



PRIMARY RESEARCH

Manipur Conflict: An analysis of causes, Claims by Meiteis and the State Government, and Counterclaims by Kukis

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Abstract

This article explores the underlying causes of conflict in Manipur state by examining Meitei's and Kuki's counterclaims. The Meitei and Kuki groups had multiple problems before May 3, 2023. The Nagas and Kukis organized a tribal unity protest in the hill districts to protest a proposal to add the Meiteis to the list of ST (scheduled tribes), which was the direct cause of the violence. Manipur has been a hotbed of contested assertions since ethnic flashpoints between the majority of Meiteis and the Kuki tribals erupted at the beginning of May 2023. The Meiteis called the Kukis drug dealers, outsiders, poppy growers, refugees, illegal migrants, and encroachers of state-reserved forests. The Kukis oppose the claims that they are overpopulated in Manipur, recognizing their land rights and the existence of a historic Anglo-Kuki War, which the Meiteis and the government deny. The Kukis strongly denied that they were illegal migrants, refugees, or encroachers on state-reserved forests. The Kukis, too, said they were not the only ones running drugs and growing poppies. They also remembered the previous Anglo-Kuki War in Manipur and claimed the territorial occupation. Manipur's Kukis have been yearning to find out their past and ancestry for a long time. Therefore, this study explores the factors causing the conflicts claimed and disputed by the Manipur State Government and the two communities.

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BACKGROUND

The northeastern Indian State of Manipur is under increasing threat due to the escalating ethnic violence between the Kuki and Meitei. The conflict is also due to the geographical and demographic divisions within the State. The enclosing hills are 90% of its land area and are divided into 11 hill districts. In contrast, the primary Valley, home to the city of Imphal, the capital, and the valley districts, account for the remaining 10% of the total area (five districts). The population is divided among three main ethnic groups: the Meiteis, who comprise 51% of the population, and the Nagas and Kukis. According to the 2011 Manipur Population Census, the Naga and Kuki people constitute 41% of the State's population and are classified as Scheduled Tribes (STs) under Article 342 of the Constitution. The geographical distribution of the population further complicates the demographic dynamics.

The conflict's core issue lies in the unequal spatial distribution and land ownership patterns. Although tribal land encompasses 67% of the State's forests, tribal communities can possess land in the Valley, whereas Meiteis are not permitted to own land in the hills. This disparity fuels tensions between the communities. Furthermore, the Meiteis dominate the State's jobs, economic power, and political influence. The issue escalated in May 2023 over plans to recognize Meiteis as STs and grant them affirmative action, prompting Kuki and Naga protests and violence. This article examines the conflict between the Meitei and Kuki ethnic groups, focusing on the claims and counterclaims between the two communities and the State Government to understand the root causes of the escalating violence.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are as follows: (i) This study aims to investigate the claims made by the Meiteis

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and the State Government regarding the underlying reasons for the conflicts in Manipur. (ii) To examine the Kukis' contention relative to the reports of conflict between the Meiteis and the authorities of Manipur State. (iii) Who are the purveyors of the claim that the Kukis are the original inhabitants of Manipur?

Significance of the study

This comparison of charges and countercharges in the Manipur conflict has many important implications. It provides a nuanced sensitivity by disassembling conflicting stories and finding areas of agreement. The study contributes to peacebuilding and reconciliation by revealing the root causes and suggesting practical steps. It promotes empathy and interethnic understanding between Kukis, Meiteis, and other societies. The analysis adds value to policy relevance and advocacy of the excluded, particularly Kuki communities, in the context of claims and counterclaims. This study offers valuable information to policymakers, scholars, and practiced scholars interested in a more nuanced understanding of the conflict and its implications for resolution.

Problems Statement

The demand for ST status for the Meitei community has thrown the entire Meitei community into chaos. To protect their land, culture, and history, Meiteis, presently categorized as General, Other Backward Classes (OBC), and Scheduled Castes (SC), are asking for ST status too. However, tribal groups fear this could risk their lands, rights, and territory. This move was viewed by tribes as a threat, even as the state government and Meiteis insisted that granting the ST status would ensure the protection. The land rights and titles belonging to the Kuki tribe have also been abrogated by the Government of Manipur's amendments to the Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act of 1960.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND RESEARCH METHOD

A comprehensive literature review constituted the basis for this study. (i) Websites: Relevant websites were searched and referred to regarding allegations and rebuttals by the Meiteis and Kukis in the Manipur conflict. (ii) Print Media: News articles from regional and national media were reviewed better to understand the allegations and counter-allegations in the Manipur imbroglio. (iii) YouTube Channels: To gain insight, videos available on several YouTube channels were watched and examined. (iv) Journal papers: For more insight on allegations and counter-allegations in the Manipur conflict, persecution research was carried out

on the peer-reviewed journal papers of multiple academic databases. (v) Additional Secondary Sources: The Linguistic Survey of India, Twitter, Google, editorials, magazines, press releases by civil society organizations, journalist reports, human rights organizations, census data, news reports, the Assam State Archive, etc.

Method of Research

Qualitative research methods, based on discourse analysis and thematic analysis, were used in this study to investigate the allegations and counter-allegations of the Manipur conflict. New themes were inductively generated and coded using thematic coding; language (fair) and power relations were analyzed through discourse analytic lenses. The range of voices heard, from writers, scholars, politicians, government officials, and organizers to community members, fed into this empirical exploration with arguments and counterarguments. The research used diverse methods to give an in-depth view of the conflict and utilized qualitative data analysis to identify concepts, themes, and meanings.

Period and Limitation

This study will be done within a year, beginning in January 2024 and ending in December 2024. A careful examination of the conflict narratives at a particular time can help understand the dynamics and genesis of the conflict. Limitation—(I) Scope limited: The paper's main focal point is covered by government papers, media stories, and articles, which do not offer a complete understanding of the conflict in all its complexities and all perspectives from stakeholders. (II) Select Sources Biases or Overrepresentation of One or More Narratives: Since some stories or narratives could be overrepresented or underrepresented, there is a possibility of conveying bias while selecting sources. This study is limited to secondary sources, so original data may not be reproduced here.

