



Violence in Manipur

This editorial is based on [What is behind Manipur's widespread unrest?](#) which was published in The Hindu on 05/05/2023. It talks about what triggered the conflict between the non-tribal Meitei people and other tribal groups and other related issues.

For Prelims: [Meitei Tribe](#), Kuki Tribe, Naga Tribe, [6th schedule](#), [Inner Line Permit \(ILP\)](#), Lokur Committee 1965, Bhuria Commission, Xaxa Committee, [Armed Forces \(Special Powers\) Act \(AFSPA\)](#).

For Mains: Issues related to North-East region, Ethnic conflicts, Demand for 6th Schedule and issues related to ILPs.

There have been violent communal clashes in Manipur due to the Manipur High Court (HC) directing the State to pursue a 10-year-old recommendation to grant [Scheduled Tribe \(ST\) status to the non-tribal Meitei community](#).

- The violence escalated after the All-Tribal Student Union Manipur (ATSUM) organized a "tribal solidarity rally" against the alleged [move to include the Meiteis on the ST list](#).

What is Manipur's ethnic composition?

- The State is like a football stadium with the Imphal Valley representing the playfield at the centre and the surrounding hills the galleries. **The valley, which comprises about 10% of Manipur's landmass, is dominated by the non-tribal Meitei who account for more than 64% of the population of the State** and yields 40 of the State's 60 MLAs.
- **The hills comprising 90% of the geographical area are inhabited by more than 35% recognised tribes but send only 20 MLAs to the Assembly.**
- While a **majority of the Meiteis are Hindus** followed by Muslims, the **33 recognised tribes, broadly classified into 'Any Naga tribes' and 'Any Kuki tribes' are largely Christians.**

What is the Meitei argument to support demand of ST status?

- The Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM) began demanding ST status for the Meiteis in 2012.
 - The **Meiteis were recognised as a tribe before the merger of the State with the Union of India in 1949**. The ST status is needed to **"preserve" the community and "save the ancestral land, tradition, culture, and language"** of the Meiteis.
 - In 1972, the union territory of Manipur became 19th state of India.

- The **Meiteis need constitutional safeguards against outsiders**, stating that the **community has been kept away from the hills** while the **tribal people can buy land in the “shrinking” Imphal Valley** (Apprehension of Meities that creation of [Greater Nagalim](#) would lead to shrinking of Manipur’s geographical area).
- The **Meitein/Meitei have been gradually marginalised in their ancestral land.**
 - Their population was 59% of the total population of Manipur in 1951 and has now been reduced to 44% as per 2011 Census data.
- The **Naga and Kuki movements fuelled Meitei nationalism.** Concerns over demographic change and shrinking of traditional Meitei areas started to surface in the 1970s.
- During the period **2006-12 came the demand for an [Inner Line Permit \(ILP\)](#) in Manipur**, to bar outsiders. **The free movement of the Kuki-Zomi across Manipur’s porous border with Myanmar fanned fears of demographic change.**
 - The growth rate of Manipur’s population had jumped from 12.8% in the 1941-51 period to 35.04% during 1951-61 and to 37.56% in 1961-71 after the permit system was abolished.
- In Manipur, the government is the largest employer and the reservation for STs in jobs amounts to an unfair advantage.
 - Infrastructure development (like railways that would open Manipur further) has made insecurities worse.

Why are tribal groups against ST status for Meiteis?

- The Meiteis have a demographic and political advantage and are also more academically advanced.
 - ST status to the Meiteis would **lead to loss of job opportunities** and allow them to acquire land in the hills and push the tribals out.
- The **language of the Meitei people** is included in the [Eighth Schedule of the Constitution](#) and many of them have access to benefits associated with the SC, OBC or EWS status.
- Kukis and Nagas point out that tribal areas are 90% of state’s geographical area, but the bulk of its **budget and development work is focused on the Meitei-dominated Imphal valley.**

The Process of Inclusion in the ST List

- State governments starts recommendation for inclusion of the tribes in the list of ST.
- After the recommendation of the state govt, Tribal Affairs Ministry reviews and sends them to the Registrar General of India, Under the Home Ministry for approval.
- After approval, it is sent to the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and then sent to the Cabinet for a final decision.
- Once the cabinet finalizes it, then it introduces a bill in the parliament to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.
- After the amendment bill is passed by both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the President’s office takes the final decision under Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution.

