

Original Article

# Infrastructural Hegemony, Governance and Ethnicity: An Observation from the Autonomous Areas of Manipur

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**Abstract** - The nature of participation divulges the state of governance where belongingness is imperative to create an environment of healthy participation. Out of the various factors, governance suffered in the multi-ethnic diverse state of Manipur as there is a serious issue of belongingness to the governing systems due to the colossal infrastructure disparity between the autonomous areas and the valley. Besides widening the gap of infrastructural belongingness, infrastructural hegemony is a contributing factor in deepening the ethno-social divide whereby intra-state ethnic tensions have led to negating the various initiatives to mend the state of governance. It is explicit that the objectives of good governance have been ignored while stimulating the strategy of infrastructural hegemony. A systematic endeavour to concentrate almost every infrastructural expansion within the valley is inseparable from deteriorating the state's corruption level.

**Keywords** - Belongingness, Corruption, Good governance, Hegemony, Participation.

## 1. Introduction: Conceptual Underpinning

Governance does not subsist in a vacuum but is intricately linked with infrastructure in security, connectivity, health, education and the growth in the quality and maturity of democratic institutions. It can be appraised within the dispensation of infrastructural facilities and democratic institutions intended to deliver public services. Infrastructure is the basic facilities that are essential for the economy and various other governing systems to function to sustain the people's social, political, cultural and economic needs. One of the most comprehensive definitions of infrastructure is stated as the infrastructure supporting human activities that include complex and interrelated physical, social, ecological, economic, and technological systems such as transportation and energy production and distribution; water resources management; waste management; facilities supporting urban and rural communities; communications; sustainable resources development; and environmental protection" (ASCE, 2009).

Infrastructure is a multifaceted and integrated concept consisting of physical assets, material facilities, and network systems needed for the modern governing system to attain the goal of good governance. A broad simplistic definition of infrastructure that integrates physical components, institutional systems and societal needs is advocated as "the physical components of interrelated systems providing commodities and services essential to enable, sustain, or enhance societal living conditions" (Fulmer, 2009: 32). While contextualizing the noted definitions of infrastructure,

the paper restricts the concept of infrastructure to physically tangible assets that include educational institutions, hospitals, roads, banks, and the railway lines among others.

Healthy participation enhances accountability, which is a barometer of good governance (Shah, 2007), and infrastructural belongingness is imperative to promote governance as participation is determined by the nature of ownership. Out of the various factors, governance suffers in the multi-ethnic state of Manipur due to a lack of concrete and appropriate policies to build sustainable infrastructural belongingness in the state. Since attaining statehood (1972) (Rao, 1972: 127), the ethnic-majority community in the valley had cornered almost every bit of infrastructural development at the cost of the tribal people in the hills.

Without undermining the consequences of the protracted strain relationship between the state and the people, there is every possibility that huge infrastructure unevenness has resulted in a deepening ethno-social divide. Thereby, intra-state ethnic tensions contributed to the waning of governance. While concentrating on the autonomous areas of Manipur, the paper addresses some concerns, like how good governance has been affected due to failure to promote infrastructural belongingness. What led the various governments in the state to concentrate almost every noticeable infrastructure in the valley alone? In what way has infrastructural hegemony deepened the ethno-social divide in the state?



## 2. Institutionalization of Autonomous Council

Being aware of the obvious socio-cultural variations of Northeast India in relation to the rest of (colonial) India, especially the hill people, prompted the colonial rulers to introduce a separate administrative mechanism to govern the region. The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, an outcome of the Government of India Act of 1870, was, in effect, instituted to administer the "backward tracts" of the Northeast. This regulation led to the birth of the "line system", which was applicable in the then province of Assam. Regulation No. 5 of 1873 allowed the Government "to prescribe, and from time to time to alter by notification in the (official gazette), a line to be called 'The Inner Line' in each or any of the above-named districts. The (State Government) may, by notification in the (official gazette), prohibits all (citizens of India or any class of such citizens) or any persons residing in or passing through such districts from going from beyond such line without a pass under the hand and seal of the chief executive officer of such district or such other officer as he may authorize to grant such pass" (Govt. of India, Ministry of Home Affairs).

