

# Human Security—Climate Change—Manipur: The Gate Way to South East Asia

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There are several threats to human security, but the two greatest threats appear to be—terrorism and climate change, both of which have ramifications, for every people and every nation. Manipur, a small state in North-East India, sharing a common international border with Myanmar, has and is experiencing how climate change adversely impacts human security, particularly in the current year. The traditional four seasons of the English calendar viz. winter, spring, summer, and autumn are no longer applicable to Manipur, which from the commencement of the current year has been wracked by devastating storms, incessant rain, landslides, fissures habitation being swept away by rivers which have overflowed their banks, bridges disintegrating, especially those constructed of wooden planks and bamboo. This has threatened human security, because basic needs of people especially in hill areas, food, water, housing, clothing, shelter, have dissolved as it were in a mist; water-borne diseases are on the rise, and communication even between adjoining villages has been severed, as also access to health centres, educational institutions, public transport facilities, water and power supply, social media, information. Moreover, Manipur is located in a seismic zone. Climate change takes a great toll and incidence on mortality and income.

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Manipur is a tiny state which merged into the Indian Union only in 1949. But its strategic location in North East India where it shares a 352 km long international border with Myanmar renders it ready to make a giant leap forward to translate into practicing India's "Act East Policy"<sup>1</sup>. Act East Policy came into existence at the Indian Asian Summit in Myanmar in November 2014. As early as 1995, a "Free Trade Agreement" was signed between India and Myanmar, but in the ancient past, because of the porous nature of the Indo-Burma border, cross-border trade to countries of South East and East Asia has been recorded. Significant developments occurred in the pattern of trade in early medieval centuries, in the expansion of maritime activity in the eastern waters of the Indian Ocean and the China Sea. The emergence of great civilized states under strong Hindu and Indian Buddhist influence ensured the presence of Indian traders and Indian men of religion as a civilizing force, leading to a shared common culture and the entry of Indian merchants into direct trading

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<sup>1</sup> Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Govt. of Manipur. 2012-13. Economic Survey Manipur, Manipur's geographical area constitutes 0.7% of the total land surface of India, Freeman Offset, Imphal.

with China (Raychaudhuri & Habib, 1984, pp. 126-127; Salam, 2012, p. 4)<sup>2</sup>. Manipur is one of the routes between South East Asia and Central Asia—gateway to South East Asia. Various ethnic groups belonging to the Southern Mongoloid group, the Tibeto Burmans, the Indo Aryans, and a sizable section of the Tai (Shan) came to Manipur from the prehistoric times down to the present day. The present ethnic groups of Manipur are the descendants of those migratory people (Kabui, 1991, p. 2). They share many similarities with people of South East and East Asia—food habits, dress, language, cultural traits, etc.

### **Human Security—Manipur: The Gate Way to South East Asia**

There can be no doubt that the greatest threats to human security are terrorism and climate change, which impact every individual and every nation. Most countries, regions, states, assign greater priority to terrorism. Manipur is extremely vulnerable to terrorism not only because of the porous Indo-Myanmar border, which permits entry and influx of illegal migrants, drugs, and arms supplies, but from a historical perspective, because the merger of Manipur as a part of India in 1949, has been popularly viewed as a “forced merger”. When India became independent in 1947, so did Manipur, because prior to her defeat in the Anglo Manipur War 1891, Manipur was a monarchical state. Manipur was an ancient kingdom, a cradle of human civilization and creativity which has come under the influence of many cultures of different ethnic groups who came at different times, and contributed to the growth of the civilization of Manipur. Manipur being a gateway of India to South East Asia was influenced by her geographical situation and ecology in the shaping of her history and cultural development (Salam, 2011, pp. 49-50). A Legislative Assembly and Council of Ministers started functioning under the Manipur Constitution Act of 1947, after duly conducting elections under Universal Adult Franchise. However, with the merger of Manipur in 1949, the nascent democracy was summarily dissolved<sup>3</sup>. It generated great discontent, and was regarded as “unconstitutional”. As a result, the 15th of October, every year is commemorated as “Black Day” in the annals of Manipur’s history (the day of the merger in 1949). Discontent grew apace, because for many decades following the merger, no development “per se” took place in Manipur. Today, Manipur is the most under-developed state in North East India despite its strategic importance. This neglect by the Centre gave rise to a feeling of deprivation and loss among the indigenous communities of the state (Manipur has a pluralistic society), but more important, it gave rise to resistance movements which transformed into open armed conflicts from the 1970’s onwards<sup>4</sup> (There are more than 34 armed groups which desire to restore Manipur to its pre-merger status—these groups are popularly known as revolutionary groups or the non-state actors).

