



# Revisiting The Inner Line Permit System in Manipur: Issues and Challenges

<sup>1</sup>Kshetrimayum Myleodee Devi, <sup>2</sup>Gautam Chakma

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Tripura University  
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Tripura University

**Abstract:** The state is home to multi-ethnic communities. After the merger with India, the state witnessed irregular migrants from other countries and parts of the Indian states till today. It has created fear among the local population and threatened their socioeconomic, cultural, political and demography. The valley people started demanding the implementation of the Inner Line Permit System (ILPS) in the 1980s. The movement has reached its highest peak in 2015, resulting in the system has come into effect in the state on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 but the Joint Committee of Inner Line Permit System (JCILPS) alleged that ILP guidelines in Manipur are loopholes. This paper will highlight the challenges faced among the local people in the ILPS movement.

**Keywords:** Agitation, Outsiders, Immigrants, Local People, ILPS Movement.

## INTRODUCTION:

Manipur is one of the small hill states in the North-Eastern region of India. The state is home to various communities having different ethnicity, caste, and religions, etc. The state has a long international boundary with Myanmar to the east and southeast and is bounded by the neighboring Indian state Nagaland in the North, Assam in the West, and Mizoram in the South. Manipur consists of hills and valleys. The former constitutes 90% of the geographical area and later occupies only 10% of the geographical area of the state i.e., 20,089 sq km is covered by hills and the remaining area is a small valley covering only 2,238 sq km. Meitei, the state's largest community, Meitei-Pangal, and migrants such as Nepali, Teli, Punjabi, Bihari etc, are all confined in a valley which can also be resided by any Indian citizen. According to the 8<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Constitution of India, the hill area is reserved for tribal communities. According to the 2011 census, the population of the state is 28.56 lakhs approximately. According to K. H. Ratan, former convener of the Joint Committee on ILPS (JCILPS), out of this, only 17 lakhs (1.7 million) are indigenous people and 10 lakhs (one million) are outsiders (non-Manipur people) (Chungkhosei Baite, 2017). The continuous influx of outsiders in the state has created fear among the locals over employment opportunities and limited natural and other resources. Due to the continuous fear and threat to their cultural, socio-economic, and natural resources and imbalanced population, the locals started demanding the implementation of

ILP in the state. The study finds that the movement for the implementation of ILP posed a great challenge to the local people of Manipur.

### **Brief historical Background of the influx of migrants into Manipur**

Historically, Manipur was a princely state before the merger agreement with independent India in 1949. Before the merger of Manipur to India, the entry into Manipur was regulated by imposition of a permit system. That permit system was abolished by a notification issued by the then Chief Commissioner of Manipur. since then, there is no restriction on the entry by citizen of India. The increase in the population has caused a panic in the mind of the people of Manipur. Of late, a mass movement by the people of Manipur arose demanding to enact a law like the earlier permit system so that by imposition of such a permit system, the fear of the people of Manipur of losing their existence can be done away with a reasonable restriction in the influx of non-Manipur people. Further, the non-Manipuri people who intend to stay in the state as tenants need to be regulated with certain reasonable restrictions.

Migrants in Manipur are divided into two - those who arrived before merging of the state to India and those who arrived after the merge.<sup>1</sup> Those who arrived before merged in India were covered under the Foreigner's Act, of 1850 but these people are mixed up with the later arrival who are considered internal migrants. The large inflow of migrants over a short period gave rise to many social movements demanding the protection of the rights of the indigenous people. These migrants are assumed to be foreigners by the people of Manipur because they were under the Foreigners Act of Manipur. Even after the act has been removed, there is no proper law to regulate the entry of outsiders which led to the irregular large influx of migrants into the state.

### **Implementation of ILP in some states in North East India**

The Inner Line Permit system was introduced under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 to preserve the integrity of the states through protection of local communities of the North-Eastern region of the country. It was introduced for preventing illegal migration and protecting the social, religious, and customary laws and includes rules for ownership and transfer of land, etc. The Inner Line Permit (ILP) official document issued by the Government of India grants entry for the 'Non-Resident' into the protected area for a limited/designated/fixed period. Foreigners/Tourists as well as Indians ordinarily residing in other states must take/obtain prior permission for entering the protected area. The document can be issued for travel purposes only. However, ILP is not applicable to the personnels of central government offices (and institutes) and security forces with their families while serving in the respective state with a valid Inner Line Permit System. The individuals holding this permit are identified just as visitors and hence they cannot purchase immovable properties from the state which has granted the permit of entry/visit. The ILP system had been implemented in Northeastern states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Manipur as an official travel document issued by the respective state

<sup>1</sup>Sougaijam Priyokumar and M.C. Arunkumar, 'Contemporary Migration Problems in Manipur', *International Journal of Research in Social Science*, 7(10),2017, pp-242.

government for visiting any of these states. In the case of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland, the ILP system has been in force since 1873.