"Line system" was introduced to regulate the movement of illegal migrants, protect the ethnic culture and tribal social practices, and restrict encroachment by the "outsiders". Above all, it was promulgated with the hope of preventing frequent disturbances by the ethnic hill tribes in the wake of the introduction of unrestricted trade in the borders (Bhattacharjee, 1975: 424). So, essentially the "line system" was institutionalized to keep away the disturbances that may affect trade flow. Initially, these areas were called "backward tracts" to distinguish them from the main/advanced tracts. Those backward tracts come within the category of Scott's (1998) "Zomia" construction of non-state spaces and "stateless society", a theory propounded by Clastres (1989). With the development of the Government of India Act of 1935, the backward tracts were rechristened as Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas. Lushai Hills (now Mizoram), the Naga Hills and the North Cachar Hills (now Dima Hasao district, Assam) were within the category of excluded areas (Reid, 1944: 19). The hill areas of Manipur were a part of the excluded areas. The reasons for exclusion may be many but can be summarized as unwillingness to administer the vast and unproductive hill tracts, non-interference policy, rigid control of trade and commerce, to protect and safeguard the tribal land and their distinct social and cultural practices. Thus, from the very initial days of the colonial expansion in Northeast's tribal areas, the British officials were conscious of the fact that the ethnic tradition and culture of the tribes in the hills and that of the people in the plains were not identical (Rao, 1976: 152).

With the dawn of India's independence, the Sixth Schedule, meant for autonomous council, was included in the Indian constitution as a constitutional strategy to integrate and nationalize the Northeast tribal areas. It is a

constitutionally mandated device that aims to integrate and identify the tribal areas with the rest of the country. The Constitution of India thus acknowledged the distinctive ethno-political situation prevailing in the Northeast tribal areas. Hence, an exclusive constitutional provision was instituted to mediate and acclimatize the typical ethno-tribal problems. While institutionalizing a distinct constitutional space, the autonomous council hopes to provide a self-contained code for the governance of tribal areas (Agnihotri, 1994, 83).

## 3. Autonomous Areas in Manipur

As per Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971, the provision of the Act is applicable to entire hill areas of Manipur as determined by the President by any notification issued under sub-section (2) of section 52 of the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 (20 of 1963) (Govt. of India, Ministry of Law and Justice). By virtue of this Act, entire hill areas inhabited by various tribes are within the jurisdiction of autonomous areas. Following the formation of Manipur state, Article 371C, which provides a special provision to the tribes in Manipur, was inserted by the Constitution (Twenty-Seventh Amendment) Act, 1971 (Constitution of India, Part XXI). According to Article 371C, the areas that are within the first schedule are defined as hill areas, which become the autonomous region in the state of Manipur. Based on Article 371C, the state constituted the "Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Areas Committee) order, 1972", in which the members will be exclusively from the hill areas, and the constitutional provision does not allow the Meitei in the valley to buy and purchase land in the hills that constituted autonomous areas. However, right from its inception of the District Council Act, it is not an extension of the Sixth Schedule (Bhatia, 2010: 41) like other states in the sub-region of India. Although various autonomous councils have their own share of limitations and complexities (Kolas, 2017: 24), leading to demands ranging from questioning whether they had catered for the aspiration of the tribal people to demand greater devolution of powers is not the concern of the paper. Suffice it to know that the tribal people in Manipur had been protesting against the Manipur (Hill Area) District Council Act, 1971, as it has failed to ensure a constitutionally guaranteed Sixth Schedule for the local self-government. Nonetheless, the various Amendments of the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, such as 2000, 2008 and 2011, were not intended to bring the same under the Sixth Schedule.

