted in 1960 – Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (MLR&LR) Act – was enacted to administer land and its distribution in Manipur, except for the hill areas, which fell under the ambit of customary law. Thus,

the land laws of Manipur make special exceptions for hill areas and do not apply to them. When Manipur attained statehood in 1972, a special provision with respect to the hill areas of the state was inserted as Article 371C in the Constitution of India, which empowered the President – in other words, the Union government – to take reports from Governor or undertake executive measures with regard to hill areas in Manipur. Further, as per the directives of Article 371C and through the Constitution (27th Amendment) Act, 1971, the central government passed the Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Areas Committee) Order, 1972 leading to the establishment of Hill Areas Committee (HAC) in Manipur, which is supposed to take measures for the welfare and autonomy of hill communities.

## **Inter-community Conflict**

The tribal structure of Manipur consists of many tribes in the Hill and Valley areas across the state. Out of these, the Meiteis have been the most powerful tribal groups and constitute the dominant majority in the state. Despite the historical influence of Chinese and Thai cultures, Hinduism is regarded as the oldest religion in Manipur. Due to this intermixture of cultures and races, Manipur's people have, interestingly, been characterized as, Mongolians by features, Chinese by culture, Aryans by tradition, Naga by observance and Mithraic by faith (Chishti, 1979). Among the hill tribes, the Kukis and Nagas are the key tribal groups. There are also a number of sub-tribes among the Nagas and Kukis.

The Nagas inhabit the three north-western and northern districts of Tamenglong, Senapati and Ukhrul, and partly the south-eastern district of Chandel. Kukis mostly inhabit the

southwestern district of Churachandpur and partly the district of Senapati. The tribal population is mostly Christian with some traces of smaller hill tribes practicing their traditional religions. The Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims), also constitute a substantive part of the state's population and are scattered mainly in the valley and adjoining hills.

Of the 60 assembly constituencies in Manipur, 40 are in the valley areas, which comprise six districts – Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, Bishnupur, Kakching and Kangpokpi. The remaining 20 seats are spread over the other 10 hill districts.

**Nagas:** The primary demand of Nagas is the establishment of Nagalim (Greater Nagaland), consisting of Naga-inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. For this, they have waged a consistent insurgency under the banner of Naga insurgent outfits.

**Kukis:** Kukis have waged an armed insurgency since 1988 – under Kuki National Army and Kuki National Organization – for the creation of an independent state out of Manipur. They demand that this separate state be called Zalongam, and would consist of hill districts of Churachandpur, Senapati, Chandel and Sadar. In the 1990s, Kuki Defence Force and Chin Kuki Revolutionary Force were formed to fight against Naga raids.

**Meiteis:** Meiteis in Manipur were opposed to the merger agreement between the Manipuri king and the Indian government at the time of Independence. In 1964, the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) was formed, demanding secession from India. Subsequently, numerous Meitei insurgent groups, or Valley Insurgent Groups, came into being, such as the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which received arms and training from China. These valley groups operated with a dual purpose – independence from India, and warding off Naga insurgent groups.

The conflict between these tribal groups is not new. They predate Independence period and were further amplified by the British policy of separate administrative machinery for hills and valley despite their integration. The continuance of this policy of separate administration, in various forms, after Independence, is that hill tribes have always looked upon the valley community with suspicion. *The past few decades have seen several instances of conflicts among the various tribal groups. The state witnessed, among others, Naga-Kuki conflict in 1993, Meitei- Meitei Pangals conflict in 1993, and, Kuki-Paite conflict in 1997-98. Meitei-Naga conflicts have also flared up intermittently, but not explicitly.* The Kuki-Zomi groups were a reaction to Naga aggression against the Kukis. In 1993, a massacre of Kukis by the Nagas led to the Kuki-Zomi tribes organizing various armed groups.

The majority Meiteis comprise nearly 50 percent of the

total population, mostly professing Vaishnava faith, and are confined to the valley. The valley, surrounded by hills, is only one-tenth of the total geographical area, despite housing the majority of the population in the state. To make matters worse, the state's land laws do not allow the Meiteis and other non-tribals to buy land in the hills. That is, nine-tenths of the state's area has been reserved for the scheduled tribes.

Thus, despite the fact that Meiteis are the dominant group in the state and are also more educationally and economically advanced – they have job reservations under the SC (Scheduled Caste), OBC (Other Backward Classes), and EBC (Economically Backward Classes) categories and Meitei language is one of India's 22 official languages, protected by the Constitution under the Eight Schedule – the group is deeply concerned that inability to buy land in the hills, combined with border incursions from Myanmar, will lead to serious demographic change in the state. It will adversely affect the Meitei community's claims to their ancestral land, identity and culture.

