

# Eloquent Silence on Burning Manipur by Prime Minister Modi - Alope Mukherjee

Now after the video of chasing of two naked Kuki girls by Meitei mob and in full view of women among the mob the Kuki girls were raped became viral, Prime Minister Modi broke his silence on Manipur. The incident took place on May 4. Many people who took Modi's words at face value started asking why did the Prime Minister took nearly 3 months to break his silence. But was he really silent? After the first spate of rather badly organised act of violences, killings, loot and arson and glaring inactivity of the Manipur Police, BJP Spokesman Sambit Patra and Union Minister of State for Home affairs, Nityananda Rai encamped in Imphal. Second in command in the Union Cabinet, Amit Shah, the Home Minister went to Manipur purportedly to meet both the sides to broker peace. But the clashes continued. To understand the objective reality let us look at how and why the violent clashes are continuing.

Let us start with the nature of violent attacks on minority Kuki Zomos. Just one example will suffice. Within hours of the clash started at Churachandpur on May 3 a group of Meitei hoodlums were moving towards the Games Village in Imphal. Sensing danger the Meitei neighbours of Mary Com, the internationally famous boxer, took her and other Kukis in their houses as safe shelters. When the gang tried to set fire on the house of Hapreng, Mary Com's brother Meitei neighbours somehow stopped them. But same did not happen in case of Siemcha Gangte. When he saw from the shelter of his Meitei neighbour that the gang was setting fire on his dear house built on much toil others could not restrain him. He rushed to the spot to stop them. He was brutally beaten up. Injured Gangte went to the Manipur Police Commando booth adjacent to Games Village for help. Instead of helping him they did not allow him enter the booth for safe shelter. Finally he was beaten to death. Such was the brutality. On 4<sup>th</sup> May morning Mary Com appealed to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister:- "Our state is burning, please help". Result was after some time they were taken to army camp for shelter, and killings, loot and arson went on. PM's silence was eloquent. His ministers, especially the Home Minister visited Manipur to train the majoritarian chauvinists to continue their attacks in more organised and massive fashion. Why? Let us have a glimpse at recent history of Manipur.

After British brought Assam under it and moving towards Burma (present Myanmar) Manipur Kingdom was brought under subsidiary alliance. An effort to change the situation was there in 1891. Through a palace coup the king Surachandra Singh was overthrown and his brother Kulachandra Singh became king and he appointed his son Tikendrajit Singh as Prince as well as Commander-in-Chief. At Surachandra's complaint British sent troops to Manipur on 31 March 1891. Kulachandra could not organise his soldiers in this short time and

was defeated on 27 April 1891. This is known as Anglo-Manipur War. From then on a section of Manipuris turned against Indian Government. But among the Manipuris a change occurred— a sizable section became Chaitanya Vaishnavite, Nabadwip became their seat of learning, they took up Bengali as their language. They were residing mainly in Tripura and Cachhar district of Assam.

But majority started to identify themselves as Meiteis. They took Brahmanical Hinduism and they started to calling their culture Kangleipak. In Manipur except a few, only 3%, of Meiteis are Brahmin or Kshatriya. They live mostly in the Valley region. Some of them are in Mizoram and Assam.

On the other hand Kukis spread in hilly areas of Manipur and adjacent Assam, Nagaland and Myanmar. Kukis have also a great history of fighting against British imperialism. Kukis had been leading an independent identity with their own social and cultural tradition. During the First World War a change took place. British needed strong youth of hilly area of North-East India for construction of roads in hilly areas of Europe and other manual work and directed them to join the Labour Corp in 1916. Kukis refused to join it. In 1917 there was a crop failure, British tried to forcibly gather tax and Kukis opposed. At first British rulers sent Assam Rifles. Within a short period smelling defeat they sent 70,000 strong army. A full scale war ensued. After three years in 1919 Kukis lost due to shortage of supplies. Huge number of Kukis died or injured. Brutal torture went on to the prisoners of war. There was not a whimper of protest by the leaders of so-called National movement. Moreover, this war was downplayed as Kuki rebellion instead of Anglo-Kuki War. But had to recognise the traditional administrative pattern of Gaonburas (Village Headmen) and above. Another change took place among the Kukis- majority of them became Christians.

After 1947, the king of Manipur was persuaded to join India against his wish. Lets avoid details of what happened before formation of Manipur as a state.

In 1972 Manipur became a separate state within India. And under article 371(C) and enactment of the Parliament recognising the rights to land and identity of the hill tribes Hill Area Committee (HAC) and separate Zilla Parishad were established. Meiteis being majority and living in the plain valley and the driving force in the Manipur Government were not ready to accept this delegation of power to the HAC. So from the beginning there was a rift between the tribals of the hill area and the Meiteis of the plains.

Another important factor was as referred earlier a strong section of Meiteis were against joining India and formed Kangleipak Liberation Front and army also. At the same time Nagas and Kukis were also fighting. Earlier Mizo insurgency was solved through dialogue with the Mizo National Front. Central Government started dialogue with Kangleipak front and reached a peaceful solution. Dialogue with Naga rebels is continuing. But Manipur government opposed dialogue with Kukis fearing that might create a separate state turning Manipur miniscule. Kuki rebellion was going through ups and downs.