## 4. Autonomous Areas and Infrastructural Hegemony

Unlike the linguistic basis in the rest of India, the Northeast Reorganization Act of 1972 was done largely based on ethno-territorial to meet the demands of various ethnic tribal groups, leading to the grant of full-fledged

statehood to Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura and the creation of Mizo (Lushai) Hills to a Union territory. But the state of Manipur was created with an amalgamation of the valley and the hill areas irrespective of the aspirations and demands of the hill tribes. Mention may be made that even during the colonial days, there were dual governing systems in Manipur, one for the valley and the other for the hill areas (Hassan, 2006: 7). The British initiated to bring the hills and valley together as an administrative strategy. However, the colonial administrators followed the dual system of governance and rarely made the hill tribes the subject of Maharaja (Johnstone, 1896). Such dual governing systems were necessitated as, despite intrinsic socio-cultural differences, the "dangerous Mussulman," "intriguing Manipuris", and "wild hill tribes" were made to come together under British control (Mackenzie, 1884: 430). Overlooking this well-established convention, however, the formation of the Manipur state simply endorsed the ethno-majority Meitei hegemony and its chauvinistic agenda. Consequent to the formation of the state, the distribution of assembly seats in the state legislature palpably favoured the majority ethnic Meitei as in the house of 60-member, the ratio of the valley and the hill areas MLAs is 40:20 although the valley comprises just one-tenth of the state's geographical areas. Idyllically, though everyone can contest from the general (unreserved) seats, such acuity lacks basic rationale as there is not an iota chance of winning if the tribal people choose to contest from the general seats. So, it is as good that the general (Meitei) cannot contest in the reserved seats for the tribal people. When such is an arrangement and proportion of the seats in the state legislature, it is a farce to envisage that both the valley people and the hill tribes are drawing equal chances to rule the state.

Since majority rule in the number game democratic politics, the proportion of tribal MLAs in the house underscored that the tribal people would be in the perpetual minority. The existing proportion of assembly seats means that the hill tribes will never get the requisite numbers in their favour to rule the state. Accordingly, any tribal legislator whosoever becomes the leader of the house would be constrained to act at the mercy of the majority ethnic community who command the number. At best, an incumbent tribal leader can maintain the status quo when it comes to sensitive issues like balancing infrastructure, as crossing the permissible limit of the valley legislators will endanger the chair. All these years, irrespective of the party affiliations and ideologies, the valley legislators had made sure that any discussion in the house related to the issue of balancing infrastructure development was throttled. The latest instance is the state government's refusal to table in the house "The Manipur (Hill Areas) Autonomous District Council Bill, 2021", which was recommended by the HAC (Hill Areas Committee) on the ground that the proposed draft bill is a complicated issue that requires consultation of all stakeholders. At the most, the recommendation of the HAC

is a step to ensure even development of both the hills and the valley in the state.

The deterioration of the state of infrastructural hegemony in educational institutions over the years through the culmination and perpetuation of political domination is quite obvious. To have a glance of it, the stage is wide-open for everyone to observe why all the central and national institutions of repute like Manipur University (MU), Central Agricultural University (CAU), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), National Sports University (NSU), Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS), National Institute of Technology (NIT), Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus, Imphal (IGNTU-RCI), Tribal Research Institute (TRI), National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), Veterinary and Animal Husbandry College, College of Art and Film Studies, and College of Nursing, are in the valley (Kaisii, 2006: 49). It was just last year (2022) that the Churachandpur Medical College (CMC), the first medical college in the autonomous areas started its first academic session with an intake capacity of 100 seats.

To make matter worst, the only national institute meant for the autonomous areas, the Indian Institute of Information Technology, Manipur (IIIT, Manipur), is meant to be situated at Nynthoupham village along the NH-2 continue to function at Mantripukri, Imphal, since the commencement of its session from July 2015 as the temporary campus. If Mantripukri Imphal is a transit campus, the infrastructural development presumed to be its permanent campus at Nynthoupham village is still farfetched. No other better reasons can be comprehended that led the institution to function in Imphal other than to enhance infrastructural hegemony. When the secretariat of the state legislative assembly, high court, university, institute of medical sciences, law college, and engineering college, among others, need to be positioned in the state's capital for administrative reasons and logistical requirements, why not other institutions noted above have been proportionally built for infrastructural belongingness? If not to perpetuate infrastructural hegemony, what has compelled the dominant ethnic group to persistently insist that every major institution should be in the valley alone? There is no confusion that these institutions themselves are the seat of power, and their function will determine how power plays in everyday life.