Recommendations for Future Research—(I) In-depth interviews: In pursuit of a wider understanding, future research might benefit from in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, such as affected persons, state employees, and community leaders. (II) Comparative Study: Comparative techniques may lead to a more successful resolution of conflicts when comparing the ethnic or community disputes soon to be presented, finding similarities, special features, and potential relevant solutions.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT: CLAIMS BY THE MEITEIS AND THE STATE GOVERNMENT IN MANIPUR

Allegation against Kukis

Not Indigenous, Hence No Land Rights—The Meitei-Kuki violence raging on in Manipur is as much about narratives as it is about bullets. Established in 2012 by retired army Chief R. K. Rajendro, the IMF (International Meitei Forum) is a significant Meitei ethnic organization with advocacy in Manipur. The IMF expressed concern about several communities in Manipur claiming land and said that the Kukis wanted a homeland just like landowners did. The IMF claims that the Kukis migrated to Manipur between 1830 and 1840 from Burma after the "Seven Years Devastation of Manipur." An IMF founder said that the Kukis had no land ownership in Manipur, so how could they claim it?

The IMF aims to understand internal differences, conflicts, and aspirations among various communities and disseminate this information on a common platform (NP, 2012). The IMF rejected the demand for "Kukiland," stating that Kukis migrated from Myanmar between 1855 and 1881, with a population of only 8,000. They also claimed that the original settlers of Manipur were Meitei and Naga communities and that later entrants (after 1855 and 1881) should be "pushed back." The President of Manipur State's Darbar Order No. 9 (1933) declared that Kuki villages with 20 households would pay a house tax of Rs 6 per annum. The Meiteis accepted this notion and treated Kukis as refugees without land rights (Wikipedia, n.d.).

Claims against Kukis: Foreigner/Illegal Migrations and Refugees in Manipur

Kukis are considered Foreigners/Illegal migrations

The International Meiteis Forum (IMF) and Federation of Haomee organizations (FHO) have labeled the Kuki community of Manipur as "immigrants" or "foreigners," contributing to the 2023 Manipur violence. Similarly, Meitei organizations have described Kuki tribes as "foreigners" and "illegal immigrants." Illegal immigrants and drug mafia are fueling ethnic clashes in Manipur, says Chief Minister N. Biren Singh. The Meitei community, primarily residing in the Imphal Valley, faces challenges due to the large-scale influx of Myanmarese and Bangladeshi immigrants restricted from settling in the State's hilly areas. Notably, Manipur lawmakers, including Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and previous Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh, approved a "charter of demands" to identify "foreigners (Kukis)," according to Arambai Tenggol Chief Korounganba Khuman. Labelling Kukis as "foreigners," "outsiders," and "infiltrators" reinforces their construction as aliens in Manipur, par-

ticularly in the Imphal Valley (Behera, 2023). The Meitei BJP government in Manipur blames the current violence on waves of illegal immigrants entering the State, allegedly with Kuki assistance. CM Biren Singh reiterated the government's stance to identify and drive them out, expressing strong words against those demanding separate administration. A Manipur cabinet subcommittee report revealed that over 2,000 Myanmar nationals have established settlements in the State and refused to move to designated shelters. The subcommittee identified 2,187 illegal immigrants in 41 locations on April 24, 2023, causing panic among the settled immigrants. CM Biren Singh attributed the unrest to "illegal immigrants" and urged for their immediate identification and repatriation (Lisam, 2020).

Refugees

The Meiteis, a group of Indian tribes, claim that the Kukis tribes in Manipur, who were granted the Scheduled Tribe (ST) quota in 1968, came from Burma as refugees. A letter from 1968, recently widely shared on social media, supports this claim (Biswas, 2024). Meitei leader Maheshwar Thounaojam petitioned the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs to review the State's ST list. Thounaojam argues that the Kukis have ST status in Manipur due to their refugee or migrant status, while the Meitei are descendants of the original tribes of Manipur. Radical Meitei groups, such as Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, accuse the Kuki community, who share ethnic ties with the Chin, of illicitly settling Chin refugees in Manipur's hills, thereby exacerbating longstanding tensions between the two communities. Official figures show 10,000 Chin refugees in the State (Donthi, 2023). T.A. Sharpe, President of Manipur State Darbar, declared that Kukis in Naga areas are aliens and refugees. According to the Meiteis, the Indian government agreed to grant the Kuki relief fund under Memo No. P3/9/66, with payment made in four installments, per the State Government of Manipur's Memo No. 01/R/RFL (Lisam, 2020). The roots of the conflict can be traced back to the differences in the spatial distribution of land between the Meitei community and the tribal people. The Meiteis feel confined to only 10% of the land in the Valley, while the tribespeople occupy the remaining 90%.

Kukis accused of Encroaching Reserved Forest, contributing to population explosion in Manipur **Encroacher of Reserved Forest**

The Manipur state government clarified the ongoing conflict over poppy cultivation and community evictions from Manipur's forests since 2017, stating that these actions

were not targeted at any specific community. The government provided data showing that 160 out of 291 encroachers removed from Manipur's forest land between January 2017 and April 18, 2023, belonged to the Meitei community. Data revealed that the eviction of Kuki tribals from forest areas was not exclusive, as various communities also vacated these areas (Jain, 2023). However, the government's decision to deport the Kukis contributed to the rioting in Manipur. The government stated that the Kukis were encroaching on protected forest areas. On March 10, 2023, when Kukis marched to the streets, the Chief Minister firmly said, "They are encroaching everywhere" (Choudhury, 2023).

Explosive Population Growth among Kukis

The Meiteis have reported a 230% increase in the Kuki-Chin population, primarily due to illegal immigration. Population growth in Manipur is predominantly concentrated in five districts near the Myanmar border, including Churachandpur, Pherzawl, Chandel, Tengnoupal, and Kangpokpi. Meitei claims that the Kuki population has surged from 1% in 1901 to 29% in 2011. Census data reveals a significant shift in Manipur's demographic landscape, with the Meitei population decreasing from 59% in 1951 to 44% in 2011, according to the 2011 Census (Northeast, 2023). Nishikant Sapam, a Meitei independent MLA of Manipur, argued that the Kuki population in Manipur has grown exponentially over time, primarily due to illegal influx. Sapam claimed that the Kuki population in 1901 was only 1% and attributed this growth to the illegal influx to Manipur over time. Since 2001, the population of Manipur has grown by 24.5%, while the Meiteis population remains constant. Sapam highlighted the significant growth of the Kuki population, which has altered the State's demographic landscape (FM, 2023).

The state government has discovered that a large Kuki-Chin population from Myanmar has illegally encroached on Manipur's reserve forests, leading to a 30% increase in the Kuki-Chin population in recent years (Kalita, 2023). Meitei organizations report that Manipur's population has increased by 24.5%, much more than the 17.64% national average. In contrast to natural birth, the Meiteis attribute this aberrant development in hilly regions to migration from nearby nations (Allegations and counter-allegations fly between Meiteis and Kukis, 2023).

