# Understanding the Ban of Bollywood in Manipur: Objectives, Ramifications and Public Consensus

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The proscription of Bollywood in 2000 by the *Revolutionary People's Front*[1] in the Northeast Indian state of Manipur has had remarkable effects on the local film industry. The industry has grown tremendously by mobilising audience, increasing demand and developing talent. However, the audiences' perception of Manipuri films has altered since then and the ban is often a subject of social ridicule. Observing responses offered by a sample of 50 individuals about their film consumption and using ideological frameworks such as cinema and nation-building, transnationalism, hybridity, 'can the subaltern speak?' and the nation as an 'imagined community' to understand them, this paper aims to uncover the void in the objectives of the ban, its impact and consequences, and public opinion about larger disputes surrounding neocolonisation and indigenous identity.

*Keywords: Manipuri films, ban of Bollywood, Indian cinema, Indianisation, nation-building, hybridity, subaltern.*

## 1.0 Introduction: the Context of Manipur

### 1.1 A Politically, Culturally and Religiously Contested Place

India is a country which forges its integrity through a unity in differences rather than in similarities. Although differences between and within states are prominent, the contrast of the culture and people of Northeast India with the mainland could not have been more pronounced. Not only is the region geographically isolated – linked only by a 14 km strait of land (Panda, 2013) – its people have been racially, religiously and culturally dissimilar throughout history, perhaps subscribing more to a Southeast Asian ethnicity than to a South Asian one.

Unfortunately, ethnic and cultural dissimilarity is not where the divide ends – it is a greatly volatile political issue. In the specific case of Manipur, one of the eight north-eastern states, history provides a reasonable explanation for this. Sinha (1987) recounts:

> Manipur enjoyed independence right up to the first two decades of the nineteenth century, except during the brief period of Burmese occupation between 1819 and 1826. In 1826 Raja Gambhir Singh liberated Manipur from the Burmese, but in the

[1] The Revolutionary People's Front is the political wing of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) whose objective is to restore the suspended freedom of Manipur and to resist the occupation force of India. (Global Security, 2011)

> process he took help of the British, and Manipur had to pay the price of it, it now had to work under British suzerainty. (Sinha, 1987, p.487)

When India regained its independence in 1947, Manipur was recognised as an independent princely state, and was the first to conduct a democratic election through full adult suffrage in the subcontinent. However, in October 15, 1949 – which is still lamented as a black day – the princely state of Manipur was merged with the union of India as a Chief Commissioner's Province. Following this, there were several transitions in her political construction till eventually it became a full-fledged state in January 21, 1972 as a result of the North Eastern Areas (Regulation) Act, 1971. (Datta, 1992)

This political transition did not come without any repercussions: the merger of the Kingdom of Manipur with India led to an uprising of the Meeties demanding an independent state, autonomous in its own right. However, as might have been predicted by the anarchic nature of global politics, "when one ethnic group is organised as an armed national liberation force threatening the security of a rival group – and the state is not seen as a reliable provider of security – it is easy to see why the latter too would turn to self-help as a way of finding security…" (Baruah, 2002, p.4179) This is the nature of militancy in Manipur; a sort of ethnic nationalism which is deemed to be against national integrity and are hence, tagged 'terrorists'. (Upadhyay, 2006)

However, the relationship between India and Manipur can be traced back to historical events which unsettled the state of affairs in the kingdom centuries before the merger in 1949. The name of the place itself – 'Manipur' – is by virtue of its origin, a Sanskritized version of erstwhile names of the Kingdom (Sharma, 2011); before the advent of Hinduism, Manipur (literally meaning 'a bejewelled land' in Sanskrit) was known by several other names to different territories in the vicinity.

> Poirei Meitei Leipak' or 'Kangleipak' to the indigenous people of Manipur more particularly Meiteis; 'Kathe' or 'Ponnas' to the Burmese; ' Hsiao-Po-lo-mein' to the Chinese; 'Cassay' to the Shans; 'Moglai' to the Cacharis and Bengalis and 'Mekle' to the Assamese (as well as to the British in the 18th Century) in the pre-Christian period. (Sharma, 2011, p.79)

During the latter part of the 17th century, a Brahmin priest and Bengali scholar from Shyllet (now in Bangladesh), Shantidas Goshai, introduced[2] the then king of Manipur - Meetingu Mayampa (1709CE-1748CE) – to *Chaitanya Vaishnavism*[3], a cult of Hinduism. (Paratt, 2005) This led him to retitle himself to Raja Garibniwaz[4]. (Laishram, 2014 b) Manipur was adopted as the kingdom's new name soon after. In 1724, Garibniwaz declared Vaishnavism

[2] Hinduism was present in the kingdom before Goshai, however, it was his coaxing that led to mass conversion of the Meitei people to the faith by wooing the then King (Singh & Khuraijam, 2013)

[3] Gaudiya Vaishnavism (also known as Chaitanya Vaishnavism and Hare Krishnas) is a Vaishnava religious movement founded by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534) in India in the 16th century. (ISKCON Desire Tree, n.d.)

[4] Which literally translates into Raja=King; Garib=Poor/modest/humble; niwaz=ruler/throne/monarch in Sanskrit and Persian.

as the state religion and vigorously imposed conversion of his subjects often at the cost of the ancient religion of the people – Sanamahism. (Singh & Khuraijam, 2013)

> Garibniwaz destroyed many traditional Manipuri temples and idols of the local deities. […] the king ordered all forms of traditional Holy Scriptures *(Puya)* and books in possession of the local priests *(Maichous)* as well as the general public to be brought and he consequently let them be burnt to ashes. This event is still known in the history of Manipur as *'Puya Meithaba'.* (Singh & Khuraijam, 2013, pp.2739-40)

The ancient *Meitei Mayek*[5] was abandoned in favour of the Bengali script; conservative clothing, food restrictions, notions of 'purity and pollution' and the caste system associated with Hinduism slowly permeated Manipuri society (Kshetrimayum, 2011); and Hindu mythology based art forms such as the *Ras Leela* flourished, but up until this day, the Sanamahi religion coexists along with Hinduism and has never been truly 'replaced'.

> An ordinary resident of Imphal, a Meitie – a community which constituted the royalty of the Kingdom – is born into a family, becomes of age, is coupled in matrimony, experiences death and is remembered by his kin in the fashion common to Hinduism as practiced in mainland India. However, his or her daily prayers, routine rituals, and biddings in times of trouble are not of a Hindu character. It reflects back to a tradition which precedes the advent of Hinduism in the region. (Laishram, 2014 b, p.1)

While Manipuri ethnic nationalism contests the political power of India, there are revivalist movements which proponent a complete revival and distinction of Manipuri language, script, culture and religion from what has been "imposed" by or "borrowed" from India. In a conversation, a scholar and former Royal Advisor to the court of the Maharaja of Manipur, Prof. N.K. Mangang recounts that revivalism of this sort began in the 1930s and manifest in pursuits such as the formation of a Meetei Mayek Expert Committee by the Government of Manipur in 1978 to reintroduce the ancient script in educational institutes, and revisiting and 'purging' of rituals and chants from Hindu influence "to maintain the pristine purity of the original system of Sanamahism." (Mangang, 2014, p.2)

As can be understood, Hinduism has brought Manipur closer to the culture of mainland India, but while many academics argue that the Meitei civilisation was 'hinduized', in truth, Hinduism was *meiteized* in Manipur. Both the advent of Hinduism among the Meiteis and the rise of ethnic nationalism following the merger with the republic of India render the *place*[6] of Manipur, a contested space between what is essentially Manipuri and what it shares with India culturally, religiously and politically.

