

Local Dynamics, Universal Context: Border Trading Through Moreh, Manipur

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A small hill town in the state of Manipur bordering Myanmar, Moreh has come to be the focus of a great deal of attention since it was declared a Free Trade Zone by the Government of India in 1995. Though there are literally no reliable official estimates of the volume of the trade that passes through this town, the need for promoting trade through this point has by now produced a substantial body of literature on the conditions, economic and political, that impede or enhance cross border trading through this town and in the region in general.

This paper, while trying to understand those conditions and the reasons for their existence, will not venture into any policy prescriptions. My effort here would be confined to exploring the overlapping spheres of conflicts that have emerged through the push and pull of those political-economic conditions to try to arrive at an understanding of the relation between the economy and the society in this region.

The Problem

One way to enter the ‘problem’ of trading across the border in Moreh would be to read my introductory paragraph more closely. Though “there are literally no reliable official estimates of the volume of the trade that passes through this town”, we perceive a “need for promoting trade through this point”.

Why are there no reliable official estimates of the volume of the trade? Because a very large percentage – once again, no reliable statistics – of the trade that takes place is ‘illegal’ if looked at from the perspective of the state and its institution of law and order. Trade in contrabands like drugs, arms, precious stones, animal skins etc. flourish through the very loosely guarded borders of this town and is the main source of the wealth generated here. This wealth is what creates (1) the internal conflicts between the ethnic groups, or more accurately the representatives of ethnic groups in the form of insurgent outfits, each of which seeks to exercise control over it (2) the external conflict between the Indian government and the ethnic insurgent outfits where the state wants to put a cap on smuggling to cut off the supply of funds to the insurgents to strengthen the territorial sovereignty of the state as well as bring back some administrative order to the region.

But if the state indeed wants to cut off funding to the insurgents to bolster territorial sovereignty it could always ban trading altogether and make it purely a security issue. That is where the other aspect of the problem manifests itself. Along with ensuring territorial

sovereignty, the Indian government also ‘needs’ to promote trade with Southeast Asia for both economic and geo-political reasons. At this point in history, India is in no position to isolate itself by cutting off economic exchange with its northeastern neighbours, especially when China is increasing its influence over the same region by leaps and bounds. The Government of India had started eyeing the rapidly growing markets of Southeast Asia starting from the early nineties, at the time when India officially adopted a more liberalized economic policy, as a major potential source for earning through export. Added to that is the interest in accessing the huge reserve of oil and natural gas in Myanmar through an agreement with both Myanmar and Bangladesh to transport it through a pipeline running from Myanmar to India cutting across Bangladesh. All in all, keeping the routes of exchange with the Southeast Asian nations is very high on the priority lists of the Government of India symbolized by the “Look East Policy” of the government.

The contradictory state policies reflecting these conflicting needs of the Indian government and the internal and external conflicts raging among the various ethnicities in the region constitute the context for the trading through Moreh. The inseparability of security issues and economic issues for the Government of India and the indissociability of the inter-ethnic land-issue and the general developmental issue for the people of Manipur are woven together to form a very complicated tapestry depicting the story of trading across the border through Moreh. This is the story I will try to narrate in the following section.

Moreh and Socio-Cultural Diversity

Though Moreh has been a center of small scale, often barter, trading amongst the local people for a long time, its importance as a trading center first came into prominence in the early sixties when ethnic Indians were driven out of Burma in thousands by the then military regime of Burma. The Indian community in Burma consisted of a large number of business-people who were engaged in trading between Burma and India, a sizeable percentage of this community decided to stay on in Manipur and continue with their trade. Moreh, being already a center for such trading was adjudged the most lucrative of all places and attracted these business people in large numbers. The most powerful and the largest community was that of the Tamil traders whose roots are traced back to Tamilnadu in southern India. Though their numbers have radically decreased now following the Kuki-Tamil riots in the mid-nineties of the last century, they still can boast of the largest number among all the ethnic non-Manipuri trading communities in Moreh. Next to the Tamils, in terms of their control over trade were the Marwaris and the Punjabis, both of whose numbers have now dwindled to a very small fraction of what it used to be in their glory days. Apart from these three communities, there are the Nepalis and the Biharis. These last two communities have had somewhat different trajectories as compared to the former. Many of the Nepalis came down to Manipur through Assam from being labourers in the tea gardens, while some settled in the area after being released from the British army or the Azad Hind Fauj, the Indian name for the Indian Liberation Army led by Subhas Chandra Bose. The Bihari community was the latest addition to this cosmopolitan set up who were drawn to the area in large numbers as trade flourished and demand for labourers increased rapidly. At least in Moreh the Bihari community consisted mostly of labourers with a smattering of small eatery owners and grocery shop owners. But in Manipur as a whole, the Bihari community is known for its control over tobacco and grain trade including all kinds of edible oils, while the Tamils primarily started with steel, textiles and gold ornaments, and the Punjabis with automobile parts and repairs. These

associations between goods and communities, however, must be seen as the broadest stroke in a painting where one needs to add many more delicate shades in terms of diversifications and collaborations among traders of different communities to produce a complex picture of trading networks.

By the early seventies and the late eighties, these non-Manipuri traders had changed the face of Moreh from a small outpost of exchanges of local products among the local people to a flourishing centre of trade networks spanning over India and the major economic centres of Southeast Asia. The network was dominated primarily by this group of non-Manipuri traders of Indian origin. As word started to spread about the money making potential of Moreh, many ethnic Manipuris, or Meiteis, started to settle there to join in the trading game. It was initially although very difficult for them to break into the tightly knit network of the non-Manipuri communities. They were largely marginalized in the early periods until the nineteen nineties. But more of that later.

The other ethnic groups in the region are the tribals. Though presently the majority of the population of Moreh town is tribal Kukis, before the early nineteen nineties, this was an area of mixed tribal population. The sudden increase of the Kuki population in this area is a result of the bloody and long-drawn Kuki-Naga riot of the early nineties that displaced both the Kukis and the Nagas with the outcome that the Nagas were driven out from the Moreh area. The Tengnoupal subdivision, of which Moreh is a part, is primarily a Kuki area now, but the rest of Chandel district presents a very complex demographic picture of tribal populations with various sub-ethnic identities, which is even further complicated with some of these sub-groups defying their popularly known identity and claiming to belong to some other tribes. Such moves, though manifesting as identity politics on the surface, are read by many political theorists as part of a larger battle for political dominance by certain tribes in this demographically highly fragmented district.

A Political History of Manipur

To understand how this diverse demographic pattern enters as a factor in the ‘problem’ trade across the border of Moreh, we must first take an overview of the political history of Manipur.