Another factor impinging on “human security” in Manipur and exacerbating conflict was the imposition of the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) in the state by the Central Government. It was in August 1958 when the Armed Forces Special Power Act Bill was introduced in the *Lok Sabha*: The two members of Parliament from Manipur—Laishram Achou and Rungsung Saisa opposed the bill tooth and nail, to no avail. The then Union Minister, Mr. G. B. Pant justified the bill, arguing that “Local Government may make use of

<sup>2</sup> The first reference to contact between Manipur and Burma as recorded in “Cheitharol Kumpapa”—Royal Chronicle (Manipur) is Sakabda 585 (663 CE). In the early centuries, traders moved freely between the two kingdoms. As early as the 4th century A.D., two Manipuri traders Pengsiba and Naokhamba travelled on horseback to Upper Burma and China.

<sup>3</sup> *Manipur: A Memorandum on Extrajudicial, Arbitrary or Summary Executions*. Submitted by Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights in Manipur and UN, March 2012, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Manipur: A Memorandum on Extrajudicial, Arbitrary or Summary Executions*. Submitted by Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights in Manipur and UN, March 2012, p. 2.

the army”, if it so chooses, in the manner provided in the Bill, and can use the army only for this limited purpose and therefore, the ordinary process of the law is to be followed (Loitongbam, 2012). AFSPA was introduced first in Ukhrul District of Manipur in 1960, in Tamenglong Subdivision in 1963, and since the 8 September, 1980, the whole of Manipur state was declared a “Disturbed State” (Salam, 2011). AFSPA has been removed very recently from the Municipal Areas of Imphal only (Imphal is the capital of Manipur).

Half a century of imposition of AFSPA has on the one hand escalated discontentment, and on the other institutionalized impunity and militarism in Manipur. AFSPA grants extra ordinary power to the armed forces of the Union. In areas declared to be “disturbed” areas, non-commissioned officers of the armed forces have powers to fire upon or otherwise use force, even leading to death, of any person who is acting in contravention of any law, or who is in possession of deadly weapons, or against an assembly of five or more persons, arrest without warrant and with the use of necessary force, anyone who has committed certain offence(s), or is suspected of having committed offence(s), enter and search any premise(s), in order to make such arrests. No prior sanction is obtained from the Union Government (Salam, 2011) (In the last two years, the Supreme Court of India has ordered compensation to the kin of few victims who were killed by members of the armed forces).