### Challenges faced during the demand for ILP in Manipur

Manipur was previously under the Bengal Frontier Regulation, 1873. However, soon after the merger with the Union of India by an order of the then chief Commissioner of Manipur, the so-called Bengal Frontier Regulation of 1873 was abolished in 1950. Consequently, in the 1980s, the All-Manipur Student's Union (AMSU) and the All-Manipur Students' Coordinating Committee (AMSCOC) jointly launched the 'Anti-foreigners Movements' in February 1980 under the motto 'Go Back Foreigners'.<sup>2</sup> Right from 1989, with the intention and hope to protect and safeguard the interest of the indigenous people, the general public of Manipur has been demanding the implementation of the Inner Line Permit System (ILPS), which have effectively been implemented in its neighbouring states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Later in 2006, the Federation of Regional Indigenous Societies (FRIENDS), a Meitei-community based organization took up the mantle for the demand of ILP in the state, which unfortunately turned violent with repeated strikes<sup>3</sup>. Representatives of FRIENDS submitted a memorandum to the Government of Manipur for the introduction of Inner Line Permit with continued agitation in 2012 leading to the formation of JCILPS (Joint Committee on Inner Line Permit System), an umbrella organization of 30 CSOs<sup>4</sup> and included all the student organization which are valley-based. The migrants are either confined in the valley or are settled in Jiribam (bordering Assam).

'The Manipur Regulation of Visitors, Tenants, and Migrant Workers Bill,' 2015 was passed by the State Assembly on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2015. The JCILPS launched full-scale agitations across the valley demanding the withdrawal of the controversial bill and submitted a memorandum to the state government to draft a fresh bill that earnestly protects and safeguard the interest of the indigenous people in the state. The agitation ensued to the death of one student named, Sapam Robinhood, with police fired rubber bullet on 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2015. The aftermath of the incident, taking into considerations the gravity of the situations connected with the intensity of the situation was that at 12<sup>th</sup> July 2015, the state government had withdrawn the bill. Thereafter, the Manipur Legislative Assembly passed three bills on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2015 – 'The Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015'; 'The Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill, 2015' and 'The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2015' which is opportune to the indigenous population of the state. The Manipur Land Revenue & Land Reform (Seventh Amendment) Bill 2015 placed prohibition on the sale/purchase of land belonging to an ST in the valley areas to non-ST without the prior consent of the Deputy Commissioner concerned. The Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill made it mandatory for all the employers/shop owners to register their Shop/ Establishments and their employees in the Shop and Establishments Registration Office. While the Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015 gives directives for the restriction of entry and exit from Manipur for non-Manipuri and tenants, respectively, to provide protection, maintenance of socio-

<sup>2</sup>R K, Narendra Singh, 'Impact of NRC Updation (Assam) on Manipur: A Dynamic of Migration', *Kangla Lanjung*, XII(I), 2018, pp-25.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew, Kap Lian Gaulnam and Challuri Babu, 'Revisiting the Inner Line Permit System: With Reference to Contemporary Issues in Manipur', *Indian Journal of Dalit and Tribal Social Work*, 3(3), 2019, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup>Batskhem, Myrboh, 'The Politics of Inner Line Permit Extension to Manipur', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(5), 2020, pp-2.

economic and cultural equipoise of the people of Manipur. However, these three bills passed by Manipur Legislative Assembly are strongly opposed by the hill people of the state. The protests against the bills ensued for three months in the hills led by hill-based CSOs and student bodies. During a large-scale demonstration on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2015 in the headquarter of Churachandpur District, the Manipur State Police force killed nine protesters and injured several others. Their lifeless bodies remain unclaimed in the mortuary of the Churachandpur District Hospital for nearly two years. Whilst some protestors resorted to vandalism and torching of the house of MLAs, Health Minister, and MP for the outer Manipur Parliamentary Constituency. The demand for implementation of ILPS in Manipur spawned to loss of lives of indigenous peoples and caused extensive and irreparable damage to individual and government properties.