Thus, despite being the majority population, Meiteis hold only 8 percent of the state land. This conundrum and perceived injustice have led to repeated demands by the Meitei community to be accorded a Scheduled Tribe (ST) status as well. The first such concerted representation was made in 2012, with the Meiteis arguing that before the merger agreement between the Manipur kingdom and the Union of India in 1949, the British had designated the Meiteis as a “tribe amongst tribes”, and that they want a restoration of their tribal identity through the ST status. The Meiteis have also argued that the ST status would help protect their ancestral land, age-old customs and traditions, and safeguard their unique identity (Chari, 2023).

## THE PRESENT CRISIS

While the immediate trigger for the present clashes between the Meiteis and the Kuki-Chin-Zo tribes is an order of the Manipur High Court directing the state government to expeditiously recommend the ST status for the Meitei community, yet another big trigger was the arrest of Mark T. Haokip. Haokip heads a separatist outfit called People's Democratic Republic of Kukiland. He was arrested last year on charges of waging war against the state to establish a homeland for Kukis. His arrest led to massive protests in Churachandpur district, dominated by Kukis, which is the hotbed of the conflict.

Following the expansion of conflict, the state government withdrew from the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with three underground tribal militant outfits – the Kuki National Army (KNA), Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA) and Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA). The SoO deal is a ceasefire arrangement inked by the Centre, the state government and Kuki outfits and has been in force since 2008. The decision was based on the assessment that these outfits were supporting the influx of Myanmar's immigrants from across the border, encouraging illegal poppy cultivation and the drug trade and instigating people against the government's anti-drug drive (Deka, 2023).

Various other factors have continued to play an endemic role in this conflict.

### Religious Dimensions

While religious identity has not played a particularly glaring role in the conflict, it has been a partial and implicit factor.

While the Meitei community predominantly practices Hindu Vaishnavism, the Kuki-Chin tribes follow Christianity. Attempts to spread Christianity in Manipur began after it became a British protectorate in 1891, with separate missionary heads being assigned to convert Meiteis and Kuki-Chin and Naga people. Even after Independence, the missionaries kept up their concerted attempts. In particular, after the 1970s, the Kuki clergy tried to infiltrate among the Meiteis. From 2% during the time of British rule in 1930s, Christianity has covered 45% of the population by 2021.

<b>State</b>	<b>Approximate Christian population (%) (based on 2011 census)</b>
Meghalaya	75
Mizoram	90
Manipur	45
Nagaland	90
Arunachal Pradesh	35
Assam	4
Tripura	4
Sikkim	10

Source: Swarajya (2016)

Many within the Meitei community believe that Christian clergy in the hills have an implicit conversion agenda which is further exacerbated by the protections guaranteed to the hill tribes under Article 371C of the Constitution of which the Meiteis have been deprived. The result is that while Meiteis and other non-tribals cannot settle in the hills, the predominantly Christian hill tribes can settle in the Valley. The

Meiteis demand that provisions of Article 371C should, therefore, be extended to the Valley as well, so as to protect them from incursion of missionaries.

However, in the present conflict, religion is not an active factor; for even Nagas are Christian and they have maintained a distance from the Meitei-Kuki clash. Several organisations of the Naga community, such as the Maram Union, Mao Union and Rongmei Naga Council Manipur, have even said that Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum – which is raising the Kuki demands – is a new organization and it does not represent all tribals and that its actions are against the wishes and integrity of the indigenous tribes.

## **Eviction Drive**

The BJP-led state government of Manipur, over the past six months, has begun a concerted eviction drive of illegal encroachments from forest lands in several hill villages in the state. The government notices said that 38 villages in the Churachandpur-Khoupum Protected Forest area are “illegal settlements”, and its residents are “encroachers”. The tribal population describes this not as encroachment, but as settlement. The Manipur government has cited Manipur Forest Rules, 2021, which empower the state to evict any encroachment on forest land. Further, the government also clarified that only new settlements, after 2021, are being evicted.

The Chief Minister, in the Manipur Assembly, has stated on record that illegal constructions in several villages began during 2021. In 2022, the state government served notices to these illegal occupants, but no response was received. Repeated reminders were also sent in the beginning of 2023. Thereafter,



the government undertook the task of demolishing the illegal encroachments.

