

The Tyranny of Insurgency and its Conflict in Manipur

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Abstract

The study examines the various module of the insurgent groups in Manipur. The rising of left-wing extremism is threatening the state and a series of insurgencies have emerged rapidly in the region intrigued by youth. Specifically, the researcher focuses on the insurgency activities and how it impinges on the ethnic groups of people and analyses the heinous crime by the armed groups in the society. Eventually, the insurgent groups prevail in the entire state, their revolt against the government, which leads the law and order of the land to become shoddier. Poverty, corruption, threat and extortion, administrative failure, political involvement and human rights abuses are the significant impacts of insurgency activities in the region. The central government declared Manipur a "Disturb Area" in 1980 and imposed Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958 to tackle the insurgency activities. Insurgency action has a broad, profound and complex impact on the state's socio-economic development and politics.

Keywords: Insurgency, Armed Conflict, Corruption, Extortion, Law and Order.

1. Origin of Insurgency

On 24 November 1964, the first Manipur-based insurgency group United National Liberation Front (UNLF), was formed in the valley areas of the State¹. The purported 'forced' merger of the princely State of Manipur with the Indian Union on 14 October 1949², sparked widespread resentment among the people of Manipur. The people Manipur's were not asked to vote in a referendum and plebiscite, violating the nation's right to self-determination. The delay in giving full-fledged statehood to Manipur provokes such unification. After that, several insurgent groups began to exist in the valley areas of Manipur, such as the People's Revolutionary Party of *Kangleipak* (PREPAK) in 1977, followed by the People's Liberation of Army (PLA) in 1978 and the *Kangleipak* Communist Party (KCP) in 1980. On the other hand, the state's hill areas have been affected by different groups of *Naga* insurgency. *Naga* insurgent groups have also wreaked havoc in Manipur. *Nagalin* consists of *Naga* groups such as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM), followed by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) factional group. Several clashes between NSCN-IM and NSCN-K have been affected in the hill district of Manipur. In the early 1990s, *Kuki* tribes formed their revolution against the NSCN-IM alleged oppression. Following ethnic clashes between *Naga* and *Kuki*, several *Kuki* outfits were formed. Hitson (2007) mentioned that the Kukis organised their militant groups to protect their interests and retain their identity. Likewise, Islamist organisations such as the People's United Liberation Front (PULF) have formed to safeguard the interest of '*Pangal* (Manipuri Muslim). Burney (1981) cited that according to the former governor of Manipur, the state's economic backwardness is making people impatient and inciting them to join the insurgency. He further argued that the political unification of Manipur was not backed by economic prosperity. Instead, following integration, the people had to endure a period of neglect, step motherly treatment, and disinterest toward the societies. Although militancy or terrorism has long been regarded as the region's

nightmare, its precise meaning remains a mystery to observers worldwide. Militancy is defined as the use of violence by a dissatisfied group to attain its desired outcome (Chandrika, 2004). However, almost all clans or tribes in Manipur have their own 'armed outfits' with their demands and overlapping agendas. In modern Manipur, ethnicity, and therefore 'nationality,' became the 'master identity' in the context of the many communities, particularly the *Nagas*, *Meiteis*, and *Kukis* (Khangchian, 2019).

2. Causes of Insurgency

Manipur's insurgency has its roots in the state's history. The People of Manipur are enraged by several historical events that they perceive as unfair. The insurgent organizations are extreme manifestations of this mindset. According to an intelligence report, by 2001, 19590 insurgents were operating in both the valley and hill districts of Manipur (Tarapot Ph. 2003). According to the Peace and Conflict Report 2008 (Quins, 2008), Manipur is one of the world's most active armed self-determination groups.

2.1 Unemployment, Deprivation and Poor Governance:

Unemployment and deprivation have harmed a substantial portion of Manipur's population. Due to a lack of actual work possibilities and the government's unwillingness to appropriately address the problem, the youth have turned to rebellion. "Manipur suffers from a failed state syndrome," Gurudas (2006) claims. All disasters appear to be caused by democratic institutions, notably the government, failing to keep the economy politically stable. Due to high unemployment and limited opportunities in the state economy, young people were forced to choose between working and joining the insurgency. The militant organisation articulated the desire for secession due to societal frustration caused by the lack of gainful work, pervasive corruption, defunct democratic institutions, and the non-operation of democratic principles. Surjeet Singh (2004) opined that the insurgency problem is political, originating from the region's backwardness

and must be dealt with politically. The central government has considered a question of law and order. However, as the last few decades have shown, the latter strategy has not brought us anywhere; in reality, it has deteriorated the problem over time. Moreover, alleged security force atrocities in the region have further estranged the people, endangering the unity and integrity of our country. Political, economic, developmental, ethnic, cultural, and geographical alienation and a combination of these factors all contribute to the insurgent threat.