The scene of infrastructural hegemony related to those government colleges affiliated with Manipur University is not different. Most of the forty colleges under government management and funding are in the valley, and only seven have been situated in autonomous areas. Those government colleges, which are in the autonomous areas include Hill College, Tadubi; Pettigrew College, Ukhrul; Presidency College, Motbung; Lamka College, Churachandpur;

Tamenglong College, Tamenglong; United College, Chandel; and Churachandpur College in Churachandpur. The status is the same for the government aided-colleges. Out of the total twenty-three affiliated government-aided colleges, there are just five colleges that are in the autonomous areas, which include Bethany Christian College, Churachandpur; Don Bosco College, Maram; Mt. Everest College, Taphou; Damdei Christian College, Kanglatongbi; and Moreh College, Chandel. Other than Churachandpur Medical College (CMC) and FHW Training School in Churachandpur, there is not a single government-run institute, be it a Medical Sciences, Dental College, Engineering College, Law College, College of Teacher's Education, Nursing College or any other professional colleges in the autonomous areas (Manipur University, Information Provided in College, 2019). A GNM (General Nursing Midwifery) school in the autonomous region initiated under the central sponsored scheme in 2010-2011 at Duigailong village in Tamenglong lies abandoned since construction was halted in 2020 for a reason best known to the concerned authorities. There may not be an immediate and practical answer for this mammoth gap in infrastructural developments between the autonomous areas and the valley. But, what is palpable is that infrastructural hegemony cannot be more crystal clear as the figure explicitly indicates.

Another classic strategy of perpetuating infrastructural hegemony is the ongoing construction of a railway line in the state. The survey of the prospect of including Manipur in the railway map of India has been going on for some years. As part of this workout, some policymakers, along with the understanding of the state government, had formulated and submitted the proposal for the railway line from Diphu (Assam) to Karong (Manipur) via Peren (Nagaland) in 1996-97, which was endorsed by the then Railway Minister, Ram Vilas Paswan. The proposal was incorporated in the Railway Budget, and the proposed line was included in the Railway Map of India, published in 1996-97 (Govt. of India, XII Lok Sabha Debates). After so many years of consistent effort, the Government of India eventually conceded to include Manipur in the railway map of India. However, in the course of time, the railway line project was diverted from its earlier agreed proposal from Diphu (Assam) to Karong (Manipur) via Peren (Nagaland), the foundation stone of which was laid by Nitish Kumar way back on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1998 to Jiribam (Assam) –Tupul (Manipur) via Noney. The ongoing construction of the railway line will connect 7 stations, such as Dolakhal, Kaimai Road, Kambiron, Thingou, Khongsang and Noney, before joining Tupul, yet except Noney, the rest will be relatively small stations. Though a few kilometers longer, the abandoned line from Diphu to Karong will connect some prominent places in autonomous areas such as Karong, Senapati, Kangpokpi, Sapermaina and Kanglatongbi, of course, not to forget Peren in Nagaland. Karong to Kohima (Nagaland's capital) is just at a distance of 73.4 kms, which is a little over from Kohima to Dimapur (71

kms), the nearest railhead for Manipur and Nagaland as of now. Going by the abandoned agreed proposal, Karong can easily be constructed as an alternative station to cater for the needs of both Manipur and Nagaland.

