



DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE TO STRENGTHEN STATE-SOCIETIES RECONCILIATION IN MANIPUR

¹Dr. Khullakpham Ruqaiya,

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Lilong Haoreibi College, Ushoipokpi, Manipur

Abstract: The paper presents a review of Indian state's capability to regulate, maintain social order and control in conflict-ridden Manipur, a state in the Northeast region of India. It explores how and why the Indian state is struggling to bring effective social control to govern the fragmented society. The situation is worsened by periodic episodes of violence based on identity politics that mark the State's historical and political trajectory. It problematizes issues of trust and legitimacy by the subjects under the State. The weak response of the Indian state has led to a crisis of governability where issues of democracy and development are sidelined. It engages issues of governance, democracy, and development in strengthening state-societies reconciliation. It presents a paradigm shift in political analysis to bridge wide gap between the state and society rather than being engulfed in ethnic strife. It makes a strong case that democratic governance has the potential to reconnect and strengthen social order through an active interaction between the state and fragmented society.

Index Terms - Democratic Governance, Development, Conflict, Ethnic politics, Northeast India,

INTRODUCTION

Manipur has been experiencing widespread political insecurity due to self-determination, revivalist, separatist and secessionist movements by armed insurgent and rebel groups based on identity issues. Identity politics has fractured the society of Manipur, fueled by political competition for power, resources and recognition. The multifaceted nature of the historical trajectory of identity politics is coupled with issues of land, property rights, political representation and preservation of cultural heritage of the different communities.

However, it is high time to ask credible questions such as:

- How do identity issues and politics act as an instrument for maintaining the plural ethnic fabric of the state?
- Has it become a source for further fragmentation among the existing communities?
- Does the appropriation of ethnic identity politics overlook or undermine the larger interest of the Indian state in its efforts to bring justice, development and democratic governance to the people?

In exploring these questions, the centre of analysis is a micro-political analysis to review the Indian state's capability to penetrate, regulate social behavior and maintain social order in fragmented society of Manipur.

State-society Disjunction

J.S. Migdal's concept of 'web-like'¹ societies in the Third World resonates with understanding the nature of societies in Manipur. Manipur has a web-like society, so it would be apt to refer to it as 'societies' due to its plurality, which indirectly affects policy implementation at various levels. At the local level, the state government's officials who implement policies are caught up in a web of pressures and demands from superiors, local leaders, strongmen, bureaucrats and beneficiaries. The contextual problems faced by the web-like societies in Manipur influence politics at the national and State levels, inhibiting effective and efficient policy implementation at the lowest local level. It weakens the state's capability to make rules governing people's behaviour based

on democratic governance. State institutions function more efficiently when they are congruent with informal norms and institutions and are historically embedded in internal social relationsⁱⁱ. .

Another analytical framework of J.S. Migdal's theory of 'politics of survival' found much relevance in explaining and understanding the struggle for social control that the Indian state faces in governing the societies of Manipur. The situation is worsened by periodic episodes of violence that mark the State's history and politics. The allocation of values has failed, and numerous non-state structures operate simultaneously in the State. Fringe groups are killing and murdering people in the name of delivering justice by taking the law into their own hands. The step is motivated by their own personal or community interests which undermines the role of formal judicial system and processes. The fragmentation of social control happens due to lack of mobilisation capacities by the local social organisations (strongmen) and state leaders. This has led to dismantled and weakened state structures which is similar to J.S. Migdal's idea of 'the politics of survival'ⁱⁱⁱ. The 'politics of survival' seizes the state leaders in performing the task of bringing development and democratic governance to the conflict-ridden societies. Developing a positive relationship between the state and societies is highly needed to institutionalise a cooperative relationship between state structures and social organisations.

However, the Indian state has been failing to control and maintain order among the societies which led to a crisis of governability. The Indian state's capability, legitimacy and trust factor to regulate and maintain social order and control in Manipur's society is at a higher risk.

