

## **Problems of Insurgency: A Holistic Understanding from Manipur, India**

M. Romesh Singh

Manipur, a jewel land of India and known for its rich cultural heritage and traditional arts, has become a place where violence and bloodshed is common feature of the state today. The problem is so much pronounced that people from other states widely recognise this small state through its prevailing problem of unrest. Insurgency threatens the existing development process and has become major obstacle for development of the state. In fact, insurgency emerged in the late sixties and seventies of the last century. Later on, it started giving tremendous pressure and lots of destruction in the systematic functioning of the state as well as central government. In due course of time, numbers of insurgent groups and factional groups have mushroomed due to differences in ideology among themselves. They have been continuously fighting against each other. On the other hand, for the purpose of controlling insurgency activities in the state, armed forces have been deployed in Manipur, equipped with wide range of powers. Ultimately, common men are suffering due to such activities and they are at the receiving end whether it is the activities of insurgency or that of the army. The present paper highlights the rise of insurgency and how innocent people's right to live in freedom has been curtailed due to unrest in the state.

**Keywords:** Insurgency, Extortions, Factionalism, Poverty, Development, Corruption

### **Introduction**

Manipur is an isolated hill girt state in the North-Eastern part of India. It is bordered in the North by Nagaland, in the East by Myanmar in the South partly by Mizoram and the Chin Hills of Myanmar, and in the West by Cachar District of Assam. The total area of the state is 22,327 Sq. Kms., out of which 90% is hilly terrain. Owing to its topographical structure, the state has had problems of economic development and socio-economic transformation for a long period. There are other factors like unskilled dominated economy, absence of industries and minimal urbanisation, ethnic conflict and insurgency problems etc., also contribute to the slow development of the state. Now, the problem is so much

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Dr. M. Romesh Singh is Associate Professor at the Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, Telangana, India. [Email: mrsss@uohyd.ernet.in]

pronounced that people from other states widely recognise this small state through its prevailing insurgency problem. It is more appropriate to describe the problem of socio-economic development in the light of ongoing insurgency activity across the state. This movement has given birth to various problems in socio-economic development. At present, Manipur has become an important centre of insurgency. The fastest growing industry in Manipur is insurgency and insurgent groups come up with the case which companies are floated elsewhere in the country. There are established liberation groups carrying on the struggle for more than three decades now (Laba, 1995). As of now insurgency problem is being considered as one of the major hurdles in the development process.

It is more appropriate to describe the problem of development in the light of ongoing insurgency activity across the state. Law and order situation is one of the key factors for slow pace of development. So, it calls for serious attention of individual from various walks of life to understand problems of insurgency in the state, which has given birth to various problems in socio-economic development. People of Manipur are living under serious threat from insurgency activities and sincere effort is needed to explore possible solution for better future of poor people living in Manipur. In this background, the present paper is an attempt to explore the root causes of insurgency movement and suffering of the common people due to insurgency.

### **Brief Account on Insurgency in Manipur**

According to an intelligence report, 19590 insurgents were operating both in valley and hill areas of Manipur by 2001 (Tarapot. Ph, 2003:178). The emergence of 34 insurgent groups including ten inactive in the state leaving apart the ten inactive groups the list includes the following- People Liberation Army (PLA), United National Liberation Front (UNLF), Manipur Liberation Front Army (MLFA), Revolutionary People Front (RPF), People Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Kanglei Yawol Kanba Lup (KYKL), Revolutionary Joint Committee (RJC), Kangleipak Communists Party (KCP), People United Liberation Front (PULF), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM and K), Naga Lim Guard (NLG), Kuki National Front (KNF), Kuki National Army (KNA), Kuki Defence Force (KDF), Kuki Democratic Movement (KDM), Kuki National Organization (KNO), Kuki Security Force (KSF), Chin Kuki Revolutionary Front (CKRF), Kom Rem People's Conventions (KRPC), Zomi Revolutionary Volunteers (ZRV), Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA), Zomi Re-Unification Organization (ZRO) and Hmar Peoples Convention( HPC) [Sharma 200: 217]. In brief, these underground organised waged war either for sovereign Manipur state or for forming differently smaller independent states by dividing present Manipur.