The challenges faced by the indigenous people of the state to demand the implementation of ILPS was that the movement received a mixed reaction from the people as it was opposed by some communities. On December 2019, the honourable Home Minister of India announced the extension of Inner Line Permit in Manipur under Bengal Frontier Regulation, 1873. Though the ILPS in Manipur has been announced to be effective as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020, there are certain lapses in its proper implementation. This does not seem fitting of the promises that were expected to be delivered at the best interests of the indigenous people. After Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur is the fourth northeastern state to join under the ILP regime. The Joint Committee of Inner Line Permit System (JCILPS) claimed that the ILP guidelines in the state have many loopholes and failed to properly define the indigenous and permanent residents (NE NOW NEWS, 4<sup>th</sup> Jan 2020). The Government of Manipur's system for issuing travel permits was a 'toothless tiger' that provided no protection for its native population and lacked a clear definition of what constitutes an 'indigenous person' of the state. Despite the system being initially in place since 1873, from the time of British rule in India to its recent implementation from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 there are various limitations, such as those on the trade of minor forest products produced in the state and the ownership of land in the state by non-residents. These situations terribly fail to fulfil the aspirations of the people of the state and hence they demanded provision of proper guidelines and regulations all the while, urging the state government to take full responsibility in seeing to the effective implementation.

#### Conclusion:

The state is resided by different ethnic communities, there are some groups who are very few. The people have felt flooded with population influx and makes them vulnerable in their own state. There is a requirement for the implementation of a laws or acts which can protect the indigenous population. After going through many challenges, extension of Inner Line Permit system under Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 could not fully protect the indigenous population of Manipur. The people of the state feels that government should implement the bills or acts which can protect or prevent the right of the people in Manipur.

#### References:

Baite, C. (2017). Movement for inner line permit system in Manipur: A threat to communal harmony. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 3(9), 245-249.

- Gaulnam, A.K.L and Babu, C. Revisiting the Inner Line Permit System: With Reference to Contemporary Issues in Manipur', *Indian Journal of Dalit and Tribal Social Work*, 3(3), 2019, 42-53.
- Haokip, L.L. Lacking Legitimacy? State, Civil Societies and Trust Crisis in Manipur. *Journal of North East Studies*, 6(2), 2016, 15-27.
- Myrboh, B. The Politics of Inner Line Permit Extension to Manipur. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(5), 2020, 18-20.
- Neba, G. (2015). Applicability and Relevance of Inner Line Permit (Ilp) in Arunachal Pradesh. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20(7), 50-52. Published details- [www.iosrjournals.org](http://www.iosrjournals.org)
- Priyokumar, S and Arunkumar, M.C. Contemporary Migration Problems in Manipur, *International Journal of Research in Social Science*, 7(10),2017, 242.
- Singh, N, R.K. Impact of NRC Updation (Assam) on Manipur: A Dynamic of Migration. *Kangla Lanpung*, XII(I), 2018, 25.
- Thoudam, N. (2021). Divisive Politics of the Inner Line Permit in Three Stories from Manipur in India's Northeast. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 44(4), 790-860. Published details- <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2021.1940479>
- The Sangai Express, Imphal, August 19, 2023
- Deccan Herald, Karnataka, June 23, 2022.
- Retrieved from <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/manipur-adopts-1961-as-base-year-to-determine-native-residents-for-ilp-implementation-1120454.html>. Accessed on September 11, 2023
- The Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015, [www.satp.org/...Manipur/...documents](http://www.satp.org/...Manipur/...documents) 13. Retrieved from [https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/manipur/documents/papers/The\\_Protection\\_of\\_Manipur\\_People\\_Bill\\_2015.pdf](https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/manipur/documents/papers/The_Protection_of_Manipur_People_Bill_2015.pdf). Access on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2023.
- The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2015, Retrieved from [www.satp.org/...Manipur/...documents](http://www.satp.org/...Manipur/...documents). Accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2023.
- The Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill, 2015, Retrieved from [www.satp.org/...Manipur/...documents](http://www.satp.org/...Manipur/...documents). Accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2023.