

## Life Experience of People in Insurgency Affected Area

RAJKUMARI NONIBALA DEVI

Department of Anthropology  
University of Delhi, New Delhi  
India

P.C.JOSHI

Department of Anthropology  
University of Delhi, New Delhi  
India

### Abstract:

*India is a nation known for its vast cultural unity in diversity. The diversity in India is in terms of its cultural and geographical factors. As far as unity is concerned, there is a huge number of internal conflicts and movements against the integration of the state in the Indian nation. There are many movements as those for freedom, autonomy, and status. Of all such movements, the Insurgency movement has its root in India since India got independent. Insurgency is a movement through armed rebellion for a particular agenda against the ruling government or authority. The northeastern part of India which is geographically and culturally very much different from rest of the Indian nation has a long history of ethnic conflicts and insurgency problems. The research work is an attempt to study the effects of insurgency on the life of people in Manipur. Anthropological research methods were employed for collecting data. In depth interview, as qualitative method and case studies were used and the quantitative socio-economic questionnaire method was employed for conducting research. The case study of the victims and their response reveal that people who are from well to do families and working class are victims and the target of the insurgent groups. Kidnapping and life threatening are some of the daily experiences felt by the people. Among young children, fear and anxiety remain in their lives due to bomb attacks and cross-firing in the state.*

**Key words:** Insurgency, conflicts, quality of life, Manipur.

The North East has been a militarized region in India. The problems of an economy under development, exploitation of natural resources, unemployment have worsened the condition of people. The states of North East prove a fertile ground for the local military. The militants, so called insurgent groups, run a parallel government. The state of Manipur has been experiencing the problems of insurgency for the last 60-70 years. The long term experience of insurgency in the state has become a problem and concern of the mental health of the people.

Insurgency, which uses act of terrorism, should be referring at as terrorism. According to the English Oxford dictionary, the meaning of “terrorism” is the systematic use of fear, threat, anxiety, or violence as a means of coercion, intimidation, submission, or dominance. It induces not only fear, but also hostility, panic, retribution, and resolution. The terror may be directed at a single individual, or at an entire religious or ethnic group (e.g., mayang or non Meitei). As a result, the required response ranges from the treatment, identification, or disposition of a single body to the horrendous problems of a mass casualty situation. The boundaries of terrorism are unfixed in any dimension, being determined only by the seemingly limitless imagination of the perverse minds of those who promote its practice. The term Insurgency is defined as an organized rebellion aimed at overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.

Insurgencies have a political purpose, and may provide social services and have an overt, even legal, political wing. Their covert wing carries out attacks on military forces with tactics such as raids and ambushes as well as acts of terror such as attacks that cause deliberate civilian casualties. (Encyclopedia Britannica 2001)

The North Eastern states of India are the best ground for such studies. The region has a congregation of common socio-economic and political problems related to ethnicity, governance, health and development. The geographical

isolation from the main stream India and slow development in the region feels a sense of alienation. The problem of economic underdevelopment, exploitation of natural resources, unemployment, and immigration from neighboring states led to worsening of the condition.

Insurgency in the region of North Eastern states like Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim are mostly unaffected while Tripura and Mizoram are declining. But the problem of Insurgency in the states of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam are a cause of concern. The insurgent runs a parallel government and collects revenue and taxes from the government's employees, private and public companies, politicians, institutes etc.

The people are in fear of unknown attacks like bombast, cross firing, threatening, kidnapping for ransom. This has become a daily life experience of the people. The unorganized political systems in the state also make the situation worsen.

The present study will focus on the present scenario of the insurgency in the state and lastly the problem faced by the general public in the state.

### **Literature Review:**

The Northeast states of India have been in the realm of insurgency for the last 60 years since India got Independence. More than 300 different ethnic and linguistic groups are distributed over the entire region (Boyden et al. 2002; Murthy and Lakshminarayan 2006; Sanghita Das 2011)

According to the study of Boyden (2002), the various ethnic groups in the region have distinct political interests and demand for separate ethnic territory or independent state and are in conflicts with each other or with the government. There is violence and ideological conflicts within the insurgent groups and this results in clashes and forming separate groups. Thus insurgents are mushrooming in the entire region of Northeast.

In one of the recent study done by Sanghita Das in 2011, it has been found that in the state of Manipur alone there are 24 insurgent groups operating in valley and hills.

Often, due to clashes within insurgent groups, or against government in the form of bomb explosion and cross firing there are lots of casualties in the region. According to one study of WHO 2001, in the situation of arm conflicts throughout the world, 10% of the people who experience traumatic events will suffer various mental health problems and another 10% will develop behaviors that will hinder their ability to function efficiently.