Frequent shifting and reframing of plan priorities by different governments is a clear sign of negligence and a lack of sincerity in developing infrastructure in autonomous areas. There is a grave doubt that the accepted initial proposal was abandoned due to some inexplicable political consideration as it would pass through the autonomous areas from Karong to Imphal. This sort of infrastructural development strategy has added fuel to the existing feeling of negligence, exploitation and suppression by the tribal people in a multi-ethnic state. Diverting the agreed railway line is not an exception to the continuation of the sinister design of infrastructural hegemony how to sound the reasons may be. Beyond doubt, there is a computing strategy of the reason behind the concentration of almost all infrastructural developments in the valley alone. It may not be evenly proportionate, but the yearning of the hill tribes is that some central and quality institutions should be based in the autonomous areas to create infrastructural belongingness to promote good governance. When the people in the state find it hard to evolve a mutual interest due to the absence of mutual tradition between the people in the valley and the hill tribes, infrastructural hegemony has just aggravated the situation.

Further, anybody can guess why almost every state highway and district connecting road should start through from Imphal when National Highway 2 (erstwhile NH 39) crossed Nagaland to Mao (Senapati, Manipur) unto Imphal. Why can't suitable alternative connecting road infrastructures be explored and built for balance and equitable connectivity from other parts of the state? Given the geographical location and nature of the terrain, quality road infrastructure can be constructed from in and around Mao-Maram-Senapati-Kangpokpi to Ukhrul and Tamenglong, the east and the west district respectively, to enhance infrastructural belongingness and connectivity. A creative magnitude of such infrastructural belongingness will not only bring about balanced and inclusive connectivity but also be economically viable and can certainly cut short the distance to Dimapur (Nagaland), the nearest railhead for Manipur and Nagaland. Though not an all-weather and standard black-topped, the road that starts from Kangpokpi to Tamenglong is also named as Imphal-Tamenglong (IT) road. To say that on account of topographical hilly terrain, infrastructural development is not feasible in the hill areas of Manipur is just ridiculous and preposterous. Some hill states in the Northeast with similar topography are far ahead infrastructurally as compared with the hill areas of the state.

It is popularly acknowledged that Yangmaso Saiza, from Ukhrul district, who was privileged to become the first Chief

Minister (July 1974 – December 1974) from the autonomous areas, had once travelled from Tadubi (Senapati district) to Ukhrul via Kharasom, which is known as Tadubi- Kharasom road that connects Dimapur (Nagaland) to Imphal, NH 2 (erstwhile NH 39) at Tadubi. However, the noted road has nowhere near adequately developed to a standard black topped all-weather road while easing the issue of transport bottlenecks between the autonomous districts of Ukhrul and Senapati. Exploring with a futuristic outlook and sincere effort to build this road as another international trade route connecting with Myanmar (Burma) is yet to be seen. Though the possibility of such connectivity is realistic, it has hardly been prioritized as materializing the same will bypass Imphal, which would hit hard the sentiment of the valley people. As per the Ministry of Road Transports and Highways Notification, Govt. of India, dated 7<sup>th</sup> March 2012, it notifies that "the highway starting from Tadubi on NH 2 connects Paomata and terminating at Ukhrul on NH 202 in the state of Manipur" will be called new NH 102A (Govt. of India, 2012: 2). Currently, the noted road, which was surveyed and approved as NH 102A is under construction for a two-lane. The systematic and calculative strategy of the valley people to keep the hill tribes in perpetual dependence had deprived and suppressed them as citizens of India from almost every infrastructural development worth mentioning. Infrastructure and road politics has contributed towards the backwardness of the autonomous areas.

Again, infrastructural hegemony in the banking institutions is very obvious since out of the total banks (204) in the state, just 55 banks are in the hill districts that comprised the autonomous areas (Govt. of Manipur, 2019: 29). Out of the 16 districts in the state, 6 districts are in the valley, and the rest 10 districts are in the autonomous areas. But the total number of banks (55) from all the districts of the autonomous areas is even less than the total banks in Imphal East district (66) alone. So, out of the total banks in the state, 149 banks are in the valley. In two hill districts viz., Phezawl and Kamjong, there is just one single bank each.