One might be wondering, how the ban of Bollywood and the impact it has had on Manipuri society is related to rise of ethnic militancy in Manipur or the religious history of the erstwhile kingdom. In this respect, it may be helpful to understand that "the conceptual thinking of the people has links with a vigorous body of tradition with a long and complex

[5] The age old script used to write Meiteilon, the language of the palace and the Meitei people
[6] It is crucial to unthink the concept of a geo-political place in favour of a composite anthropological understanding of a place and voice (Appadurai, 1988)

history" (Vatsyayan, 1972, p.10) which is perhaps why policies for culture and hence cultural consumption is dictated by religious groups, social norms, ethnic organisations and the likes of aforementioned ethnic militants more than the democratic government itself.

Manipur, as a kingdom, had the monarch at the apex of every aspect of local life be it political, economic, cultural or religious. Historical documents from the Royal Palace such as *Ninghthou Kangbalon, Cheitharol Kumbaba, Ningthourol Lambuba, Poireiton Khunthokpa, Panthoibi Khongkul* record every important instance throughout history where the King on the advice the *maichous*[7] performed his duties w.r.t. land distribution, taxes, warfare, rites and rituals, punishment for offenses, etc. (Paratt, 2005)

Following the advent of Hinduism, the *maichous* were replaced by pundtits[8] and Meitei morality by Hindu morality. Since then the centre of power has transferred from the Meitei king to the British and then to the Indian parliament. However, the issue of morality and local tradition in governance has been deficient since. Local organisations such as the *meira paibis* (Sunil, 2013), insurgent militants and revivalist groups such as MEELAL (Hueiyen News Service, 2014) have been filling in these missing elements in governance with or without any support from the state government.

If we can digest that the government has only a nominal say in cultural policy making either because of its newness or a deficiency, we can also comprehend why radical groups such as ethnic militants who, however unconstitutional, are taken seriously. Placing ethnicity and "culture" at the heart of their manifestos, these groups ring a familiar bell, perhaps which resound a local sentiment. However, this statement is not unconditional. Whether through effective sentimental positioning or violence and intimidation, these groups have earned an image that is as significant as the government, if not more.

### 1.2 Objectives and Rationale of the Study

This study aims to uncover the void in the objectives of the ban imposed on Bollywood, the effectiveness of the policy, the consequences it has had and whether or not it gathers public consensus. In the current state of political tension between India and Manipur, what is most amiss is the life of ordinary denizens of the state. Subject to gross human rights violations owing to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958, Manipuris are prey not only to armed state agents but also to insurgents who 'demand' donations, regulate activities and pronounce punishments. (Laishram, 2014 a) It is therefore crucial to understand opinions expressed by the masses in relation to Manipur's subjective position within India in order to observe which side of the equation the public occupies or if it chooses an ambivalent position.

"Film [are] perhaps the single strongest agency for the creation of a national Mythology" (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1995), which leads us to asking how locating ethnic militants as a policy maker for films impacts the concept of integration and the ideology of a greater nation-state. It then becomes pertinent to understand how films which are controlled by

[7] The scholars of the *puya* and advisers of the royal court who also doubled as religious priests
[8] The local articulation of the Sanskrit word *Pundit* denotation a priest

militant groups – who are against the integration of Manipur into the larger country – can really help the cause and, if not, gauge any counter-productivity. Additionally, understanding how the imposition of the ban itself is a 'resisting voice' – a case where the silenced subaltern (Spivak, 1995) finally speaks up against 'indianisation' – is important to the discourse of cinema and nation.

Furthermore, by studying public opinions expressed in the survey, this paper attempts to understand the hybridity exhibited by Manipuris generally; how their choice of film consumption reflects larger patterns propounded by globalisation discourses. At a time of growing racial discrimination of Northeast Indians in India, understanding how estranged Manipuris are from the country and whether it identifies with transnational ambivalence (Higson, 2000) is absolutely indispensable.

"At a time when the world seemed to be entering an era of full-blown globalisation, it is localisation in all its varied forms that has thrust itself centre-stage." (Chakravarty, 2000, p.223) This study voices a universal concern not only for places with on-going civil strife and internal unrest but also for nations wherein subaltern communities are being taxed to meet the cost for being a part of the global village.

## 2.0 Methodology

As part of the study, 50 individuals of varying age, sex, education level, socioeconomic status, political affiliation and lifestyle participated in an investigation which surveyed their film consumption habits and how they relate to Manipuri cinema in terms of their frequency of engagement and how they appraise it with respect to Hollywood, Bollywood, Korean and Regional Indian cinema.

The only inclusion criteria in sample selection were that a participant must be currently living in Manipur/have lived in Manipur/have familial connection in Manipur or has watched Manipuri films. A snowballing sampling technique was used to gather participants; the survey was distributed by the researcher through online platforms to certain others who in turn forwarded it to those who qualify the inclusion criteria and thence in random repetition.

An inventory of 6 questions was constructed on an online survey portal; the questions inquired if they watch Manipuri films, when and why they began watching it, how often they watch different kinds of films, how they evaluate Manipuri films in comparison to the rest, if their watching habits would change if other films were readily available, and finally, what their attitude towards the ban of Bollywood in Manipur. (See Appendix A for a questionnaire sample)

## 3.1 The Ban of Bollywood in Manipur: A dictate against the Indianisation of Manipur

By the time Manipuri cinema was born, the Hindi-based Bollywood film industry in Bombay was flourishing, experiencing the greatest of its periods. This implied that a sea of masala movies was flooding the silver screen in Imphal – the capital of Manipur – and capitalising on the limited market the city had anyway.

> This was back in 1995, at a time when the cinema halls in Manipur showed mostly Bollywood and a few Hollywood films. […] Yet the vast majority of the time it was posters of Shahrukh Khan, Salman Khan, Madhuri Dixit, Raveena Tandon, with an occasional Sylvester Stallone or Arnold Schwarzenegger, that occupied the hoardings and public walls. Over the following decade, however, the Bollywood posters slowly began to vanish, followed by the Hollywood posters. The last I heard about a Hindi film being shown in a Manipur theatre was Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam, in 1999. (Akoijam 2009)

The place of Cinema halls in Manipur in its social and cultural life is a story told by every grandparent – established concretely in Jogendro Kshetrimayum's (2011) anthropological study of the space. Even after Manipuri films came into existence, it was Bollywood films which captured the imagination of Manipuris in what the author calls an "anxious encounter with modernity." (p.19) Centring his argument on jokes circulated among the masses, he exposes local obsession with female Bollywood actors who spoke a 'foreign' language, and reactions to the realness of the visual medium and its potential to arouse violent emotions – in all, a sense of 'awkwardness' that simpletons associated with cinema, a kind of 'awkwardness' that lay concentric with every step towards development – the local city, the metropolitan city and finally, the west. However, with the ban of Bollywood in 2000 – this awkwardness stopped its advance and with it, its associated paraphernalia.

> Given the popularity of Hindi films in Manipur, it is very interesting […] to note that cinema halls in Manipur was (before 2000) [a] public space where people of different languages, regions, and religions come together to watch a powerful visual media in Hindi, a language foreign to most in Manipur, a language which the militant nationalist organizations in Manipur identify with the hegemony of the Indian state. (p.19)

BBC South Asian network reports a spokesman of the rebel group, RPF (Revolutionary Peoples Front) of Manipur, "The Hindi films from Bombay [are] undermining the cultural values of the state and [are] unacceptable to its people." The rebel spokesman threatened to bomb any cinema hall screening Hindi movies, the report continues. (Bhaumik 2000) This dictate was passed as a sign of protest on September 12, 2000 following the death of Captain Mangal in custody of the 17th Assam Rifles of the Indian Army on September 10, 2000.