The demand for enforcement of the Inner Line Permit is connected with human security but basically from the perspective of sustainable livelihood for the indigenous communities of Manipur, viz. the Meiteis, Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims), and the tribals. These communities feel threatened by the influx of migrants, whether from other countries especially those bordering Manipur and North East India, and also Indians from other states of the subcontinent. This influx of migrants upsets the equilibrium of the state, in that demographic index changes, migrants whether skilled, semi-skilled, or unskilled easily find employment, whereas out of a total population of 2,570,390 (Singh, 2013), approximately 700,000 indigenous people are unemployed and have no access to sustainable forms of livelihood. Moreover, nine-tenths of the state comprise of hills which are the exclusive domain of the Naga and Kuki cognate tribes. Law does not permit Meiteis or Meitei Pangals or non-indigenous people to buy land in the hills but tribals can purchase land in the Imphal Valley. As a result, the population has grown exponentially to 834,154 in urban areas and to 1,736,236 in rural areas (Singh, 2013, p. 2). The demand of the reinforcement of the Inner Line Permit which was in existence during the period of British colonialism in Manipur (1891-1947) stems essentially from the Bengal Frontier Act 1873, whose main objective was to protect British interests in tea plantations, oil and the rubber industry. It was abolished after Manipur’s merger into India, but in the last two decades, there has been a clarion call to reinforce the Inner Line Permit, to prevent the entry of illegal migrants, especially from the labor classes (Nag, 2014)<sup>5</sup>. There is also a Protected Area Permit (PAP) which regulates the entry of any Chinese or Myanmar into Manipur. Without PAP, such individuals entering Manipur can and have been arrested/detained/deported. But as the present ethnic groups of Manipur viz. the Meiteis, the Naga tribes, the Kuki Chin tribes, and other ethnic communities came to Manipur from prehistoric times and belong to either Southern Mongoloid group, the Tibeto-Burmans, Indo Aryans, or a sizable section of Tai (Shan), they are predominantly Mongoloids and speak the Tibeto Burman language (Haokip, 2011). This common ethnicity means that the indigenous communities of Manipur share commonalities in physical form and feature, language, customs, religious beliefs, culture, dress,

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<sup>5</sup> The Bengal Frontier Act 1873 prevented any non-tribals to enter the demarcated Lushai (now known as Mizo) territory without a valid pass from the district administration.

etc. with people from the neighboring countries of South East and East Asia (China)<sup>6</sup>. It is possible to pass off as a citizen of Manipur, especially for Myanmarers entering through the porous land border, and obtain even identity cards and driving licenses. The media has highlighted some such instances. This can exacerbate both drug and arms smuggling both inimical to human security—Manipur is in close proximity to the Golden Triangle, and there are many revolutionary groups who have bases/camps in Myanmar. This may adversely affect the proposed development of Kwatha village of Moreh (the border town of Manipur) block as a model village, which would act as a stimulus to the “Act East Policy”, as a cultural centre would be setup, where cultural troupes from countries of South East Asia could perform. The village is known for the production of bamboo shoot, an essential ingredient in cuisines in South East Asia and North East India. The Government of India has not permitted Rohingyas from the Rakhine state of Myanmar to seek refuge in India. The borders of Manipur have been sealed against their entry—this is because it impinges on human security of Manipur. There is also a problem of young girls from Manipur being recruited by agents to work as housemaids supposedly in countries of South East Asia. These girls are taken illegally across the Indo-Myanmar border to Yangon, where they are holed up until the recruitment agent provides them with fake Myanmar passports. Travelling on illegal documents leaves the already vulnerable young women with little protection. Since Myanmar democratic government took over in 2016, it has been easier to travel through the country and traffickers have stepped up activity according to a recent report by the anti-trafficking unit of Mizoram (in North-East India). “The Myanmar route to South East Asia is seeing increasing trafficking because for many miles on both sides of the border, the people are the same—speaking the same language, looking the same”—Thianghlina Pachuau, Head of Mizoram Police Force<sup>7</sup>.

### Climate Change

Despite every one of us has experienced the adverse impacts of climate change, green house gas emissions continue to be almost unabated, also the increase in both air and noise pollution, Manipur is a non-industrialized state, and land area is 22,327 sq.kms. with a population of 2,570,390 (Singh, 2013) having escalating road traffic congestion.

The year 2017 has witnessed devastating impact not only from Cyclone Mora, but incessant and often torrential rain, lightning storms of brief intensity, high humidity, resulting in habitations both in the hills and valley of Manipur being swept away or flooded, paddy (the staple of Manipur) fields and fish farms inundated (fish is part of the daily diet), road communication disrupted, fissures appearing on the surface, accompanied by a plethora of water borne vector diseases, like Japanese Encephalitis and of course diarrhoea.