What led to the recent Unrest?

- **While the forest eviction and demand for ST status for Meiteis have been the most prominent recent triggers**, the divide between the Meiteis and tribals on several issues has widened over the past decade.
- **Issues in Delimitation Process: In 2020, as the Centre began the first delimitation process** in the state since 1973, the Meitei community alleged that the Census figures used in the exercise did not accurately reflect the population break-up.
 - **Tribal groups (Kuki and Nagas)** on the other hand said they had grown to 40% of the state’s population and were **underrepresented in the Assembly.**
- **Intrusion of Migrants from Neighbour Area:** The **February 2021 coup in Myanmar** has led to a refugee crisis in India’s Northeast. Meitei leaders have alleged that there has been a **sudden mushrooming of villages in Churachandpur district.**
- **The Drugs Problem:** Some tribal groups with vested interests are trying to scuttle govt’s crusade

against drugs.

- The anti-drug drive was started by destroying poppy fields. **“Illegal settlers” related to the Kuki-Zomi of Manipur, growing drugs on cleared lands.**
- **Recent Unrest:** The first violent protest erupted over the eviction of the residents of a Kuki village.
 - **38 villages in the Churachandpur-Khoupum Protected Forest area (in Churachandpur and Noney districts) are “illegal settlements”** and its residents are “encroachers (encroaching reserved and protected forests and wildlife sanctuaries for poppy plantation and drugs business”).
 - Kuki groups have claimed that the survey and eviction is a violation of Article 371C, as kukis are residents of Hill Area.
 - **Article 371C provides for the creation of a committee of the Manipur Legislative Assembly consisting** of the members elected from the Hill Areas of the state and Governor shall have responsibility for proper functioning of that committee.
 - **At the State level there is Hill Area Committee constituted under the Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Areas Committee) order, 1972.** The Hill areas Committee comprises of all MLAs elected from the hill areas of the State as its members.
 - The state government withdrew from the suspension of operations agreements with two Kuki extremist groups accused of inciting the protesters.

Geography of Manipur and History of Violence in Manipur

CHEQUERED HISTORY

Manipur, which has over 35 communities inhabiting the valleys and hills of the state, has a chequered history of violent and deadly clashes.

Naga-Kuki Fight
The Kukis are hill tribes spread across the Northeast besides Myanmar and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. On September 13, 1993, militants of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muivah) massacred around 115 Kuki civilians in the hills of Manipur. However, NSCN-IM refuted the allegation.

Meitei Pangal and Meiteis
In 1993 there were clashes between Meitei Pangal (Muslim) and Meitei. A bus carrying Muslim passengers was set on fire. Over 100 people were killed.

Insurgency
Manipur had scores of militant outfits and violence was largely triggered by insurgents. The NSCN-IM entered a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India in 1997. Valley-based militant outfits (Meitei groups) such as the UNLF, PLA, KYKL etc. are yet to come to the negotiating table. The Kuki outfits under two umbrella groups, the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and United People's Front (UPF), also signed the tripartite Suspension of Operation (SoO) pacts with the Centre and Manipur on August 22, 2008.

Hill and Valley
The current conflict between Meiteis and Kukis is the extension of hills versus plains conflict. Meiteis account for 53% of the population, while tribal communities account for around 40% of the population. Naga tribes make up for (24%) and Kuki/Zomi tribes (16%).

NSCN-IM
Integration of Naga-inhabited areas of Northeast is the core demand of NSCN-IM which has been holding peace parleys with the Centre. There was violent protest in Manipur in 2001 when the cease fire agreement signed between the Government of India and NSCN IM was extended.

The rivalry between Nagas and Kuki started in the colonial era. In 1990 there were clashes over land. Kukis often claimed 350 of their villages were uprooted, over 1,000 killed and 10,000 were people displaced. Chins are called Kukis on the Indian side.