The current conflict between the external and the internal and the confusion created by the meshing of the two is what characterizes the political history of Manipur too. We find there the conflict of the Manipuris, or more specifically of the Meitei community, with the dominance of the Hindu Brahmins in the pre-colonial era, then with the British during the colonial period and then with the independent Indian state after 1947 that has culminated in the Meitei secessionist movement of today. On the other hand, the internal ethnic conflicts of Manipur also date back to the pre-colonial days when there were intermittent battles between the hill tribes and the valley kings. These battles sometimes led to political alliances between the ethnicities while sometimes created an enduring tension in terms of territorial authority. Since the formal establishment of the legal authority of the independent Indian state over this entire region has caused some mutations of these earlier conflicts. This mutation needs to be understood if we are to have a grasp over the ‘problem’ of trade.

B. G. Verghese¹, as someone who has been involved with northeastern India for a long time in various capacities, notes

[T]he geo-political reality of the Northeast still eludes common understanding. This huge landmass, shaped something like an elephant's ear, is attached to the Indian heartland by the narrow, 37 km wide Siliguri corridor. *As against this*, the external boundary of the Northeast runs over 4,500 km and is contiguous with five countries, Nepal, China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Everything north and east of Siliguri must be defined as part of the Northeast...*This is mongoloid India and culturally part of Southeast Asia.* (Verghese 2006: 29. Emphasis mine)

This geo-political reality of what Verghese describes as a 'landmass' is what underlies the violently conflictual reality of Northeast India today. It is a 'landmass' both culturally and ecologically because of the continuity and overlap of both ethnic habitats and natural resources. The current political boundaries, both within India in terms of the seven states (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura) and outside of India between India and Myanmar, India and Nepal, India and Bhutan, India and Bangladesh and India and China, are mostly colonial and post-colonial developments that have overridden the pre-colonial fluidity of population movement, trading connections and boundaries of kingdoms and ethnic habitats. Today there is a complete dissonance between the political reality of the Northeast and its cultural-economic reality. The 37 km wide Siliguri corridor symbolizes this dissonance by making the Northeastern part of India completely landlocked and at the same time virtually separated from the nation-state to which it is politically affiliated.

Looking at pre-colonial history we find that the northeastern region of India was very well connected with the East Asian economies.² It enjoyed a dynamic trading network, both land and maritime, where regional and long distance trade buttressed each other. Such trading networks also led to communication of culture and migration, which in its turn explains some of the diversities found today in the northeast. Verghese points out how Manipur has been found mentioned in Ptolemy's *Geography of Further India* with reference to the northeast and Burma through which "a trade route to China had been established from Kushan times for Roman and Greek merchandise via Afghanistan...Manipur's exports of gold, silk and malabathrum (tejpat) to China" is mentioned by Greek authors. Later scholars³ too have noted that Manipur primarily exported silk, wax and ivory to China and Burma through the Kabaw valley. Oinam⁴ is of the opinion however that these connections were not very stable. These were quite often severed on account of problems with neighbouring kingdoms. But the British facilitated free movement of goods both in terms of policy and in terms of building an improved transport system. The irony of it is that they did too good a job of it. It was during this period of flourishing trade with encouragement from the British that the famous "Women's Uprising" or *Nupi Lal* took place in Manipur in 1939 to protest against uncontrolled export of rice from Manipur by Marwari traders as agents of the British to far off regions like Assam, Punjab and Rajasthan. It can be read as the first sign of discontent in Manipur regarding exploitative outsiders, which today forms the central theme of the insurgency movement in Manipur.

Skipping over the very complicated post-colonial history of the northeast that finally resulted in the seven separate states, let us focus on the present day political conflicts in Manipur. Today Manipur shares its borders with Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland within India and Myanmar outside India. While Assam and Mizoram do not pose any overt threat, Nagaland and Myanmar are problematic neighbours. To grasp the problem that the state of Manipur faces from Nagaland one needs to know the geographical and demographic pattern of Manipur.

With a total area of 22,327 square km. Manipur is divided between hills and the valley. The valley accounts for only of 2238 sq. km. that is only 10.02% of total area, but it represents 58.85 % of the total population of state. Its hill areas with 20089 sq. km. represent 41.156% of

population. Of the three major ethnic groups the Meiteis, mostly settled in the valley, constitute the largest segment of state population and are classified as non-tribal. The hills are the abode of the remaining Naga and Kuki (a sub-group of Mizo) groups with their many sub-tribes. Muslims, who are mostly immigrants from East Bengal of British period, erstwhile East Pakistan and now Bangladesh, are known as Pangals and form around 8% of state population. The rest of the non-tribal population known as Mayang – meaning ‘outsiders’ in Manipuri language -- are from different parts of inland India who have emigrated to Manipur through different historical trajectories. Meiteis, for being classified as non-tribals, are not permitted under state Land Reform Act to buy lands in the hill districts. The tribals, however, have the right to buy lands in the valley and settle there if they so wish.

Manipur’s, or more precisely its numerically majority ethnic community of the Meitei’s, problems with Nagaland stem from this geographically bounded condition of the Meiteis. In an effort to solve the insurgency problem of the Nagas, which is perceived by the Indian government as the “mother of all insurgencies”, the Indian state entered into a ceasefire agreement in 2001 with the powerful Naga militant faction, with the NSCN (IM) agreeing to the formation of a greater Nagalim, a Naga homeland, “without territorial limits”. That is, the agreement meant that the Nagalim need not be contained within the political boundaries of the state of Nagaland. For Manipur, this meant that the four Naga majority districts of Manipur (Senapati, Ukhrul, Chandel and Tamenglong) would be taken away from under the jurisdiction of the state of Manipur and given over to the Nagas. The declaration of this ceasefire along with this condition thus immediately gave rise to violent protests in Manipur as well as in other affected states. The agitation was led primarily by the Meiteis who correctly perceived such a condition as an immense threat to their security as the valley is surrounded by hills on all sides which are the abode of the tribals. If the four districts to the north of the state go into the Nagalim while the Kuki tribes dominate the southern hills, the economic and political security of the valley-based Meiteis would be severely compromised.

Though the Kukis on the south are not demanding a separate homeland like the Nagas, they too are demanding political autonomy in the form of Autonomous District Councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. It would help to note here that neither Naga nor Kuki are considered by historians as original names for any tribal groups. These umbrella nomenclatures are an outcome of administrative measures undertaken by the British during the colonial times taking advantage of an emerging unified political-cultural identity among the tribals as a result of the work of the Christian missionaries making it possible for communication among diverse tribal groups with different languages through the common medium of English.⁵ As far as the name ‘Kuki’ goes, it was used by the British to replace the earlier ‘Lushai’ to cover Kuki, Chin, Mizo and Zomi clans, and just like the name ‘Naga’, the term ‘Kuki’ developed in the course of the search for a common identity between clans of various origins. Gangumei Kamei⁶ notes that some of these clans are in culture midway between the Nagas and the Kukis. The same author observes in another work that the Mizo-Kuki groups have a greater cultural and linguistic unity than the Naga clans. Some of these groups have a long history of residence in Manipur, while others were settled by the British and Manipuri rajas in the 18th and 19th Centuries.⁷ The Kuki population, however, is not as demographically consolidated as the Nagas, though there are pockets in the state where Kukis are in the majority. The two southern districts of Churachandpur and Chandel have a sizable Kuki population many of whom were displaced during the vicious Naga-Kuki riot of the early nineteen nineties.