3. The profile of violence in Manipur

Manipur is now one of the worst-affected states in Northeast India, with at least 23 insurgent groups active (Das, 2008). The Annual Report of the Indian Government's Ministry of Home Affairs in 2017–2018, and 2018-2019 highlights that the state of Manipur is afflicted by insurgents from the *Naga*, *Kuki*, *Meitei*, *Zomi*, *Hmar*, and Muslim undergrounds. In 2017, Manipur accounted for about 54 percent of total violent incidents in the Northeast region (Manipur-167, entire Northeast region -308). Counter-Insurgency operations by Security Forces resulted in the killing of 22 insurgents, the arrest of 558 cadres, and the recovery of 127 weapons in 2017. About 62 percent of the insurgency incidents in the state were accounted for by the *Meitei* insurgency, killing seven Security Forces personnel and eight civilians in 2017. Manipur remained the region's most violent state in 2018, accounting for more than half of all incidents (entire Northeast region: 252, Manipur: 127). In 2018, Counter-Insurgency Operations in the State resulted in the neutralisation of 10 militants, arrest of 404 militant and recovery of 99 weapons. *Meitei* insurgency accounting for 57 percent of all insurgency incidents in the state, claimed the lives of six Security Forces personnel and five civilians.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs' Annual Report 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, in 2019, Manipur accounted for almost 57 percent of all incidents (entire NE: 223, Manipur: 126). Insurgency-related occurrences in Manipur

decreased in 2019 compared to 2018. In 2019, there were no Security Force deaths in the state. Neutralised nine terrorists, 476 militants were arrested, and 92 weapons were recovered throughout the state due to counter-insurgency operations. Insurgency incidents in *Meitei* accounted for almost 60 percent of all insurgency incidents in the state. In 2020, there has been a decrease in insurgency-related incidents by 23 percent compared to 2019. There has been no civilian death in the state in 2020. Security Forces killed 07 cadres/insurgents in the state, arrested 259 insurgents, and recovered 92 weapons in 2020. Meitei insurgency accounted for around 44% of insurgency incidences in the state.

United News of India reported that the Manipur Police Department presented its annual report for 2021 on 3 January 2022. According to a statement made by Manipur Police in 2021, The State Police apprehended 233 cadres from various outfits as part of its counter-insurgency operation, along with 167 guns, 3115 live rounds, 253 IEDs (Improvised Explosive Device), explosives (3kgs), 76 hand grenades, six RPGs (Rocket-propelled grenade), two safety fuses, 27 lathodes, 360 detonators, 30 NT sets and Rs. 6,17,222 and 4500 Kyat in cash were seized. Fourteen persons were detained under NSA, 15 suspected militants were killed, while 20 others surrendered their weapons to the government. (South Asia Terrorism Portal). The term 'violence' is usually understood as a *'degree of conflict rather than a sort of conflict or even a form of social or political action for its own sake'* (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998).

The profile of violence in Manipur during the last 23 years is given below:-

3.1 Fatalities in Insurgency-linked Violence in Manipur: 2000-2022

Table No. 1

	Incidents of Killing	Civilians	Security Forces	Terrorists/Insurgents/Extremists	Not Specified	Total
2000*	44	46	31	60	0	137
2001	98	48	16	101	2	167
2002	103	30	44	106	21	201
2003	102	23	23	153	6	205
2004	140	39	51	130	13	233
2005	203	140	51	135	9	335
2006	195	74	38	146	28	286
2007	257	130	58	240	33	461
2008	309	113	10	349	24	496
2009	276	76	19	329	8	432
2010	90	29	6	102	1	138
2011	42	23	9	31	2	65
2012	67	23	12	77	1	113
2013	33	21	6	28	0	55
2014	36	22	10	23	0	55
2015	52	18	24	52	3	97
2016	25	14	13	9	0	36
2017	37	23	9	22	1	55
2018	21	7	7	9	0	23
2019	7	4	0	5	0	9
2020	4	1	3	3	0	7
2021	12	8	5	14	0	27
2022	2	0	1	1	0	2
Total**	2155	912	446	2125	152	3635