Climate change may alter the eco-system as well as bio-diversity of a region in many ways. It poses a major change challenge to sustainability of social and economic development especially by adversely affecting the distribution system, and quality of the regional natural resources, impacting livelihood and environment: Climate change is likely to result in food shortage and infrastructure damage also. Poor communities are affected disproportionately. Adapting to climate change is a rapidly growing challenge for the dependent

<sup>6</sup> Generally believed to have migrated from China during the reign of the Chinese Emperor Chinlung or Chienlung around 200 B.C., the ancestors of the Kukis according to a Mizo historian (Zawla) must have come out of the Great Wall in or about 225 B.C. Enriquez (1932) was emphatic that the Mongolian races who now occupied South East Asia and also North East India, originated from western China and migrated in three waves: (1) The Mon-Khmer; (2) The Tibeto Burman (Pyu-Burmese-Kachin, Kuki, Chin, Lolo); (3) The Tai Chinese.

<sup>7</sup> The Sangai Express, Imphal, November 8, 2017, p. 4.

communities, particularly, the backward and rapidly urbanized areas in Manipur<sup>8</sup>.

Dramatic climatic change has been experienced by all in the current year. Appearance of earth fissures which dislocated traffic, created fear and panic, as the danger of mud slides was all too real. The current spell of flood is the severest in the last 20 years—rainfall in the catchment area is persistent. Roads leading to major hospitals and health centers, as also the latter were flooded, cutting off access to health care. A JCB (machine used in construction) had to be used to carry a sick man to hospital but he died *enroute*. In many hill districts, the roads were washed off and the old and infirm were unable to walk to the district hospital—some individuals were carried by others which was a grueling task in dangerous conditions.

Landslides disrupted all communication and traffic on Asian Highway I which runs through the state and connects it to Myanmar. It will be extended both into Thailand to Mae Scott and later to Kunming in China. But continuous sinking of the highway is a hazard to travelers, and the carriage of goods, to and from the state. William Laurance, Professor at James Cook University, Australia pointed out that global road building projects may be disastrous, especially those planned in wet, swampy, and mountainous regions. Rainfall drenched roads develop pot-holes, giant cracks, and landslides so fast, and it is nearly unbelievable. This is true of the Trans-Asian Highway, in Manipur, as most of the highways pass through mountainous terrain and become impassable several times a year, it even poses a hazard to travelers on foot. Landslides have washed away habitations and devastated whole villages. There is no rail service and if the two major highways of Manipur are continuously impacted by climate change, there is inflation and shortage of essential commodities. This is compounded by the fact that bridges *en route* are constantly breaking down or being washed away, unable to take the load of trucks and oil/gas tankers. Manipur has an agrarian economy which is inadequate for the growing population—Manipur is dependent for essential goods from other parts of India and from Myanmar, and the latter sends both indigenous goods and goods from South East and East Asia, especially China.

Relief camps are set up, but drinking water is scarce as low-lying areas in the Imphal Valley remain submerged for long periods of time. This stagnant water gives rise to epidemics. Many farmers and children drown: The former in their attempts to salvage something from their farms, and the latter play beside the rising waters.

There is a disruption in the academic calendar as many educational institutions are flooded or destroyed. This results in increased pressure on both students and teachers, who at any cost have to complete the curriculum for the year. The mediocre and poor students struggle to cope and experience trauma and distress—academic excellence registers a decline.

Climate change leads to poverty, malnourishment, poor health, loss of livelihood, loss of home, and property. Villages have to be evacuated, but household goods are left behind.

Cyclone Mora disrupted government functioning, as offices were flooded and relief could not reach to those rendered homeless for long periods of time. Moreover, water pipes across the state were either leaking or badly damaged (Most are left over from the colonial times, 1891-1947).