Geo-politically speaking, this has roughly divided up the state into three zones for the three ethnicities: the Nagas in the north, the Kukis in the south and the Meiteis in the valley in the middle. This is the scaffolding on which hangs the many-hued internal ethnic conflict of Manipur. But cutting across these internal conflicts is the long running secessionist movement of the Meitei community. Though technically speaking the problem with the Government of India and the Meitei community started when, allegedly, the Indian government held the then king of Manipur incommunicado and forced him to agree to annex Manipur to the Indian state under duress, a problem with Hindu cultural dominance has been with the Meitei community for a long time. It was the legendary Manipuri king, Garibniwaz, who is known for the Hinduisation of Manipuri culture in circa. 1714 AD.⁸ He was also a king who fought many a battle. It was while he was busy fighting his eastern neighbours like the Burmese, he was perhaps forced to look for allies in his western neighbours. Thus during his time, Manipur's contact with the neighbouring Hindu kingdoms like the Ahom, Tripura, Cooch-Bihar, Sylhet etc. became closer. Matrimonial and military alliances were forged with these Hindu states. This process of two and half centuries of hinduization had not only a significance impact on Meitei society, but led to the emergence of a closer political and economic relationship with these regions that exists till today in some form or the other.

The Meiteis, or the "valley people" as opposed to the tribals who are the "hill people" (hence the popular description of the conflicts in Manipur as hill-valley conflict), share a history with the so-called tribals, though their historical trajectory took them in a direction where they established a kingdom in the area to rule over both the valley and the hills. The cultural superiority the Meiteis are generally seen to exhibit in relation to the tribals dates back to this historical connection with the royalty whence a hierarchical structuring of the social world that included both the valley and the hills. The later tightening of the control over Meitei society by the coterie of Brahmins backed by the king Chura Chand further crystallized this hierarchy.⁹ This rather excessive and tyrannical Brahminism, however, gave rise to a reaction among the older Brahmins (possibly those who had come during the time of the pre-colonial kings) who were more in tune with the traditional values of the Meitei society. Some of them took steps to reverse the outcasted status of many. John Parratt puts these developments in a historical perspective in the following words:

We should thus see the *mangba-sengba* controversy as conflict between two different groups of Brahmins as well as between the new Brahmins and the common people. It was essentially a conflict between two different understandings of Hinduism itself – the more liberal Vaishnavite Meitei tradition and an extreme brahminical conservatism. ... Hinduism, it seems, was operating on two different levels. At the level of Chaitanyite devotion to Krishna, Hinduism retained its popular and non-elitist attraction. At the level of Brahminism, however, obsessed¹⁰ with purity and caste, the priests exercised a deeply unpopular and corrupt role.¹¹

The next and decisive conflict with India came in 1947 which can also be described as the first violation of the integrity of the Manipuri kingdom and therefore that of Meitei pride in their identity as the ruling ethnicity of the region. This was experienced when the Indian state annexed the kingdom of Manipur to itself in 1947 under allegedly dubious circumstances. The other came a few years later when Jawaharlal Nehru waived the claim of the Manipur durbar to receive a compensatory payment against the loss of the Kubow valley to Burma. Both these incidents rankled deeply in the independent Manipuri minds¹² and led to the inception of insurgency. The left nationalist dissident turned insurgent Hijam Irabot Singh, a radical and the then Maharaja's brother-in-law, slipped across to Burma to evade arrest and sought assistance

from the Burmese Communist Party. Though he died before he could make much progress on his mission, the idea continued to live and “gradually germinated in an injured Meitei sub-nationalism”.¹³ Since the time of the controversial merger in 1949, the Manipuris suffered further insults to their dignity when they had to wait for a full 23 years before being granted statehood within the Indian union. Even worse, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Himachal were accorded this title earlier than Manipur. Further, the Manipuri language, which the noted Bengali linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee had described as possessing a literature 1500 to 2000 years old, was not included in the Eighth Schedule until 1992.

The irony of the situation now is that the Indian state, having adopted a liberalized economic policy since the early nineties and pushing for a more globally integrated economy as a means toward a faster rate of economic growth, now is very keen on a peaceful and conflict-free northeastern region. In its highly publicized “Look East Policy” the Indian government has made a clear case of its interest in tapping the markets of the rapidly developing southeast Asian economies that also means that the northeastern region has an immense geo-political significance in facilitating this project. Yet, the problem is that long-time militarization of the northeastern region, especially in violence prone states like Assam and Manipur, has only fed the popular distrust for the Indian government. This has led to the strengthening of popular support behind insurgency movements that then obstructs the Indian government’s vision of the East as it “looks” at it.

The above very sketchy account of the history of political conflicts in Manipur should help us now to contextualize the problems in the sphere of trading across the border. Given the multi-ethnic character of Moreh, its being the transit point for goods both from inland India and Southeast Asia and China and its location on the Indo-Myanmar border provides us with a microcosm of conflicts in Manipur which then gets integrated into the larger national geo-political as well as eco-political conflicts.

Trading through Moreh

The Government of India, to renew the long tradition of trade between Manipur and Myanmar, signed Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement in January 1994. The cross-border trade, through Moreh of Manipur, became operational in April 1995.

The volume of official trade between 1995 and 2000 is reported to be one hundred and thirty-five crores of rupees. However, the estimates for unofficial trade range between one thousand and six hundred and two thousand five hundred crores of rupees annually. The local business people claim that the clandestine trade, including drugs and precious stones, would amount to not less than rupees two thousand and five hundred crores per annum. As the clandestine trade exceeds the official one, the government loses much of its revenue.¹⁴

I choose to open this chapter with this quotation from the very beginning of a volume exploring the problems and potentials of Indo-Burma trade through Moreh to stress the fact that unofficial trade is at the centre of the problem of writing about trade here. When rough estimates put the volume of unofficial trade above the volume of official trade, one realizes that this unofficial economy plays a greater role in the ordering (or should one say disordering?) of the local society by its sheer magnitude. The expression ‘unofficial’ is used as a substitute for the illegal as the latter immediately aligns one’s position with that of the state. ‘Unofficial’ also keeps one away from the murky waters of political ethics that the use of ‘licit’ evokes. It is an expression that is institutionally and politically neutral.

This linguistic neutrality, unfortunately, belies the reality on the ground where the 'unofficial' is far from neutral in terms of practice and forever borders on the violence. The fear of violence stands behind every unofficially organized act of trade, and erupts in its real form whenever the terms and conditions of that organization are violated. The virtual absence, in terms of action, of the institution of law and order, marks this now-famous trading town.