Claims exist of Kuki involvement in the drug trade and Poppy cultivation

The Manipur state government is actively combating the illicit drug trade by apprehending key players, including village chiefs involved in poppy cultivation in the hills. In July 2022, Congress MLA Kangujam Ranjit Singh (Meitei) raised concerns in the Manipur legislative assembly, advocating for stringent legislation to impose capital punishment or life imprisonment on those arrested in connection with the illicit drug trade (M. G Shreekumar 2023). Meitei groups accuse Kukis of mass poppy plantation, destroying forestland ecology, and drug trafficking with Myanmar-based drug lords. The Manipur government has been conducting a "war on drugs" campaign since 2017, killing thousands of acres of poppy farms in hill districts.

The drive to address the population growth has been linked to violence between the majority of Meitei and Kuki communities, which erupted in May 2023 (Achom, 2023). The Meiteis claim that poppy is grown in hilly districts dominated by the Kuki tribes, who are accused of increasing illegal poppy. While the government's crackdown on forest areas is part of a larger drug war, it has also been criticized for using "drug lord" as a blanket term against all Kuki people. According to official Manipur government data, approximately 15,400 acres of land are currently under illicit poppy cultivation, with the Kuki community allegedly responsible for around 85% (13,121.8 acres) of this activity.

The 1917-1919 Anglo-Kuki War was called the Kuki Rebellion by the Manipur government and Meitei groups

The Anglo-Kuki War, also known as the Kuki Rebellion, was a significant tribal uprising during British colonial rule in India. However, the Tangkhul (Kacha Naga) community in Manipur disputed the term "Anglo-Kuki War" due to land disputes with the Kukis, prompting them to request the Manipur government to halt commemoration events. In 2019, the FH (Federation of Haomee), a Meitei civil society organization, petitioned Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who supported their demands, leading to the Manipur government's order to dismantle centenary monuments referencing the "Anglo-Kuki War."

A monolith referencing the "Anglo-Kuki War" was altered in 2020 to read "Kuki Rising." In August 2023, the Meiteis Federation of Haomee Organisation (FHO) filed two First Information Reports (FIRs) against authors of books on the "Anglo-Kuki War." Professors Dr. Thongkhohal Haokip and Dr. Jangkhomang Guite, who edited a book on the Anglo-Kuki War (1917-1919), were named in an FIR filed by the Manipur police. According to the Meiteis, archival mate-

rial, including a letter dated June 27, 1919, from J.E. Webster, the then Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, indicated that the Anglo-Kuki War 1917-19 was a Kuki rebellion rather than an Anglo-Kuki war.² On August 7, 2023, a Meitei organization filed FIRs against authors who described the event as a war, insisting it was merely a rebellion. FHO denied the "Anglo-Kuki War" ever being part of Manipur's history and termed it as an "armed Kuki rebellion."

Meiteis and the Manipur CM claimed that the conflict is due to Kuki Narco-Terrorist

The Meitei community in Manipur has accused ethnic riots of being triggered by a crackdown on narco-terror networks. They have called for the National Register of Citizens (NRC) to prevent Myanmar infiltration. The Union government's intentions to interact with the ITLF (Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum) have been challenged by Khuraijan Athouba, spokesperson for the COCOMI (Co-Ordination Committee on Manipur Integrity). Athouba argued that the government is forcing innocent Kuki citizens into violent acts and cited threats to ecological and environmental security from cross-border illegal migration, narco-terrorism, and opium poppy cultivation. Myanmar infiltrators have reportedly enlisted the Kuki people in illegal poppy farming, causing anger among the Kuki population due to the state government's massive campaign against narco-terrorism (A. Singh, 2023). The Kukis, who claim ethnic cleansing as a state-sponsored act, have been accused by CM Biren Singh and Meitei organizations of involvement by Kuki "narco-terrorists," some of whom are based in Myanmar. Singh has denounced the Kukis as a terrorist group despite authorities' appeals for peace.

The recent violence on May 27, 2023, has sparked further tensions. Singh labeled the Kukis as "militant" and "terrorist" during a press conference on May 28, 2023. He claimed that around 30 militants had been killed in retaliatory and defensive operations against militant groups using sophisticated arms against the Meitei population. The Chief Minister reported a conflict between state forces and terrorists attempting to overthrow Manipur, with 40 terrorists killed in the violence, using weapons like AK-47, M-16, and sniper rifles (QN, 2023). Minister L Susindro Meitei MLA claimed that the ongoing violence was instigated by Kuki narco-terrorists for their efforts against poppy plantations and preventing them from engaging in the illicit drug business. Shiv Sena Manipur Unit President M Tombi accused Kuki militants of putting on masks and attacking innocent farmers and civilians, some in their sleep. On August 31,

2023, the Meiteis claimed that Kuki militants were so high on drugs that they saw Chief Minister N Biren Singh as a Meitei, not as the CM of Manipur (Tombi, 2023).

THE KUKIS COUNTERCLAIMED AGAINST THE CLAIMS MADE BY THE MEITEIS AND THE MANIPUR GOVERNMENT

The Kukis have land, and they are the actual Indigenous people of Manipur

Historical Perspective

The Meiteis and the state government claim that the Kukis do not have land in Manipur, as they are not the original settlers, and the land belongs to the state government. In contrast, the Kuki community asserts that they have inhabited areas within Manipur since ancient times, with their settlements spanning approximately 50,000 square miles across India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, predating British rule (B. S. K. Sharma, 2017; Jam, Haq, & Fatima, 2011). Using historical evidence, the Kukis claim ownership of land in Manipur. The Cheitharol Kumbaba, or "Royal Chronicle of Manipur," records that a Kuki named Taothingmang became King of Manipur in 264 AD. In 33 CE, two Kukis, Ahongba and Achouba, allied with Manipuri Nongba Lairen Pakhangba. King Irengba, who ruled Manipur from 1107 to 1127 AD, contacted Kuki villagers north of Imphal Valley. Historian L Joychandra stated that Manipur King Naofanga, who reigned between 624 AD and 714 AD, signed friendship treaties with Kuki Chiefs east of Imphal, Manipur (Doungel & Lawngtlai, 2011).

Following the tradition of the Kukis, Kukistan was established in 1195 AD, followed by Ko-ki country in 1608 AD. Some colonial writers suggest that "Kuki" first appeared in the 1830s and 1840s. However, Kukis' claims have been known since 32 AD. The Kuki, native to the "Land of Freedom" (Zale'n-gam), inhabit areas including Northeast India, Manipur, Northwest Burma, and Bangladesh's Chittagong Hills tracts. Captain Lewin, Deputy Commissioner of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1870, commended the Kukis for their power and independence. The Kukis were first mentioned in British colonial records in 1777 and were officially recognized in 1904 by GA Grierson, Superintendent of the Linguistic Survey of India. This historical and linguistic evidence supports their presence in Manipur and land ownership (Ngulminthang, 2017; Jam, Khan, Zaidi, & Muzaffar, 2011). The 1907 publication "Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India" records the presence of Kukis in the Lushai hills of Mizoram as early as 1777 and mentions their involvement in various Indian kingdoms from the 1820s onward. Based on colonial writers, the Kukis claim origi-

nal land ownership in Manipur, specifically the Kuki Hills. This pre-invasion and colonial-era historical ownership is supported by the British Colonial Regime, writers, and the Gazetteer of Manipur, written by Captain EW Dun in 1886.