Among the above organisations, National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM & K), Kuki National Front (KNF), People Liberation Army (PLA), United National Liberation Front (UNLF) and Kanglei Yawol lup Kanba Lup (KYKL) etc., actively operating in the state. Insurgency problems have occupied a large space in the day-to-day life of the people of Manipur. Today, NSCN(IM), the biggest insurgent group in North East India, is expanding its operation in Nagaland, North Cachar and hill areas of Manipur. It is the leading insurgency group and actively functioning under the guidance of one of the associates of the late A.Z. Phizo, who had propagated the demand for the indepen-

dence of Nagaland. There is of course, another faction of NSCN led by Khaplang, which has its headquarters at Kachin in Myanmar. The NSCN(IM) has emerged as the focal point around which other insurgent groups have been moving. Besides NSCN (K), UNLF operates from Myanmar with which the valley insurgent groups of Manipur have developed good coordination. Moreover, the Kuki insurgents are also actively operating in hill areas. Few years back, they were engaged in bloody clashes with the Nagas. Their ultimate objective is to establish a Kuki homeland. In recent past, another group which belongs to Muslim community, has already been established to fight against exploitation of Muslims. The insurgent violence in Manipur has virtually turned this small state into a battlefield. However, it is well known that while the insurgents in the valley are fighting for an independent Manipur, those in the hills have launched a struggle for an independent Nagaland including Naga inhabited areas of Manipur. Another in the fray is the Kuki with the objective of forming greater Kuki homeland. At present, Manipur has become an important centre of insurgency. A reporter of *The Statesman* from Manipur highlights: "The fastest growing industry in Manipur is insurgency and insurgent groups come up with the case which companies are floated elsewhere in the country" (Laba, 1995).

### **Rise of Insurgency**

The insurgency problem in Manipur came into existence in the late 1960s and 1970s. There was no problem of insurgency when Manipur merged into India. Later, the opposition to merger slowly started a struggle and now it has become a big hurdle in the state as well as to the central government by creating multiple problems in various form of revolt. There are various root causes of insurgency movement in Manipur. As V.K. Sarin (1980) rightly pointed out: "political integration alone is not enough. Integration should be accompanied by suitable government measures to consolidate it". The case of Manipur is a clear example of the failure of the government on socio-economic development of the state. The fact is that integration did not entail any organisation to revolt immediately and that it occurred at the later stage.

The acquiescence of Manipur to merger was an indication that they were prepared to associate themselves with India. Moreover, integration was necessary for a state like Manipur because of her non-viability and peculiar geographical position. "Nationalities", however, small would not renounce their sovereign existence when they do not find in the new arrangement changes if protecting their "National" interest as perceived by them (Sareen, 1981). For any society, some of the basic aspirations of the people everywhere are speedy development of their region, increased amenities, better standard of living and a sense of belonging through effective participation in the major activities of the state. One of the reasons for the present insurgency in Manipur is the gradual widening gap between the expectation of the people and their attainments. "The former governor of Manipur points out that economic backwardness of the state is making the people impatient and egging them on to take into insurgency. He also further said that political integration of Manipur was not followed by the economic development. Instead, the people after integration had to witness a most painful period of neglect and step-motherly treatment and indifference right up to the societies" (Burney 1981

cited in *Frontier Chronicle Imphal*, August 18).

Another scholar I.L. Singh (1981) opined: "...as insurgency in Manipur is directly linked with the problems of the educated, unemployed youth, channelising their energies by creating employment opportunities will go a long way in weaning them away from the path of violence". To substantiate the above statement, the unemployment problems are also linked with the inappropriate educational system in the state. There is no proper system of learning and teaching in educational institutions. Infact, examination halls are centers of malpractices. Generally, student pass out degree without having basic knowledge of concerned subject. As a result of this, they are not in position to compete with other people. Thus, a majority of the people rely upon the state government jobs where getting job is possible through bribing higher officials and ministers. Besides, corruption is found in many other states in India also. The magnitude of corruption prevailing in the state has threatened the very existence of the society. Apart from this, public money is shared among the Ministers, bureaucrats, the contractors etc. Very little of it percolates down to the people in the form of development measures and tangible benefits while the central government has been pouring large amounts of money. It also resulted in brining out more insurgency groups in the Manipur.