However, the inhabitants argue that they have been living in the land for years and that it is their ancestral property. This resulted in clashes as Kuki groups have claimed that the survey and eviction is a violation of Article 371C, which confers some administrative autonomy to the tribal-dominated hill areas of Manipur. To further aggravate matters, the consistent eviction drives of the Manipur government have also resulted in demolition of a few churches which were purportedly illegally constructed. The Chief Minister has also allegedly termed the evicted people as outsiders who do not belong to Manipur, but have come from bordering areas.

This perception is strengthened on the basis of the fact that *ever since the 2021 Myanmar coup and the resultant influx of refugees to India – majority of whom were Kuki-Chin-Zomi tribes – a large number of new villages are rapidly being created out of protected areas and reserved forests*. This represents a serious security threat to the state.

## **Influx of Refugees from Myanmar and the Resultant Insurgency**

The coup that occurred in Myanmar in early 2021 and brought the military junta to power in that country has been a major factor in creating instability across the states of Manipur and Mizoram. India and Myanmar share a 1643 km long border. Both the countries have a Free Movement Regime (FMR) since 2018, which means that people living on either side of the border can freely travel to the other side up to 16 km without a visa. This was suspended in 2022 in the wake of refugee

influx. More than 40,000 refugees (according to conservative official estimates) have fled Myanmar and entered India, taking advantage of the open borders policy between the two countries. Majority of these refugees are Kuki-Chin-Zomi ethnicity people. Ever since the 2021 coup, Myanmar has launched concerted attacks against the Kuki-Chin tribes in the country. They have been welcomed by the hill tribes of Manipur and by the state of Mizoram, despite the orders of the Union Home Ministry to restrict the inflow of refugees. Central forces, like Assam Rifles, have also been alleged to have allowed their movement.

While Mizoram – a predominantly Christian state with the Mizo people belonging to similar ethnicity as Kuki-Chin tribes – has openly welcomed these refugees and given them shelter, despite the contrary directives of the Union Home Ministry, in Manipur the reaction has been opposite. In Manipur, these ethnicities have integrated well with their hill brethren (except Nagas), while the Meiteis perceive them as a security threat. *For, the Kuki-Chin tribes are part of the powerful Ethnic Armed Organizations in Myanmar, who are fighting against the military junta, and are running parallel governments in various border divisions of Myanmar, such as Chin state, Rakhine state, Sagaing division etc. It is also alleged that they have exchanges with Rohingya terrorists. Their movement in India may have contributed greatly in lending not just a strong militant character to the present Manipur conflict, but is also responsible for its long-drawn nature making it last for so many months.*

*As it is, even before this influx from Myanmar, the decadal growth rate of population of hill communities was increasing rapidly compared to the valley – only 16 percent in the valley as against 40 percent in the hills. After this massive influx, their*

*new illegal settlements are being perceived as nothing short of a demographic disaster.* Even the Nagas – who themselves are a hill tribe in Manipur and are mostly Christian – have flagged this issue and demanded that the state government prepare the National Register of Citizens (NRC) to weed out the outsiders.

It has also been alleged that Assam Rifles – a force under the Indian Army – has been allowing this illegal influx to continue. Presently, more than 20 battalions of Assam Rifles are stationed in the state. They are stationed in buffer zones viz. fringe areas that separate Meitei and Kuki settlements, to ensure that miscreants from different communities do not cross over. Yet, despite their watch, Kuki insurgents recently murdered a Meitei family in their sleep. In the incident, Manipur police accused Assam Rifles of preventing them from pursuing those Kuki militants. Thus, inexplicable allegations of the soft approach of Assam Rifles towards the Kuki-Chin groups are bolstered by the serious differences and minor altercations between the Manipur police and Assam Rifles that have cropped up during this conflict.

While Meitei and Naga groups have demanded that Assam Rifles be withdrawn from the state and replaced by any other central forces, Kuki-Zo groups have maintained that they trust the Rifles and requested for their continuance. Manipur's Meitei population – due to many years of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) imposition – has traditionally had a strained relationship with Assam Rifles.

## **Drug Cultivation**

Manipur and the neighboring northeastern states of India are vulnerable to the Golden Triangle, the drug nexus of

Southeast Asia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos, with some towns in Manipur reported to have become hubs for the drug trade and cultivation. Chinese crime syndicates are alleged to be key players in the flow of drugs to Myanmar, controlling the drug flow of the drugs that enter the Indian markets via northeastern states. Further, these drug cartels – many of which are controlled by the Ethnic Armed Organizations of Myanmar who have declared war against the Myanmar junta – fund insurgency among Indian insurgent groups. The flow of drug trade also helps to maintain their business.