The Kukis are the original landowners in Manipur, as evidenced by the Assam State Archie

The Kukis claimed to be the original settlers in Manipur and have evidence of land ownership in the State. The British Kuki Hills Map from 1907, archived in the Assam State Archive (Dispur, No. SA.1/2020/385, vide Lib/R138/81/13), supports this claim. According to the scheduled boundary of Kuki Hills, as depicted in the 1907 British map, Haokip Kuki Chiefs were the original landowners. Others held land through traditional and customary gifts or were tenants/illegal occupants, paying separate Hill House Tax since the colonial regime or later, as per the Hill House Tax Act, 1966. A 1926 case (No. 25 of 26/06/1926) by British S.W. Sir Crossier led to an order by B.C. Gasper, SDO (SW), on June 22, 1925. The order required Meiteis (Manipuris) to pay tobacco taxes to Kuki Chiefs in exchange for collecting timbers, plantain leaves, bamboo, and other materials in the Thangting (Thangching) Hill ranges. All villages paid the British Hill House Tax (but not Land Tax) from the 1800s to Indian Independence and obtained land titles in the name of Kuki (AST, 2020).

The Kukis are the Real Indigenous in Manipur, as evidenced by the Amit Bansal research finding

Major Amit Bansal, an Indian Defence Strategist, discovered authentic data proving the connection of the Kuki community with India since the times of the Mahabharata. The Kukis are the real indigenous people in Manipur, as Major Amit Bansal's research findings supported. In the History of Buddhism in India by Taranatha and the Copper Plates of Tripura, history records that Kukis were a part of the Tripura Kingdom. Taranatha's 16th-century treatise has a chapter on the Kuki, describing their origins and noting the Ko-Ki of the jungle-covered hills between Bengal and Burma. The Copper Plates of Tripura (641–1194 CE) are a reference regarding Kuki's presence and land transfer and paddy cultivation in the vicinity of (the present) Manipur's Langol Hills.

The Tripura Rajmala also supports the Kuki claim, describing them as followers of Lord Shiva who participated in incidents during the reign of King Subrai. Also, the Manipur royal chronicle (Cheitharol Kumbaba) provides accounts of the Kuki tribes and the operations by Meitei rulers against them. These historical narratives bring the

Kuki presence in the region to at least three thousand years. Labeling them as refugees or immigrants is not only inaccurate but also potentially misleading, given their long-standing presence in the area, which could link them to the 'Kiratas' of the Mahabharata (Bansal, 2023).

The Kuki claim that the Hill areas were not included as per the Manipur Merger Agreement of 1949

The Kukis, who claim to be indigenous people, assert that their land in Manipur was not included in the Manipur merger agreement with the Union government. On September 21, 1949, the Manipur Merger Agreement was signed by Maharaja Bodha Chandra Singh of Manipur and Shri V.P. Menon (Menon, 2023), Advisor to the government of India's Ministry of State. This historic agreement began Manipur's integration into the Indian Union. A ceremonial parade was held on October 15, 1949, where the Maharaja took the salute, symbolizing the formal merger. The 1949 Merger Agreement of Manipur was pivotal in the region's history. Consequently, by this agreement, endless geographical claims, titles, authority, rights, and privileges of the Maharaja of Manipur stood transferred, except his private properties and religious liberties. The Maharaja was granted an annual privy purse of 3 lakh rupees for his lifetime — covering expenses for him and his family, including retainers, residences, etc.

After the merger, Manipur became a Part-C State, and its administration was placed under the direct control of the Indian government with the appointment of a chief commissioner. India's Home Minister, Sardar Patel, congratulated Maharaja for the agreement, a landmark difference. Notably, the agreement only covered the territory of 700 square miles (26,500 Paris/hectares), excluding the hill areas of Manipur. Historically, tribal chiefs in North-East India, including the Kukis, remained independent and sovereign nations until the British era. Traditionally, the Kuki community governed themselves according to their customs and traditions, with village chiefs holding significant authority. Land ownership was protected, and administrative machinery was preserved under the chiefs, who collected taxes and levies independently. The Maharaja of Manipur signed the accession agreement without the participation or invitation of any Kuki tribal chief (S. Sushil Kumar 2017).

The Kukis are not Foreigner, Illegal migrations, or Refugees in Manipur

Kukis are not Foreigner based on historical perspective

The Kuki group claims that the Meiteis and the state government of Manipur have created a false narrative against the entire Kuki community, labeling them as "illegal immigrants" and "foreigners" without reliable evidence. They assert that they are not foreigners or illegal migrants from a historical perspective, with roots tracing back to the Stone Age. Archaeological excavations reveal their existence during the Neolithic age, and the Kuki tribe is mentioned in ancient Indian texts, including the Mahabharata (Kuki Tribe n.d.). As an indigenous group in North East India and North West Upper Burma, the Kukis claim they are not immigrants but ruled in collaboration with the Kings of Tipperah and Manipur.

Historical records show that the British government was the first known invader of the Kuki country, also known as the "Independent Hill Country." The Apex body of the Kukis (Kuki Inpi) government defended the country since 1761 AD, with the last battle being the "Kuki Rebellion" or "Anglo-Kuki War" between 1917 and 1919. According to historical evidence, the Kukis are not foreigners or illegal immigrants. Instead, they are considered one of the earliest known people in pre-historic India, preceding the Dravidians, who currently inhabit the region (Majumdar and Bhattasali, 1930). In the 2nd century AD, geographer Claudius Ptolemy identified the Kukis with Tiladai, associated with Tilabharas, and placed them north of Maiandros, Garo Hills, and Sylhet. Later, British Army Officer Capt. Pemberton (1853) claimed that the Kuki territory extends from Manipur Valley's southern borders to Arracan's northern limit (T. Haokip, 2022).