Thus insurgency related violence claimed 1049 lives in the North East while some of them are not reported. 96% were reported from Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, while Manipur reported 47% fatalities, the highest in the region (Sanghita Das 2011). There are many people including children, women and disabled affected by arm conflicts in various countries; however those most affected live mainly in specific areas, often quite localized ones or the affected population is small in national terms, thus not having been given priority (Boyden et al. 2002; Murthy & Lakshminarayan 2006).

In the study done by Murthy & Lakshminarayan (2006) the prevalence of insurgency related trauma is associated with the degree of trauma and availability of physical and emotional support.

The exposure to terrorist's assaults through television and newspaper ushered in a sense of insecurity and vulnerability among people in different part of the world. Psychiatric morbidity and disability are among the many outcomes of insurgency and terrorism (Margoob 1996, Pfefferbavetal 2003, Knudensen et al. 2005).

According to a study done by Knudensen et al. (2005), the impact of insurgency or terrorist acts is not confined to the region of its origin or not only to those who experience the trauma directly but also people living far away may also be

affected indirectly.

## Material and Methods

The present cross sectional study has been conducted on a total of 300 participants, 144 female and 156 male in the range of 15-70 years of age. The data was collected from both the rural and urban areas of Manipur, using purposive sampling method. The data was of two types. The quantitative data was collected by questionnaires which include of Kuppu's Swamy socio-economic status, occupation and education. The qualitative data was collected through interview, life history and case study through pile sorting technique. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 16.

## Results:

The results by analysis of socio economic status and education, age and occupation have been presented here.

	Female	Male
Sex	144	156
Age	25.67	26.92
Education	4.69	4.83
Occupation	2.29	3.51
Income	2.45	3.34
Socio Economic status	9.43	11.67

**Survey table 1.1**

## Discussion:

There has been a continuous problem on school going children due to frequent strike and road blockade by the agitators in the state. Most of the classes are called off due to the prevailing protest and daily strikes, as the authority cannot take the risk of the large number of children. Students most often feel like not going to school as there will be no regular class and the attendance is low. As a result, the school syllabus is not being

covered in time and last minute rush to cover it makes a huge burden among the students. The principal of a school located in Imphal has the following opinion of the problem: “we cannot help the students, as it is socio-political issues we cannot go against the public, so we have to close the school on public strike and protest”. In order to make up the syllabus cover there are usually extra classes and students find it hard to cope up and prepare for the examination. This type of situation is not the single issue of a school but a problem of all schools and of the educational institute running in the state.

The recent case of the students who were victims of the bomb blast attack in the dhramsala area of the Imphal city is a clear example of student and children being at high risk of the insurgency attacks. There are numerous such cases in the state which have never come to light. The report of the young adolescent boys and college going students are even more wretched; they are the easy target of the state and armed force. They are also forced into detention and body search. In one interview, a college student narrated his experience: “I was detained for two hours long, as there was a search going on at the market area which is on my way to college. I requested them that I have important classes but of no use, and I missed the lecture on that day. But I am used to it as this type of situation is a regular phenomenon in our state.” From such an incident it can be assumed that the young citizens of the state are facing the burden of torture and they are an easy target of the state force.

The problem of the state force and armed force violating human rights in the state has been highlighted by many printed media and national channels and the situation is a continuous problem. But from the last decade or so the situation has become worse due to the increasing number of insurgent groups in the state both in the hills and valley. The ever increasing number of different insurgent activities operating in various part of Manipur has been a great problem

both for the central and state government in terms of controlling options. There are many examples which can be cited as a result of insurgency activities causing tension and fear among the people in the state. But in general people tried to hide their problems related to these insurgency activities running in the state. The reasons are many and vary depending upon the socio economic status of the affected individuals. Most often one would find it difficult to convey the respondent to narrate their experience as a result of insurgency activities. These can be due to the fear of insurgent activities, as the insurgent groups usually put bombs and fired bullets to those rich and well off individual houses if their demand for money and are not given. So, most of the participants do not speak up the problem. After proper investigations it has been found that most of the victims have health related psychological problems like tension, depression and anxiety. In one interview a middle aged government official from a suburban area of Manipur narrated his experience on insurgency activities. The respondent X worked as an engineer in the electric department. One eventful day, he was late from his office and was returning from work to home. On his way home, three men stopped his car and asked him to drop them at a place. After inquiry, he came to know that these people belonged to an insurgent group. He was very much afraid when he came to know about them, so he decided to give his car to them to drive to their destination and he decided to travel by foot on way home. He walked that fateful night 30 km by foot and reached home safely. After four or five days there was information that his car was found by some villager in a remote area of Manipur and recovered by police. The respondent, when asked why he preferred to walk down the road rather than to drive those people at their destination, he wide opened his eye and replied that "I have a family which depends on me and my salary so the car was not important at that moment, I can buy a new one but if something unfortunate had happened, my whole family would

have been devastated.” The point here is that the respondent revelation was that he was not in support of the insurgent group, but he felt helpless and afraid of death so he unwillingly had to support them.