Surjeet Singh (2004) further opined that insurgency problem is basically political, arising out of the region's backwardness and needs to be resolved politically. While the government of India has been treating it is a law and order problem. But as the experience of the last few decades goes to show, the latter approach has not led us anywhere; if anything, it has only worsened the situation over the years. Besides, the atrocities allegedly committed by security force in the state have further alienated the people, posing a threat to our very national unity and integrity. Menace of insurgency which is caused by alienation, political, developmental, ethnic, cultural, economic and geographical and combination thereof.

It is also true that lack of socio-economic development and poverty are mainly responsible for disaffection with the state and rise of insurgent movements. Fore instance, Manipur continues to be one of the most backward states with regard to economic growth in the country. Rice being the main food crop both for the valley and hills has witnessed a decline in its production during the last decade mainly due to natural calamities like droughts and floods besides ever increasing population. There is no diversion from agriculture to other activities such as plantation and forestry for which there is tremendous scope in the state. Settled form of agriculture still continues to be concentrated in the valley and jhum cultivation continues to be predominant in the hills. Even after decades of independence, agriculture continues to depend on monsoon. Forests, covering about four-fifth of the state area, contribute too little to the state's net domestic product mainly due to poor management practices including indiscriminate exploitation, jhuming, forest fires, etc. Therefore, the state heavily depends on other central pool states for its food requirements.

Besides, there has been rapid decline in industrial output in Manipur. Even well established industries and factories are not able to function due to law and order problems, particularly monetary demands by the insurgency groups. Since profit margin is reduced due to extortion, no new investment has been coming to the state. Besides, there

is no source of income from the public and private sectors to this state. Because of remoteness and the poor transportation and law and order situation, private sector has not come forward with investment in Manipur. Thus the state has been kept outside the scope of external assistance, which may have added to the state plan.

Manipur is not far behind from other states in education but its share in technical and profession education is not up to the mark. The employment opportunities are confined to government employment and the scope in private sector is not favorable due to lack of industrial base. Government employment has been static due to ban on new recruitments because of severe financial crisis in the state. As a result, the state has a high rate of unemployment particularly among the educated youth. The problem has been accentuated due to the fact that avenues for private employment are restricted. The unemployment problem in the state is mainly responsible for social tension through manifestations in the form of drug addiction, social unrest, and ethnic clashes. This causes a strain on the resources of the state and hamper development activity. All these above facts as a whole can be considered as the main cause of insurgency in Manipur, despite their different goals and objectives. Most of the persons who joined in the insurgency group are youth in the age group of 15 to 30. It is worth mentioning that the initial part of insurgency movement was carried out in a peaceful and systematic manner and they had better understanding with the people of Manipur. Even people used to have sympathy towards the insurgent groups. Today, it is quite a contrast with the earlier part of the movement. In the long process of revolt they are gradually losing good image among the people and at the same time the number of insurgency groups have increased within a short span of time due to difference in ideas and goals. There are factions among insurgents who are fighting against each other. People in Manipur have the similar opinion that if the insurgents unite under one group, the problem would be really formidable. Under the present situation, it sounds impossible to unite them under one roof since they are not able to see eye to eye with one another. Factionalism among the insurgency groups also conveys wrong impression to the public. Many elderly persons do not approve the violent path adopted by the insurgents but they are unable to dissuade the youth.

### **Insurgency Intervention: A Ground Reality**

Here, an attempt has been made to highlight the various problems faced by the common man due to insurgency. Related information is collected from people residing in the hills and plain areas to examine the real suffering across the state. Based on the information provided by the people, many of them are quite familiar with insurgency groups and they have come across many problems in their day-to-day life. As a part of daily operation, insurgents visit the villages and force the villager to harbour them for a night or more. It is a compulsion for the person to take care of them and shelter them in the house. They have to provide food to those people. This is an additional burden to the villagers since they are surviving on a very meager source of income. Above all, their presence in the villages has created lots of tensions and fear among the villagers. Even the children are scared by seeing their uniform and guns. It is obvious that villagers' movement are normally restricted and could not even move freely when insurgents are present in the

village despite important works. It is really disturbing peace and harmony of the society. As result of their frequent visits and interaction, youths are getting close to them and have started supporting their operation from over ground. Working as an over ground is known as initial step for entering into such organisation. It adds more pressure to the parents of the youth (Romesh, 2006). Infact, it is easy to attract youth of the villages, pushing them into this path, since these youth are struggling for survival in the present day society.