In Manipur, *Kuki-dominated Churachandpur district is believed to be amongst the worst drug-affected areas of Manipur.* It is estimated that more than 80% of the smuggling of drugs in India has its origin in Myanmar. The *India-Myanmar border in Moreh town of Manipur is known to be the major hub of drugs.* Since the past one year, Moreh has been experiencing a range of drug seizures and arrests. Drugs reach Moreh through Myanmar's Tamu village and then make way to Manipur and Nagaland.

Over the past one year, the Manipur government has carried out a massive drive to check drug cultivation and prevent drug abuse and trade. *The dangers of such drug abuse and illegal trade became magnified manifold in the wake of the influx of refugees from Myanmar.* Prior to the Myanmar coup and the inflow of refugees into India, drug cultivation was a means of earning extra income for the hill tribes, who engage in significant amount of illegal poppy cultivation. The Kuki community, in particular, is into this kind of illegal drug cultivation. Thus, the anti-drug abuse drive of the government further made the Kuki-Chin hill tribes a target of the government.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE ARRESTED IN MANIPUR DRUGS CASES, COMMUNITY-WISE, 2017-2023								
Community	Number of people arrested							Total
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
Kuki-Chin	82	54	122	127	151	288	49	873
Muslim	93	223	201	177	163	210	16	1083
Meitei	44	67	64	54	40	98	14	381
Others	12	9	47	14	36	62	1	181
<b>Total</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>658</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>2,518</b>

Source: Bordloi (2023)

The government has went on record to state that Myanmar immigrants are responsible for deforestation, poppy cultivation and drug menace in the state, with the Chief Minister even forming a cabinet sub-committee to identify illegal immigrants and set up temporary shelters so that they can return to their country again (Deka, 2023). *Between 2017 and 2023, the Manipur police destroyed over 15,496 acres of poppy cultivation. In one year alone, more than 1200 crore worth of drugs were destroyed or seized.* Further, in its report to the European Union in 2023, the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) – an umbrella of Valley-based civil society organizations – stated that *narco-terrorists belonging to Christian Kuki-Chin tribes had established a Rs. 500-600 billion economy inside Manipur by illegally occupying 125,000 acres of forest areas*, and that drug cartels across Indo-Myanmar border have established armed groups to run the illegal drug trade. The attempts by the government to upend this widespread drug network within Manipur has been credited as one of the biggest

reasons for the present crisis as well as a plausible source of funding of the present rebellion.

## CONCLUSION

In the light of the various factors impacting Manipur at present, it becomes clear that the present crisis is rooted in the complex historical and geopolitical dynamics in the state, which have become worsened by certain immediate developments and triggers. In a broader sense, Manipur is a microcosm of the northeast region as a whole – a region characterized by endemic inter-community tribal conflicts over ethnic identities and demands for statehood.

Historically, the post-Independence decades have been among the most strife-torn decades for the northeast region and have also witnessed an astonishingly rapid spread of Christianity to which successive governments have turned a blind eye, deliberately or incidentally. The retention of British-era policies which sought to isolate the region from the rest of the country made it a fertile ground for thriving insurgency. Instead of attempting active integration of the region, previous governments have followed a combination of draconian imposition of AFSPA (which exacerbated even Meitei insurgency) and persistent patterns of economic underdevelopment and exploitation. Vote-bank politics has further encouraged the political class to actively promote sharp identity-based divisions.

It is undeniable that post-2014 has witnessed a vast change in the region, especially Manipur, where the ruling party has attempted to facilitate integration and nationalism among Meitei people and has also earned goodwill of hill tribes like the Kukis. Due to active political and administrative interventions

by the central government and party politics by the BJP, the region has witnessed the rise of peace, minimization of insurgency and removal of AFSPA from lot of areas in the region. Instead of a hub of insurgents, the region – thanks to infrastructure development, integration with Bay of Bengal trading networks and economic prosperity – is now associated with peace. And yet, as we stand at the present juncture of the Manipur crisis, how fallacious this peace appears.

The two contrasting pictures – of an earlier era of armed insurgency and separatism giving way to the later era of relative peace – entailed in the progression of northeast region, especially Manipur, represent a paradox. *Despite the fact that the region seems to be shifting from insurgency to peace and development, yet the dark picture presented by Manipur shows how facile and superficial this so-called peace and development can be.* At present, Manipur presents a picture of a society whose major chunk of the hill population is ravaged by ills such as drug abuse, crime and corruption. To talk of providing peace and development in such a situation is akin to providing misplaced remedies for a situation that has a completely different diagnosis.