## 5. Infrastructural Hegemony and Governance

When the hill tribes and the valley people were obligated to come together in the same administrative unit, even though there was a dearth of mutual tradition, the ultimate policy of the state should have been on how to bring about inclusive infrastructural belongingness for good governance. However, the policy after attaining statehood is farfetched to develop a balanced infrastructural belongingness. Instead, every infrastructural development has been executed in consonance with the interest of the valley people at the cost of the hill tribes. An important obstacle to resolving the problems is "due to lack of inclusiveness of the Manipur identity. The course of history has one in which the Meitei valley dwellers dominated almost completely, so much so that the 'Manipuri' identity has today come to be almost synonymous with the Meitei identity" (Phanjouban, 2005:

281). The ultimate consequence of a vast infrastructural unevenness is that the hill tribes can hardly identify themselves with the governing systems of the state. Everyday experience demonstrates that people from autonomous areas are becoming strangers in their state due to huge infrastructural disparity. When the people from the autonomous areas cannot identify with the governing systems of the state, where is the sense of ownership to be boosted the same as theirs? The government's vision document conceded that "Manipur has experienced a marked disparity in terms of economic development between the hills and valley over the past several decades. This has been a serious socio-economic-political issue in Manipur over the decades" (Govt. of Manipur, Manipur Vision 2030, 2019:191). Such an imbalanced infrastructural development that is thoughtfully institutionalized to perpetuate ethnic-majority community hegemony has only added fuel to the already strained ethno-social divide between the hill tribes and the valley people.

Uneven infrastructural development has been strategically implemented to ensure that the ethnic-minority people from the autonomous areas permanently depend on the valley people for their basic needs. Since vertical expansion in the valley is saturated, the valley people are in full gear to promote horizontal expansion in various forms. The calculated and systematic demand of the valley people for a tribal status cannot be seen in isolation. Against such strategic demand has led to questioning the rationale of the insertion of Article 371C, which gives a special provision for the tribes in the state. To validate and rationalize such an avowal, there is already a well-crafted discourse among the valley scholars emphasizing that all the people of Manipur were tribal as per the tradition. Going further, this school of thought propagated the view that Manipur is essentially a hill state. Based on such well thought and strategic moves, the demand for the scheduled tribe status by the ethnic-majority Meitei is aimed at defeating the purpose of Article 371C effectively. It is not a secret that the ultimate goal of the demand for scheduled tribe status by the Meiteis is to co-herir the tribal land in the autonomous areas. Of course, behind every conflict in the state is essentially a land centric, and the ongoing conflict between Chin-Kuki-Zomi and the Meitei is not exceptional.

Nevertheless, all the infrastructural developments within the valley show that the hill people are rarely considered one. There is an intrinsic feeling of "we" and "they", which compelled the valley people to think only of themselves. Of course, not long ago, the valley people had labeled the hill tribes (Nagas) as *hao*, which roughly means *chin me* (where *chin* means hill and *me* means people), something related to outcaste and derogatory. When the valley people refer to the hill people as *chin me ne* (they are hill people), it is not so much different from tagging as "other". The hill tribes are looked down upon and considered weaker ethnic and low

ethnic origin. They have been discriminated against based on their location, ways of life, foot habits, worldviews and ethnic and cultural identity. The systematic prototype of hegemonic domination and subjugation of the hill tribes is not much different from the practice of pollution and purity within the caste hegemony. Incidents where the *haos* (people from the hills) were not welcomed in the home of the valley people, and the host sheltered them in the corridor are still fresh in the mind of many octogenarians from the autonomous areas. Even lately, those students who hailed from the hills and studied in Imphal faced similar discrimination, and they were treated differently, not just by the teachers but by the cooks also.