### **Extortion, Factionalism and its Impact on Common People**

In fact extortion is so rampant to day that it has seriously affected developmental activity in the state. Over time, the insurgent outfits have perfected the art of extortion. They generally targeted the general populace, common people, government servants, petty traders, apart from well to do businessmen, are forced to pay up. Sometimes insurgents also demand money from Ministers and MLAs. Quite an open fact, yet none have the courage to defend themselves and express it openly. Many people were killed by insurgents when they failed to arrange the ransom demanded by the outfit. This extortion mechanism makes a significant contribution to the war chest of the insurgent outfits. Extortion constitutes an important source of income, many of the outfits are wholly dependent on extortion. Thus any success in disrupting this mechanism would neutralise these second rung outfits. Extortion has a created a decadent culture. Young people have joined insurgent outfits in the state but also masqueraded as insurgents coerce people to pay up. It is alleged that the insurgent organisations collect monthly donations from government employees “going by the source” the collection of money by various underground groups are nearly 100 cores of rupees a year (Phanjoubam, 2003: 54). Based on the information gathered from officials insurgency groups have been collecting money from each and every employee in the state. The amount of money contributed by employees depend on the pay scale of the employees. This practices is common for all the employees working on government institutions except army and police. Everybody knows about this issue but nobody complains to any of the higher authorities. They fear that insurgents may take any ultimate action. Thus, every employee no matter of which grade, has to contribute atleast some amount to the insurgency group whenever they get their monthly salary. This system is regulated more systematically among the government institutes situated in Manipur. Officials expressed that Manipur is ruled by two governments i.e., the state government and underground groups (insurgents). That’s why people are suffering and expected to suffer more and more in near future.

Such acts of extortion also give tremendous amount of mental pressure to the people. Through collection of money, these groups are able to operate and function in the state. Here, it is interesting to note that outsiders or armies have assumed that people of Manipur are backing these insurgency groups by giving financial support or giving shelters etc. If one looks at the reality, people who have contributed money to insurgents have not done voluntarily as such. Actually, they are threatened and forced to give money to them and these helpless people did not have any alternative to escape from them. This is the reality which one needs to understand. Due to such disturbances, common man have developed lots of antagonism towards these groups and criticised them when they are

not present in the village. But none have the courage to express their feelings and their views. This situation is prevailing across the state. Thus, insurgency groups have been creating lots of problems to the villagers (Romesh, 2003). It is also important to note that the local youths are indulging in robbery, looting and collecting money by taking advantage of the imbroglio created by insurgency. Often, one hears that youths who are not really insurgents scare and collect money from the innocent people. This type of incidents happen quite frequently and society misunderstood insurgents due to these acts of false insurgents. As a result, common man are also put into dilemma in recognising true insurgents coming to them. They don't dare to do any sort of enquiry about insurgents since they have more power. Ultimately, both the groups, either it may be insurgency or robbery; it appears same to the common people. Therefore, it is obvious to witness people suffering from both real and fake insurgents. Majority of the people expressed that these groups are able to sustain their operation because of the people in the state and at the same time one can't see any positive aspect of change from the revolt in Manipur. Instead of fighting for the real cause they are fighting among themselves and killing each other due to increasing number of factions within the insurgency groups.

There are lots of factions among the insurgency groups, which are operating in Manipur. This creates considerable amount of problems to the society. These factions always fight whenever they meet each other and disturb the peaceful environment. In the process of fighting, a number of people have been killed. Besides, if villagers are close to one group, the other one never encourages such relation, and same time they give warning to the villagers not to maintain relations with their opposite group. Actually none of the villagers are interested in maintaining relation with these groups. Unavoidable circumstances made the villagers to keep relation with one of the group. Villagers do not have any other alternative to escape from this type of situation. Factions among the groups are one of the factors for not having faith in insurgent revolt in Manipur by the people.

Due to their frequent visits to the villagers, the youths are developing good rapport with them and some of the youth are easily attracted towards them. To avoid this, elderly people constantly advice their youngsters not to maintain close relationship with insurgent groups. Otherwise, they may be influenced by insurgency to get involved in their activities, when they are in a state of frustration. That is the reason why parents are also worried for their children.