The Kukis are not Foreigners, as evidenced by their Language

The Kukis assert that they are not foreigners or illegal immigrants, citing their significant presence in the hill areas of Manipur and their prominent Kuki language, which served as a lingua franca. Historically, they claim to have ruled and owned a substantial portion of northeastern India, Bangladesh, and upper Burma, from the Arakan Jumma to the Great Sea. A historical record from 1922 reveals that the Kuki Language Examination was held to ensure British officials, including Assamese and Bengalis, could effectively govern North East India during the colonial period. Mr. L.T. Peters, Sub-Divisional Officer of Ukhrul, received an award of Rs. 1000 for passing the examination in March 1922, as documented in Letter No. 1/25/422 from L.O. Clark, I.C.S., Political Agent in Manipur, to the Chief Secretary, Govern-

ment of Assam. The Kuki language was considered a vital tool for governing the hills, including Ukhrul. In contrast, the Tangkhuls migrated to India and were regarded as 'insignificant tribes.' This document demonstrates that the outer Manipur Hills have historically belonged to the Kukis (T. Haokip, 2022).

The Kukis are not Foreigner, as confirmed by the INA

During the 1940s, the Indian National Army (INA), led by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, marched to India under the banner of "Dilli Chalo" (On to Delhi). The Kuki tribals of the Indo-Burmese frontier played a significant role in supporting the INA and joined the movement. This historical fact supports the Kukis' claim that they are neither foreigners nor illegal immigrants. Many Kukis from Manipur actively fought for India's independence, further reinforcing their assertion (Singh Mairembam M 2009).

TABLE 1. Districtwise List of Indian Fighters: Manipur

District	Meitei	Kuki	Naga	Others	Total
Imphal	14	22	Nil	03	39
Thoubal	02	Nil	Nil	00	02
Chandel	Nil	25	Nil	00	25
Ukhrul	Nil	48	Nil	00	48
Churachandpur	Nil	26	Nil	00	26
Senapati	Nil	39	Nil	00	39
Bishnupur	06	Nil	Nil	00	06
Total	22	160	00	03	185

(Freedom-Fighters Enshrined in the INA Memorial Complex 1999-2009 (H. D. Sharma, n.d.))

Dr. Om Jee Upadhyay, Director of the Indian Council of Historical Research, stated in 2022 that over 80 Kukis, out of 112 freedom fighters from Manipur, bravely fought for their motherland. The Kukis assert that they are not foreigners or illegal immigrants, citing a Supreme Court decision that recognizes them as indigenous people. According to the Supreme Court of India's January 5, 2011 decision, "Scheduled Tribes are indigenous peoples of India." As ST (Scheduled Tribes) under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, the Kukis are considered Manipur's original peoples, reinforcing their claim of being the native inhabitants of the region.

The Kukis are not Illegal immigrants or Refugees, as demonstrated by their presence in the region before the 2021 Myanmar Conflict

The conflict between the Meiteis and Kukis in Manipur centers on the claim that Kukis are illegal immigrants or refugees, which the Kuki groups vehemently deny. The Meitei state government, led by Chief Minister Biren Singh,

has made this claim since 2002, particularly in the context of the influx of 40,000 refugees from Myanmar's military coup in 2021, of whom 4,000 migrated to Manipur. The conflict escalated further on May 3, 2023.

Kuki organizations reject allegations of being illegal migrants or involved in ethnic cleansing. Supreme Court lawyer Prashant Bhushan contends that the Manipur government is using illegal immigration as a scapegoat. Former BSF (Border Security Force) Director General Rakesh Singh also argues that the government's handling of the situation is the primary cause of the issue.

In March and April 2023, a cabinet subcommittee led by Letpao Haokip visited two locations to meet immigrants who had fled Myanmar after its 2021 military coup and discussed aid and shelter options with them. However, Kuki groups continue to dispute the government's claims (Lam Khan Piang, 2023). In May 2024, the Manipur government detected 5,457 individuals whom it alleged to be illegal immigrants in the Kamjong district and initiated deportation proceedings. However, the Kuki Inpi Manipur criticized Chief Minister Biren Singh's selective data presentation, claiming that 3,866 individuals were from other tribal villages, not Kuki villages like Phaikoh (Kuki village).

Kuki MLAs and activists like Miss Mawi accused Home Minister (India) Amit Shah's claims about the influx of people from Myanmar triggering ethnic violence. The Kukis accused the BJP government of treating Kukis as "outsiders" and threatening their existence.

According to the data, 1,591 Kukis reside in Phaikoh village, whereas 4,058 are from non-Kuki villages.

TABLE 2. Refugees/illegal immigrants bifurcation in Kamjong district, Manipur

SN	Village	Whether Kuki or Non-Kuki village	No. of Refugees
1	Phaikoh	Kuki	1,591
2	Shangkalok/Khenroram	Non-Kuki	661
3	Skippe	Non-Kuki	356
4	Pilong	Non-Kuki	595
5	Aloyo and Choro	Non-Kuki	414
6	Wanglee	Non-Kuki	570
7	Namlee	Non-Kuki	1087
8	K Ashang Khullen Aze	Non-Kuki	375
Total			5,649

(News, 2024)

Not all Kukis are Refugees, as evident from the Khadawmi operation in Myanmar in 1968

The Kukis, granted Scheduled Tribes (ST) status in India in 1950, assert they are not refugees, having resided in the Manipur kingdom for centuries. The Constitution (ST) Order of 1950, registered in the India Gazette (Number D-481) on September 6, 1950, granted ST status to Kuki tribes in Assam. The Constitution ST Order lists six North East Indian provinces: Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland, and Manipur (as of 1951). Kuki clans in various states are recognized as "Any Kuki Tribes" or simply "Kuki." A 1968 letter circulating on social media claims Kuki tribes in Manipur were refugees from Burma, granted ST quota in India in 1968. The letter highlights the 1967 influx of Myanmar's Kuki people into Manipur, fleeing the Khadawmi operation. The Khadawmi operation was a military operation in Myanmar in 1967, forcing a small group of Kukis to flee their ancestral land in Burma to Manipur. "In 1967, the Khadawmi operation in Myanmar led to the forced migration of a small Kuki group from their ancestral Burmese land to Manipur. The viral letter only refers to refugees from Myanmar within the Kuki Community. It does not categorize the entire Kuki community in Manipur as refugees, making the claim misleading." "The letter's focus on Myanmar's Kuki refugees in Manipur does not imply that the entire Kuki community in Manipur comprises refugees, rendering such claims inaccurate" (Konda Harshavardhan, 2023).

The Kukis do not encroach on reserved forests, and their population is not explosive

The Kukis are not encroachers of reserved forest, as documented in the Assam State Archive

The Kukis claim that Hill Tribal Villages are excluded from Manipur's reserved forests due to the Manipur Government's alleged violation of the Forest Act of 1927. Between 1927 and 1947, their landowners and chiefs were not informed or consulted about the state forest reserve constitutions, violating the Indian Forest Act and the principle of natural justice. The Kukis argue that the Manipur State Government has re-implemented laws violating Article 371C of the Indian Constitution and various legislations defining hill areas, including the Manipur Legislative Assembly Order of 1972, the Indian Forest Act of 1960, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989.