*The present state of the country in general and Manipur in particular has its foundations in the lack of national character, which no amount of so-called development can remedy.* Our national character is the whole of what frames our collective psyche and consciousness. It is not constituted by one factor alone but has deeper foundations and is what makes us a distinctive nation. As Sri Aurobindo had said, *“To us, from the very geography of the country, it [India] appears to be quite distinct from other countries and that itself gives to it a certain national character... The inner and outer constitution of India,*

*the customs and culture of its people, its religion, etc. etc. have an independent character different from the rest of the world. It has its foundations in the ancient past.”* (CWSA 6&7, 2002, pp. 811-12).

At present, the root cause of all our ills is a progressive decline of national character which has been exacerbated by our collective immersion in the utilitarian ideal of development as a panacea for all our ills. *This materialistic gospel of development was deployed as a solution in the northeast region, motivated by good intentions but lack of depth.* And, predictably, few years down the line, it is visible that this utilitarian gospel of development as a panacea for all ills triggered the opposite reaction from the one that was expected. Instead of bringing in peace and harmony, it became a mask for executing human selfishness and greed. For no peace can sustain itself merely on the back of superfluous government prescriptions or attempts to harmonize equality and freedom mechanically. It needs a strong foundation of fraternity to truly be meaningful – the one attribute which cannot be imposed mechanically through some kind of developmental procedures but must be sought for in the spirit.

As Sri Aurobindo had said, *“For the ego to speak of fraternity is for it to speak of something contrary to its nature. All that it knows is association for the pursuit of common egoistic ends and the utmost that it can arrive at is a closer organisation for the equal distribution of labour, production, consumption and enjoyment. Yet is brotherhood the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity. The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else. For this*



*brotherhood is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement...When it [the soul] strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity.”* (CWSA 25, 1997, pp. 569-70).

In the present deteriorating condition of our national character and collective psyche, this ideal of fraternity is far from us. Despite commendable intentions and the revival of national spirit over the last few years, we are rapidly reaching a precipitating point, having hit the roadblock of utilitarianism and the psychological selfishness it is engulfing us in. While the crisis in Manipur may be a limited manifestation of this larger malaise in the form of inter-community conflict, it indicates a complex future ahead.

It shows that the need of the hour is not simply national revival, but a national revival based on deeper, spiritual awakening, premised more on substance and depth and less on preoccupation with materialistic self-satisfaction. The role of the government has also to change accordingly. The assumption that development and deployment of more machinery and infrastructure can bring peace and harmony is a fallacy that has to be seen for its limitations. The northeast region – where such development brought limited peace, but has eventually hit a roadblock – provides an excellent example of this.

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# HIGHLIGHTS

## DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

The Russia-Ukraine has witnessed some key developments in recent times.

On the military front, the Ukrainian counteroffensive, which started off at a tepid note, has picked up pace. The supply of cluster munition bombs by the US as well the rise in frequency of Ukrainian drone attacks inside Russian cities reflect the tilting balance in Ukraine's favour.

Beyond the Russia-Ukraine theatre, signs of tense conflict are also visible between Poland and Belarus. With Russian private military group, the Wagner Group, stationing its base in Belarus, their threatened incursions near Poland have begun. Although, Poland, being a NATO member, will not be directly attacked by Russia, yet, indirect proxy war or conflicts through the private militia, Wagner Group, could be a likely possibility.

Diplomatically, the peace conference on Ukraine in Jeddah represented the engagement of countries of global South with the implications of the war. It saw the participation of more than 40 countries, including India, China, US, UK, France and others. While Ukraine was part of the conference, Russia was not invited. The conference discussed prospective peace plans for ending the war. However, no particular agreement could be reached. Ukraine was consistent in the peace plan it had originally come up with. This involved, among other things, complete Russian withdrawal from all Ukrainian territories, compensation to be paid to Ukraine, as well as initiating war crimes prosecution against Russia. This has not worked out

due to Russia's refusal. China's peace plan, while calling for respecting sovereignty and integrity of all nation-states yet supported Russian position on negative implications of NATO expansion.

