

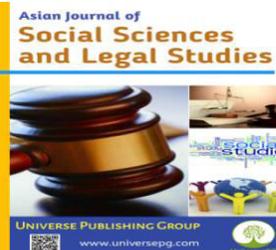


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The Manipur Violence; Beginning of the End or End of the Beginning? A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

In the Indian state of Manipur, significant violence erupted in early May (end of April) 2023. Over a hundred people have been killed since then, and tens of others have been forced to evacuate their homes. However, while receiving almost no international notice, the issue has posed some critical questions regarding managing inter-ethnic relations in the world's greatest democracy.ⁱ For many years, tensions between various groups have lingered, but it is now clear that this has burst into new violence.ⁱⁱ In addition, there have been calls for the state to be partitioned.ⁱⁱⁱ This type of crisis is known as 'External Self-Determination,'^{iv} in which a group wishes to secede from an existing country and form its own sovereign state.^v As a result, the purpose of this investigation is to answer three particular questions: What exactly is the basic root of this tragic massacre? And would it be dangerous to be perceived as a "new federal state in India, or even a sovereign country?" Finally, how will this unwelcome circumstance be resolved?

Keywords: Manipur violence, Sexual violence against minority women, Constitution of India, and Kuki.

INTRODUCTION:

As already stated above, the situation in Manipur which has been deeply disturbing for quite some time there's been violence you can keep trying to figure out where exactly the brain game is without the chief minister saying that Terror organizations^{vi} are responsible for some of it the cookie side says that there's been an attempt to dry them out in violence we've been done the meeting inside the cookies started the whole thing let's before we go any further and talk to leaders from both sides let's just quickly give you an update on the latest situation in Manipur it's the sixth least populated state in India the sixth smallest state by area in the country^{vii} and yet it has been burning for a month with the state and Central governments the police^{viii} the Army and the paramilitary struggling to

restore normalcy the violence began on the 3rd of May 2023; the first Spark was lit in the February but the Embers have been smoldering for decades to understand what is currently happening in Manipur and why we need to take a look at who lives in the state and where the major groups living in Manipur are the meti cookies and naga metis comprise around 70 percent of the state population right about 43 of the 57 Manipuris are from the meti community majority.

Metis are Hindus while around eight percent are the Muslim around 35 percent population of the state is of tribals like cookies and nagas members of the tribal groups are mostly Christian how this population is divided is also to the current conflict the metis mainly live in the imfal valley which lies at the center of

Manipur it comprises around 10 to 15 percent of the state's land mass the tribal population mainly lives in the Hills surrounding the valley.^{ix}

Reckoning Ferocity from May 2023

As stated above, this never ending conflict reactivated; as this latest violence was triggered by two events the first was an eviction Drive launched in the February mainly in Hills inhabited by cookies the Manipur government said that, it was clearing Forest encroachment it was also called a Crackdown on drug cultivation the campaign was also seen as action against alleged illegal immigrants from Myanmar who have ethnic links to the cookie people however agitated cookies saw this as the harassment by the politically influential metis.^x The second trigger was a petition in the Manipur High Court for scheduled tribe status for the Mathis on April 19th the court issued directions to the state government to make a recommendation to the union government on the demand methi say they need the tribal tag to save their culture the amid illegal immigration^{xi} in the state the Mathis also say that it's unfair that they cannot buy land in the hills in response the tribal groups say that Mathis are already dominant tribals fear that their land and job opportunities would be snatched if metis become an SD group all right the Manipur High court's order led to the calling of a tribal solidarity March in all 10 Hill districts on May 3rd this protest against the metis deteriorated into vandalism and violence what made the situation worse was Manipur's dark history of terrorism with the state being caught in India's oldest Insurgency movements.^{xii}