Several reserved forests are in dispute, such as the Khamenlok-Gwaltabi Reserved Forest in Kangpokpi District, Langol Reserved Forest in Kangpokpi District, Longja Reserved Forest in Chandel, Kangbung Reserved Forest in

Chandel, Yangenching Reserved Forest in Chandel, Yangoupokpi Reserved Forest in Tengnoupal District, and Cheklapai Reserved Forest in Churachandpur. The Hill Areas of Manipur (House Tax) Act of 1966, specifically Section 8, Subsection 1, repealed the Manipur Council resolution creating the Kangchup-Chiru Reserved Forest. From 1951 to 1966, the Manipur State Government published Gazette

notifications creating reserve forests, protected forests, and wildlife sanctuaries over tribal villages in hill areas without transparency. Certain hill areas were designated autonomous districts under the Government of Manipur (Hills Areas) District Council Act of 1971, published in Gazette No. 136-E-93 on February 15, 1972 (AST, 2020). The government decided on Section 3 of the Act.

TABLE 3. Refugees/illegal immigrants bifurcation in Kamjong district, Manipur

SN	Name of The Autonomous District	The description of the areas included in the autonomous districts concerns the revenue districts and revenue Subdivisions.
1	Manipur North Autonomous District	Mao-Maram Sub-Division of the Manipur North District (Now Senapati District)
2	Sadar Hills Autonomous District	Sadar Hills West Sub-Division and East Sub-division of the Manipur North District (Now Kangpokpi District)
3	Manipur East Autonomous District	Manipur East District (now Ukhul District & Kamjong District)
4	Tengnoupal Autonomous District	Tengnoupal Sub-Division, Chakpikarong Sub-Division, and Chandel Sub-Division of the Manipur Central District. (Now, Tengnoupal District & Chandel District)
5	Manipur South Autonomous District	Manipur South District (now Churachandpur District and Pherzawl District)
6	Manipur West Autonomous District	Manipur West District (now Tamenglong District and Noney District)

(Assam State Archives 2020)

The Manipur Gazette defines the State's hill regions and areas under the Chief Commissioner's jurisdiction. According to the Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Areas Committee) Orders, 1972, the Hill Areas include districts such as Kangpokpi, Senapati, Ukhul, Kamjong, Tamenglong, Noney, Churachandpur, and Pherzawl, over which the Hill District administration and the Hill Area Committee have jurisdiction. The Manipur government's creation of reserved forests and protected areas without the knowledge or approval of tribal village chiefs, the Hill Area Committee's recommendation, and the Hill Administration's approval allegedly constitute criminal trespass and unlawful encroachment. This includes areas like the Nongmaiching Reserved Forest, Sikhong-Ningel Protected Forest, Tairenpokpi-Tamenglong Protected Forest, Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi Reserved Forest, Lokchao-Yangoupokpi Wildlife Sanctuary, Dampi Reserved Forest, Kailam Wildlife Sanctuary, and Churachandpur-Khoum Protected Forest. The Forest Department's actions may violate tribal rights, and issuing "No Objection Certificates" for sacred sites like Koubru, Lai Pukhri, and Ibudhou Thangjing without proper authority could be considered a culpable offense under the Indian Penal Code, specifically under sections 24, 29(1), 33, 34, 39, 149, 120A, 153A, 141, 420, 427, and 503 (AST, 2020).

There is no explosive Population growth

The Kuki people in Manipur, classified into numerous clans and sections, are generally divided into old and new Kukis despite various Kuki and Naga divisions. Both Cachar and Manipur implemented this classification system concurrently, albeit independently. According to the 1881 census, the total population of Khongjai or New Kukis was 17,204, while the old Kukis numbered 8,180. The combined Kuki population, old and new, was 25,384 in 1881 (Dun, 1992). 1901, Manipur's population was 284,488, with the Kuki population accounting for 41,262 (14.5% of the total), according to the 1901 census. By 2011, the Kuki population had grown to 448,214 out of the total population of 2,855,794 in the State. Notably, the Kuki population in Manipur has grown less than 2% over 110 years, from 14.5% in 1901.

Based on an interview with Meitei independent MLA Nishikant Sapam (as reported by The Wire Journalist). The 1901 census recorded Manipur's population as 284,488, comprising 41,262 Kukis (14.5%) and 203,222 others. Meiteis, including Lois, accounted for 57.7% of the total population, not 64% as per the census. According to Dr. Thongkhohal Haokip, an assistant professor at JNU, Delhi, an estimated 47,042 Kukis lived in Assam, including Manipur, in 1901, with 41,252 residing in Manipur alone. According

to a report by the Editors Guild of India, the government falsely portrays the Kuki community as "illegal immigrants" and "foreigners," despite census data from 1901 to 2011 showing no unusual growth in the Kuki tribal population in the State (FN, 2023).

The Kukis are not the only drug traders and Poppy cultivators

The Superintendent of Police, K. Meghachandra Singh, provided a detailed breakdown of community-wise arrests for

drug traffickers and poppy cultivators in Manipur in the last half-decade. The data reveals that, from 2017 to 2022, state enforcement agencies arrested 2,518 individuals involved in the illegal drug trade and poppy cultivation. The Kuki community claims they are not the only ones involved in these activities.

TABLE 4. Arrests in Manipur's drug cases, 2017-2023: A community-wise tally

Community	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Meitei-Pangal	93	223	201	177	163	210	16	1083
Kuki-Chin	82	54	122	127	151	288	49	873
Meitei	44	67	64	54	40	98	14	381+
Others	12	09	47	14	36	62	1	181
Total	231	353	434	372	390	658	80	2,518

(Achom, 2023)

The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985 has led to the arrest of at least 2,518 individuals over the past five years. The Community-wise arrest breakdown is as follows: Meiteis (381), Muslims (1,083), Kuki-Chin (873), and others (181). There were about 80 arrests in 2023: 14 Meiteis, 16 Muslims, 49 Kuki-Chin, and one other. There were 82 Kuki-Chin inhabitants arrested in 2017: 12 others, 44 Meiteis, and 93 Muslims. Among the 658 individuals arrested in 2022 were 288 Kuki-Chins, 210 Muslims, 98 Meiteis, and 62 others (B. Singh, 2023).

