



## INSURGENCY: A FLOURISHING INDUSTRY IN MANIPUR

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### ABSTRACT

*A tiny state in India, rich in resources but poor economically. It is well known for being the most trouble torn state in the Northeast perhaps in India with numerous insurgent groups actively operating. The state is well known for frequent bandhs, strikes, and economic blockade by one ethnic group and a counter by another. There is no prominent medium or large scale industry in Manipur that is worth mentioning as the environment is not conducive for attracting heavy investment in spite of the potentiality of the state in terms of resource and proximity to South East Asian countries. In fact Manipur is crucial to the success of the "Look East" and "Act East" policy of India with its long history of social, economic and political association with the East and South East Asian countries.*

**Keywords:** Insurgency, Nagalim, ethnic, Zale-ngam, industry, handloom industry, insurgency industry, AFSPA

### INTRODUCTION

Manipur is one of the 8 states of the Northeast India with a total land area of 22,327 Sq. Kms. It has 9 districts out of which 4 are in the valley and 5 are in the surrounding hills. The valley districts are inhabited by the Meiteis and Pangals while the hill districts are inhabited by the tribals of various ethnic groups. With the accession of Manipur state to the Independent India on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1949 Manipur has witness an ever increasing problem of insurgency. Insurgency problem in Manipur is not religion based but ethnic centric.

Manipur is well known for its rich ethnic diversity, flora and fauna and natural beauty. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru lovingly calls it the "Jewel of the east". It is also one of the few independent princely state in Independent India which was eventually annexed. The battle of Imphal and Maram of World War II is of great significance in the defeat and retreat of the advancing Japanese and its progress in the march of the Japanese to the west, in fact some scholars have termed the battle of Kohima and Imphal as the "Stalingard of the East".

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### **Objectives:**

This paper is to highlight the problem of insurgency in the state Manipur as a flourishing industry. There are different insurgent groups operating in the state established by different ethnic groups and communities. They operate within the same territory using similar means to achieve similar of different objectives.

### **Methodology:**

The study is descriptive in nature and judgmental where much of the content is the logical conclusion drawn by the author after analysing primary sources (interview, questionnaire) and secondary sources (books, journals, newspaper articles etc).

### **Insurgency:**

Insurgent activities and insurgency is synonym with Manipur. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) “Mother of all insurgencies” and its factions in the Northeast are active in Ukhrul, Chandel, Senapati, and Tamenglong districts of Manipur. The Nagas had declared themselves independent on August 14, 1947 but went underground in 1952. Today, the Nagas are demanding for greater Nagaland ‘Nagalim’ under one administration including all area inhabited by the Nagas in the state of Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Myanmar.

Manipur became an independent princely state in 1947 and adopted the Manipur constitution but on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1949 the king of Manipur signed the document of accession to India and was formerly merged with India on October 15, 1949. This was the beginning of insurgent movement and problem in Manipur. It was initiated by Mr. Hijam Irabot Singh. Today, there are over 46 active/inactive insurgent groups in the state of Manipur which are all ethnic oriented.

The origin of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo insurgent groups was the bloody ethnic conflict and violence with the Naga over taxation or extortion and territorial dispute. These communities migrated to the present location of habitation much later than the Meitei and the Naga. They were mostly brought in by the British and given land between the valley and the hills as a buffer from the constant violent activities of the Naga tribes. Their main demand today is Zale-ngam” – “the land of freedom” and Sardar hills to be upgraded to a full-fledged district. This demand has become the bone of contention between the tribal communities of the Naga and Kuki.



Insurgent movement in Manipur is not all anti-India or the established state under the constitution. All insurgents in Manipur are not demanding for independence from India. Insurgents in Manipur are organised for total independence, demand for a district, demand for “Alternative arrangement”, extort money, and to protect and preserve the ethnic tribe. It is true that some of the activities resorted by the insurgents are law and order problem but much of the demands of the insurgents are economic and political in nature which requires careful policy considerations rather than just militarizing the state which actually complicates and breeds the insurgency issue.

### **Insurgency as a flourishing industry:**

Insurgency is a promising industry or the only industry that is flourishing in Manipur by default. Manipur is of course well known for ancient handloom industry. This industry is flourishing and surviving because of the numerous ethnic groups who are very protective and proud of their culture and traditions. The traditional costumes are like the trade mark of a brand that identifies the individual with an ethnic group. The product of the handloom industry is the hallmark of the ethnic group and since all insurgent groups are ethnic centric and they need the support of the public for sustenance and survival, it does not meddle and dare to disturb and destroy the fabric of this industry.

Besides the handloom industry there is no other industry in Manipur that is worth mentioning except some small scale business like fisheries, transport and communication services, potteries, basket weaving, tourism etc. Agriculture and agriculture related activities continue to be the backbone of the economy as the social problems of ethnic conflicts and violence, and political instability due to insurgency and poor governance is not conducive for investment.

Thus, beside the traditional handloom industry and some small cottage industry, Insurgency is thriving and flourishing. The following features can be candidly examined to view insurgent group operating just as a firm in the corporate world. Since an industry is a group of firms operating in a territory competing for resources and the marketing by providing similar products or resources, insurgency situation in the state of Manipur can be viewed as an industry:

#### *1. Input-Output:*

It is an “insurgency industry” since there are many insurgent groups operating in a market “Manipur” using similar inputs (unemployed frustrated youths, arms, ethnic sentiments, geographical location etc) with competing objectives of independence, power, money, territory etc .