In this situation in 2019 Kukis organised a programme to unite themselves. It was to commemorate the centenary of Anglo-Kuki War by building a memorial plaque in every Kuki village with "Anglo-Kuki War Memorial" written on it. Manipur Govt. opposed it. Finally a Memorial was built at Churachandpur.

### **Now Let us have a View of Manipur:**

Total area : 23,327 sq Km; Borders with Nagaland (North), Mizoram (south) Cachhar of Assam (west); Myanmar (east). According to 2011 census Meitei constitute nearly 60%. They reside in the valley and plains. Thankul (Naga), Kabul, Kuki, Paitet, Gangte, Hmar, Kom etc constitute nearly 40.88%. Almost all of them live in hill areas except Thankul Nagar. All others are clamped together as Kuki-Zomo.

Meiteis are mostly Hindu Brahmin and kshatriyas, a large section Vaishnavites. They belong to OBC; in 1956 during the hearing of Kaka Kalelkar chaired Backward Classes Commission they contemptuously did not enlist them as STs and only a section of 3% enlisted them as SC.

Two recent events changed the situation.

A) Recent changes in Forest Act marked Protected Forests and Reserved Forests most indiscriminately. Large numbers of hill tribes lost their right to the forest. They also were evicted from their houses and agricultural land since they were declared Protected Forests. Bulldozers were used at random. Two churches were razed to the ground. In the assembly Kukis were minority, their opposition did not work since Meiteis were majority. But even under this majoritarian rule Kukis, Kuki-Zomo and Nagas had constitutional right over the land in the hill area.

Second important happening was that survey by the GSI and Ministry of Mines and Minerals found the hill areas rich with limestone, chromite, nickel, copper, malachite, azurite, magnetite and PGE (Platinum group of elements. Manipur government paying scant respect on Article 371C of the Constitution started handing over areas to Companies from outside Manipur without the knowledge of the HAC. And the companies started to show the areas as unclassified land instead of the villages resided by the tribes. Protests were launched in Manipur as well as other places of India.

To suppress the opposition the BJP Chief Minister gave call to the plain people, i.e, Meiteis to "go east" aping Modi's "Look East" slogan. Objective was to plunder through the management and contracts of government and private enterprises. But the companies had to obey certain constitutional positions and give preference to the tribals of the hill area.

This created a new crisis. It has already been mentioned 97% of the Meiteis are OBC. So with support of state government they went to Manipur High Court for recognition as STs. High Court asked the state government to start the process of recognition as ST. The hill tribes getting alarmed by the development started protesting. On May 3 rallies were organised in

the hill area. The state government and the Chief Minister Biren Singh sponsored a gang of lumpens who started attacking Kuki Zomos with the help of the police. Attacks spread even in Imphal. The Kukis who have a history of fighting could not resist at the onset. But soon they started retaliating from May 4. A spite and advice from higher ups needed. Peace was established after May 4. Sambit Patra and Nityanand Rai encamped. Biren Singh started talking about infiltration by Kukis and Nagas from Myanmar. To turn the focus of attraction demand for NRC and banning of Kuki popular representatives were raised. Union Home Minister Amit Shah added fuel to fire by talking about NRC instead of meeting both sides to find a solution and asking Biren Singh to stop sponsoring hoodlums. The video of stripping and raping of the Kuki girls was released on May 4<sup>th</sup> before Amit Shah's visit. Why did he not act, clashes continued after a short interval.

Meanwhile the Chief Justice of India, DY Chadrachud gave verdict that the High Court's direction was wrong since there is a clear procedure in the Constitution for inclusion in ST list.

After the verdict violence enhanced. BJP leaders from state to centre are bent upon utilising the majoritarianism and majority chauvinism to suppress the discontent of the tribals at the interest of mining companies which are acting on behalf of big capital and imperialists as their supply lines. At least 120 persons have died. Killing, looting, rape, molestations, arson has been going on.

The high handedness of Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh and Manipur state aiding and abetting Meiteis to continue violence resulted in Kukis demanding a state separate from Manipur. They have built up a joint platform. Chief Minister of Mizoram Joramthanga has supported and led a demonstration of Kukis. Actually the tactics of BJP leaders have turned out to be counterproductive.

While Manipur was burning the Prime Minister was busy in globe trotting. Even after his return he is busy making jollity of opening Convention Hall at the Trade centre or going for Rajasthan safari avoiding to make a statement on Manipur in the Parliament. The Prime Minister's silence is eloquent, through this silence he clearly shows his scant respect to the democratic institutions and democracy. Worst sufferers are the people of Manipur, both Meiteis and Kuki Zomos. The Meiteis are drawn into an internecine violent struggle not for their own interest but to serve the BJP leaders acting for the imperialists and big capital. Modi's disciple Biren Singh is following his footsteps by keeping the police forces inactive while mayhem is going on at his express order.

### **Solution is Easy :**

- Either allow Kukis to have separate state or stop meddling with the rights of HAC.
- Chief Minister Biren Singh the main person behind the violence must be brought to book;
- The policemen aiding and abetting killings, rapes and arson must be punished;

- Meitei leaders are to be advised not to allow themselves acting as pawns in the hands of BJP -RSS Combine.
- Stop plunder of Manipur's oil and minerals.