Below I would present ethnography of Moreh town focusing on the circumstances and problems of trading there as community identity, trading networks both official and unofficial, and insurgency movements come together to create a world where one cannot distinguish between the civil and the political.

Ethnography of Trading in Moreh

Moreh is 110 kms from the capital city Imphal of Manipur on the National Highway 39 (henceforth NH 39. The other major national highway that runs through Manipur is NH 53). While NH 39 runs from Moreh to Imphal and thence to Mao and all the way to Dimapur in Nagaland¹⁵, NH 53 connects Manipur with Assam through Silchar. Of the two, the NH 39 is the most used, though of recent NH 53 is also being used by Manipuri businessmen as a way of avoiding being waylaid by the NSCN (I-M) cadres on NH 39 which runs a long way through Nagaland as well as northern Manipur which is a Naga stronghold. Trade between Moreh and Imphal, however, necessarily has to be carried out on the NH 39 as that is the only road connecting Moreh and Imphal. Of the two, NH 39 is also the one with the largest number of check posts on account of insurgent activities on it. It is on account of this presence of the security forces that most travelers as well as businesspeople prefer NH 39 to NH 53.

It will help at this point to familiarize the readers with the geography of settlements and trading activities in Moreh town. The town, with a population size between 30 and 40 thousand, lies on two sides of the NH 39. This national highway divides the town into two halves with most of the residential ethnic neighbourhoods lying on the left side of it if one is coming into the town on NH 39 from the direction of Imphal. In 1995, along with declaring Moreh a limited Free Trade Zone, the Indian Government set up a Land Customs Station by the side of what is popularly known as Gate Number 1 in Moreh. This is the gate through which all formal trade, except informal headload transfers, is supposed to take place after the contents of trucks have been weighed and customs taxes are paid at the newly established Land Customs Station. But as things stand this gate is almost always desolate except for the very occasional truck full of betel nuts coming from Burma which seems to be the only item worth trading along the formal route. I visited the Land Customs Station several times during my visit, but never to actually witness the unloading of a truck. The custom official in place looked bored and listless, possibly partly because of the heat. They told me that they get one or two trucks full of betel nuts a week to inspect. This Gate Number 1 is located almost at the very end of the NH 39 where it meets the Burma border. The expectation behind setting up the Land Customs Station was that truck full of loads would be driving into Moreh from Imphal and from Moreh to Imphal along the national highway and the gate would be busy marking and registering these exchanges. Things turned out otherwise. Within a few years of the opening of the Land Customs Station, the Burmese government opened the Namphalong super market next to the no-man's land between the two borders adjacent to what is known as the Gate Number 2. Since then Namphalong has been the

pivot of interest in Moreh. Before going into a description of Namphalong, let us first walk down the road leading to it.

The road to Gate Number 2 lies at the end of what is called the Morning Bazaar Road which runs off left from the NH 39 and lies next to the Tamil neighbourhood of the town. It is called the Morning Bazaar because it is lined by shops which open very early in the morning to cater to the Burmese buyers who cross over the border very early in the morning and leave by the afternoon. On this street therefore one finds shops for what the Burmese favour the most, such as cotton textile dress-material and readymade clothes, Indian made cosmetics and processed food items, auto parts, aluminium utensils etc. As one gets closer to the market one finds more shops of grocery items like lentils of many varieties, kidney beans, Soya nuggets, onions, garlic and ginger in huge mounds, small eateries for people to rest for a few minutes to sip a cup of tea with snacks and exchange notes on business or strike a deal. During the summer time one also finds overflowing mounds of watermelons selling by the side of the road close to the gate. These melons sell at a third of the price for which they will sell in Imphal. One would find each and every vehicle leaving the gate carrying a huge number of these fruits along with other merchandise.

Setting up the Namphalong market was the *coup de grace* of the Burmese military junta that fundamentally changed the character of Moreh the town. As local folklore goes, some Burmese businessmen visiting Moreh were roughed up by some local thugs which led the Burmese government to set up the market. Though the story does not strike one as convincing, the historical reason behind the setting up of the market is immaterial at this time. What is important is what the setting up of a huge market place offering all varieties of cheap Chinese and Thai products, ranging from cheap footwares and umbrellas to blankets to electronic goods sold by Burmese businessmen did to the economy of Moreh exactly at the time when the Moreh business people were expecting a good period of trade following upon the declaration of a limited Free Trade Zone in Moreh. The setting up of the Namphalong market opened up a lively and brisk trading sphere in the town of Moreh, made possible for a wider participation of people in the business, but at the same time reduced Moreh from a businessman's town to a middle-man's town.

The most obvious sign of brisk trading through Moreh is the busy transport sector in the town. Private buses, Tata Sumos, and Maruti vans serve to transport both travelers and business-goods mixing them quite indiscriminately and haphazardly. Originally buses were the only means of transport for passengers whereas trucks were used for carrying business consignments. But as business imperatives grew by leaps and bounds outstripping profits earned by carrying passengers, most of the bus-owners pulled the passenger seats out from inside the vehicles to maximize their use for carrying bulky trade-items. It is at this point that Tata Sumos and Maruti Vans entered into the business of passenger transportation. But soon the growing demand for carrying business items drove a wedge between the Tata Sumos and the Maruti Vans. Being a little bigger in size, the Tata Sumos emerged as the vehicle for carrying only those passengers who were carrying business loads with themselves back to Imphal, while the Maruti Vans became the sole carriers for passengers who were purely travelers without any business-loads with them. With these developments the cost of traveling to Imphal and back increased substantially as compared to that of a bus, but in a business-town like Moreh nobody objected much since any trip anyone made to Imphal from Moreh was business-related and hence money-making. Only a very tiny fraction of the travelers travelled for non-business related reasons. As I traveled from Imphal

to Moreh on my first field trip to Moreh, I saw buses and Tata Sumos coming down from Moreh to Imphal loaded to the point of tipping with bulky containers while vehicles coming from Imphal were largely empty. The buses carried the bigger and bulkier items, and the Sumos were loaded with relatively small containers and packets belonging to the passengers of the vehicle who have bought their loads at the Namphalong market to sell them in Imphal. Most of the manufactured items were headed for the shops at the Moreh Market section in the Paona Bazaar, the biggest retail market for smuggled goods located in the heart of Imphal.

I provide this somewhat detailed account of the transport system to stress the point that the significance of Moreh today is as a transit point for goods from further afield in Southeast Asia in China and Thailand coming into Burma and traveling to various parts of the world through Imphal along the NH 39. While social existence in Moreh always revolved around the trading business, it was not always so focused on transport. Though transport is an integral part of any trading operation, what we are looking at here is an intensification of the frequency and speed of transportation suggesting some fundamental shift in the business parameters.