Landslides cause air pollution, affect water quality and aquatic life, and it destroys habitat, reduces arable land, forest cover (Singh, 2017). Recently, change in the rain fall pattern viz. sudden rains, hailstorms, flashfloods, and even drought, the shifting of horticulture cultivation in the hills (nine-tenths of Manipur are hills), low percentage of rice yields, and incidences of new diseases, is the result of transformation of nature by

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<sup>8</sup> Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Govt. of Manipur. 2012-13. Economic Survey Manipur, Manipur's geographical area constitutes 0.7% of the total land surface of India, Freeman Offset, Imphal.

man. Scientifically, it is proved that the dumping of waste materials, rise in temperature, and deforestation lead to a sudden change in climate (Ashem, 2017). All the above are present in Manipur, especially the last, as deforestation has grown apace in the hill areas of the state, because of the traditional practice of the slash and burn method of cultivation i.e. *jhum*, in the hill areas. This was feasible when population density was low and land available for cultivation was more than sufficient, moreover, the *jhum* method allowed land to regain its fertility as areas burnt down were not cultivated for 5 to 10 years. Even in medieval times in India, this was practiced by the Mughal Emperors although burning was not resorted to. Methane is a significant greenhouse gas produced from the organic waste disposal, illegal dumping, leaching, paddy fields, live stocks, wetlands, natural gas, and forests burning. In Manipur, deposition of waste materials in rivers, streams, lakes (Loktak is the largest fresh water lake in the North East India where fishermen live on the *phundis*—floating biomass), affects the food chain system. The slow changes in Loktak Lake disrupt the normal association of plants and animals allowing the spread and dominance of weedy and exotic species (*para grass*), posing a threat to the indigenous, endangered Sangai deer found in the floating wild life sanctuary of Keibul Lamjao (Ashem, 2017) This deer is found nowhere else in the world except Manipur and we have an annual tourism festival in November named after it (21 November to 30 November).

Rice is the staple crop in Manipur but the warm waterlogged soil of rice fields is ideal for the formation of methane by microbes. But it is also an important fuel source that produces fewer green house gasses when it is burned, unlike coal which is burnt in winter in *chulahs* (stoves) to protect from the winter cold (Ashem, 2017). Coal is sold in polythene packs all over the state in winter.

Climate change also impacts air traffic and inconvenience passengers who have to catch connecting flights—especially international flights. Bad weather almost prevented flights from landing, at Imphal (the capital) on the day the author was to fly from Manipur to Rome, the flight to Manipur was almost cancelled. And this was in February 2017.

Projected increase in temperature in Manipur by 2030 is  $1.7^{\circ}\text{C}^9$ . The entire state of Manipur is projected to receive increased precipitation and extreme rainfall (10 mm a day).

Change in rice yield (insufficient rice is grown) can be attributed to the increase in temperature and  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration, coupled with change in the rainfall pattern. Change of climate may link directly or indirectly with health—human health impacts are likely to escalate with respect to their virulence, and spread to hitherto disease-free areas. Climate change impacts on water resources—an increase in water yield with a magnitude up to about 40%. Even though the forest types of Manipur are unlikely to be impacted by climate change up to 2030, the forest grid has been marked as vulnerable. Increasing population and decreasing land productivity, relatively higher dependence on natural resources (eg. forests) are major constraints for Manipur's environmental sustainability. A high degree of vulnerability to water and climate induced disasters will increasingly make it environmentally insecure in the future<sup>10</sup>. This happened with the occurrence of Cyclone Mora in May 2017.

The response of the civil society to such crisis has been swift but although individuals and groups would like to react immediately and provide relief, their efforts are often hampered by inability to access those most in need of help, because of impassable flooded roads, treacherous muddy tracts, broken bridges, inadequate funds, supplies, etc. Government relief packages are dispensed to the affected, but compensation for losses suffered is

<sup>9</sup> Ravindranath, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, cit. in Government of Manipur—Directorate of Environment, op. cit. P. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Govt. of Manipur. 2012-13. Economic Survey Manipur, Manipur's geographical area constitutes 0.7% of the total land surface of India, Freeman Offset, Imphal.

a long time in coming—the affected are bereft of means of sustainable livelihood and also of proper homes and find it difficult to eke out a bare livelihood.