- There are 16 districts in Manipur, but the state is commonly thought of as divided into ‘valley’ and ‘hill’ districts. **Today’s valley districts of Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, Bishnupur, and Kakching were part of the erstwhile kingdom of Kangleipak,** ruled by the Ningthouja dynasty.
- **The Manipur valley is encircled by skirts of low hills** (hill areas comprise the bulk of Manipur’s geographical area), live 15 Naga tribes and the Chin-Kuki-Mizo-Zomi group, which includes the Kuki, Thadou, Hmar, Paite, Vaiphei and Zou peoples.
- **The Kangleipak kingdom,** then a British protectorate, was repeatedly **raided by Naga tribes who came down from the northern hills.** The British political agent in Manipur brought the **Kuki-Zomi** from the Kuki-Chin hills of **Burma to protect the valley from plunder by acting as a buffer between the Meiteis and the Nagas.**
 - The Kukis, like the Nagas, were fierce headhunting warriors — and the Maharaja gave them land along the ridges, where they could act as a shield for the Imphal valley below.
- **Kuki-Meitei divide:** The **hill communities (Naga & Kuki) and the Meiteis have had ethnic tensions since the kingdom era.** The Naga movement for independence in the 1950s triggered insurgencies among the Meiteis and Kuki-Zomi. The Kuki-Zomi groups militarised in the 1990s to demand a state within India called **‘Kukiland’(a state within India).** This alienated them from the Meiteis, whom they had earlier defended.
 - In 1993, **Hindu Meiteis** clashed with Pangals (Muslims), and also there was horrific

violence between the **tribal Nagas and Kukis**, which saw more than a **hundred Kukis massacred in a single day by Nagas**, and thousands driven from their homes.

- **District of Churachandpur:** Kuki-Zomi-dominated Churachandpur (a Myanmar bordered District) has mostly Christian population. It is the country's poorest district (as per the Panchayati Raj Ministry in 2006) and it remains abjectly poor.
 - **In 2015, as the Meiteis of the valley protested demanding ILP** in Imphal city, equally intense **protests were seen in Churachandpur countering the demand** and protesting the introduction of laws.

Way Forward

- Need to evaluate the criteria for ST status (to Meities) in line with recommendations given by several Committees, like:
 - **The Lokur Committee (1965)** recommended 5 criteria for identification, namely, primitive traits, distinct culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness.
 - **Bhuria Commission (2002-2004)** focused on a wide range of issues from the [5th Schedule](#) to tribal land and forests, health and education, the working of Panchayats and the status of tribal women.
 - **A High-Level Committee (HLC) in 2013**, under chairmanship of **Prof. Virginus Xaxa** was constituted to study the 5 critical issues related to tribal communities: (1) livelihood and employment, (2) education, (3) health, (4) involuntary displacement and migration, (5) and legal and constitutional matters.
- Bring more surveillance along the border areas to prevent the incursion of the migrants from Myanmar. Strengthening economic and diplomatic ties with neighboring countries can help enhance regional stability and security.
- Need to maintain the identity of the people along the border areas to identify the local residence. Signing Peace settlement agreements with the local insurgent group to maintain the peace in the region.
- The repeal of AFSPA, the controversial [Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958](#), is necessary to improve the human rights situation in the region. The government should ensure that the legal system is fair and transparent to prevent the misuse of power by security forces.
- The government should foster the participation of the people of the region in the decision-making process to instill a sense of ownership and belonging.

Drishhti Mains Question

Examine the causes and consequences of recent violence and unrest between the Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur. What steps need to be taken to address the grievances of all the stakeholders and restore peace and harmony in the northeastern region?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year's Question (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. Consider the following pairs: (2018)

	Tradition	State
1.	Chapchar Kut festival	Mizoram
2.	Khongjom Parba ballad	Manipur
3.	Thang-Ta dance	Sikkim

Which of the pairs given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 2 and 3 only

Ans: (b)

Q. If a particular area is brought under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which one of the following statements best reflects the consequence of it? (2022)

- (a) This would prevent the transfer of land of tribal people to non-tribal people.
- (b) This would create a local self-governing body in that area.
- (c) This would convert that area into a Union Territory.
- (d) The State having such areas would be declared a Special Category State.

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. What are the two major legal initiatives by the State since Independence addressing discrimination against Scheduled Tribes (STs)? (2017)

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