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Manipur Violence -A Threat To Cooperative Federalism In India ?

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ABSTRACT – The term ‘ Cooperative Federalism ’ means coming together of centre and state to solve issues of conflict without disrupting the unity and integrity of our country .The current PM Narendra Modi has been emphasizing the concept of ‘Cooperative Federalism ’ ever since coming to power. Recently a havoc was created in the whole nation due to the ethnic violence between the two indigenous community of northeastern state of Manipur ‘Kuki and Meitei the unexpected silence from centre and state as well as lack of robust action to curb the Violence is putting up a question on the idea of ‘cooperative Federalism ’ in India.

INTRODUCTION -

Cooperative Federalism is when the centre and the state act as a team to promote the democratic idea. If conflict arises it is the responsibility of the centre State duo to resolve it with collaborative efforts and handle issues cooperatively in the best interest of the nation. However the term ‘Cooperative Federalism ’ even the term federalism is not mentioned in our constitution. Article 1 of our constitution describes India as a Union of State. The Indian Model of Federalism is based on Canadian Model with a Strong Union. The reason for it was to protect the vast diversity and maintain unity in the country.DR BR Ambedkar called Indian federalism as “Indestructible Union of Destructible States “.The 7th schedule of Indian constitution has provided three lists – The Union, The State ,The Concurrent for the success of federal principles. In the Union List the centre will make laws ,in the State List the state will make laws (exceptions exist) It is in the sphere of Concurrent List where the principle of ‘ Cooperative Federalism ’ comes into play. In subjects mentioned in the concurrent list both centre and state can make laws that’s there where chances are high that conflict will occur. For the better interest of the country centre and state are advised to peacefully resolve the issue and come to an amicable decision. While many political scientists criticised Indian Model of Federalism to be biased in favour of centre for example KC wheare called it ‘quasi federal ’ .Paul Appleby ‘extremely federal ’ .Morris Jones ‘ bargaining Federalism ’ . Many political thinkers and scientists however also supported Indian Federalism . Granville Austin in his book ‘The Indian Constitution -Cornerstone Of A Nation ’ termed Indian federalism as Cooperative Federalism which was made to meet the country’s unique and peculiar needs. In his book ‘Politics In India’ Rajani Kothari stated that ‘India’s federalism is asymmetrical yet cooperative with the constitution serving as a binding force between the centre and the states . DurgaDas Basu argues that ‘Indian Federalism is quasi federal in nature with cooperative mechanism ensuring unity while respecting state autonomy.Sarkaria Commission 1983 suggested ways to enhance cooperation and harmony between centre and state govt.Interstate council (article 263) Zonal council,

National Development Council which has been disbanded in 2015 are institutions to promote cooperative Federalism in India. In recent times with the coming of Narendra Modi the concept of cooperative federalism gained lots of attention. Right after coming into power the Modi govt replaced Planning Commission which had been criticised as 'top-down' or one size fits all model with NITI Aayog that encourages cooperative Federalism by involving states in decision making. GST and its success can be termed as another achievement in field of cooperative federalism. The GST council has members from both Centre and State. Further initiatives like 'Make In India', 'Digital India', 'Swachh Bharat abhiyan' promotes healthy relationship between centre and state government. Recently the ruling government popularised the phrase "double engine government" which means same ruling party in both centre and state for smooth functioning of between the centre and state and thereby promoting Cooperative Federalism. Even with all these positive points the recent happenings in the North-Eastern State of Manipur and disheartening silence on part of central and state government is forcing the people to put a question mark on the effectiveness of the principle of 'Cooperative Federalism.'

ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN MANIPUR –

Often called 'Land of Jewel' The North Eastern State Manipur lies in between latitude of 23.83N-25.68N and longitude 93.03E – 94.78E. In the north it is surrounded by Nagaland, in the west Assam, in the south it has Manipur and in the southeast it has Myanmar. Manipur became part of India in 1949 by signing 'Instrument of accession' as a union territory and gained full statehood in 1972. Geographically Manipur can be categorised in two distinct areas of rugged hills and narrow valleys. As per 2011 census Manipur has a population of about 28,55,794 with more than 50% in Imphal valley. TC Hodson in his article 'The Native Tribes of Manipur' as well as Edward Gait in his 'A History of Assam' talked about the belief among people in Manipur that the state has roots in Mahabharata. The Meitlies as people of Manipur called themselves believed Arjun the third Pandava came to Manipur and married the local women who became ancestors of their race. However the claim was refuted by the scholars. Manipur is a multi ethnic state with distinctive socio cultural personality. The state's three main community Kuki, Meiti and Naga never had smooth relations. Insurgency violent conflicts are common in the state. 90% of the state's land is hill and is occupied by Kuki and Naga. They ran their own village system over there. The remaining 10% of the land belonged to valley. The main point of conflict is between Kuki and Naga and Kuki-Naga vs Meitei community and often related to demand for autonomy and demand for ST status. Nagas formed United Naga Council and wanted integration of the Nagas into the present state of Nagaland. Kuki formed Kuki National Organization and demanded separate Kuki Statehood. While the relations were never smooth between Kuki and Naga incidents that took place in 1992 took a bitter turn. In 1992 Sardar Hills which belonged to Nagas was upgraded to a district and given to kukis to act as buffer state between the Meities and Nagas (Honray 1981:31). In the same year another incident happened in Indo Myanmar border town Moreh. It was a place famous for black businesses and hub a drugs supply. Naga insurgents were infamous for collecting taxes over here and kukis refusal to pay made the situation extremely stressed. Killing of a Kuki O Haokip and the Violence that followed worsened the situation. Apart from Kuki and Naga conflict Even Meities didn't have any positive relation with any of these two. Meities lived in 10% Valley area but they had access to productive soils, trade and commerce, transport facilities, education, beneficiaries of all government schemes, medical facilities. Even though Geographical position favored Meities which is a majority community in the Manipur. Their concern was unable to buy land in the hills due to insertion of article 371(C) and forest rights in which only Nagas and Kuki had access. Meitei raised concern for the illegal settlements in the hill from Myanmar and Bangladesh and illegal drug trade and to prevent these happenings They have been demanding ST status for them since 1981.. Their purpose they say it to preserve the indigenous land and culture of Manipur from illegal immigrants. Against Meities demands Kuki and Nagas asserted Meitei is a dominant community. In state legislature also they had 40 /60 seats. Their language is in the 8th schedule of the Indian constitution. All

development works in the state has benefitted the Meities only . Further Meitei government's interference in the hills in name of ' war on drugs ' and illegal immigrants never pleased the Kukis and Nagas tribes. Meities relentless efforts to gain ST status wasn't given importance by the State government. They were given OBCs status in the year 1995 . since 1981 till present Meities made various efforts. Most Recently in April 2023 Meitei Tribal Union recommended Union Ministry Of Tribal affairs to give ST status to the Meities Community while the union ministry asked the government to respond to them state government turned deaf ear. The absence of response from the state government made some members of the Meitei Tribes Union to approach High Court urging it to issue ' Mandamus ' to the government to answer the recommendation. The High Court Issued an order in this matter. High Court's order created a storm in the State .Kukis and Nagas United against the Meities. The protest which started peacefully in form of 'Tribal Solidarity March' took a hateful turn. The State witnessed bloodshed, injuries of the innocents , displacements of thousands of people.Holy Religious places were burnt down. The situation hasn't come to control even now. The video that surfaced on internet of two kuki women raped, paraded naked made the situation worst. Whole country who wasn't comprehending the seriousness of the situation raised their voices against the inhumane atrocities.

The happenings in Manipur that captured attention of the whole world got silent treatment from the own government both centre and the state. While the government expressed it's grief on social media the lack of robust efforts to curb Violence is alarming. For the record Assam Rifles, Armed Forces have been deployed in the state internet was banned however it impacted negatively as the atrocities came to light quite later. The situation hasn't been slightly better in Manipur even after 4 months. The opposition even passed no confidence motion against the ruling government for its silence on the Manipur Incident that shook the whole Nation. Questions are arising what happened to the idea of " Cooperative Federalism " here? Where are the collaborative actions from the centre and state . Despite ruling party being the same in both centre and state what is causing the delays? All these answers can be answered when the government will come forward and respond.

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