Besides the Jeddah peace talks, another significant conference that took place was the NATO annual summit. This year the summit took place at Vilnius, Lithuania. The summit fell collectively short of articulating how Ukraine will defeat Russia in this war. As the summit convened, the Ukrainian counteroffensive was faltering due to a lack of air support and long-range precision fires. Rather than arming Ukraine adequately for its counteroffensive to succeed, however, the alliance merely invoked its "steadfast ... commitment to further step up political and practical support to Ukraine ... for as long as it takes." However, the summit saw some breakthrough in terms of relaxing conditions for facilitating Ukraine's membership of NATO. The demand of a Membership Action Plan that was required earlier was dropped and the alliance committed that it will in the future facilitate Ukraine's membership. Furthermore, this summit has upgraded the old, ineffective Ukraine-NATO Commission to the NATO-Ukraine Council where the alliance members and Ukraine would sit as equal members.

These indications from the NATO summit have produced some anxiety in Russia, as this summit was definitively better in terms of affirming Ukraine's path to future membership of NATO, as compared to previous NATO summits. Russia's discomfort is further visible in the withdrawal from the grain deal that was brokered by Turkey last year, under which Ukrainian grain exports were insured from the war. That is no longer the case, as Russian bombing of Odesa shows. As

reflected in the statements of African leaders to Putin, this was a diplomatic failure for Russia.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Increasing use of Artificial Intelligence in general applications continues to pick pace steadily, so much so that now the conversation has shifted from AI to Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), which threatens to take over human jobs and other activities. What distinguishes AGI from AI is that the former is not simply intelligent but is also performative, that is, it can perform the tasks that humans do just like humans, if not better. This has greatly widened the scope of AI, not only for general purpose tasks, but also devious crimes and cyber-attacks. Often these involve the use of tools like deepfake (creating fake video and audio of a person to fool others and scam them or worse) and even create malware or computer viruses. Earlier it used to take time to create such viruses. But now AI can do it in minutes and create a much worse virus that can evade existing security measures. Recently, members of the US Congress, in a hearing before a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, also warned that criminals can use AI to develop biological weapons as well.

In recent weeks, British Airways and BBC fell victims to such cyberattacks, with the attackers exploiting vulnerabilities in third party file transfers, gaining access to personal data and subsequently resorting to blackmail and demands to negotiate with victims. The UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has predicted a significant increase in cyber services over the next five years as more state and non-state actors obtain capabilities and intelligence not previously available to them.

Even the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the US had to issue public advisories in the face of rise of cyber-crime.

The application of AGI has also witnessed other repercussions. The recent strikes by Hollywood organizations against big media streaming platforms are a case in point, as Hollywood turns increasingly towards the greater use of AI in entertainment industry.

In politics too, AGI is seeping in, although in a much less publicized manner and in a limited form yet. An interesting example is a tool called *Polis* which is used by politicians in US and UK to frame consensual policies in an interactive manner (through direct people participation) and gain public support. This tool has been compared with potential to bring in elements of direct democracy through AI citizen assemblies, repair the relationship between state and citizen and facilitate conversation between elected politicians and their constituents for policy implementation. Few politicians who have used it have described themselves as AI-powered politicians. *Polis* is an open source, real-time system for gathering, analyzing and understanding what large groups of people think, enabled by advanced statistics and machine learning. It is maintained and designed by a platform called the Computational Democracy Project.

## **IMPORTANT PARLIAMENTARY LEGISLATIONS**

The Monsoon session of the Parliament was held between July 20, 2023 and August 11, 2023. While it was disrupted by the Opposition hold-up over the Manipur crisis and also saw the tabling of a No Confidence motion against the government, the session saw the passage of several key bills. Some of the bills passed and those which will be passed are:

Bill Passed	Key Features
<p>The Integrated Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023</p>	<p>It amends the Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) Act, 2017. The 2017 Act provides for the levy and collection of IGST on the inter-state supply of goods and services. Following changes were made:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A supplier of online money gaming, not located in India, will be liable to pay IGST on the supply of online money gaming to a person in India.</li> <li>2. A supplier of online money gaming must obtain registration under the Simplified Registration Scheme notified under the 2017 Act.</li> </ol>
<p>The Central Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023</p>	<p>The Bill provides that suppliers of specified actionable claims will be liable to pay CGST. The Bill defines specified actionable claims as actionable claims involved in: (i) betting, (ii) casinos, (iii) horse racing, (iv) lottery, (v) gambling, or (vi) online money gaming.</p>

<p>Anusandhan National Research Foundation Bill, 2023</p>	<p>It repeals the Science and Engineering Research Board Act, 2008 and dissolves the Science and Engineering Research Board set up under it. The Bill provides for establishing the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (NRF). NRF will be the apex body in the country to provide direction for research, innovation, and entrepreneurship in the fields of: (i) natural sciences including mathematics, (ii) engineering and technology, (iii) environmental and earth sciences, (iv) health and agriculture, and (v) scientific and technological interfaces of humanities and social sciences.</p>
<p>The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2023</p>	<p>The Bill will apply to the processing of digital personal data. Its key features are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal data may be processed only for a lawful purpose upon consent of an individual. Consent may not be required for specified</li> </ul>



legitimate uses such as voluntary sharing of data by the individual or processing by the State for permits, licenses, benefits, and services.