This rapid expansion of transport-as-business between Imphal and Moreh took place following upon the setting up of the Namphalong market. The transport sector is a service industry in this small town providing informal work to a large number of people in the town as drivers, attendants and loaders. Apart from that there is a brisk business of auto-rickshaws (motorized three-wheelers) that ply within the town carrying people between Namphalong and their residence. One thus does not find too many unemployed youths in this town, though the income may be modest. But what comes free with this otherwise modest income is the chance to travel to and from Imphal and pursue one's own trading interests for free. At the time of my fieldwork during the period 2007-2008, there were about 100 Tata Sumos, 70 to 80 Maruti Vans and about 50 buses plying between Imphal and Moreh. This count was provided by a local driver taking into account only the vehicles that originate in Moreh. The Tata Sumos and the Maruti Vans often made their return trip the same day thus practically doubling the number of vehicles on the road.

Setting up of the Namphalong market took away the control over supply-chains of goods from Burma that was until then fully in the hands of the businessmen in Moreh. These businessmen, that is the immigrant business-community of Tamils, Punjabis, Nepalis and Marwaris who had fled Burma in the early 1960s, catered to both retail and wholesale buyers of goods from further inland in India as well as goods that reached India via Burma. They all had their own business network in both Burma and India primarily through their diasporic network which served them in good stead by helping them to smoothly run their supply chain. Their shops were visited by business people from all over northeast India and particularly from other areas of Manipur for buying stocks in wholesale.

But the setting up of the Namphalong Market reduced the shop owner businessman in Moreh to a middleman between the Burmese and the businessmen from outside Moreh. The Namphalong market opened up previously unimagined opportunities for business for many small capital owners – such as people who could invest just about Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 15,000 or even as low as Rs. 5000 – who earlier could not afford to do business with the established wholesalers in Moreh. The Moreh business community now has absolutely no control over this sphere. The Namphalong market also started to eat into their wholesale customers, as the very existence of this huge market complex – estimated turnover per day is Rs. 2000 crores¹⁶ – opened up a vast network of the Burmese business world to the traders on this side of the border. They no longer

had to make their wholesale deals with the businessmen sitting in Moreh. They could make it directly with the suppliers in Burma. The ability to communicate directly with people doing business from Burma also revived some old diasporic ties especially for the Manipuri diaspora. This development thus helped to increase as well as widen the sphere of capital accumulation in capital starved Manipur. Amar Yumnam¹⁷ notes that the Moreh trade has generated a financial capital base of about Rs. 1000 crore in the state and has enabled, on a limited scale, some people to exit from this trade to enter into some trade on the basis of this capital accumulation. That long-distance deal-making is assuming a place of importance in the Moreh town is evident by the rise in the number of that ubiquitous small-business enterprise found in almost every corner of India, the pay-phone booths, or STD/ISD booths as they are called in India. In Moreh one finds one such booth at an interval of roughly 100 yards. All of them have a waiting area in the front part of the booth that provides wooden benches or moulded plastic chairs bought from the Namphalong that are normally full during the peak business hours. One also finds that most of the new phone booths have come up on the street that runs straight unto the gate leading into the Namphalong market. This is the prime business location in Moreh now; to be able to put up a shop along that street assures one of a more or less regular flow of customers from among Burmese and Indians alike. With the coming up of the Namphalong market the Moreh Chamber of Commerce, primarily controlled by the Tamil traders, has lost its influence over the ever-expanding number of people who now trade through Namphalong. As compared to the 1980s or the early 1990s when the Tamil Sangam, the name of the Tamil civil organization which was actually a traders' organization, virtually controlled the Moreh Chamber of Commerce and exercised influence over the state government, the Moreh Chamber of Commerce today has no real authority to impose any common rules and regulations for the business community in the town, let alone exercise influence over the state government.

That the Namphalong market has changed the face of the town is quite obvious to any visitor who stays for a couple of days in Moreh. The NH 39, the road that carries one from Imphal to Moreh also runs through the middle of the town with all the various ethnic neighbourhoods falling on both sides of it. The two sides of this arterial road is dotted by small eateries offering different sorts of ethnic food and offering cheap lodging interspersed with small shops selling everyday items like biscuits, packaged snacks, detergents, candles, soft drinks, small kitchen items etc. But it all, especially the eateries, wears a desolate look today while auto rickshaws ply over the road in front of them carrying passengers to and from the street leading to the Namphalong market that runs perpendicular to it. The only time this arterial road looks crowded and busy is early in the morning when the daily bazaar starts. This is the time when one finds many Burmese women who have crossed over the porous border with head loads of fresh vegetables, fruits and other eatables to sit by the roadside outside the covered central part of the bazaar which is reserved for Manipuri Meitei women vendors only. The road starts assuming its desolate look by late morning when the bazaar breaks up and all the women vendors leave for their homes. I was told by one Punjabi eatery owner that in the good old days of Moreh they would get on an average fifty trucks parked on this road everyday and the truckers as their regular customers. The eateries that offered lodging alongside also found business in putting up the traveling traders. These low scale boarding and lodgings used to function as public spheres for transaction of business information. The trucks were the evidence that business was still in control of the non-Manipuri traders carrying out their wholesale business. But now that is all changed. Tata Sumos and Buses ply busily carrying as much item load as they can, while one can

spot two or three trucks a few times a week being unloaded in front of the Gurdwara which, I was told, offers some godown facilities in its basement. As compared to this arterial road, the street in front of the Namphalong market leading to Gate Number Two is busy starting early in the morning to late in the afternoon up to four o'clock by which time the Namphalong closes since the Burmese clock is one hour ahead of the Indian Standard Time. Many new shops have come up in the last five years or so selling primarily goods made-in-India, such as aluminium utensils, clothes, cosmetics, branded snacks etc. which are in great demand in Burma. Especially clothes and cosmetics are very high on their demand list. In comparison to the dominance of made-in-India products in shops along this street, the shops on the side of the arterial NH 39 store a mix of cheap 'Burmese' (read Chinese, Thai, Singapore) and made-in-India indicating that their clientele is primarily locals who often prefer the cheaper 'Burmese' to the comparatively expensive Indian.

The Namphalong market and the Gate Number Two thus function as one of the major gateways to India for cheaper Chinese and Thai manufactured products providing a source of income to thousands of ordinary people living in Manipur who until the establishment of the Namphalong market did not have this option. Looked at from that point of view, the Namphalong market has indeed introduced a much needed democratization of the limited economic opportunities available in Manipur. The stranglehold of the 'mayang' – the indigenous word for a non-Manipuri – businessmen over trading has been broken. A large number of Manipuris, that is Meiteis, have now come up as big traders. There have even formed an organization called the Indo-Myanmar Border Traders Union (IMBTU). They are now entering into business arrangements with the non-Manipuri traders and gradually trying to penetrate the network that was earlier a monopoly of the non-Manipuri business communities.