> The Revolutionary People's Front imposed a complete ban on the transmission, screening and viewing of Hindi movies and entertainment connected with Hindi language which are being used as a primary means of Indianization in the course of suppressing the minority communities and the people of Manipur with effect from 12 midnight, Tuesday 12th September 2000. (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.26)

A retrospective report on a forum clarifies, "On October 16, volunteers of RPF confiscated several thousand videocassettes of Hindi films and music and burnt them as a protest against the "Indianization" of Manipur. Movie theatres stopped screening Hindi movies." (Abujam 2014) Although cinema halls suffered the worst blow from the ban, among the general masses "[t]here was a sense of fear in the air, around listening to Hindi songs or watching Hindi films in the first couple of years following the ban." (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.26)

The objective of the ban seems to be imprecise and under explained although it is evident why it came about – the 'murder' of an RPF captain. The term used – indianisation – has several connotations[9] and may be considered as an objective as it figures in the official statement issued by the organisation. Indianisation is an academic terminology used to describe the cultural imperialism[10] of indigenous cultures by fashions of Indian origin. In Manipur, Indianisation may be associated with Hinduism, the Hindi and Bengali language and a host of other cultural insinuations that are quintessentially Indian, those previously absent from the Manipuri cultural fabric.

However, we shall only deliberate the influence of Bollywood on the indianisation of Manipur. The language in which Bollywood films are produced is Hindi – a language alien to most of Manipuris – a fact also iterated in the ban's official statement. The role of language in colonisation has been strongly established so much so that the process of decolonisation is said to be contingent on whether the 'empire writes back' or not. (Ashcroft et al., 2002) In which case, the ban is perhaps prohibiting the decolonisation process as it stops 'writing back' to the imperialism of Bollywood, using its own language and structure, although it attempts to prohibit interpellation itself. Their attempt has not been able to completely shut off Bollywood, but more on this in the next section.

Apart from language, Bollywood confronts Manipuri society with certain unknown and even nasty 'alien' mannerisms that perhaps characterise Hindi films such as song, dance and spectacles of sexuality. In "No sex please, we are Manipuris" (Yumnam, 2007), the author argues what is fundamentally Manipuri about Manipuri films, and he identifies the marked distinction between Bollywood and Manipuri cinema in the treatment of song and dance, which is a key aspect of both.

> Manipuri songs are done very tastefully without any display of tits and bums and that makes it eminently fit to be watched together in a family of three generations without any awkwardness and embarrassments. […] No rain-soaked blouses for the Manipuris. The Manipuris are a very conservative people. […] These values get reflected in the Manipuri cinema. (Yumnam, 2007)

This distinction from Bollywood does not come organically though; it is a result of heavy institutional and extra-institutional censorship. The consequence of a filmmaker ignoring local sensibilities and the fine line between decency and fantasy may be the same as those cinema distributors and exhibitors who do not comply with the dictates of the ban – as Sunil, the proprietor of Azad Talkies[11] exclaims, "There was nothing official about it but it was understood that not complying would mean death." (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.30) As Yumnam notes (2007), insurgents use force to censor Manipuri films as they "consider[..] Manipuri

[9] Indianisation also has several other meanings; in this particular context, it is an anthropological phenomenon of 'making matters Indian'. (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.53)
[10] Cultural Imperialism usually describes the cultural hegemony of industrialised worlds over the non-industrialised world and bears a strong postcolonial tinge. (Sarmela, 1975) However, in this context, it seeks to adapt to Indian culture as the hegemonic power while Manipuri culture is the subjugated one.
[11] One of the oldest cinema theatres in Manipur

cinema to be a nationalistic product and a cultural ambassador." He also alludes to instances where actors were prohibited from working together because of "inappropriate on-screen chemistry" and in an extreme case, where "a female actor was shot at her legs" while the male actors either been executed or managed to flee to neighbouring states.

This brings us to our survey, wherein participants were asked if the ban was justified. 62% of respondents infer that 'it is pointless and must be removed immediately', 26% of them believe "it is a necessary step to protect and preserve Manipuri culture" while only 12% said it does not bother them. Understanding the implication of the views expressed problematizes the objectives of the ban and reveals how incongruous it is to public opinion. The majority opine that the ban is pointless and must be done away with; it is a subject of deeper investigation if indianisation does not exist or if it simply does not matter anymore.

### 3.2 The Effects of the Ban: Manipuri Cinema 'writing back to the empire?'

Following the imposition of the ban, all cinema halls in Manipur stopped exhibiting Hindi films immediately, distributors withdrew from the state, "there were reports of RPF cadres confiscating and burning CDs and cassettes containing Hindi films and songs in the first couple of years". (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.1) Cinema halls were the worst affected: they had no films to show, they filled in their vacant slots with Hollywood and Tamil films, in spite of that their revenues dropped drastically and many of them were shut down or converted into shopping malls. However, satellite television and national radio still operated uninterrupted.

> It is still a mystery for us. Basically what they said was that Hindi film was polluting Manipuri culture and it was being used as medium for colonization by India. But then that does not make sense when they can't stop the cable service providers like Dish TV, Star Sky, Airtel, Sun TV etc., there is internet and they can't even do anything about AIR [All India Radio]. (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.34)

Both the state and central government did not issue any official statement regarding the ban although it had undeniable counterproductive effects on revenue collected from entertainment tax, which featured a sharp decline from a peak of over Rs 1,00,00,000 in 1996-2000 to a meagre Rs 57,615 in 2010 even after the advantages of inflation. "For an income deficit state like Manipur, it makes economic sense to counter the ban imposed on Hindi films by RPF." (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.37)

After a few years, with the digital renaissance of Manipuri digital films, these cinema halls began screening video-based films shifting from film projectors to digital projectors. The Cinematograph Act (CBFC India, 1952) does not sanction movies produced on mediums other than film, but the state, through the office of the District Magistrate allowed the cinema halls to screen films in the video format. (Kshetrimayum, 2011) Since then, an industry which produced only 31 films in its first 25 years now produces more than 50 films every year. (Ahanthem 2014)

In the survey, when the participants were asked when they began watching films, 46.81% said they have always watched Manipuri films while only 6.38% revealed they began watching it only because Hindi and English movies were unavailable. An astounding 31.91% of them said they watch it occasionally for a change from Hindi/English/Korean films while 14.89% said they have never watched one.

This reveals that a very small percentage of the population actually began watching Manipuri films owing to the ban while a significant part of them watch it only for a change from other films. The results are congruous with other observations which articulate that although cinemas stopped screening Hindi films, they were still available to the masses in one way or another. Interestingly, Manipuri films do have a market as almost half of the sample expressed that they have *always* watched them.

The survey also reveals that while Hollywood and Bollywood are the most watched, Manipuri films come in as the third most watched films followed by Korean and regional Indian films. They also admit that if Bollywood or Hollywood were screened or televised locally, most of them (55.10%) would watch it less often while 32.65% of them maintain that they would watch Manipuri films as frequently if not more than Hollywood or Bollywood films. Interestingly, only 12.24% confessed they would not watch Manipuri films at all if they had these options.

It is therefore clear that "if the main purpose of the ban was to stop people from watching anything Hindi, it failed. However the ban persists, in spite of this failure, in everyday life, informing bodies and generating discourses about sexuality, Manipuri culture, Manipuri cinema, sovereignty etc." (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.6) The intellectual point of interest here is: have the insurgents managed to 'write back to the empire' using the medium of films that is quite so similar to Bollywood in terms of structure and approach but yet very different in sensibilities. The contestations are myriad: who has spoken on whose behalf and if it has been accurately articulated, whether Manipuri cinema has developing a style of its own and challenged the 'language of the empire' which in this case is Bollywood, and most importantly, if in the passive process of resistance, Manipuri cinema and through it, the Manipuris in general, has begun to occupy a position of ambivalence exhibiting a sort of hybridity which characterises and enables decolonisation – at least cinematically.