Civil War Pragmatism

Nevertheless, even up until today, there are many unconfirmed reports of killings and lynchings. People are afraid that more people could be killed in the next few days. If one carefully monitors recent media reports then, he or she can easily be confused that there is a civil war going on in Manipur.^{xiii} The situation is so serious that the Indian government has already activated Article 355 to neutralize take over all the Manipur's escalated situation in addition a shoot-at-sight order it has issued hence now this beautiful land is now facing 'Curfew',^{xiv} the internet is completely shut down off, and the army has taken full control. If these above evidences can be taken for granted then, the colossus situation of Kashmir is no different with

Manipur.^{xv} Furthermore, the Manipur's current Chief Minister N. Biren Singh from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).^{xvi} In February this year, his government decided to protect the forests of the Manipur which triggered the assumption of the eviction of Tribals. Consequently, he had to evacuate some villagers from their homes.^{xvii} These were the residents of the K. Songjon village in the *Churachandpur* district.^{xviii} The villagers said they were the evacuated without any warning. The Kuki People Alliance, the alliance partner of the BJP government, also criticized this decision. These villagers were from the Kuki ethnic group and this same ethnic group that's in the hill region. Henceforth, question remains that; it would seem that, the BJP government's decision is against their entire tribe. In March, many tribals protested peacefully against the government's decision.^{xix} What is staggering here that, the controversial land survey seemed to include only three districts and one of them was Churachandpur district. Consequently, some tribal leaders announced an 8-hour shutdown, in the entire Churachandpur district, which can be compared with the slipshod treatment of the East Pakistan's flood situation during the 1970 by the Central Government.^{xx} It is noteworthy that, when someone refers tribals, then the Naga and Kuki tribes are to be meant, who are also subject to the constitution of India. But then again, the government of Manipur repeatedly claiming that, this protest is virtuously unconstitutional. This dodgy initiation could also trigger further violence with a possible secession situation. The government of Manipur said that their protest is unconstitutional and many villagers are using the forest land for their drug business, nevertheless, even it is true, the Government's actions can be labeled as despicable and biased.

Government & Meiteis; an Enigmatic Relationship?

It is clear that the All-Tribal Students Union Manipur called for a Tribal Solidarity March. They opposed a Manipur High Court judgment requesting that the central government grant the Meiteis Scheduled Tribe status. The Naga and Kuki Tribes of Hill oppose Meitei Scheduled Tribe recognition. The Meiteis have demanded Scheduled Tribe designation since 2013.^{xxi} The Meiteis believe that their community needs the Scheduled Tribe status to the protect their land and culture. They say that the illegal immigrants from

Bangladesh and Myanmar are harming the identity and culture of the Meiteis. The Meiteis say that if they get the Scheduled Tribe status, the Naga and Kuki Tribes won't be harmed. Instead, it will bring peace to Manipur.^{xxii} However, Hill tribals Nagas and Kukis opposed this. The Hill tribes say the Meiteis are powerful, intelligent, and connected. Hill people in Manipur will lose political and economic power if they become Scheduled Tribes. The Hill tribes say two-thirds of Manipur's Legislative Assembly is Meiteis. At this point one had better raise a question; if they have such the political power, why do they need the Scheduled Tribes status?^{xxiii}

They also claim that some Meitei are OBC. They also receive protection there. The Constitution's 8th Schedule includes Meitei language Manipuri. The Hill tribes say the Meiteis will have to struggle for jobs if they become Scheduled Tribes. Recent violence stems from these prominent problems. The Hill tribes say the Manipur government is evicting the Kuki tribal people and giving the Meiteis Scheduled Tribe designation. The Meiteis allegedly attacked a tribal lady, which sparked violence at the tribal protest demonstration a few days earlier. The demonstration began with this rumor, and statewide violence followed. Mainstream media reported Meitei and tribal home burnings. The Indian Army was sent to Manipur because the Central and Manipur governments justified it.^{xxiv}