### **Security Force Equipped with Armed Forces (Special Power) Act (AFSPA)**

The Armed Forces (Special Power) Act 1958 is imposed upon the people of the Manipur and equipped with all the powers army raided villagers, arrested and tortured many innocent villagers, branded them as insurgency activists and sent them to the jail. Many people have been killed in fake encounters. However, over deployment of the army to control the insurgency in Manipur has lead to anger among the local people. The abduction and killing of Manorama Devi was a classic example. She was arrested from her home in the wee hours of 11 July 2004. Her dead body riddled with 19 bullets was found on a road side. This issue triggered massive protests by the people of Manipur against AFSPA. A group of brave Manipuri women shock the conscience of the whole of India

by baring themselves in front of the Manipur Assam Rifle gate. Such incidence has rocked the nation but failed to sustain for long. During that crisis, Prime Minister appealed to the people of Manipur that he would consider replacing the other act with a more human law that will address both the concerns of national security and the right of the citizens. Subsequently, constituted high level committee headed by Justice BP Jeevan Reddy to study the situation and finally submitted a report to the government for further action plan. Unfortunately, people in the state still failed to get positive response from the government which may again invite unwanted incidence. However, recent hunger strike against the AFSPA at Jantar Mantar by Irom Sharmila has captured nation's attention to certain extent. However, none of the central union ministers make a courtesy call to her which generally noticed in agitations led by Medha Patkar or Arundati Roy. This shows central government apathy towards the people of Manipur. It is worth mentioning that her battle enters the sixth year and she was being force fed through a nasal drip for over the years. She is determined to continue the hunger strike until AFSPA is removed from the state. Basically, the act was mainly imposed to contain insurgency and revived the civil administration from paralysis over the years. On the contrary, insurgency outfits have mushroomed and the administration remains more paralysed. Hence, repealing of the act is basic need of the hour. It is important to reexamine and formulate an alternative counter insurgency plan for future growth of the state.

### **Army intervention and its impact on common people's life**

In addition to the above, people of Manipur are suffering due to over deployment of Indian army. Indian army has been given wide-ranging powers in Manipur. The Indian army men who are racially different tend to look upon every Manipuri as a suspected insurgent. It is well known fact that many armies have been killed while confronting with the insurgents. Majority of them feel insecure to be posted in the state. Given the threat to their life, they feel as if they are in an enemy area. It is common to find the army moving for patrolling in every nook and corner of Manipur and disturbing people who are traveling on the buses and two wheelers. Moreover, the over deployment of army and their combing operations and harassments have quite often led the rural youth joining the insurgents. Besides, sudden imposition of curfew during crisis also disturbs people who are struggling to earn daily livelihood. Infact, nobody prefers to travel far away from their home town, except for urgency since the law and order situation in Manipur is not so friendly for the people. In short common men are at the receiving end and whether it is the activities of insurgents or that of the army. Therefore, the police and army should be given frequent orientation training programme based on human rights, respect for human and constitutional rights, and respect for ethnic and communal sensibilities. Such training will ensure that counter insurgency activities do not affect the common people. Similarly, Government and NGOs should start awareness programme among common people about their basic rights, obligations and legal awareness in insurgent affected areas. They will develop more strength to fight against injustice.

### **Conclusion**

Recapitulation of the above discussion reflects that innocent people are going through



tough time to cope up with the situation of unrest. People are dying to live a harmonious life. Considering the trauma of people, it is important to have peace in the state for faster progress and development. However, bringing peace in Manipur is not an easy task since there are many constraints. It is high time for the concern authorities to initiate the peace building process in the state by involving various organisations, groups, and individuals to come out with a possible solution. Innocent people have been suffering and can't afford to suffer for such a longer period if so state is going to erupt like a volcano. Government has been initiating various strategies for counter insurgency in the state but continue to fail over the years. Therefore, it is important to re examine and formulate an alternative counter insurgency plan for future growth of the state. There is urgent for proper rehabilitation scheme for surrender militants and restricting extortion activities, which is the main lifeline for their operation. Besides, effort should be made to create more employment opportunity for educated youth by creating ambience environment for establishing IT companies, BPO to the people of the state. On the whole, insurgency problem cannot be left with some particular group or government alone. These strategies can be achieved by involving local people having strong will power with the strong support from government and other NGOs. However, it still remained as an incomplete mission for many people who are concerned about future growth of the state.

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