### 3.2 Manipuri Cinema within Bollywood: Transnationalism and National Cinema

Another bewildering consequence of the ban is the arrival of Korean films in Manipur – a sort of cultural imperialism that is not associated with indianisation or even limited to the geographical boundaries of Manipur, the northeast region, Asia or the world. Korean popular culture, also known as the "Korean wave", *"Hallyu"* or *"Hanryu"* (Shim, 2006) has led Manipur to be described as "a little corner of Korea in India." (BBC, 2010) Following the ban of Bollywood, while cinemas screened Hollywood and Tamil films, television channels began broadcasting Korean TV dramas and music videos which became a trend in no time. Youngsters not only listen to Korean music, follow Korean sitcoms, dress and behave in Korean fashions but also speak to their lovers in Korean endearments. (Kshetrimayum, 2011)

Much of this hallyu results from local TV channels broadcasting Korean entertainment when Hindi-based shows were banned; Arirang, the Korean international TV channel is also available on all home television.

The interesting point is the insurgents do not really restrict this *hallyu* cultural imperialism and there may be various self-fulfilling reasons for that. First off, it is not indianisation. Second, it is relatable because Korean entertainment is *echam-chamba,* literally meaning 'simple'.

> Compared to popular Bollywood films, the characters in the Korean films and telenovelas are perceived as 'real', down-to-earth and identifiable by the Manipuri audience. In spite of the tremendous impact Korean pop culture has had on the youth culture in Manipur, the militant groups in Manipur have not had issues with Korean films and telenovelas. On the other hand, some militant groups have strictly censored song and dance sequences, a la Bollywood, in Manipuri song albums. Korean pop culture [has] definitely found its resonance in Manipur for whatever its worth. (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.42)

Evidently, the issue of the ban is not cultural imperialism per se but a deeper controversy surrounding the sovereignty of Manipur from the Indian state. The survey reveals intriguing responses when asked about the quality of Manipuri films with regard to other films Manipuris are heavily exposed to.

57.14% think that Bollywood is as good as Manipuri films, while 40.48% think it is 'bad'; only 2.38% think Manipuri films are better than Bollywood. Korean films, on the other hand, received a contrary response: 51.22% think Korean films are better than Manipuri films while 36.59% think they are equally good, and 12.20% think Manipuri films are better. Hollywood is thought to be the best while regional Indian cinema was thought to be the worst; Bollywood and Korean films stood on each other's ends, Korean faring better than Bollywood.

The implications of these results lead us to interrogate if Manipuris relate better to cinema produced by a country far away from it than to the national cinema of the country it is actually a part of. Asking these questions in the light of the role national cinema plays in the articulation of a nation's identity reveals attitudes which perhaps the government, insurgents and even the masses are not particularly conscious of.

## 4.0 Conclusion

Evidently, as noted by researchers before, if the objective of the ban was to stop the process of indianisation of Manipur, then it has failed rather miserably. Bollywood films are widely available with the exception of cinema halls and local television; especially with the internet and satellite television services, home entertainment is dominated by Hindi-based programmes. "The ban on Hindi films is a bold attempt to define a 'pure' Manipuri culture and the failure of which […] is testimony to its impossibility." (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.43)

The reason behind the impossibility of their mission lies in the fact that Manipur is soaked in many Indian traditions from religion to government. In fact, Manipuri filmmakers have grown up in the tradition of Bollywood films than any other; it therefore seems completely rational to think that they will fashion their own films according to their experience and that, they do. Manipuri films dwell on romance and love stories; involve a range of song and dance – although in a whole different sensibility. It appears as though Manipuri films are moulding out what is *unmanipuri* from Bollywood films and moulding in what is Manipuri.

However, if the objective of the ban was to promote Manipuri films, then it has definitely worked. There seems to logic in the evidence that the ulterior motive was exactly this:

> [The] ban of October 2000 is seen as an attempt to capture the market by the video film producers in nexus with certain elements within the RPF. However, what is equally intriguing to me, and to exhibitors like Tamo Sunil, is the response of the state to the ban. So far the state, both at the regional level (the Government of Manipur) and the central level (The Government of the Indian Union), has not come out with any official statement acknowledging even the existence of the "ban". On the other hand, the cinema halls are "allowed" to screen films in the video format. (Kshetrimayum, 2011, p.36)

If this allegation is true, then Manipuri cinema is attempting to 'write back to the empire' in a form imposed by the power as an instrument of colonisation, albeit in a different language, quite literally. Bollywood is alleged to make a fetish out of regional cultures, and the northeast has never found a place in mainstream Hindi cinema (Hasan 2011) up until 2014, with the film 'Mary Kom'; most films have also misinterpreted the various insurgencies and grossed over political discontent. (Bhartiya 2007) "Although, people in Manipur still consume Bollywood films privately, the ideology of a composite Indian culture as portrayed in mainstream Bollywood has a mixed response." (Rajagopal 2001, p. 22)

Given these circumstances, it is not completely unreasonable to regulate Bollywood films. 'Indian culture' and 'tradition' had been an important marker of national identity against imperial domination, thus, it seems logical that the covert cultural imperialism (Hasan 2011) imposed on the northeast is confronted by an indigenous film industry, which the ban of Bollywood, in Manipur has elicited. In this respect, perhaps the subaltern (Spivak, 1995) Manipuri cinema is finally speaking up against the 'colonizing forces' of Bollywood, and through it, Manipuri nationalists to the state of India.

However, primary research indicates that there is a contest between the popular reception of Bollywood and Korean films, the latter faring slightly better than India's national cinema. Perhaps, the 'imagined community' in India's national cinema does not feature a secure, shared identity that rings bells of familiarity (Higson, 2000) among the Manipuris as well as Korean cinema is? Maybe it is the iconic medium of cinema which "divides and differentiates as much as it connects" (Chakravarty, 2000, p.225) which may be accused of failing to mediate national identity to the Manipuris as well as it does to more mainstream audiences. The sense of "otherness" may be too strong in Bollywood cinema while Korean films even in

its *alienness*, submits a sense of transnational connection which transcends evident differences and creates a homely reception familiar to Manipuri audiences. This pirate film culture characterises a global trend of transnational sub-cultures which is above and beyond the control of local legislation as it is "the problem of the international capitalist economy" (Higson, 2000, p.69) wherein even different governments work in partnership rather than in opposition.

This brings us to the issue of hybridity. Manipuris are not new to occupying ambivalent positions perhaps due to the awkwardly confusing miscegenation of the religion they practise (Laishram, 2014 b) or their obedience to the authority of both the state and those against it. Now, with Manipuri cinema talking back to Bollywood and developing a genre of cinema quite like Hindi films and yet so different, their ambivalence is evident. An era of rethinking or unthinking paradigms of cultural imperialism is in order following an age of revivalism which has had a mixed response.

## 5.0 Limitations and Recommendations

This study is a process which has no defined or anticipated resolution; in this journey of discovering of what constitutes Manipuri identity, politically, culturally or otherwise, developing a whole approach is of primary importance. By all means, this study is not conclusive and it does not intend to be; however, several investigations may stem from it and it is highly recommended that one identifies loopholes and perspectives from which the 'view' is clear not only to the Indian state, insurgents, or the world but to the public of Manipur within and from which the system is derived. That is the resolution of this study: the resolution of the troubles state of affair in Manipur.

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# Appendices

A. Survey Sample and Results

B. Interview with Prof Ng. Kangjia Mangang

C. Other original research work

## Appendix A: Survey Sample and Results

Hello!
Please take this survey to help us understand how we watch Manipuri films and what the film industry and social organisations must do to empower freedom of expression through film-making. And most importantly, where you think the industry stands in comparison to a world of global entertainment. Please answer all the questions. Thank you in advance for your participation!

### 1. Do you watch Manipuri films?

- Do you watch Manipuri films? Yes, I watch Manipuri films.
- No, I don't watch Manipuri films.

### 2. When did you begin watching Manipuri films?

- I have always watched Manipuri films.
- I began watching it only because Hindi and English movies were unavailable.
- I watch it occasionally for a change from Hindi/English/Korean films.
- I have never watched Manipuri films.