*Data since March 6, 2000

Source: South Asian Terrorism Portal (SATP)

** Data till April 12, 2022

4. The Hegemony of Insurgency

˘ The Dictionary of International Law defines:

‘insurgents as rebels, resistance, detachments, or participants in a civil war or national liberation war who control certain territory in their country, wage struggles against colonialists, dictatorial fascists and other anti-democratic regimes for self-determination of their people and have been recognized as ‘insurgents’ by other subjects of international law’ (cited in Sajal Nag, 2003).

Academically, 'insurgency' has been defined '*as a struggle between a non-ranking group and ruling authorities in which the former consciously employs political resources and instruments of violence to establish legitimacy for some aspect of the political system it considers illegitimate*' (Bard, 1980). Insurgency is a threat to a country's economic, political, and social security, as well as a pivotal contributor to underdevelopment by stifling both domestic and foreign investment. Also, it degrades people's quality of life, depletes human and social capital, harms citizens' relationships with governments, and weakens democracy, the rule of law, and the country's ability to foster growth (Akhain, 2012). Today, insecurity is the biggest problem in Manipur. Insurgent groups have ruled the state since it was merged into the Indian Union. For an instant, CorCom the Coordination Committee of seven underground organizations has declared 15th October as the "National Black Day." The CorCom has called for a mass strike throughout Manipur on 15 October 1949, to protest Manipur's integration with the Indian Union. The conflict has often led to violence against the state, the general public, private organizations, etc. In Manipur, militarization has become a big issue. Instead of the civil administration, the armed forces rule the state. In this view, insurgencies are caused by greed. Building on a significant body of economic literature, this argument likens violence to an industry that generates profit from looting. Its proponents suggest that insurgents may be "indistinguishable from bandit or pirate" (Herschel I. Grossman, 1999).

Insurgencies can be divided into two categories: Conspirational and Warlike. The other forms of violence *coup-de-etat*, terrorism, guerilla warfare, hijacking, kidnapping, etc., are later included (A.D. Smith, 1976). Therefore, the insurgent groups have various dimensions and manifestations across the nation. In Manipur, the armed groups have the ambition of lust for power and have carried out their attacks in the form of extortions, abductions, assassinations, bombings, and armed assaults, among the others, over the decades of its uprising

with the objectives of achieving the selfish goal. Manipur has been a hotspot for rebel activity.

On Saturday, 14 November 2021, the banned People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Manipur Naga People's Front (MNPF) staged the worst ambush in Sehken village. An Army Colonel serving as the commanding officer of the 46 Assam Rifles, his wife, and their six-year-old kid, as well as four paramilitary force soldiers, were killed along the India-Myanmar border in Churachandpur district. (Prabin K, 2021). This has been the bloodiest strike on security personnel since an ambush on the army's 6 Dogra Regiment on 5 June 2015, in the nearby *Chandel* District, which killed 18 troops and injured more than ten more. The main question is why Manipur's security forces have been sustaining such heavy losses. The state's geographical location, as Myanmar's close Indian neighbour, is one of the factors. The ambush took place near the village of Behiang, just 10 kilometers from Myanmar's border, which cannot be overlooked (Wasim, 2021). As a result, combating the insurgency in Manipur has been a significant struggle for the security forces, even though the state has enacted the rigorous Armed Officials (Special Powers) Act, which gives security forces near-universal powers to deal with anyone they suspect of being an insurgent.

Internecine and factional battles occur among the valley's insurgent groups from time to time. They frequently enter the hilly district of *Chandel*, *Churachandpur*, *Senapati*, *Tamenglong* and *Ukhrul* to seek shelter and disturb the locality. They also target military posts and patrols in hilly places security troops are deployed. According to the Ministry of Defence (Annual report 2007-08)²² Government of India, in Manipur, operations have been carried out to cleanse the area of underground organisations influence in Samtal Salient. This location is in Manipur's Chandel district. The civil and developmental administration and operations are being reactivated in this area.