As a process of the social construction of reality and hegemonization, lower ethnic and social status has been attributed to the hill tribes, thereby constraining them from occupying a weaker social stratum. The people in the valley and the hill tribes hardly join together in any mutual common platforms for a mutually shared interest, but the latter as the "other" is categorical. Even though there is a claim that as per the tradition of the *Hou Chongba* festival, a representative of a *Hao* is imperative to make the festival complete (Lisam, 2011: 617), accorded to the hill tribes the same socio-cultural status of the Meiteis remains a distant dream. Such representation of the *Hao* in this particular festival is more symbolic and tokenism rather than creates a sense of oneness and fraternity. Likewise, the tale of *Makhel* (a village in the Senapati district where many Naga tribes claimed to have migrated) tradition says that the ancestors of the Meiteis and the Nagas are brothers. However, its authenticity and existential fact are shrouded in mystery. With this horrid social history and clear-cut ethno-social divide, jointly participating in better governance in unison is not happening, further aggravated due to infrastructural hegemony. Mutual inclusion and mutual reciprocation do not simply exist as historical traditions of ethno-social divide and hegemonic domination perpetuate. Far from identifying the state as an ideal institution of good governance, there is an acute sense of restlessness and anxiety among the hill tribes with the existence of administrative arrangements. Sentiments of these sorts fed the idea of armed rebel movements making the state paralyzed and sick. Thus, to safeguard and promote the interest of the respective ethnic community, every ethnic group has nurtured its own armed group, where at the time of attaining statehood, there was only the Naga National Council (NNC). Today, the major ethnic groups in the state are the Meitei (including *Pangal*, Meitei-Muslim), the Nagas and the Chin-Kuki-Zomi, which resulted in a triangular ethnic confrontation leading to overlapping of competing and contested space.

Because of infrastructural hegemony, for almost any immediate and important office-related matters and health issues, the hill people are bound to rush to Imphal, making them perpetually dependent on the valley people. The hill

people are steadily getting vulnerable to falling prey to a sinister design of the governing systems, hoping to let their work see the light of day. Those individuals hailing from the hills in their haste to return to their places find themselves paying tips to dealing clerks and concerned officials as they envisage that staying in the hotels in Imphal will be more expensive has increased corruption. Thus, another immediate consequence of infrastructural hegemony is the worsening culture of corruption. Coupled with language barriers, as many hailing from the autonomous areas are not comfortable with Meiteilon (Manipuri), the language of the ethnic-majority community –Meitei, they landed up paying tips while running from pillar to post. So long as the mission is soothing, people rarely consider paying tips as another form of bribe, which is illegal and immoral. Instead, perception has steadily gained ground that without obliging to pay tips, the files will not move.

Amidst the magnitude of infrastructure disparity between the autonomous areas and the valley, it is unlikely that the valley people will bid some of the privileges to hill tribes out of consideration for building a mutual interest. Given such an unfeigned binary situation, the hill tribes are increasingly getting critical of the state and its governing systems. The mounting lopsided and asymmetric infrastructural development not only kept the autonomous areas backwards but also made the hill tribes restless and agitated. Suppose the current trend of infrastructural development is of any indication. In that case, there is a bleak future that the people from the autonomous areas would get justice in the immediate near future. When the people of the autonomous areas in the span of the last 51 years find it hard to get any reputed national institute, where is the chance that they will attain one in the near future when the tension between the valley people and the hill tribes has aggravated? The slogan of territorial integrity was unheard of when the Nagas in the hills demanded territorial integration of the Nagas who inhabited contiguous areas. Today, territorial integrity has emerged as a rallying point for the valley people to come together, thereby aggravating ethnic tensions. Whatever the nature of ethnic conflicts may be, the issue of land and territory became a major bone of contention. Thus, against the backdrop of a huge infrastructure imbalance, demand for a state within a state is increasingly becoming a compelling option.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be summed up that the autonomous areas have denied any worthwhile infrastructural development, although the live line of the state NH 2 (erstwhile NH 39) passes through the heart of Senapati district, then known as the North district. The tribes in the hills have been the long-term victims of political, social and economic injustice as citizens of India in the state. It is pertinent to adopt a multi-pronged strategy to bring about infrastructural belongingness. It would be worthwhile to

work out a suitable constitutional mechanism for granting administrative autonomy for autonomous areas under the Indian federal system with adequate infrastructural schemes. Likewise, in future delimitation exercises, the composition of the state assembly needs to be comprehensively reviewed for

a democratic and just proportionate representation of the hills and the valley. Further, the autonomous areas should be given priority for any new proposal on infrastructural development in the state.

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