- Data fiduciaries (intermediaries) will be obligated to maintain the accuracy of data, keep data secure, and delete data once its purpose has been met.

- The Bill grants certain rights to individuals including the right to obtain information, seek correction and erasure, and grievance redressal.

- The central government may exempt government agencies from the application of provisions of the Bill in the interest of specified grounds such as security of the state, public order, and prevention of offences.

- The central government will establish the Data Protection Board of India to adjudicate on non-compliance with the provisions of the Bill.

The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2023

- The Bill establishes the National Capital Civil Services Authority, which consists of the Chief Minister, Chief Secretary of Delhi, Principal Home Secretary of Delhi.

The Authority will make recommendations to the Lieutenant Governor (LG) regarding transfers and postings of officials and disciplinary matters.

- The Bill empowers the LG to exercise his sole discretion on several matters including those recommended by the National Capital Civil Services Authority, and the summoning, prorogation and dissolution of the Delhi Legislative Assembly.

- It authorizes department secretaries to bring to the notice of the LG, the Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary any matter that may bring Delhi Government into controversy with the Central Government.

<p>Offshore Areas Mineral (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2023</p>	<p>The Bill amends the Offshore Areas Mineral (Development and Regulation) Act, 2002. The Act regulates mining in maritime zones of India. The Act categorises offshore mining-related activities into: (i) reconnaissance, which involves a preliminary survey to locate mineral resources, (ii) exploration, which includes exploring, proving, or locating mineral deposits, and (iii) production, the commercial activity of the extraction of minerals. The bill provides various concessions in exploration activities.</p>
<p>The Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Bill amends the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 to make it applicable to certain types of land. These include land notified as a forest under the Indian Forest Act, 1927 or in government records after the 1980 Act came into effect. The Act will not be applicable for land converted to non-forest use before December 12, 1996.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It also exempts certain types of land from the purview of the Act. These include land within 100 km of India’s border needed for national security projects, small roadside amenities, and public roads leading to a habitation.</li> <li>• The state government requires prior approval of the central government to assign any forest land to a private entity.</li> <li>• The Act specifies some activities that can be carried out in forests, such as establishing check posts, fencing, and bridges. The Bill also allows running zoos, safaris and eco-tourism facilities.</li> </ul>
<p>The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill</p>	<p>It allows the private sector to mine six out of 12 atomic minerals, such as lithium, beryllium, niobium, titanium, tantalum and zirconium. Currently, only government entities are allowed to mine atomic minerals. Also, the Act</p>

	will now allow private sector entities to explore deep-seated and critical minerals, such as gold, silver, copper, zinc, lead, and nickel. The bill empowers the central government to exclusively auction mining leases and composite licences for critical minerals. The Bill further seeks to establish a National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET) to fund mineral exploration activities in India.
The Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill	It brought changes to the Cinematograph Act, 1952, which is the primary law governing the film industry in India. It aims to combat film piracy and revamp film certification.
Pharmacy (Amendment) Bill	It made changes to the provisions of the Pharmacy Act, of 1948, that regulate the practice and profession of pharmacy. The bill recognises pharmacists qualified under the J&K Pharmacy Act, 2011.
Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Bill	This bill amends the Constitution (Scheduled