According to *The Indian Express* (Jimmy Leivon, 2018): A woman was killed by the armed miscreant's suspected cadres of the banned NSCN-K opened fire on the vehicle she was traveling in. The incident happened near *Siblong* village *Money* district of Manipur, about 147 kilometers from Imphal, along the National Highway-37. The victim has been identified as *Jianthailiu Kamei*, 45 years old, from Kambiron (*Puiluan*) village, Money district. According to reports, the late Jianthailiu was returning home with fellow villagers after attending the opening ceremony of a railway substation in *Kamai*. Insurgent groups are pretty active along the National Highway-37, notably in the Nungba sub-division. It has been learned that several cases of abduction have occurred.

5. Insurgency and People's Sentiments

There has been widespread resentment against valley-based insurgent groups from time to time, according to Research Report prepared by *Human Development Society*, Delhi. On 16 August 2006, during a crowded Krishna Janmashtami celebration, suspected terrorists detonated a powerful grenade at the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) temple complex *Sangaiprou*, Imphal. In this incident, at least five civilians, including two children, were killed and over fifty others, including five American and two French nationals, were injured. More than twenty civil society groups came together to protest against this incident. In another incident, there was a bomb blast at *Paona Bazaar*, Imphal, on 17 November 2007. For this incident also, people reacted sharply against militant groups. Nandni Devi, wife of Hem Singh, a blast victim, said, "*Rebels are ruthless people who do not value human lives. How can they barter people's lives for money?*"

According to *The Time of India* (Sarojkumar, 2021) social activist *Athuan Abonmei* was allegedly kidnapped on 22 September 2021 by unidentified gunmen from a public gathering held by the Chief Minister of Manipur and other ministers in *Tamenglong* district. His body was discovered shot in the head, 28 kilometers

away from where he was kidnapped. According to police sources, about 20 suspected militants arrived at the *Tamenglong* townsite and carried *Abonmei* away in a jeep along the *Tamenglong-Tamei* road. He was the leader of the *Zeliangrong Baudi*, a major social organization within the tribe. Family members and community leaders criticized why the gunmen were not arrested and why no police or security forces tracked the fleeing kidnappers. The kidnappers' identities and motives are yet unclear.

6. Why has Armed Force Special Power Act 1958 been widely condemned?

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958 was enacted by the Indian government in response to the state's unrest and insurgency. The entire State of Manipur has been declared a "disturbed area" under the Act since 1980 (mention in Kamboj, 2004). Section 6 of AFSPA specifies that '*No prosecution, suit or other legal proceedings shall be instituted, except with the previous sanction of the Government, against any person in respect of anything done or purported to be done in exercise of the powers conferred by this Act.*' For the past 42 years, Manipur has been subjected to AFSPA. The military forces' use of unrestricted powers under Section 4 of the Act to arrest, search without a warrant, seize, and even shoot to kill on mere suspicion has resulted in widespread abuses of people's fundamental rights guaranteed by Articles 14, 19, 21, 22, and 25 of the Constitution. The power conferred on the armed forces under Section 4(a) of the AFSPA Act has harmed the citizens of Manipur the most, as they believe the Act grants the armed forces broad powers to shoot to kill and that it fosters an environment in which law enforcement agents can be used excessive force with impunity. It also violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) flagrantly. The Jeevan Reddy Committee (The Indian Express, 2015), which was constituted in 2004, further urged that the act be repealed entirely. The body stated, "*The Act is a symbol of hatred, oppression, and an instrument of*

high-handedness," and several anti-AFSPA have also referred to the law as "draconian" or "martial law" in nature.

6.1 Army intervention and its impact on ordinary people's life

In addition to the above, the *Malom* massacre in Manipur was also one of the infamous incidents in September 2000; the 8th Assam Rifles killed ten civilians at *Malom Leikai*, near Imphal Airport. However, it was later found that the incident had been faked encounter. Which prompted *Irom Sharmila*, one of the most outspoken protesters against the act, to go on a hunger strike for 16 years, for which she was detained on charges of "suicide attempt" (Deccan Harald 2021). In another incident, according to *The Hindu*, on 4 June 2021, *Mangboilal Lhouvum*, a father of four children and a daily wages labourer, was shot and murdered by the Commanding Officer of the E Company of the 44 Assam Rifles stationed at *Kangpoki's Banglabung* outpost. The Assam Rifles reported that the event occurred during an anti-insurgency operation aiming at arresting members of the *Kuki* Revolutionary Army rebel organisation. (Iboyaima Laithangbam, 2021). The tragedy was yet another example of abuse of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act in the state.