The Narcotics and Affairs of Border (NAB) unit reports that poppy cultivation in Manipur's hills expanded to around 15,400 acres between 2017 and 2023. A breakdown by the National Agricultural Bureau (NAB) shows that Kuki-Chin-dominated areas accounted for approximately 85% of the total, with around 13,121.8 acres under poppy cultivation. Naga-dominated regions accounted for approximately 15%, covering 2,340 acres, and other areas had a smaller share of 35 acres. Kukis claims that this report is biased.

TABLE 5. Community-Wise Poppy Cultivated in Manipur: 2017-2023 (Approx.Area in Acre)

Community	Poppy cultivation: Yearly area coverage (in acres)						Total
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
Kuki-Chin	2001	2174	16770.5	3871	2,600.8	804	13121.8
Nagas	229	67	626	763	305	350	2340
Others	00	00	10	00	25	00	35
Total	2230	2241	2306.5	4634	2930.8	1154	15496.8

(Achom Debanish & Choudhury Ratnadip 2023)

Poppy cultivation is a significant concern in Manipur, particularly in districts dominated by the Kuki and Naga tribes. However, the issue is not confined to these communities, as all three main ethnic groups—Nagas, Kukis, and Meiteis—are involved in illegal poppy farming for drug manufacture. The Kukis argue that the drug menace poses a serious threat to Manipur's society and requires collective action from all communities (DH, 2024) The Manipur government, led by Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, has launched a "war on drugs" campaign, but its effectiveness is disputed. While the

government claims to target poppy cultivators and narco-terrorists, many argue that the approach is biased, focusing primarily on the Kuki community.

In December 2024, the Manipur Police destroyed approximately 70 acres of poppy plantations in the Ukhrul area, which is inhabited by the Naga community. Meitei social scientists, such as Dhanabir Laishram, highlight the role of various groups in the poppy cultivation industry, including planters, transporters, and sellers. Laishram estimated that farmers were paid ₹1.2 lakh per acre of plantation and

attributed significant funding of poppy cultivation to the Meitei community (Mander, 2023). There are allegations that the Meitei community was involved in poppy cultivation before the Kukis and currently sponsors Kuki poppy cultivators. On Kuki Awakening Day, May 3, 2024, President Thangkam Lupheng of Kuki Inpi Saikul Gamkai (KISG) defended the Meiteis and Chief Minister N. Biren's claim that the Kukis are narco-terrorists, stating that the Meiteis had started poppy cultivation before the Kukis (Day, 2024).

Statistics on drug traders between 2017 and 2022 show that the Kuki-Chin, Meiteis, and Pangals (Muslims) accounted for 33%, 15%, and 43.5%, respectively, of the 2,438 drug traders apprehended. This disparity has raised questions about the effectiveness of the government's approach and its commitment to addressing the issue comprehensively. The government's focus on poppy cultivation targets the poorest cultivators, often from the Kuki community, while neglecting other aspects of the drug trade. The 2018 drug expose and a recent letter from Uripok MLA Raghumani Singh (Meitei) revealed the involvement of high-ranking Meitei political leaders, in collaboration with Meitei armed groups, in controlling and facilitating an international drug network (Hausing, 2023). Brinda Thounaojam, a former police superintendent, has alleged that Chief Minister Biren Singh is not fighting a war against drugs but is instead part of a drug cartel that protects drug lords (NTT, 2023).

Kuki Rebellion 1917-1919 can be named as Anglo-Kuki War 1917-1919

The debate between the Kukis and Meiteis regarding the conflict in Manipur revolves around whether it was a "Kuki Rebellion" or the "Anglo-Kuki War." The Kukis view the 1917-1919 conflict as a war for independence, fought to preserve their land, culture, and tradition. They claimed sovereignty before British arrival, citing their governance system, the Kuki Inpi, which is based on chieftainship (P. Haokip, 2018). The conflict began when the British demanded that the Kukis join the Labour Corps during World War I. The Kukis resisted, leading to a three-year war that resulted in significant losses on both sides. The British suppressed the rebellion, burning villages and killing many members of the Kuki community. In March 1917, the Kukis declared war through a ritual sacrifice led by their fourth Chief, Tintong Haokip, who became the commander of the Kuki warriors, according to Kuki accounts. Dr. Thongkhohal Haokip explains that the Kuki Chiefs prepared for war, declaring they would fight against the British for their independence, land, culture, and tradition. Colonial writ-

ers dismissed this as a rebellion against enlisting in the Labour Corps, but native scholars considered it a war of (Chakravarty, 2017).

The Meiteis argue that the Kukis were not a nation or country, so the conflict could not be termed the "Anglo-Kuki War." However, George Abraham Grierson recognized "Kuki Country" in 1904 due to its self-rule during the pre-British period (Grierson, 1941). The Kukis responded that the war between the Kukis and the British could be called the Anglo-Kuki War, given their traditional governance based on chieftainship. During the British period, the British administered Kuki country through chieftainship. Colonial writers described Kuki settlements in North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, and Manipur as 'Kuki Country' (S. Haokip, 2019). The Kukis claim that colonial writers, historians, researchers, and other writers could easily understand the Anglo-Kuki War.

Dr. Thongkhohal Haokip: Dr. Thongkhohal Haokip, Assistant Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), draws a parallel between the British reference to the Revolt of 1857 as the Sepoy Mutiny and the Indian perspective of it as the first war against colonial rule. Similarly, the Kuki Rebellion (1917-19) is termed differently by the British and other tribes, whereas the Kukis and their allies view it as a war of independence against British rule from 1917-1919. Dr. Haokip argues that the Anglo-Kuki War was a modern warfare where the British used fighter aircraft to overcome terrain difficulties. He also claims that the military tactics used during the war violated the 1977 Geneva Convention, as surprise attacks were mounted using modern guns from Silchar and other locations (Bachaspatimayum, 2018).

Mr. Lam Khan Piang: According to Lam Khan Piang, a sociologist, the Revolt of 1857, referred to by the British as the Sepoy Mutiny, was the first war of Indian independence. Similarly, the Kuki Rebellion (1917-19) was a war of independence against the British for the Kukis, a tribe that fought from 1917-1919. Robert Reid, who served as governor of colonial Assam from 1937 to 1942, described the longstanding conflict in Manipur as the most severe, with a resolution cost of Rs 28 lakh, according to Piang (Dutta, 2023).

Mr. Vijay Chenji: According to Vijay Chenji, the Kukis also claim it may be called the Anglo-Kuki War. Retired Colonel Chenji referred to the conflict between the Kukis and the British as the Anglo-Kuki War 1917-1919: Victory in Defeat. According to Chenji, it was a war since the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-1919, one of the most challenging wars fought by the British since the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Chenji presented a paper on the war to the North East History Asso-

ciation (NEHA) and referred to the outcome as 'victory in defeat,' as the Kukis, despite a crushing defeat, remained determined to fight with the same spirit, resulting in the British also suffering a crushing defeat (Chenji, 2022).