This has generated a mixed response amongst the non-Manipuri businessmen. On the one hand, they are still not very comfortable in doing business with Manipuris who by their standards are not very 'business-like'. During my informal chats with many non-Manipuri businessmen, especially the ones who have lived in Moreh since the 1960s, I discovered that some of their pet stories are about how they have witnessed the Manipuris gradually learn the ropes of the business. Several of them claimed to have entered into business deals with the local Manipuris in the earlier days only to find the Manipuris lacking in the discipline of business mentality. For example, I heard several complaints about how the Manipuris do not deliver on time or do not make their payments on time leading to financial losses for their business partners. In all these cases, the teller did not so much insinuate any trait of dishonesty as a collective laidbackness, an absence of the spirit of the 'go-getter' which is a dominant trait in the non-Manipuri business community, and of not taking business commitments seriously enough. All in all, the mayang businessmen have a stereotype of the Manipuri as one who is too lazy and unfocused on the ultimate goal of business, i.e., monetary profit. The popular justification for restricting business deals within the mayang community of businessmen is that originally the local Manipuris were too unreliable for business purposes. But they all concede that in the past one decade or so – which is roughly since the Namphalong market broke the mayang stranglehold over the business of trading – the local Manipuris are gradually learning the virtues of 'business-mindedness'.

On the other, this grudging acknowledgment comes with the uncomfortable awareness that their business turf is now threatened by the inroads of the Manipuris. At this point of time the Moreh Chamber of Commerce which was and is a stronghold of the Tamil community of Moreh has taken in one Manipuri trader as a representative of Manipuri trading interests. But that has happened only within the last ten years. Until then the Moreh Chamber of Commerce was entirely

in the control of the mayang business community. Today, even though there are occasional attempts among the mayang traders to close their ranks to keep the “outsiders” out, the strategy does not work very well since solidarity within the mayang community is not very strong on account of their being composed of different communities. Though the Moreh Chamber of Commerce tries to present a front in the name of “traders’ interest”, this office is now virtually toothless in negotiating terms with the government both due to external circumstances and internal conflict of interests. With the loss in their monopoly over trading through Moreh, community solidarity has become stronger among them rather than their identity as traders. This is primarily because with the increase in the extortion level by the local insurgents diasporic community networks have become more important than local community contacts. Diasporic networks are now more important because traders are more interested in making long distance deals and conduct their trade through the sea route to avoid paying the insurgents. Thus the solidarity to be found within the Tamil business group in Moreh will be found to be a little weaker if we introduce the Punjabis or the Biharis or the Nepalis into the picture. Further, since the numerical strength of the different communities have become extremely unbalanced with many traders having left town perceiving a threat to their lives and properties from the insurgents, the respective community’s control over the volume of business has reduced to that extent. The Tamil community, even after the exodus of more than 50% since the infamous Tamil-Kuki riot of the mid-nineties, is the largest community of traders. For many long years, the Moreh Chamber of Commerce was run virtually by the Tamil community, which is evidenced today by the close contacts the older Tamil traders have in the government bureaucracy. Even now, Tamil traders hold the most important positions in the Moreh Chamber of Commerce and are the most active in negotiating with the government regarding policy matters. For example, since violence among the two major insurgent groups, the Kukis and the Meiteis, in the area often resulted from a dispute over their “cut” in the government grants for building infrastructures, an old timer Tamil trader narrated to me how he informally tried to negotiate a deal with the Manipuri government that such grants be divided into two halves and then awarded to contractors belonging to the respective ethnic communities. Since infrastructure building contractors are the most important conduits for government funds to reach the insurgents in the form of extortion-money, one strategy for restraining ethnic violence would be to have both ethnic communities have a more or less equitable access to this source of income.

It would be instructive here to illustrate my point with the story of the rise of one Tamil trader. Let’s call him Mr. X. He is quite an energetic young man in his late thirties or early forties. The older traders recall him, with some obvious envy and some resentment, as a young boy who used to accompany his small-trader father and earn money on the side by working as a loader for more successful traders. An intelligent boy, he soon mastered the lessons of trading and struck out on his own. He made his fortune in trading contrabands, primarily drugs, though he had several legitimate business fronts. Though it is impossible to verify such stories, local people gossip that he had a hand in the murder of the Tamil community leader who preceded him to become the undisputed leader himself. Today he has a house each, apart from Moreh, in Singapore, Delhi and Chennai and his business deals run into several hundred crores of rupees of which a large percentage comes from contrabands like drugs, arms, precious stones and the likes. Indian intelligence and the security forces have been after him for quite some time¹⁸ to stop his trading in contrabands which, they are of the opinion, finances a great deal of insurgent activities. He visits Moreh quite frequently and moves about with armed body guards surrounding him, the

body guards all being Tamil young men who are related to him through kinship. Nobody but kin and community, in that order, is trusted in this world. But our businessman has another side to him. He is highly respected in his own community since he spends a large part of his earnings in looking after the people in his community who may have fallen into hard times, donates generously for community causes, helps young men of the community to find a foothold in the business world, and in general takes an active interest in anything that involves his own community. He is thus the undisputed leader in his community and people vie for his attention. He occupies an important position in the Chamber of Commerce and leads whenever it is a case of having to negotiate either with government officials on policy matters or insurgents to bargain about the percentage of tax/extortion for business communities. It is common knowledge that he has business network with Manipuri UG outfits and hence is the best person to be entrusted negotiating with them in the case of deadlocks in negotiations.

This story is instructive since it brings out the relation between armed violence and trading. Big money in trading comes through trading in contrabands, and since the ever growing insurgent outfits need money just as much as the business people do, a nexus has been created between the traders and the insurgents. This has created a problem of governance both for the civil administration as well as the security forces stationed in the area. If one is to take local people's voices seriously, neither of these two state institutions is free of this business-politics nexus. As a matter of fact, people insist that the nexus is a three way one involving the state personnel, that includes security personnel and civil administrators, the traders and the insurgents. Governance becomes a problem because under the circumstances it becomes impossible to identify which is a law and order problem and which a territorial-security problem. In the above case of Tamil leader Mr. X, how does one classify his leading a negotiation with Manipuri insurgents to decide on a "rate" for extortion without which the highway to Moreh stays indefinitely blocked by the insurgents putting a complete halt to daily trading and thus disrupts the source of income for the poorest of the poor? Does the word 'law' have any meaning in such situations? How are citizen's rights to be understood in such situations? What is the role of the state here? What we are witnessing here is a certain emergent form of social order that still cannot call itself by any name (and possibly never will) that bypasses the issue of state sponsored 'law' in trying to order itself to meet the daily needs of its members.

Conclusion

What emerges clearly from the ethnographic account above is the impossibility of separating the economy from the society in this case. The discipline of economics is founded upon the modernist assumption that the sphere of the economy can be analytically separated from the other affective forms of social institutions like the family and kinship since 'economic' actions are carried out on the basis of rationalist calculations which are substantively different from the emotional and cultural embedding of other social institutions.