Divide and Rule Formula from the British Raj

The intricacy of these issues cannot be understood without understanding Manipur's history. Let's travel back hundreds of years to determine Manipur's owner. Manipur's history began with the Meitei's centuries-old dominance. Some say the Meiteis settled their kingdom in Manipur Valley from Myanmar. The Meitei kingdom expanded under several monarchs. Apart from the Meitei, Manipur had various hill tribes, including the Nagas and Kukis. These mountain tribes of Manipur had their own culture, language, and customs. The Meitei Kingdom had a complicated connection with hill tribes. Many military battles against tribes were launched. Hill tribes were forced to the embrace Meitei culture, language, and religion. If history is reexamined, the Meiteis expanded their dominion. The Meiteis felt they must pressure tribes to enlarge their dominion. Violence between Hill Tribes

and Meitei Kingdom ensued. But this narrative isn't straightforward. Meitei Kingdom ties with Hill Tribes exist. So they could swap. Tribes supplied Meitei with forest commodities. The Meitei Kingdom protected tribes against intruders. This changed in 1819-1825 when the Burmese Empire conquered Manipur. Meitei was defeated by Burma. The Meiteis were forced to accept Burmese culture and Buddhism. The Hill Tribes met the same fate. The Burmese authorities killed and destroyed Hill Tribe settlements in many military battles. This lasted 7 years, thus the Seven Years' Destruction. The British defeated the Burmese Kingdom and captured Manipur in 1826 in the First Anglo-Burmese War. After the British took authority, the Manipur changed politically and economically. The British established a political agency in Manipur in 1835 and converted it to a princely state in 1891. Political agencies and princely states differ. In a princely state, the British assigned rulers to manage their kingdom and required the allegiance. A British political agent was the king's counsellor. But the monarch was powerless. The British manipulated him. The British first ruled Meiteis. However, the British gave the Hill Tribes free reigns that altered gradually. The British 'Divide and Rule' tactic began then. British political structures favoured Meiteis. This caused conflicts between the Hill Tribes and the Meiteis, so the British developed a land settlement program to select who would get land. They distributed territory to Meiteis and Kukis. There were two big issues. Kuki tribalism was the first issue. They were landless. Animals accompanied them on trips. Thus, when assured their land was permanent, they couldn't practice their culture.^{xxv} The second problem was that the British gave more fertile land to the Meiteis and less fertile land to the Kukis. This created tensions between the Meiteis and the Hill Tribes; this didn't stop even after India's independence.

British Legacy Adopted by Indian Governments

Since the independence, the British were not the enemies. It was the Indian government rather. Maharaja Bhodhchandra Singh, who was the king of the Manipur after independence. In 1891, the British made Manipur a princely state. After India's independence, the king had to decide whether Manipur would go with the India, Pakistan, or remain independent. Maharaja

Bhodhchandra Singh decided that Manipur would remain independent. Manipur was very strategic for the Indian government because Manipur was on the border between the Myanmar and China. The Indian government was also afraid that a communist movement was about to start in Manipur, which could instigate instability in India. Consequently, it was very important for the Indian government that Manipur didn't remain independent but became a part of India. In 1949, Manipur signed a merger agreement, which made Manipur a union territory instead of a state. But there's a twist to the story. Before the agreement was signed, many people in Manipur had been protesting against the king, because they didn't want a monarchy in their state.^{xxvi} That's why a legislative assembly was formed. But when the king signed the merger agreement, he didn't seek permission from the legislative assembly.^{xxvii} Instead, many Manipuris say that the king signed the merger agreement under pressure.^{xxviii} When the king went to Shillong in 1949 to talk to the Assam government, he was arrested and kept in the custody until he signed the merger agreement. Many ethnic groups in Manipur were not happy with this. The problem was that after the merger, Manipur was run by the central government (Yesmen *et al.*, 2023).