The case is not a single incident; similar ones are experienced by people, yet there are many who remain silent in the fear of death and scare of torture. The voice of the common people is seldom heard by the government or by the insurgent groups. The situation of the women is unheard and hidden in the area which has been a playground of armed force and insurgent activities on the one hand. Those women who are a victim of the human right violation by armed force or insurgent activities come to limelight and often government tries to suppress and give compensation. The rising question is related to the innumerable mothers and wives of men in the state. The mothers of adolescent young boys and wives in the state are in a state of restlessness and tension going in their mind until their sons return home. This is not just a problem of a mother or wife or family but an ongoing experience of the mother for their son. There is not much trouble for the girl child as they usually stay at home before sunset. The women in Manipur society play an important role and challenging task for the development and political affairs from the local ground. The *Meira Paibi*, which is a local term used to denote the women association, is found in every corner of the locality. These women guard against drunken people and military army during night time. As in Manipur there can be search operation any time where the army can search for suspect insurgents, so these women come out of their home and guard their men and young children in every locality.

The role played by *Miera Paibi* is important as it acts as a mechanism to bring a peaceful relation between the arm forces and people in the state. Even the government of Manipur has full support on the role of this *Miera Paibi*. The women in the hill also have such kind of association which works for the



protection and development of their people. The women in the hilly region are more vulnerable to the insurgency activities but their voices remain unheard unless there is media report.

### **Conclusion:**

The state has frequent problems of strike and protest, which is one of the possible reasons that the income and gross domestic product of the state is very low. The daily activities of the people of middle income and lower income, including daily bread earners, are the most affected groups in the state. Frequent strikes and protests in the city force to shut down the market where these daily earners come from their villages and sell their vegetables and return home. The market in the state is mainly operated by women, where elderly women come and sell vegetables, goods and grains. These women are the immediate victims of protest and strike as they depend on their money from the selling of vegetable and goods. When the public transports are shut down due to non -availability of petrol and diesel, the situation is more pitiable as daily goods and food items are sold in the market with high price. There are long queues behind the petrol pump in and around the city during the economic blockade that one will find in the state. During months of long economic blockade on the national high way over the last few year the life of common people has been a continuous anguish. All sections of people were made to suffer, among them the elderly and the patients in hospital were at the highest risk. The state government had to airlift consumer goods and medicine from neighbouring states. Trucks were escorted by army to guard the truck from protestors. But, still the people are living “happily” and silent. The public agitations are localized sometime against the state and at times against the insurgent activities in the region.

Recent bomb attacks in market of the state and public places have made the people angrier over those attackers. But

no insurgent outfit runs in the state have claimed the act which puts government and even the insurgent outfit in dilemma of who are the attackers. The big threat in the state which has recently risen is the fear of some international terrorist groups operating in the state. But still neither the central government nor the state governments are taking up any initiative to check the situation. If such situation of bomb attack in public place is not checked in the early stage, there is the possibility of bigger threats from international terrorist outfit.

This paper is an attempt to look at the changing paradigm of violence in the state. Lastly, this should not be considered as a warning signal to the government but as a precaution towards a civil war in the state.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

- Boyden, Jo, Jo de Berry, Thomas Femay & Jason Hart. 2002. *Children affected by armed conflicts in South Asia*.
- Man, Chanda & Rita Ed. 2001. *Women, War and Peace in South Asia*.
- Margoan, M.A. 1996. "The Pattern of Child psychiatric disorder in Kashmir." *JK Practioner* 3(4): 233-236.
- Murthy, R.S. and Lakshminarayan, R. 2006. "Mental health consequences of war: a brief review of research findings." *World Psychiatry* 5(1): 25-30.
- Pierre, V., William D., Donna L.L., Jean Nesl, Celive D.V., Lucien A., and Frederic R. 2004. "The Psychological Impact of Terrorism: an Epidemiologic study of Post Traumatic stress disorder and Associated Factors in Victims of the 1995-1996 bombing in France." *Am psychiatry* 161:1384-1389.
- Sanghita, Das. 2011. *Manipur and the paradox of security*. Anmol Publication.
- Sharma, S.C. 2000. *Insurgency or Ethnic Conflicts* Kolkata: Magnum Press.