There are numerous incidents of killing civilians in the Northeast region. For instant, according to *The New York Times*, the incident of killing civilians near the mountainous village of *Oting*, Nagaland in December 2021, when Indian Army Special Forces mistakenly targeted ethnic *Naga* peasants for rebels and opened fire on a truck that was taking them home after working at a coal mine. Survivors said no warning was given before the bullets flew, killing six individuals. As an angry gathering of people — some armed with machetes — battled with soldiers, who opened fire again by nightfall, the death toll had risen to 13 civilians and one army soldier (Hari and Mujib, 2022).

Soon after the *Oting* incident on 1 April 2022, soldiers from an elite Army unit in *Tirap* district of Arunachal Pradesh two civilians mistakenly shot

suspected extremists. According to witnesses, the two men, *Nokphua Wangpan* and *Ramwang Wangsu* — were returning from fishing in a river when the soldiers opened fire. The army troops were finally identified from the 12 Para security forces as reported in *The Hindu* newspaper (2 April 2022). The incident happened on the same day as the Armed Force Special Power Act 1958 was removed from some regions of some Northeastern states. Sharma (2011) describes, in Manipur, that the severity of counter-insurgency operations has an impact on civilian life. The development process reinforces the aggressive attitude to dominance, which is rightly referred to by the public as security-related advancements. The Indian government moves between political reconciliation, development assistance, and military cleansing. A persistent notion of being a frontier — inherited from the British colonial era — dominates the ruling class of post-colonial India's perspective of the region.

Romesh (2018) highlighted that the people of Manipur are suffering as a result of the Indian army's over-deployment. Every Manipuri is suspected of being an insurgent by the Indian army in a different racial background. It is common knowledge that many troops have been killed in battles with rebels. Most of them are apprehensive about being assigned to the state. Because their lives are in danger, they believe they are in an enemy zone. The soldiers may be seen patrolling in every single corner of Manipur.

Furthermore, the army's over-deployment and combing operations and harassment have frequently led to rural youngsters joining the insurgents. Moreover, imposing a curfew unexpectedly during a crisis disrupts people who are already trying to earn a living. No one prefers to travel far from home unless it is necessary because the law and order situation in Manipur is not very favourable to the people. In short, whether it is insurgents or the army, ordinary people suffer. As a result, the police and army should be given periodic orientation training programmes based on human rights, respect for human and

constitutional rights, and ethnic and community sentiments are respected. This kind of training will ensure that counter-insurgency actions do not endanger civilians. Similarly, in insurgent-affected areas, the government and NGOs should begin an awareness campaign among the general public about their fundamental rights, obligations, and legal knowledge. Their ability to fight injustice will improve.

Conclusion

Recapitulation of the preceding discussion reflects that innocent people are having difficulty dealing with the disruption. A peaceful atmosphere is aspired by ignorant people. Given the pain individuals have endured, the state must maintain peace to progress and develop more quickly. However, restoring peace in Manipur is difficult due to numerous obstacles. The perilous character of the insurgency group's threat has raised severe concerns among the people of Manipur. Innocent people have suffered and cannot afford to endure any longer if the state is set to erupt like a volcano. Kangujam (2008) stated the insurgency in the Northeast has turned into a gold mine in disguise. They aim to continue the problem by using extreme force without taking any steps to solve it. The government does not seem interested in identifying the underlying difficulties or root causes of the situation. The scenario has established itself as a practical tool to hide government mismanagement. Perhaps insurgency is understood and disseminated as a tool to advance the state's sanity. However, the concerned government should take up the initiative role to bring an amicable solution to bring peace and tranquility to the region. William (1997) suggested that negotiation is also a means of resolving conflicts, and as such, it is utilised in decision process modeling. To bring negotiation, mutual adjustment is the critical factor achieved. Each side suggests and implements adjustments to the other's position as the negotiations go.

Notes

1. For the profiles of the different militant outfits, see Manipur: Militant Groups Profile, Website of the Centre for Development and Peace Studies, <http://cdpsindia.org/manipur/militant-group-profile/>
2. For a complete study of the merger that took place on 14 October 1949, see Verghese, B. G. (1996). *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, and Development*, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi: Konark Publishers.

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