For the first 25 years, Manipur wasn't even a full state; it was a union territory. The Indian bureaucrats ruled Manipur, who weren't from Manipur but from other parts of India. Another problem was that different communities had different aspirations. The Naga tribe wanted some parts of Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh to be merged into Nagaland. The Kukis wanted areas of India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar with Kuki domination to be a separate country called Zale'n-gam. So, the Kukis wanted Kukiland, the Nagas wanted Nagalim. The problem was that some areas were common to both. The Meiteis didn't want either. They believed that for centuries, the Meiteis ruled the Manipur area, which also had hill regions. Therefore, they wanted the hill regions, where the Kukis and Nagas were, to be part of Manipur, where the Meiteis ruled. Henceforth, they made Manipur a union territory and revoked the Scheduled Tribe status given to the Meiteis. The Indian government argued that if Manipur was dominated by the Meiteis, why would they want the status? They also told the Meiteis that they couldn't

buy land in the hill regions. The Indian government gave the Kukis and Nagas the Scheduled Tribe status. And said that they could buy land anywhere in Manipur. In 1972, Manipur was made a state from a union territory and the first elections were held in Manipur. But there was a problem with these elections. Manipur has 60 constituencies. 40 of them are in the Meitei-dominated valley area and 20 in the hill region. This means that it's easier for Meiteis to win power.

A Hushed Prime Minister with an Inept Central Government

As per the above discussion, no one should overlook that, the biggest demand of the Kuki people living in the hills was to make a new Indian state for the Kuki people with the name as 'Kukiland'. But they said that if this can't be done, at the very least to include the forests under the tribal area in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Besides if even, this can't be done, then their demand was to at least pass the ADC Amendment Bill 2021.^{xxix} Therefore, that the local-level governance in the hills could be made easier. Up to date, the BJP government in Manipur does nothing of the above rather it introduces a new bill. Manipur Hill Area District Council's 6th and 7th Amendment Bills. This was done by the government in August 2022, without discussing it with the Hill Area Committee. Whatever was written in this bill, the tribal people were not happy about it and they started protesting. Being under pressure by the protests, the government signs an MOU with the protestors and assures them that they will consult with the Hill Area Committee. Apart from this, this year the government took another decision which enraged the Kuki people. Moreover, on 31st March 2022, the Ministry of Home Affairs, lifted the AFSP Act, Armed Forces Special Powers Act from some areas of Manipur. In addition, the areas from which it was lifted were mostly the valley areas. The government had already signed a ceasefire with the insurgent groups in the hills. To ensure no conflict. A Suspension of Operations agreement was signed in 2008 by the Centre Government, Manipur Government, and two Kuki organizations.^{xxx} Which included 25 insurgent Kuki groups. Under this agreement, they had to put down their weapons, because this ceasefire had been successful for so many years, people were expecting the government to lift

Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from the hill area as well. Finally, a long-lasting peace could be achieved. But this never happened. Later, the Manipur government does the opposite.^{xxxii} Furthermore, in March 2023, the Suspension of Operations agreement was also withdrawn by the Manipur government. They accused the insurgent groups of influencing agitations among the forest encroachers. Thus, they justified the withdrawal of the Suspension of Operations.^{xxxiii} Then came the third decision of the government which enraged the Kuki people even more. Look at this article from *The Outlook*.^{xxxiii} The state government redraws the boundaries of the district. Some land that was previously in the hill tribe areas were added to the Valley districts without consulting the tribals. This land becomes government land and now they have to pay land taxes. Not only this, there were eviction drives in some places.^{xxxiv} The government claimed that they had to survey the reserve jungles and so the people of a village were forced to relocate. This happened in K. Songjang village in Churachandpur district.^{xxxv} Around 38 villages were labelled illegal settlements and the villagers living there were declared encroachers (Faysal, 2022).

It is noteworthy that, Kuki people were called to these hills to protect the Meiteis and now they are being thrown out of here. But why? three bills were passed in Rajya Sabha. One of them was the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill. With the help of which private companies can now mine 6 out of 12 atomic minerals in India. Before this, only government agencies could mine these minerals. But now, even the private companies are allowed to do so. Second, Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill in which 183 provisions from 42 existing Acts are decriminalized. This includes many significant Acts. Such as the Environment (Protection) Act, the Indian Forest Act, and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act. Chief Minister Biren Singh stated that, 'Manipur Government Launches Oil Palm Project' which was identified places in the Chandel, Churachandpur, Imphal West, Bishnupur and other districts, where oil palm cultivation can be done. He said that it can be an alternative to Jhum cultivation and poppy cultivation. Memorandum of understanding (MOU) being signed with Assam, Manipur and Tripura, where

it was written in the article how this company will be allotted land in these three states for the oil palm cultivation.