Indian state's Intervention in crisis of Governability

The Indian state's response towards the movements and demands led to the adoption of counter-insurgency strategies, which further violated human rights. In the post-statehood phase, the Indian state's approach towards the State is obsessed with economic growth. It is regarded as the solution adopted to ease underdevelopment and cater to the low-growth economy. The fixation of looking at States of the North-eastern region of India through the lens of a conflict-ridden society constricted and shaped the limited response of the Indian state. The central government cannot come out of the framework of bringing peace and security to control and maintain social order in society. It sees the region as a complex, conflict-prone zone which needs security and economic development as the magic wands that will eradicate the gap in economic growth between the States in the region and the mainland States. The conflict-ridden society and conflict-prone zone tags led the region to be further marginalised geographically and financially, with no source of revenue and no growing economy. The region has complex, multi-layered and multifaceted constraints, which are structural and have a historical character based on the 'efficiency paradigm', inherited with colonial structure of governance. This colonial structure of governance is hierarchical and bureaucratic. The post-colonial state claims political supremacy with development functions imposed by the colonial state, thereby creating social contradictions. An obsession with security and integration disempowers the region. From the security perspective, an informal security structure disproportionate to the population is in place, in which the State governments have limited autonomy in decision-making power.

Therefore, the State government has minimal political space for demanding accountability to the Central government's decisions. The security structure defined by the Indian state delinks the state from connecting with local societies. The Indian bureaucracy lacks coordination and is riddled with overstaffing, jurisdictional disputes, and red tapism. The bureaucrats and political leaders are not well equipped or able to deal with internal structural and political conflicts. The State and Central government officials thus become active stakeholders in building a symbiotic relationship in looting and exploiting the most disadvantaged and minority sections. This has led to democratic values and processes getting eroded as Indian state's legitimacy is flailing.

The other security dimension is counter-insurgency operations which turned out anti-democratic as it makes the States of the region powerless and creates more unrest in the State. The integration theory that the Central government pursue is to design a

footprint of nationalising the States through a uniform ideology. The model of integration is a homogenising process that peripheral States like Manipur do not agree with. No effective governance can be made possible by the State as well as Central government as lack of trust in public institutions and political processes have worsened. The post-colonial Indian state's approach of development and governance thus fails to synergise with the society of Manipur.

Reclaiming Democratic Governance: Need of the Hour

It demands re-appropriating the state as the main protagonist in bringing development and democratic governance to bring transformation in social order of Manipur. It calls for state and societies of Manipur to act as partners in governing, rather than state acting only as the provider and protector. It advocates for a re-politicised participatory practice that can build up political capabilities with active citizenry. An active citizenry capable of calling the state to account for promoting and increasing democratic governance through state-societies' reconciliation. The study, therefore makes a strong case for not only an active state-society interaction in promoting democratic governance but also calls for an intra-state distribution of power. This can be possible in two ways: the first option is possible when the state leader tries to collaborate with strongmen and local authorities by giving them more autonomy and distributing power to transform and bring more social control and changes. The second option is to dominate where a state leader may try to co-opt strongmen (the local tribal chiefs in the hills of Manipur; the local youth club leaders/clan leaders in the plains), challenging and controlling their bases of social power to prevent more conflict. The case of Manipur shows the failure of both tasks where the Indian state fails to accommodate these forces and transform them or break their social control and dominate them.

Conclusion

The paper suggests that the priority of Indian state must focus on democratic values in governance framework that can manage ethnic conflicts, deter violent conflicts and clashes in conflictual societies. The obsession of bringing security and development to curb identity conflicts and clashes needs to be reviewed. The approach of dealing problems from the state perspective is inclined toward strategic (state-based or state-defined) issues. The internalised approach which is outdated needs to be done away with. Therefore, the Indian state's efforts must be to educate, organise, construct and revitalise the citizens to ensure that democratic space and culture are expanded in the societies of Manipur. It is feasible when state-society collaboration and efforts are diverted towards consolidating democracy, making it more sustainable and irreversible. Thus, the task of accommodating democracy in development can be a case of democratic consolidation rather than a threat to society.

ⁱ Joel S. Migdal, Atul Kohli and Vivienne Shue, (eds), *State Power and Social Forces: Domination Transformation in the Third World* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 1994. pp.11-13

ⁱⁱ Pierre Englebert, 'Do Social Capital and Ethnic homogeneity really matter? Preliminary evidence for a political theory of growth and stagnation in Tropical Africa'. *University of Leipzig Papers on Africs, Politics and Economic Series No. 18*. 1998. p.4

ⁱⁱⁱ J. S. Migdal, M. *Strong Societies and Weak States: State Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Princeton University Press, 1988. p. 213