2. *Employment opportunity:*

It generates employment opportunity to the huge population of educated unemployed in the state. The state has one of the highest literacy rate but employment opportunities are scarce due to lack of growth and development in the industrial and service sector.

3. *Risks:*

To initiate and operate business is a risk taken so also running and operating an insurgent group is highly risky. Risk in any business is an accepted reason for the returns, thus, in an insurgency the risk of investment in the means (arms) to achieve the ends (money, power, freedom etc) are realized. While returns on money and power may be immediate but freedom could be just an illusion because the risks in an insurgency industry are:

- a. Not being accepted by the market (people).
- b. Irony of freedom; fight for freedom while freedom is denied through rigid control.
- c. Loss of property, resources and lives.
- d. Militarization

4. *Competition:*

There is stiff competition in the insurgent market for arms, recruits, public support and market (territory). Armed encounters between the insurgent groups, insurgent with the government, insurgent with the general public is all the outcome of competition. The government is also a competitor for the territory against these smaller players.

5. *Products and services:*

Their product or service is similar but not homogenous. They provide security, socially responsible activities, protection and preservation of ethnic group identity and traditions, protection of environmental resources, developmental activities, governance etc. Their common enemy is the state but the degree of enmity may differ.

6. *Pricing:*

The pricing in the insurgency industry is determined by the competing interaction of insurgents and the government. It is also determined by the objective and strength of the

insurgent group. Price in this market is the sacrifice that the general public have to pay for the operation of the insurgent group.

7. *Investment:*

- a. The present insurgency scenario attracts huge investment in arms business and establishment of new business (insurgent) entity to grasp the profit of easy money and gun power. It also attracts investment for establishment of new group to counter the exploitation of the existing groups in the market.
- b. This industry is attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) in terms of arms, money, logistics, loyalty, destabilizing the established institution with an objective of a pound of share for themselves from the spoils.
- c. It is also attracting huge investment from the government. The government is pumping in huge amount of money as a solution to insurgency but it is in reality feeding and breeding insurgency.

8. *After sale service:*

The after sale service of insurgent groups are militarization, corruption, poor governance, ethnic conflicts and violence, and social and economic services. This is the factor that determines the continuation of the support of the market to the group.

9. *Money:*

No firm can grow without money in a monetary economy. All transactions from the factor market to the product/service market are done through money. So, also the money plays the central role in the initiation, sustenance, and growth of an insurgent group. It is for this reason that the insurgent groups engages in collection of tax from the market to meet their needs.

10. *Objectives:*

In as much as any corporate firm in an industry have objectives to achieve, the insurgent group(s) have diverse objectives to achieve:

- a. *Profit maximization:* in the form of achieving the objective of demand for independence, autonomy, land, reservation, recognition, security, and to squeeze the maximum out the establish state.
- b. *Wealth maximization:* through control of the limited natural resources and human resources, control over trade and commerce, taxation.



- c. *Long term survival*: through internal and external linkages. One of the main objectives of an insurgent movement is to survive, and the stream that feeds and determines the survival of such group is the general public. Thus, every insurgent group projects itself as a people movement.
- d. *Political nexus*: insurgency is a political movement and therefore it needs political patronage. It is for this reason that the close nexus between the political parties and such groups can be closely observed through their overt support during elections.
- e. *Social responsibilities*: insurgent is a social movement and has to be projected to the people as “people movement” to sustain and continue the insurgent activity. They take keen interest in building relationship with the general public by protecting the society, preservation of culture and tradition, providing justice. It is the society that sustains them and they are obliged to return to survive and sustain the movement.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

There are many socio-economic and political challenges facing the state of Manipur and boils down the ethnic oriented insurgency problem which is multi-facet. It is a part of the greatest challenge encountered in independent India as rightly stated ‘ the internal security problems are the greatest challenge facing India’. Unless the government of India in New Delhi and Manipur intervenes and sincerely address this issue with the right multi-pronged approach, insurgency problem will continue to flourish. India cannot continue to ignore this ever growing industry which may have large repercussions in the neighbouring states by spreading its cancerous tentacles and also subverting the economic policies of India to reach out to its neighbouring countries in the South East Asia.

Delhi needs to urgently address the grievance and problems of the people genuinely and with sincerity and not through militarization. Militarization of the territory will only aggravate the issue as force produces rebellion. Blood once shed cannot be just washed away by money and water, the policy of containment and concealment needs to be reviewed. If India is to grow and act to the east, it must destroy this well established industry and replace it with industry of growth and development that makes the people of this region less alienated. Their rights as a human being need to be restored by repealing draconian laws like the Arms Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1958. It needs to be remembered in policy making that excessive use of force ends up in serious rebellion. Military victory never guarantees victory over the heart of the people conquered.

It needs to be remembered that, “insurgency is a fight of the weak against the strong and the will to die among the weak is stronger than the will to kill among the strong.” If there is to be



peace, it should be initiated by the strong and the weak needs to reciprocate with sincerity. If an existing industry is to be destroyed, then it can be replaced only by an innovated idea, product and service that is better than the one offered by the existing industry. One blanket policy change will not solve the problem for the insurgency in Manipur is complicated and multi-dimensional. The product and service offered by the government should be suitable and acceptable for the target market; meaning the solution to insurgency problem in Manipur is only the prism of multi socio-economic and political relationship in the state.

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