Sexual Assaults on Minority Women and the Viral Video

Following the above, two women were the brutally assaulted by a group of men. The incident took place in a remote village in the Manipur, India. The video showed the women being beaten, stripped, & verbally abused by the perpetrators. The incident has sparked outrage and calls for justice from various human rights organisations and the activists. The incident, which occurred on the evening of 19 July, gained significant online attention as a video depicting a distressing situation involving two women from the Kuki-Zomi community in Manipur, India, was widely circulated. The video captured the women being subjected to severe physical assault, including being stripped and verbally harassed, by a group of male individuals. This incident has elicited strong condemnation and demands for legal redress from numerous human rights groups and advocates.^{xxxvi} In the Indian state of Manipur, a group of individuals were publicly exposed without clothing and reportedly subjected to sexual assault by multiple perpetrators. Manipur possesses the region has experienced a significant escalation in the violent ethnic conflicts since May 3rd of the current calendar year. The state has had intercommunity violence with the minority group known as the 'Kuki' residing in the hilly regions.^{xxxvii}

More so, the state of Manipur is home to a prominent tribal group called the "Meitei" people, the most of whom live in the state's most urbanized region, Imphal valley. Nearly 200 people have lost their lives due to the violence that has broken out. In this context, "individuals" might mean either a single person or a single organization. Chief Justice of the India DY Chandrachud, the Justice PS Narasimha, and Justice Manoj Misra convened a bench today to take suo moto cognizance of the case. This is an important and disturbing new development. When we talk about a country's development on a national scale, we're talking about the overall growth and improvement of that nation. On Thursday morning, the bench called India's top lawyers, the Attorney General R Venkatara-

mani and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta. They said the situation required immediate government action and asked what should be done.

This response might outline the necessary measures to effectively handle the issue at hand, as well as the strategies employed to navigate through the challenges involved. Take measures to prevent its recurrence in subsequent instances. The statement expressed strong disapproval of acts of the sexual violence perpetrated against women. The perpetuation of a situation is observed in Manipur in the middle of the civil insurgency. The Chief Justice of India (CJI) additionally decreed that the matter at hand will be brought to attention in light of the existing collection of petitions concerning Manipur. The matter at hand necessitates the establishment of a future date for the hearing, which has been determined to be the 28th of July. While the prompt and efficient judicial process Minister of India's endorsement of the judiciary's activism was widely recognised as a significant stride. The Prime Minister of India expressed his apprehension and faced overt scrutiny.^{xxxviii}

Furthermore, the bench summoned the Attorney General for India, the R Venkataramani, and the Solicitor General of India, Tushar Mehta, on Thursday morning to represent the government. The matter necessitated prompt governmental intervention and inquired about the appropriate course of action. This response will outline the necessary measures to effectively handle the issue at hand, as well as the strategies employed to navigate through the challenges involved. Take measures to prevent its recurrence in subsequent instances. The statement expressed strong disapproval of acts of sexual violence perpetrated against women. The perpetuation of a situation is observed in Manipur in the middle of the civil insurgency. The Chief Justice of India (CJI) additionally decreed that, the matter at hand will be brought to attention in light of the existing collection of petitions concerning Manipur. The matter at hand necessitates the establishment of a future date for the hearing, which has been determined to be the 28th of July. While the prompt and efficient judicial process Minister of the India's endorsement of the judiciary's activism was widely recognised as a significant stride.^{xxxix} The Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his apprehension and faced overt

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scrutiny. He specifically mentioned that, upon arriving and standing beside the temple of democracy, my heart is filled with pain and rage. The Manipur incident is a sad event for any civilised culture.^{xl}

Solution?