The obvious indissociability of the economy and the society in this case of trading in Manipur compels us to think about works of social theorists who have grappled with this very question of the integral relation between the economy and the society and how they affect each other. I find it instructive to bring to bear some of the insights of Karl Polanyi's work on the socio-economic transitions from the nineteenth to the twentieth century in Western Europe upon the socio-economic upheavals we witness in Manipur. In his classic work "The Great

Transformation”¹⁹ Polanyi tried to grasp the emergence, in twentieth century Europe, of the system of the “self-regulating market” as an institution where all inputs were for sale and output was distributed solely in exchange for earnings from sales of inputs. Polanyi sets this apart from organic markets in any society which are places or networks where goods are bought and sold but which do not swallow up all social resources and objects as ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ which are to be then exchanged for each other through a society-wide institution. Organic markets, or pre-industrial markets were an extension of the society, not an autonomous institution that could regulate and perpetuate itself solely on the ground of ‘rationalization’ of objects and actions. Space does not permit me to go into further elaboration of Polanyi’s thesis, but what is of importance for this essay is that Polanyi came to the conclusion that the self-regulating market could not survive in its ideal form. Unlike Marx, Polanyi did not point his fingers particularly at the exploitation of labour by capitalist, but argued that the commoditization inherent in the idea of the self-regulating market system led to reactive protectionism even from owners of capital. But the self-regulating market as an impersonal system was not much bothered about the well-being of commodities like ‘labour’ or ‘land’ or ‘capital’. In the rationalistic neo-classical approach that underpinned the self-regulating market, any imbalance of demand and supply was to be corrected through changes in the price level which supposedly represented the ‘value’ of the commodity. But the commodities like labour, land and capital did not just disappear when their market ‘value’ decreased. They continued to exist as a part of a social system where they had functional roles to play other than as formalized ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’. As Polanyi points out, this inherent conflict between the idea of the self-regulating market and the society that pre-existed it eventually led to demands for protection not only from labour, but land owners and bankers and merchants whose interests were often threatened by the fluctuations inherent in a market system. There arose, as Polanyi points out, an unorganized set of movements, legislative reforms and administrative actions to limit the effects of self-regulation. For example, this was the time when early legislations appeared to limit the hours and places of work of women and children, the growth of labour unions, as well as legislations that presaged the welfare state. The dual idea of the non-viability of an idealized institution of a self-regulating market and the emergence of organized movements demanding protection from the state against the uncertainties inherent in the self-regulating market shows up both the similarity and the difference in the transitions in the non-Western part of the world. The similarity lies in the absolute failure of the Indian state in instituting a formal and rationalized trading sphere in the area, and the difference shows up in the absence of the formation of movements around protection for “occupational groups”. At the heart of the difference is the relation between the ‘market’ and the ‘state’. Polanyi’s thesis is founded upon the assumption of a legitimate and viable state that is empowered to negotiate with organized civil society movements, a condition conspicuous by its absence in Manipur.

Manipur’s problems are generally described as “ethnic conflicts” or “insurgency related problems” or “territorial disputes” and likes. This manner of representing the problem, however, misses the point that the full-fledged armed conflicts that are consuming Manipur today are manifestations of historical economic relations that have over centuries created a relation between these ethnic communities and their geographical habitat. There is abundant evidence in the literature on pre-colonial history of the region of wars among the ethnicities that have continually redrawn the boundaries among them. Securing trading advantage by subjugating the people of a distant area was one of the prime motives behind most of these wars. But the crucial difference

between now and then lies in the nature of the boundaries. As Oinam²⁰ points out, political victory and consequent authority over an area and its people were not marked, unlike today, by physically occupying a territory and posting security forces at the border to demarcate one's territory. Political authority was established through the collection of taxes/rents from the people without extending the administrative system of the victor over the vanquished. This all, however, changed with colonialism. The first territorial boundary creating treaty was the Yandaboo Treaty (1826) that was signed between the British and the Burmese with the Manipuri king Gambhir being one of the signatories.

Economic security, given this history, has thus come to be merged with the issue of a historical identity which in its turn is fashioned around the vision of a homeland conceptualized, as the political circumstances of the time demands, with a hard territorial boundary along the line of a nation state. One can understand why an agreement between the Indian government and the powerful Naga insurgent group NSCN (I-M) to create a greater Nagalim whose borders would eat into the Naga majority northern districts of Manipur was so strongly opposed by the valley-based Meiteis of Manipur. It would have meant that the entire northern hilly area of Manipur with all its natural resources would be taken away from under the jurisdiction of the state of Manipur creating both economic and security problems for the valley-based Meiteis. The problem becomes specially acute when one takes the Kuki dominated southern districts into account and realizes that a greater Nagalim would virtually trap the Meitei community between two hostile hill tribes as well as make it very difficult for them to meet their economic needs which is mostly served by importing goods either from inland India via Assam or Nagaland or from Burma via the southern hills of Manipur which are abodes of the Kuki tribes.

These territorial issues have thus made unimpeded flow of both goods and human traffic across the state very difficult and ultimately explains the violence around trading and the predominance of illegal trading. The three major ethnic groups, the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis have each staked their claims, albeit informally or illegally, on certain crucial transit points of transportation of goods to and from Moreh. For example, the National Highway 39 is used strategically by the Naga insurgents for blockade purposes as soon as it enters into northern Manipur, which is a Naga stronghold. The Kuki and Meitei insurgents are still fighting out for dominance over the turf of the open border next to the Namphalong market. Both the groups want to have control over the large volume of illegal trade that passes through this point. As the Meitei insurgents enjoy some support from the military junta in Burma, they have been able to establish some strongholds in the very inaccessible border areas of the southern districts of Manipur from where they strike out against Kuki strongholds in the hilly areas around the Namphalong market.

But unlike in Western Europe, the Indian state does not enjoy the moral authority to act as the arbiter in these economy related conflicts. It is the lack of legitimacy of the institutional authority of the state that explains the absence of civil society organizations of occupational groups negotiating with the state. Though nominally speaking there are occupational groups like Traders' Cooperatives and Chambers of Commerce who are supposed to represent traders' interests, in actuality these organizations are permeated through and through by the ethnic insurgent groups and mostly work for promoting the interest of particular ethnic groups. Therefore the economy of trading and its ups and downs are inseparable from the resources controlled by the insurgents through their strategy of extortion/taxes.