Manipur Government designed an Action Plan on Climate Change in 2013. No new plan has been formulated since. Following are the main components of the plan:

- (1) Enhancing ecological sustainability, by investigating causes and consequences of disturbance regimes, promoting conservation of native and endemic elements, and understanding river systems dynamics;
- (2) Protection of vulnerable sections of society through inclusion of participatory resources, management strategies, and development of livelihood options;
- (3) Heavy emphasis on green skill development of livelihood options;
- (4) Deploying technologies for hazard mitigation and disaster management, development of ideal human habitats;
- (5) Promoting community based management through developing mechanisms and institutionalization incentives for protection and enhancement of forested lands and conserving species diversity;
- (6) Appropriate land-use planning, sustaining traditional knowledge/practices, sustainable management of natural resources and skill development;
- (7) Enhancement of water resources, catchment, treatment, and improvement of basin health through augmentation of other water infrastructure, both for conservation and use. The five major rivers of Manipur will be dredged and rain harvesting is made a norm;
- (8) Developing new crop varieties (has been done) including hybrids to increase the tolerance and sustainability of plants to temperature (resilient to heat and water stress), moisture, and other climate conditions. Also increase in area of cultivation under aromatic black rice which is also available for instance in Thailand, in Chiangmai;
- (9) Promotion of new crop varieties (introduced), improvements in water and soil management, improving animal health technology (periodical veterinary camps for vaccination held);
- (10) Extreme weather events like excess rainfall, flooding, drought are major contributors to water-borne infectious diseases. The state wants to incorporate all the climate related health risks in the state policy. Several medical relief and diarrhoea camps are held;
- (11) State will facilitate adaptation of forest dependent communities to climate variability (distribute seeds, etc.), promote afforestation, urban forestry, improved chulhas, biogas, etc., forest fire management, livelihood improvement activities (cultivation of indigenous, medicinal plants), enhancement of community livelihood through biomass and non-timber forest produce (herbs, edible berries, mushrooms);
- (12) Promotion of grid interaction and off grid intervention in power generation options of using renewable energy technology (solar promoted);
- (13) Improvement of water management, enhancement of climate sensitive architectural urban infrastructure (the famous women market in Imphal was devastated by an earthquake about three years ago), water distribution and lighting system, and public transport system (the last has recently been revived);
- (14) Development of an institutional framework on climate change science knowledge to act as the repository of knowledge about sectoral demands and needs<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Govt. of Manipur. 2012-13. Economic Survey Manipur, Manipur's geographical area constitutes 0.7% of the total land surface of India, Freeman Offset, Imphal.

Despite the plan being formulated and partially implemented, climate change occurs so frequently that every year witnesses nature's fury. It is imperative for every citizen to contribute to mitigating the adverse consequences of climate change and farmers to initiate carbon free villages. The first such village is Phayeng in the Imphal Valley which is the rice bowl of the state. Climate change will continue into the foreseeable future. It is apparent that it impacts not just every sector of livelihood, particularly agriculture, pisciculture, horticulture, but health, education, communication, information technology, prices, business, trade, the Act East Policy, etc. It is obviously the responsibility of every one of us to slow down and gradually do away with all kinds of pollutant emissions which pose hazards and dangers to our continued existence, and to conserve our depleting natural resources, have recourse to alternative sources of energy and transport, and ensure a safer environment for future generations.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, human security is extremely important in a state where a dichotomy exists between the high literacy rate which is 76.94%, higher than the national average of 74.04%, and the per capital income estimated to be just Rs. 47,453 against the national average estimate of 1,03,007 during 2016-2017. The average monthly income per person in Manipur is about Rs. 3,954 (1 \$ equal to 64.94 Indian Rupee)<sup>12</sup>. The identity consciousness of the smaller communities in Manipur has been sharpened with changing dynamics of the world, and this spurt in ethnic identity has pitted one indigenous community against the other (Salam, 2017). Human security is of utmost importance to the state of Manipur.

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<sup>12</sup> The Sangai Express, Imphal, November 2, 2017.