Several significant rallies in the India have revolved around issues related to land disputes and reservation policies. Both of these factors are encompassed within the Manipur issue. Allow me to elucidate the intricate nature of the Manipur issue with the use of an illustrative case. In the state of Maharashtra, there exists a legal provision where in the individuals possess the freedom to reside in Mumbai at their discretion, as well as the liberty to engage in the purchase or sale of land as desired.^{xli} However, it is important to note that in the remaining regions of Maharashtra, residency and property ownership are exclusively restricted to the individuals of Marathi ethnicity. Consider the potential challenges associated with the administration in that particular context. In the present analysis, we shall examine the situation of Manipur as an illustrative example. The focal point of this video holds utmost significance. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) proceeded to provide reassurance to the populace that appropriate measures will be taken to address all individuals implicated in criminal activities. Furthermore, the PMO expressed a commitment to acknowledge the heinous acts perpetrated in Manipur. The Prime Minister delivered a national address subsequent to the expression of concern by the Supreme Court. In addition,

The statement issued by the Prime Minister was not delivered during a parliamentary session within the Parliament, but instead the actions taking place in proximity to the Parliament have provoked strong disapproval from the leaders of the opposing political parties, who express their bewilderment at the lack of attention given to the matter raised inside the legislative body, the Indian National Congress, along with nine other opposition parties in Manipur, are led by a group of prominent politicians.^{xlii} The Congress Party, operating at the national level, has filed a memorandum to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in order to express their concerns. There is a sense of disillusionment with the ambiguous position of the Prime Minister, who has declined any opportunity for the

engagement or discussion. The leaders from Manipur are earnestly requesting state intervention and assistance. It is worth mentioning that, the Prime Minister's acknowledgement of the turmoil in question marks the initial instance of criticism for this crisis. After considering multiple perspectives, three viable ideas have emerged. Additionally, there exists a Brahmasar, which is considered a formidable weapon. Initially, it is necessary to engage in a comprehensive discussion on the matter at hand, subsequently leading to a resolution or conclusion. The initial inquiry pertains to is the order of the Manipur High Court a potential catalyst? The Supreme Court has opined that, solely based on a legal mandate the list of the Scheduled Tribes remains unaffected. Therefore, it can be inferred that there will be no discernible impact. The stimulus should not elicit a negative emotional response.

However, it is imperative that this explanation should have been effectively communicated, to the populace of yesteryears. Due to our understanding of the context in India, the dissemination of disinformation occurs at a faster rate than the transmission of the accurate information.^{xliii} The cultivation of poppy plants poses a significant challenge. In order to effectively eliminate it, therefore, it is imperative that we undertake a novel undertaking. It is recommended that a novel cash crop be produced to cater to the needs of hill farmers. It is imperative for the states in the northeastern region to unite and establish a governing body, an independent council, and the thoroughly analyse all the pertinent aspects. The occurrence of ethnic confrontations, whether it pertains to matters of the state, whether it pertains to border disputes, it is imperative to engage in comprehensive discussions regarding all relevant topics.^{xliiv} In order to gain an understanding during periods of difficulty this essay explores the various approaches and strategies that can be employed to the restore peace in a given context.

CONCLUSION:

Finally, violence prevention techniques must be examined. Can Manipur establish President's Rule? The Manipur issue has persisted for a while. President's Rule may be the last resort. When the State Government violates the Constitutional Machinery, the Central Government takes direct authority. President's Rule has been imposed on Manipur ten times between UniversePG | www.universepg.com

1951 and 2019. Would this intervention be able to find and implement a long-term solution? The Central Government should propose a comprehensive and the lasting solution for North Eastern states. To fully assess any border conflict or ethnic conflict, one must examine its causes and complexities. Explore long-term solutions to find a sustainable solution.^{xlv} This research is concluding with a scary question, *If today the fire seemed to lit on Manipur, then tomorrow it can be Nagaland or the Mizoram? Are the international community and Central Government of India will be ready for it?*

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The author declares there are conflicts of the interest with respect to the research, and publication of this article.

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