### 3. How often do you watch the following kinds of film?

| | Often | Sometimes | Not at all |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hollywood Films | | | |
| Bollywood Films | | | |
| Regional Indian Films | | | |
| Korean Films | | | |
| Manipuri Films | | | |

### 4. Would you watch Manipuri films if Bollywood or Hollywood movies were screened or televised locally?

- I would watch Manipuri films as frequently if not more than Hollywood or Bollywood films.
- I would watch Manipuri films occasionally or less frequently if I had these options.
- I would not watch Manipuri films at all if I had these options.

**5. Manipuri films are _____ when compared to...**

| | Better | Equally good | Bad |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hollywood Films | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Bollywood Films | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Korean Films | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Regional Indian Films | ○ | ○ | ○ |

**6. What do you feel about the ban of Bollywood and Hollywood movies in Manipur?**

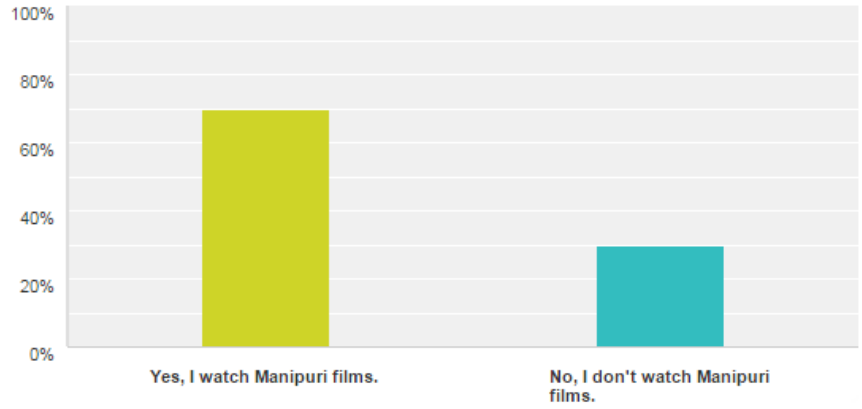
- ○ It is pointless and must be removed immediately.
- ○ It is a necessary step to protect and preserve Manipuri culture.
- ○ It does not bother me.

Done

Q1 Customize Export

## Do you watch Manipuri films?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0

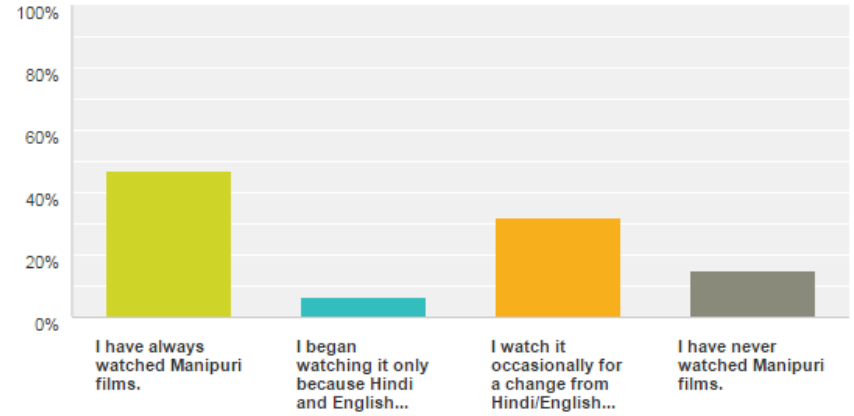



| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes, I watch Manipuri films. | 70.00% | 35 |
| No, I don't watch Manipuri films. | 30.00% | 15 |
| Total | | 50 |

Q2 Customize Export

## When did you begin watching Manipuri films?

Answered: 47 Skipped: 3

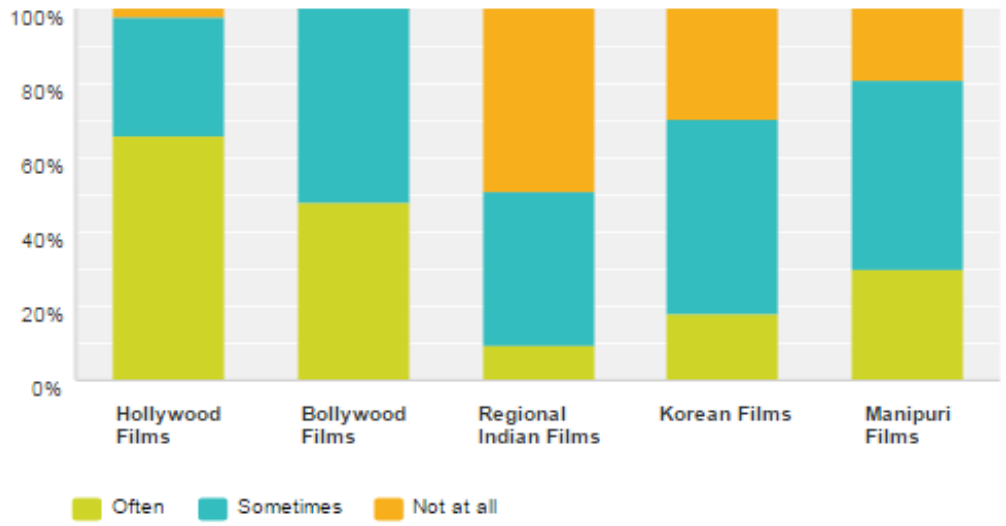



| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| I have always watched Manipuri films. | 46.81% | 22 |
| I began watching it only because Hindi and English movies were unavailable. | 6.38% | 3 |
| I watch it occasionally for a change from Hindi/English/Korean films. | 31.91% | 15 |
| I have never watched Manipuri films. | 14.89% | 7 |
| Total | | 47 |

Q3 Customize Export

## How often do you watch the following kinds of film?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



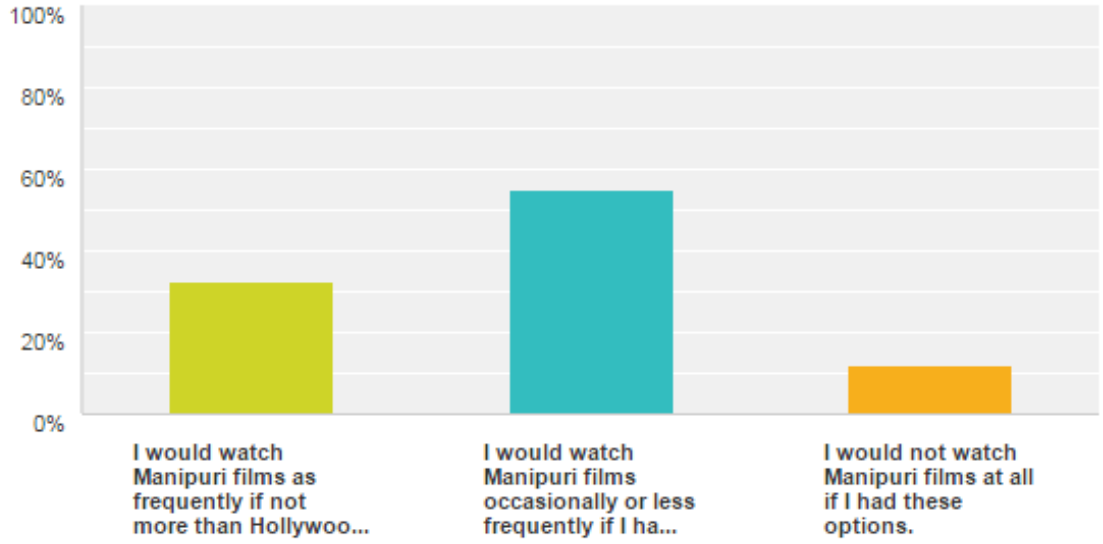

| | Often | Sometimes | Not at all | Total | Weighted Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hollywood Films | 66.00% 33 | 32.00% 16 | 2.00% 1 | 50 | 1.36 |
| Bollywood Films | 47.92% 23 | 52.08% 25 | 0.00% 0 | 48 | 1.52 |
| Regional Indian Films | 9.30% 4 | 41.86% 18 | 48.84% 21 | 43 | 2.40 |
| Korean Films | 18.18% 8 | 52.27% 23 | 29.55% 13 | 44 | 2.11 |
| Manipuri Films | 29.79% 14 | 51.06% 24 | 19.15% 9 | 47 | 1.89 |