	<p>Caste) Order, 1950, to modify the list of Scheduled Castes in Chhattisgarh. The new Act includes Mahara and Mahra communities as synonyms of the Mehra, Mahar, and Mehar communities in Chhattisgarh.</p>
<p>Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill</p>	<p>It amends the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, seeks to create a National and State level database of registered births and deaths. This database can be used for other services such as maintenance of population register, electoral rolls, ration cards, property registration etc.</p>
<p>I n t e r - s e r v i c e s Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill</p>	<p>It seeks to empower the Commander-in-Chief or Officer-in-Command of Inter-services Organisations (ISO) with all disciplinary or administrative control over all personnel under them even if they are from other services. Though all Army, Navy and IAF personnel will continue to be governed by their respective Service Acts, the</p>

	heads of Inter-Services Organisations will now have powers over the armed force staff irrespective of the service they belong to.
National Dental Commission Bill	It repealed the Dentists Act, 1948. It proposes to establish the National Dental Commission (NDC) as the apex regulatory body for dental education and the profession in India. The NDC will have the power to grant approval to dental colleges, to prescribe the curriculum for dental education, and conduct examinations for dental students.
National Nursing and Midwifery Commission Bill	It proposes the formation of the National Nursing and Midwifery Commission (NNMC) as the apex regulatory body for nursing and midwifery education and practice in India. The bill that repealed the Indian Nursing Council Act, 1947, also created three autonomous boards under the NNMC.
Mediation Bill	It requires settling civil or

	<p>commercial disputes through mediation first, especially institutional mediation, before approaching any court or tribunal. The bill proposes setting up of the Mediation Council of India (MCI) as a statutory body.</p>
<p>Indian Institutes of Management (Amendment) Bill</p>	<p>It entrusts the management accountability of the Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) to the President of India. The bill grants the President the role of Visitor, bestowing upon the office powers to audit their functioning, order investigations, and appoint or remove directors.</p>
<p>Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill</p>	<p>It amends the existing Biological Diversity Act, 2002 aims to facilitate the fast-tracking of research, and patent application process, and decriminalise all the offences under the Act. The new Act proposes a benefit-sharing mechanism where the local communities and traditional knowledge holders receive a</p>



	<p>fair share of the benefits of biodiversity commerce. It exempts registered practitioners of AYUSH, local people and communities of the area, including growers and cultivators of biodiversity, from giving prior intimation to state biodiversity boards for accessing biological resources for commercial utilisation.</p>
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## VIOLENCE IN FRANCE

Violence in France escalated to unprecedented levels in the wake of shooting of a 17-year old Algerian Muslim migrant. ***The migrant, Nahel M, had a criminal background and was wanted by the police.*** What started as peaceful demonstrations soon turned into mob violence and rioting as protests spread across various major French cities, including Paris, Marseilles etc. The violence was mainly led by youth, including minors, from Black and Arab communities. Libraries, buildings and iconic French heritage were set afire. Even the Mayors residence in Paris was not spared. Over a span of five days, nearly 3000 arrests were witnessed.

The violence was not just limited to France itself but also spread to the country's overseas territories, such as French Guiana. It has also polarized the country. Crowdfunding petitions show that ***the amount of money and support that came in for the policeman who had shot Nahel topped one million dollars, far exceeding the support that had come for Nahel, which***

*amounted to around 189,000 euros.* The incident brought to fore not only the racial tensions within France, but also religious tensions, as many of the Black community migrants belong to Islam. In addition, socialist and Left-leaning activist groups have also actively participated in rioting. Islamic radicalism has been on a rise in France recently, with major incidents such as Charlie Hebdo attack in 2015, the Nice attack in 2016, and the Paris attacks in 2015.

The existing French system of neutral secularism which does not recognize identities like religion, race and ethnicity have made things worse in this era of identity-based Black Islamic religious radicalism. France, therefore, collects no census or other data on the race (or ethnicity) of its citizens. The non-recognition of race and ethnicity make it difficult to assess racism and take preventive steps. It is important to maintain data of different identities not only so that targeted measures could be taken, but also so that profiling of citizens can be done in the interest of national security.



## FOUR CATEGORIES OF HUMAN BEINGS

“Human beings could be classified under four principal categories according to the attitude they take in life:

( 1 ) Those who live for themselves. They consider everything in relation to themselves and act accordingly. The vast majority of men are like this.

(2) Those who give their love to another human being and live for him. As for the result, everything naturally depends on the person one chooses to love.

(3) Those who consecrate their life to the service of humanity through some activity done not for personal satisfaction but truly to be useful to others without calculation and without expecting any personal gain from their work.

(4) Those who give themselves entirely to the Divine and live only for Him and through Him. This implies making the effort required to find the Divine, to be conscious of His Will and to work exclusively to serve Him.

In the first three categories, one is naturally subject to the ordinary law of suffering, disappointment and sorrow.

It is only in the last category – if one has chosen it in all sincerity and pursued it with an unflinching patience – that one finds the certitude of total fulfilment and a constant luminous peace.

26 December 1971”

The Mother

(CWM 16: 428-29)