Unlike a rationalized liberal economy where income generated through economic activities gets redistributed in the form of income for the "inputs" or "factors of production" thus

creating interest-groups out of 'inputs' like labourers and entrepreneurs, in mostly non-liberal societies as in the Northeast economic activities are not organized in terms of 'inputs' and 'outputs' but along the lines of societal and community relations. For example, in Moreh trade in particular goods are primarily controlled by particular ethnic communities since historically these communities, through their kinship and other social networks, have consolidated their hold over the market of these goods (such as the Tamils in gold ornaments, the Punjabis in automobile parts, the Biharis in cereals, edible oils and tobacco-based intoxicants) and the profits that are generated by activating community-related channels. As we have seen in the ethnographic part, today the ethnic insurgent groups have organized themselves enough to demand a share in this profit through their taxing/extortion tactics. But then even this system of redistribution of income from trading is organized along membership in ethnic communities. Each ethnic militia uses the resource they generate through taxing/extortion to strengthen their own organization in terms of supporting existing cadres and their families, recruiting newer cadres with assurance of financial support and then supporting other developmental projects geared towards the development of that particular ethnic community. It is this state of organization of ethnicity-specific economy and polity that gets called "parallel government", and when it comes to Manipur or to the Northeast in general, each region is a showcase for a contest over control of governance by several "parallel governments", only one of which is the institution of the Indian state. These ethnicity-based parallel governments tend to turn Ferdinand Tonnies'²¹ distinction between the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* on their head, since here only ascriptive qualifications are taken into consideration in forming representative 'interest groups'.

Our understanding of the 'economy' of trading and the potentials for development of the region through growth of trading opportunities will therefore be very incomplete if we look at it simply through the optic of the development of a rationalized self-regulating liberal market sphere. Classic works like Polanyi's opens our eyes to the limitations of idealizing and analytically isolating a self-regulating market sphere, but when it comes to understanding the local problems of the development of a rationalized market sphere in those parts of the world where the state is an outcome of colonialism and thus does not enjoy the social and political legitimacy among its 'citizens' we have to look deeper into how the contest over the power to control the economy is fought between the 'society' and the 'state'. Because, unlike the liberal states and societies in Western Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, in these cases the society and the state are not in harmony with each other. In these cases the society, which has a history of autonomy from the state, resents the power the state wields in organizing the society in its own image and contests it in its own terms.²² This is what we witness in the violent events that regularly occur in Moreh in the course of something apparently rational like trading and in the conflicts over distribution of the profits from trading. To obtain a proper understanding of the specific problems around the question of the illegality/informality of the trading patterns through Moreh, we therefore have to seek an answer both at the universal and at the local level. Universally, the uncertainties generated by a rationalized self-regulating market sphere gives rise to organized movements against its complete and exhaustive control over social entities like labour, women, children, merchants and so forth. In this respect, we find a comparative analysis on a global scale useful. However, this comparative universal answer has to be complemented by an understanding of the local/regional relation between the people and the state and the historical development of this relation that throws up the local identities of social entities. The universal can manifest only through its local form.

Notes

¹ B. G. Verghese, “Unfinished Business in Northeast” in C. J. Thomas (ed.) *Engagement and Development: India's Northeast and Neighbouring Countries*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, pp: 26-37.

² Vineeta Shanker, (2004), “Towards an Asian Economic Community: Exploring the Past”, in Nagesh Kumar (ed.) *Towards and Asian Economic Community: Vision of a New Asia*, Research and Information System for Developing Countries, New Delhi.

³ See Brown, R. (1873), *Statistical Account of Native State of Manipur and The Hill Territory Under Its Rule*. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing. Also by the same author (1869) *Annual Administrative Report of Manipur: 1868–69*.

⁴ See Bhagat Oinam, “Manipur”, http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Jrp/pdf/jrp_133_04.pdf.

⁵ See John Parratt (2005), *Wounded Land: Politics and Identity in Modern Manipur*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, p 6.

⁶ See Gangumei Kamei's article “Genesis of the Nagas and the Kukis” in Naorem Sanajaoba (ed.) *Manipur Past and Present*, Vol. III (1995), pp.21-47.

⁷ Kamei (2002), *Ethnicity and Social Change: An Anthology of Essays*, Imphal.

⁸ See Bhagat Oinam, “Manipur”, http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Jrp/pdf/jrp_133_04.pdf.

⁹ S N Arambam Parratt describes the situation in her book *The Religion of Manipur* (1980:150) thus, “There developed a much more rigid application of purity rules than had ever been the case before in Manipur. Onerous restrictions were placed upon the consumption of food and drink...All hill people and Europeans, pagan and Christian, were considered *mangba*. Even for a European to touch the plinth of a Meitei house at this time rendered it unclean and demanded a fine and purification. Rules on intermarriage were strictly enforced ...” (*mangba* means “unclean/outcaste” in Meitei language, as opposed to *sengba* which is “clean”. Author's addition)

¹⁰ I will use the term “Manipuri” whenever I discuss some movements that sought to represent the state as a whole. Though the people involved in such movements were Meiteis, I have decided to use “Manipuri” rather than “Meitei” because the Meitei perceived their movements as representing everyone in the state. Whether the opinions of all other ethnicities in the state were taken into consideration is an issue that reveals another dimension of the conflicts that are tearing this state apart.

¹¹ John Parratt (2005), *Wounded Land: Politics and Identity in Modern Manipur*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, p 21.

¹² Comprehensive accounts of both these incidents can be found in all works on the history of modern Manipur. For starters, the reader can look at either J. Parratt (2005) or B. G. Verghese (2006).

¹³ Ibid Verghese.

¹⁴ N. Bijoy Singh (2005), “Presidential Speech” in G. Das, N. B. Singh, and C. J. Thomas (eds), *Indo-Myanmar Border Trade: Status, Problems and Potentials*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi.

¹⁵ Dimapur in Nagaland is an important commercial town of Nagaland in extreme North East India. Dimapur is an axis around which the economic and developmental activities of the district are centred. The town is also a gateway to Nagaland and Manipur. It is a major railhead and the only airport in Nagaland and is also well connected with the neighbouring states of Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram by National Highway 39.

¹⁶ “informal trade with Myanmar at Moreh was close to Rs 2,000 crore (as per a recent Rites study), against the Rs 10 crore of formal trade” (Mohan Padmanabhan, “Ministry for full trade with Myanmar at Moreh”, *Business Line*, Saturday Oct 7, 2006).

¹⁷ Amar Yumnam, (2005), *Indo-Myanmar Trade through Moreh: Status and Assessment*, in G. Das, N. Bijoy Singh and C. J. Thomas (eds) *Indo-Myanmar Border Trade: Status, Problems and Potentials*, Akansha Publications, New Delhi, p. 80.

¹⁹ Karl Polanyi, (2001), *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Second Edition from Beacon Press, Boston.

²⁰ See Bhagat Oinam, “Manipur”, http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Jrp/pdf/jrp_133_04.pdf.

²¹ See Ferdinand Toennies (1957), *Community and Society: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, translated and edited by Charles P. Loomis, The Michigan State University Press, East Lansing.

²² See Sudipta Kaviraj (2001), “In Search of Civil Society” in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds.) *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge University Press) for a more elaborate discussion of the relation between pre-colonial societies and the colonial state especially in India. The dynamic of the relation between the post-colonial Indian state and its society derives from this history.

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