For the whole result on the online portal follow [https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-QZTKSHK7/](https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-QZTKSHK7/)

Q4 Customize Export

## Would you watch Manipuri films if Bollywood or Hollywood movies were screened or televised locally?

Answered: 49 Skipped: 1




| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| I would watch Manipuri films as frequently if not more than Hollywood or Bollywood films. | 32.65% | 16 |
| I would watch Manipuri films occasionally or less frequently if I had these options. | 55.10% | 27 |
| I would not watch Manipuri films at all if I had these options. | 12.24% | 6 |
| Total | | 49 |

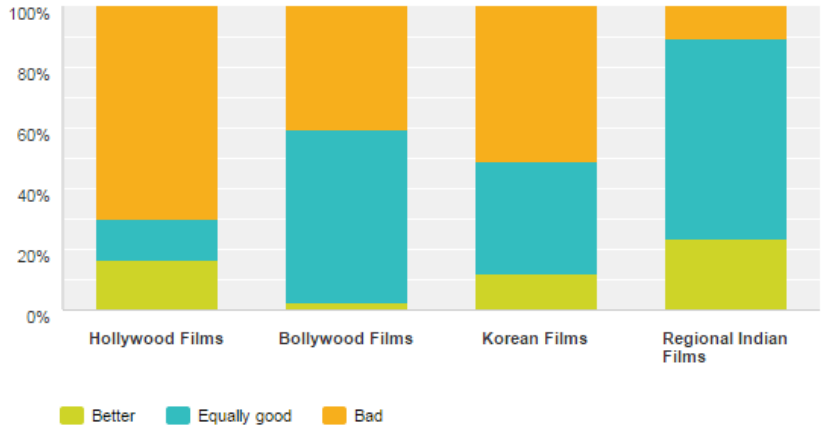
For the whole result on the online portal follow [https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-QZTKSHK7/](https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-QZTKSHK7/)

Q5

Customize Export

## Manipuri films are _____ when compared to...

Answered: 45 Skipped: 5



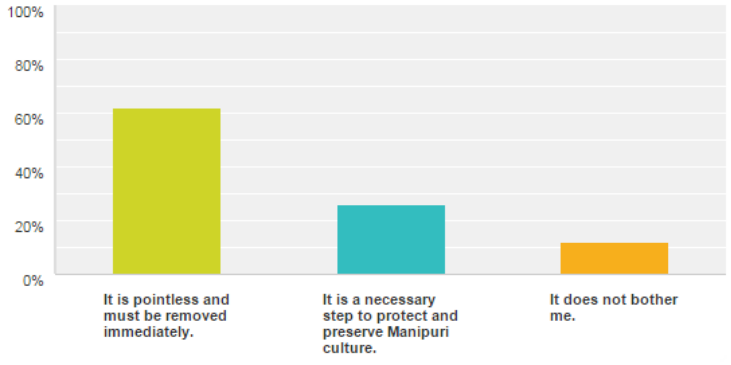

| | Better | Equally good | Bad | Total | Weighted Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hollywood Films | 16.28% 7 | 13.95% 6 | 69.77% 30 | 43 | 2.53 |
| Bollywood Films | 2.38% 1 | 57.14% 24 | 40.48% 17 | 42 | 2.38 |
| Korean Films | 12.20% 5 | 36.59% 15 | 51.22% 21 | 41 | 2.39 |
| Regional Indian Films | 23.68% 9 | 65.79% 25 | 10.53% 4 | 38 | 1.87 |

Q6

Customize Export

## What do you feel about the ban of Bollywood and Hollywood movies in Manipur?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0




| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| It is pointless and must be removed immediately. | 62.00% | 31 |
| It is a necessary step to protect and preserve Manipuri culture. | 26.00% | 13 |
| It does not bother me. | 12.00% | 6 |
| Total | | 50 |

# Appendix B: Interview
# IN CONVERSATION WITH PROF. NG KANGJIA MANGANG

*Professor Ng. Kangjia Mangang is the former Principal of Presidency College, Motbung, Imphal and has obtained his Masters in Philosophy. He has also served as the Maichou Purel to the Sana Konung which is equivalent to being the Royal Advisor to the Court of the Maharaja of Manipur.*

Q1. Ancient Meetei religion has intermixed with Hinduism in contemporary Manipur. How is this influence exhibited in terms of deities, mythology, rituals and worship patterns?

Ans. Santidas Gosai from Silhet (a district of undivided Bengol) had introduced Ramandi Dharma in Kangleipak (former name of modern Manipur) during the reign of Pamheiba (king of Kangleipak) in the first quarter of the 18$^{th}$ century A.D. (vide, Cheitharol Kumpaba, the Royal Chronicles of Kangleipak). After the introduction of Ramandi Dharma in Kangleipak, the very name "Manipur" of epic fame had been used as state name side by side with its original name Kangleipak. Slowly and slowly the State religion "Sanamahism" had intermixed with Hinduism in terms of deities, mythology, retuals and worship patterns as follows:

(i) Nongpok Ningthou, deity of the east comes to be identified as Siva Mahadeva. Ganja has been used as offering to Nongpok Ningthou for the propitiation of the deity as a result of the identification.
Ha, Ra, Sa, the tantric mantra of Hindu Tantrism has been used while chanting rituals of Nongpok Ningthou.

(ii) Panthoibi has been identified with Parvati. Then, Panthoibi, a goddess of Sanamahi religion has been started to be worshipped during Durga Puja Festival.

(iii) Wangpulel, the Meetei deity of death has been identified with Varun, the Hindu deity of water.

(iv) Hiyangthang Lairembi of Sanamahi religion has been identified with Kamakhya Devi. Kamakhya Devi has been installed in place of Hiyangthang Lairembi at the top of Hiyangthang hill. Kali Mantras have been chanted at Hiyangthang temple.

(v) The dragon-deity, Pakhangba Paphal, has been identified with Hindu Ananta. Tantric mantras have been used to propitiate Pakhangba Paphal.

(vi) Hanuman Thakur's idol has been installed in place of Mongbahanba deity of Sanamahi religion and a number of monkeys have been kept by arranging their daily feeding surrounding Hanuman temple.

(vii) The mythological tale of draining out of water from the water-bed of central Kangleipak running together with a new tale of the same episode by deleting Panganba and replacing him by Shiva Mahadeva.

These are some important facts of the said intermixture.

Q2. How different is the currently practiced religion of the Meeties from what was present before the hinduization?

Ans. The movement of the revival of Sanamahi religion has started since nineteen thirties in Manipur. With the restless efforts of the revivalists of Sanamahi religion, Meetei scripts (Manipuri scripts) has been reintroduced in the educational institutions with the advent of the formation of a Meetei Mayek Expert Committee by the Government of Manipur in 1978. With a large scale knowledge of Meetei Mayek (Manipuri Script), the knowledge of the ancient scriptures increases day by day. By virtue of these knowledge, number of scholars of Sanamahi religion increases. By the incentives and efforts of these scholars, the inter-potation of Hindu mantras and rituals have been deleted while chanting rituals in Lai Haraoba festivals, birth ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, death ceremonies, Cheiraoba ceremony (New Year ceremony of Sanamahism) and many more traditional ceremonies.