Prof Lal Dena: Prof Lal Dena emphasized that the Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919, significantly impacted the history of Manipur and modern Indian history. The anti-imperialistic liberation movement, which took three years to suppress, demonstrates its significant size and strength. Prof Lal Dena argued that British documents in India and London recorded the war as the 'Kuki Rebellion,' highlighting racial prejudice in the colonial mindset.

Prof Rajib Handique: According to Rajib Handique, historians argue that the interpretation of the Kuki revolt has been influenced by ethnic clashes, with some claiming that hatred between communities leads to attempts to erase the history of others. Handique noted that the Anglo-Kuki war was once commemorated by both the Meiteis and the Kukis and was included in the curriculum at Manipur University. Prof Handique highlighted that the Centre and Manipur government planned to build a stone pillar in Imphal to commemorate the Anglo-Kuki War, which remains a significant event in India's anti-British resistance.

The Kukis are not Narco-Terrorist, but the Meiteis are Terrorist

The Meitei community has been accused of falsely labeling all Kukis as narco-terrorists, including those who have lived in the Imphal valley for generations and work as government employees. Meanwhile, Kuki Inpi Manipur claims that state-sponsored ethnic cleansing against the Kukis is a deliberate plan by the state government to seize tribal lands, particularly those dominated by the Kukis. The Kuki apex body demands a separate administration for lasting peace and calls for legal action against Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and his cohorts for their alleged communal agenda against tribals. The Kukis point to instances where individuals spreading hate speech against them faced the consequences, such as Khuraijam Athouba and Mahesh Thounaojam.

According to TOM TV News Imphal on September 2023, the COCOMI (Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity) Spokesperson's (Athouba's) microphone was muted during a United Nations conference in Geneva for his hate speech against the Kukis, accusing them of waging war and sidelining the root cause of the conflict. Then, he returned with shame (Inpi, 2024). Thounaojam lost the Lok Sabha Election 2024 significantly after campaigning against Kukis as "Chin-Kuki Narco-terrorists." Kuki Inpi Manipur

also demands accountability from Meitei groups like Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, alleging that they justify state-sponsored ethnic cleansing against Kuki tribal Christians. According to the Kuki, the Meiteis are the real terrorists, citing the Home Ministry of India's listing of Meitei terrorist organizations under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, in Manipur are mentioned below:

TABLE 6. List of Meitei terrorist organizations in Manipur, as per the Indian government records (2024)

SN	Name of Meitei Arms Groups	Terrorist Organization
1	PLA (People's Liberation Army)	-do-
2	UNLF (United National Liberation Front)	-do-
3	PREPARK (People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak)	-do-
4	KCP (Kangleipak Communist Party)	-do-
5	KYKL (Kanglei Yaol Kanba Lup)	-do-
6	MPLF (Manipur Peoples Liberation Front)	-do-

(GOI, n.d.)

The table shows six organizations identified as 'terrorist organizations' under Section 35 of the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act), 1967. Moreover, according to the Home Ministry of India, 10 Meitei arms groups or outfits have been declared unlawful associations in Manipur for ten years, effective November 13, 2023 (The Times of India, 2023). The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has extended the ban on specific organizations under the UAPA for advocating secession from India through armed struggle. The government has also identified its role in the ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur. TOI (2023), the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested M. Anand Singh, a former PLA (People Liberation Army) cadre from Imphal, alleging that Myanmar-based insurgent and terrorist leaders were recruiting overground workers, cadre, and sympathizers to enhance their attacks on security forces and ethnic groups. Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's labeling of Kukis as "militants" and "terrorists" during a press conference has been criticized by some community members as baseless. On June 9, 2023, a news reporter from the Times of India (TOI) questioned the Kukis about the CM considering the Kuki community terrorists. The Kukis responded, "If 40 terrorists are murdered, the CM should be notified of their identities." The killings are taking place in Manipur. The CM should not call us terrorists without evidence, Kukis claimed.

Implications for Research

Policymakers can use the study's implications to deal with the Meitei-Kuki conflict. For this, policymakers can design targeted interventions to promote social cohesion, diffuse tensions, and foster understanding by understanding the root causes. Reconciliation and confidence-building can be supported by discussing land claims, territorial rights, and historical underpinnings. Persistent peacebuilding may also entail considering administrative procedures that privilege the Kuki community. Promoting evidence-based policy-making and community engagement can support policy reform, contribute to peacebuilding, and eventually form a more stable and peaceful Manipur.

CONCLUSION

Interrelated historical, ethnic, economic, legal, and political complications all add to the depth and complexity of the Meitei-Kuki conflict in Manipur. Lastly, both populations also have legitimate grievances and concerns. Some important factors fueling the competition between the Kukis and the Meiteis in Manipur are discussed. Deciding to declare the Meitei group a Scheduled Tribe has heightened the rivalry over land ownership and control between the Kukis and Meiteis. From the perspective of the Meiteis, this would have led to the fragmentation of Manipur, whereas the Kukis demanded greater autonomy and recognition of their ethnic identity. There are said to be historical grievances on both sides—the Meitei kingdom encroached on Kuki lands, and the Kuki Rebellion was initiated against British rule, to which the Meitei were parties. However, this can only be achieved by a comprehensive understanding of these

complex issues and being willing to work towards the primary concerns of both parties. This might involve encouraging communication between the Kukis and Meiteis to address old resentments and foster reconciliation. Exploring how the Kuki people can have greater autonomy and self-governance while maintaining Manipur's territorial integrity is also important. Land reforms that respect the rights of both communities and provide a framework for addressing the competing claims on land ownership, control, and use are necessary. The historical, ethnic, economic, juridical, and political reasons underlying this dispute must be analyzed comprehensively for a final settlement.

Limits of the Study and Recommendation for Further Studies

This study has several limitations on the Meiteis-Kukis clash in Manipur. Further inquiry is also necessary to investigate the economic and legal dimensions of the war since its history, or ethnic-based diagnosis might not be enough to capture its complexity. Despite those limitations, the analysis provides crucial insights into the root causes of conflict. Future research must look into community projects, legal frameworks, and detailed studies of economic factors. Researchers should examine Article 342 and the Fifth and Sixth Schedules — provisions in the Indian Constitution for tribal rights and safeguarding, among others. Research on autonomy and self-government models is needed to resolve community issues while additionally upholding the integrity of Manipur. Study and research in these directions will support sustained peacebuilding for Manipur.

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