The revival is in progress with a view to maintain the pristine purity of the original system of Sanamahism. The main difference between the practice of Sanamahism before Hinduization and the present practice is that some parts of original long rituals have been shortened for time economy and some limited improvements have been added as time demanded.

*[Courtesy to Smt. Malaya Mamang, daughter of Prof KM]*

**Appendix C: Other original research work**

# Militant Groups as Policy Makers: Extrajudicial Control of Film Consumption in Manipur

*Simon Laishram for Creative Industries and Cultural Policy*
*MA Media and Creative Enterprise*
*Birmingham City University, UK.*

Production, distribution and exhibition of films in India are not directly under governmental control unlike most cultural industries; rather public boards such as the Central Board of Film Certification regulate the exhibition of film nationally. However, in the north-eastern state of Manipur, films are not only regulated by the central censor board but also by Film Forum Manipur – a public body at the apex of the Manipuri film industry. Unexpectedly, these two bodies are not the only groups forming and regulating policies for films; local militant groups exercise paramount control in the consumption of films, as with other aspects of political and sociocultural life. Thus, this paper attempts to locate its position as a policy maker and explore its significance.

*Keywords: censorship, militancy, Manipur, cultural intermediary, films, Bollywood, ban, Revolutionary Peoples Front of Manipur.*

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 India's crippling relationship with Manipur: ethnic militancy

India is a country which forges its integrity through a unity in differences rather than in similarities. Although differences between and within states are prominent, the contrast of the culture and people of Northeast India with the mainland could not have been more pronounced. Not only is the region geographically isolated – linked only by a 14 km strait of land (Panda 2013) – its people have been racially, religiously and culturally dissimilar throughout history, perhaps subscribing more to a Southeast Asian ethnicity than to a South Asian one.

Unfortunately, ethnic and cultural dissimilarity is not where the divide ends – it is a greatly volatile political issue. In the specific case of Manipur, one of the eight north-eastern states, history provides a reasonable explanation for this. Datta (1992) recounts:

> Manipur enjoyed independence right up to the first two decades of the nineteenth century, except during the brief period of Burmese occupation between 1819 and 1826. In 1826 Raja Gambhir Singh liberated Manipur from the Burmese, but in the process he took help of the British, and Manipur had to pay the price of it, it now had to work under British suzerainty.

When India regained its independence in 1947, Manipur was recognised as an independent princely state, and was the first to conduct a democratic election through full adult suffrage in the subcontinent. However, in October 15, 1949 – which is still lamented as a black day – the princely state of Manipur was merged with the union of India as a Chief Commissioner's Province. Following this, there were several transitions in her political construction till eventually it became a full-fledged state in January 21, 1972 as a result of the North Eastern Areas (Regulation) Act, 1971. (Datta, 1992)

This political transition did not come without any repercussions: there was a massive deindustrialisation phase, where development of state owned institutions taxed a production base that had been largely self-sufficient. This lead to an overwhelming dependence on government jobs which was predictably followed by massive unemployment – another nail on the coffin of divide. (Laishram, 2014)

This consequence yielded another. The demeaning merger of the Kingdom of Manipur with India led to an uprising of the Meeties demanding an independent state, autonomous in its own right. However, as might have been predicted by the anarchic nature of global politics, "when one ethnic group is organised as an armed national liberation force threatening the security of a rival group – and the state is not seen as a reliable provider of security – it is easy to see why the latter too would turn to self-help as a way of finding security…" (Shimray 2001) This is the nature of militancy in Manipur; a sort of ethnic nationalism which is deemed to be against national integrity and are hence, tagged 'terrorists'. (Upadhyay 2006)

### 1.2 India's unique case: who are the 'real' policy makers?

One might be wondering, how cultural policy for cinema is related to militancy in Manipur. It may help to understand that the study of cultural policy in India as a whole is multi-layered, given that a 5000 year old history is traced back to when we even speak of culture in a "bewildering multiplicity of races, castes, ethnic groups, sub-cultures and religious sects." It might also be helpful to understand that India is a young democracy and although cultural policy is only framed by this young government, "the conceptual thinking of the people has links with a vigorous body of tradition with a long and complex history" (Vatsyayan, 1972) which is perhaps why policies for culture and hence cultural consumption is dictated by religious groups, social norms, ethnic organisations and the likes of aforementioned ethnic militants.

### 1.3 Extrajudicial control: the 'Other' governance

If we can digest that the government has only a nominal say in cultural policy making because of its newness, we can also comprehend why radical groups such as these ethnic militants who, however unconstitutional, are taken seriously. Placing ethnicity and "culture" at the heart of their manifestos, these groups ring a familiar bell, perhaps which resound a local sentiment. However, this statement is not unconditional. Whether through effective sentimental positioning or violence and intimidation, these groups have earned an image that is as significant as the government, if not more.

Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that they have the power to not only form cultural policies but to tax, punish and even prosecute offenders who do not comply.

### 1.4 The Manipuri Film Industry: a brief history

Manipur's fascination with cinema can be traced back to the first ever screening in the kingdom, not in tents or empty lots like in Mumbai or Kolkata but, in the royal palace itself. The bombing of Imphal in the WWII stopped the screening of films, but in 1936, the royal prince Maharajah Kumar Priyobrata made films an actuality in Manipur. A nationally renowned film critic, RK Bidur (2009) relates:

> M.K. Priyobrata […] was completely enchanted by the Charlie Chaplin films he had seen regularly at Raipur, Central Province (near Madhya Pradesh) where he received his school education in the 1920s. On his return to Imphal and acting on the advice of Col. Dr. Tylor, Civil Surgeon of Manipur Hospital, M.K. Priyobrata purchased an 8mm movie camera and went on filming socio-cultural events and other happenings in the existing milieu and many trips to places in and out of Manipur.

Since then many tried their hand at film-making, however attempts like *Mainu Pemcha* could not be completed for lack of funds; Kongbrailatpam Ibohal Sharma produced many silent films with a rundown 16mm Bolex movie camera. Manipuri cinema was just born when a whole new wave of cinema was taking the world over; however, 1972 was a turning point:

> Karam Monomohan Singh (popular name - Karam Amumacha), a spirited enterpriser produced for the first time a Manipuri full-length feature Matamgee Manipur under the banner of K.T. Films and got it released on April 9 in 1972. (Bidur 2009)

That being the beginning, many films followed, often at the price of quitting secure jobs at least and becoming bankrupt at most. Making cinema on celluloid was expensive and without appropriate infrastructure to support the industry, it could produce only 31 feature films (including 2 short features) within a span of 25 years. (Bidur 2009)

Legendary film-maker, Aribam Syam Sharma made 'Imagi Ningthem' in 1981 and bagged the Golden Montgolfiere award at the Nantes Film Festival, France making it the only Indian film till date to have done so. This brought recognition to the industry for its artistic originality, even though the industry did not churn out as many films.

However, with the ban on Bollywood films in 2000 by a militant group on grounds of cultural infiltration and corruption, Manipuri cinema and television came to a standstill for almost 3-5 years. Fortunately, with the digital wave sweeping all media in the new millennium, Manipuri films too experienced a boom in production as Hanglal (2011) observes in her editorial.

> To circumvent the ban […] many filmmakers started making films on important social issues in Manipur. Commercial and documentary films in Manipur are flourishing as a result. As digital technologies were used to make these films, the

> ‘digital cinema’ movement came about. […] Manipur has become a pioneer of digital film movement all over India. (Hasan 2011)

### 1.5 Objectives and rationale of the study

With the pioneering digital renaissance of Manipuri cinema, it is important to locate the major stakeholders of the industry. Especially because it is not difficult to overlook the position militant organisations play in the industry as their actions are quite inconspicuous. Furthermore, with political tensions between the state of Manipur and India on the rise and the racial discrimination fuelling hatred among common people, films as a medium can help foster understanding and clear ignorance. It then becomes pertinent to understand how films which are controlled by militant groups – who are against integration of Manipur into the larger country – can really help the cause and, if not, gauge any counter-productivity.

Additionally, “Film [are] perhaps the single strongest agency for the creation of a national Mythology” (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1995), which leads us to asking how locating ethnic militants as a policy maker for films impacts the concept of integration and the ideology of a greater nation-state.

Firstly, we must attempt to identify militant organisations as policy makers by juxtaposing its activities, particularly the ban of Bollywood films in 2000, alongside attributes of a conventional policy making body. Like we do with any policy, we shall attempt a content analysis of the ban. Unfortunately, since the actual policy is only a statement, this paper will study other academic literatures, news articles and editorials regarding the ban. Touching lightly upon the implications the ban has had on the industry and the subsequent developments, both positive and negative, it has evolved – we shall arrive at a conclusion.

## 2.0 Bollywood cinema accused of corrupting ethnic value: ban of September 2000

By the time Manipuri cinema was born, the Hindi-based Bollywood film industry in Bombay was flourishing, experiencing the greatest of its periods. This implied that a sea of masala movies was flooding the silver screen in Imphal – the capital of Manipur – and capitalising on the limited market the city had anyway.

> This was back in 1995, at a time when the cinema halls in Manipur showed mostly Bollywood and a few Hollywood films. […] Yet the vast majority of the time it was posters of Shahrukh Khan, Salman Khan, Madhuri Dixit, Raveena Tandon, with an occasional Sylvester Stallone or Arnold Schwarzenegger, that occupied the hoardings and public walls. Over the following decade, however, the Bollywood posters slowly began to vanish, followed by the Hollywood posters. The last I heard about a Hindi film being shown in a Manipur theatre was Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam, in 1999. (Akoijam 2009)

BBC South Asian network reports a spokesman of the rebel group, RPF (Revolutionary Peoples Front) of Manipur, “The Hindi films from Bombay [are] undermining the cultural values of the state and [are] unacceptable to its people.” The rebel spokesman threatened to bomb any cinema hall screening Hindi movies, the report continues. (Bhaumik 2000)


**Figure 1: BBC South Asian Network's report on the RPF's Ban of Hindi Films and Television in Manipur (Bhaumik 2000)**

A retrospective report on a forum clarifies, “On October 16, volunteers of RPF confiscated several thousand videocassettes of Hindi films and music and burnt them as a protest against the "Indianization" of Manipur. Movie theatres stopped screening Hindi movies.” (Abujam 2014) The term “indianization” of Manipuri cultural values is claimed to have been used in the original statement issued by the organisation.

## 3.0 Militant organisations as policy makers

Firstly, we may understand policy makers as those individuals, bodies or organisations that actually formulate policy for a people. In this sense, militant groups in Manipur are an organised body of people who not only produce policy but implement it as well. Secondly, like conventional policy making bodies, these organisations have a structural hierarchy and formulate policy that work towards a stated mission.

Thirdly, militant outfits are complexly structured and have positions and ranks at par with the national army if not more. They work towards a mission which in the specific case of RPF is obtaining complete independence from the jurisdiction of the Indian state. (Abujam 2014)

Fourthly, policy bodies not only formulate policy but also demand reciprocation and are therefore regarded as authority figures. Like the government, the relationship between the people for whom the policy is made and the policymaker is top-down – wherein an authority at the top dictates the activities of whom the policy is made for. Another similarity with the

government is the repressive and ideological state apparatuses (Althusser 1970) these outfits employ to implement their policies which may range from taxation to prosecution.

While those are areas where the militants qualify as policy makers, there are others which do not. Funding will be a primary disqualifier as groups are not seen to provide financial assistance to those who keep with their rules. Their governance lacks a reward system, relying mostly on punishments and negative reinforcements.


**Figure 2: Militant group demands money from the Manipuri Film Industry (Terrorists threaten to ban movies 2014)**

Another crucial disqualifier is the obscurity of their policymaking process. Quite obviously, given the nature of their struggle and their unlawful control of public life, their activities including but not limited to policy-making is largely underground.

## 4.0 Militant groups as 'cultural intermediaries' and tastemakers

This section explores the position of militant groups in relation to Bourdieu's concept of cultural intermediaries drawing heavily from his work in 'Distinction: A Social critique of the judgement of Taste' and Matthews and Smith's 'The Cultural Intermediaries Reader'.

Cultural intermediaries are in essence the tastemakers of society. Tastemakers occupy a space between the economy and culture monitoring consumption, constructing legitimacy and adding value to cultural products. (Matthews & Maguire (eds.) 2014). Militants control film

economy by threating cinema exhibitors, they justify their policy with reference to ‘preserving traditional values’ and adds value to local culture by epitomising it. (Hasan 2011)

Bourdieu (1984) says that tastes are a manifestation of cultural needs, which are, in turn, a product of ones upbringing and education; a marker of ones “class”, following a hierarchy, wherein cultural practices points to its process of acquisition and in turn to the “classes of individuals which they characterize.”

Reflecting on the above, rebel groups are adamant on conserving traditional Manipuri values and articulating indigenous cultural needs as separate from a mainland Indian one. Thereby, marking a class of a wholly Manipuri society independent from any “alien” cultural infiltration – which is a part of their mission.

It is also interesting to note that militant groups sufficiently satisfy the two characteristics (Matthews & Maguire (eds.) 2014) associated with cultural intermediaries:

i. *Value formation:* Militant groups have clearly articulated statements and their policy reflects the values they want to inculcate in Manipur and those they wish to shun.
ii. *Expert orientation:* Militant’s autonomy, authority, devices and resources are illegitimate but are certainly heeded. They lack expertise in filmmaking but they know what must be censored to keep with their objectives.

## 5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

Bollywood makes a “fetish out of regional cultures”, and the northeast has never found a place in mainstream Hindi cinema (Hasan 2011) up until 2014, with the film ‘Mary Kom’; most “films have [also] misinterpreted the various insurgencies and grossed over political discontent.” (Bhartiya 2007) Although, people in Manipur still consume Bollywood films privately, the ideology of a composite Indian culture as portrayed in mainstream Bollywood has a mixed response. (Rajagopal 2001, p. 22)

Given these circumstances, it is not completely unreasonable to regulate Bollywood films. ‘Indian culture’ and ‘tradition’ had been an important marker of national identity against imperial domination, thus, it seems logical that the covert cultural imperialism (Hasan 2011) imposed on the northeast is confronted by an indigenous film industry, which the ban of Bollywood, in Manipur has elicited.

Whether we acknowledge militants as policy makers or not, it is a fact that the banning of Bollywood has accentuated local industry and encouraged local talent. An industry which produced only 31 films in its first 25 years now produces more than 50 films every year. (Ahanthem 2014) Evidently, the digital revolution and the ban were perfectly timed to give Manipuri Cinema the push it needed.

So far, militant organisations have assumed that local culture must be preserved and safeguarded from the Bollywood epidemic through the development of a local film industry to counter it. They have also taken the liberty to formulate a policy, albeit illegal, and enforce

it from their position of autonomy and authority using devices of taxation and prosecution employing their military resources. Their policy has, for most parts, worked for the better of the local industry – giving it the boost it required – and perhaps subverting the epidemic.

This leads us to conclude that while militant organisations are not the most predictable policymakers, they are undeniably instrumental in controlling cultural consumption – making them a policy body anyway.

This study does not deliberate concerns such as commercial Manipuri cinema being a sycophantic remake of Bollywood (Kh 2014), the pirate invasion of South Korean cinema (Kuotsu 2013) and the popularity of regional Indian cinema in the state. Further study may consider these contradictions and revaluate the conclusions. It is also possible to gauge public opinion and empirically chart the opinions of CBFC, Film Forum Manipur, filmmakers and the audience. The study was limited to content analysis; primary research such as interviews and field research may be undertaken to validate the findings.

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