

Unintended Consequences: Northeastern Peace Accords and Manipur's Women

Swarna Rajagopalan

Abstract

Diversity and migration are historical realities that contemporary border-making turns into sources of conflict. Multi-ethnic societies are a universal reality that must contend with the states that would like to identify as single nations. People in these multi-ethnic societies move where security and livelihoods lead, across regions and states, while holding on to stories of where they came from. In North East India, an accord to settle one conflict has consequences for other communities and actors not party to that settlement. Manipur, sharing borders with Nagaland, Assam and Mizoram, as well as a long stretch of the international border with Myanmar, is affected to varying degrees by developments in these states. Manipur's politics naturally reflects: this impact, and the women of Manipur have lived with militarisation and conflict for decades. This paper traces the relationship between accords in the region and this 'last mile' insecurity experienced by women in Manipur.

Author Profiles

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Gendered Peace Accords

What is the gendered impact of peace accords? This essay argues that peace accords, in their exclusions and unintended consequences, can increase militarisation and conflict, thereby adversely affecting the security of men, women and others. In Northeast India, accords have been signed to settle conflicts of nationalism, nativism and cultural rights, and the signatories have varied, involving the Government of India, state governments and a selection of non-state actors. Manipur sits on the international border with Myanmar and is surrounded by Mizoram, Assam and Nagaland, all of which have attempted to settle, with varying success, disputes with the central government and with non-state groups within the states. Inevitable, that there should be repercussions of these accords for the politics of Manipur and its people.

Manipur's location at the crossroads of four areas with active militant organizations— Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Myanmar—and the fact that communities within Manipur are also found in these other places - further contributes to the level of violence in the state. Clashes between Naga and Kuki groups, between Pangals and Meiteis, and between Kukis and Tamils in Moreh have occurred over the last decade, and the Hmar continue to demand to become part of Mizoram. (Rajagopalan 2008, 34) ¹

In the first instance, we look at how peace accords signed in its neighbourhood have affected Manipur's people.

Every accord leaves out more issues than it covers: for every issue for which parties seek resolution through an accord, several others remain unresolved. First, it is intrinsic to the process of negotiation that both sides move away from their original positions in order to achieve a compromise. In addition, in the course of negotiations they might choose to focus on a set of issues of common concern, leaving other important questions unresolved. Moreover, the problem in the case of accords, as noted, is that they usually leave out important stakeholders. But even if important stakeholders are part of a consultative process, sometimes they are not signatories to the final version of an accord. Inadequacies of the process and problems of implementation make almost every accord unsatisfactory.” (Rajagopalan 2008, 32)

Accords often result in conflict. This happens in three ways (Rajagopalan 2008, 36-39). First, the peace negotiations are likely to have left out some parties to the conflict or stakeholders, who are therefore, not party to the accord. This means they were not recognised as significant actors and it sets up or reinforces divisions and rivalries. Those at the peace table become invested in monopolising their status as legitimate spokespersons, and this creates a power hierarchy

¹Moreh is a trading town located on the India-Myanmar border. The Hmar are an ethnic group who live in Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. In India, they live in Manipur and Mizoram.

among groups. This discrimination can be part of the negotiating strategy of the other party; that is, the state. Second, dissenters within organisations that are part of the negotiations might go underground and start splinter groups, creating new conflict centres. Finally, the exclusion and side-lining of interests can cause a backlash beyond the finite universe of the accord.

In Manipur's case, the discontents began from the merger with India and have steadily escalated, in part because of internal rivalries and in larger part, as a function of developments in its neighbourhood which has included the signing of multiple peace accords in its neighbouring states that has exacerbated conflicts within the state. This journey of escalation is the background for this essay, underscoring the gendered consequences it has had. Much of the writing on Manipur places the spotlight on the heroism of Manipuri women in resisting AFSPA and militarisation, but that will not be the focus here. The essay will relate one factor—peace accords in the neighbourhood—as it has steadily transformed the political landscape of the state, and thereby, affected people in the state in distinctively gendered ways.

The larger point the essay seeks to make is that in our haste to conclude an agreement, we are selective about who is included in a peace process, which further divides society around who is recognised as a significant player and who is excluded. This can escalate tensions and have a ripple effect beyond the area covered by the accord, with consequences on each society's most marginalised—usually women and gender minorities.

The bulk of this essay will be an accord-by-accord discussion on terms and consequences. Following this, we will look more closely at the history of militarisation in Manipur and its gendered impact. What we learn afresh is an old lesson: the more inclusive a peace process, the less harm an accord does to the universe it impacts. Notwithstanding twenty years of UN Security Council Resolution, gender transformation is not on any peace agenda, but we can still hope to limit the lasting damage of militarisation.

Accords and their Discordant Notes

While developments in Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland find responses or mirrors in Manipur, it is Nagaland's history of conflict and negotiation with the Indian government that has most directly affected and will continue to affect, Manipur politics. This section is structured around various neighbourhood accords since 1947 and in each instance, we look at how it affected Manipur.

The Nine -Point Agreement (The Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord), 1947

Signed just before Indian independence and Partition, this accord set forth the terms of Naga inclusion in the new Indian state. It was signed with representatives of eleven tribes. It recognised “the right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes.” (South Asia Terrorism Portal n.d.) Moreover, it appointed the Governor of Assam as the Agent of the Indian Government responsible for observing the agreement for ten years.

The accord stated that after ten years, that is, in 1957: “the Naga Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at.” (South Asia Terrorism Portal n.d.) This

provision was differently interpreted by the Nagas and the Indian government. The former read it as a promise of self-determination, and the latter as one of many possible administrative arrangements within the Indian Union.

One section of the Naga National Council rejected the accord and declared Naga independence. By the end of the 1950s, the Naga struggle against the Indian Union had become an armed struggle.

Meanwhile, in May 1947, the principality of Manipur had adopted a constitution that limited the powers of its king. On August 11, 1947, the king signed the Instrument of Accession that made Manipur a part of the Indian Constituent Assembly but sharing a representative with Tripura and Khasi & “Jyantea” (Mohendro 2009). This was done after consultations between the Assam Government and the Manipur Darbar. Nevertheless, on 21st September, 1949, the Manipur Maharaja, who had been invited to Shillong for a meeting, was made to sign the Merger Agreement (South Asia Terrorism Portal n.d.) with India under duress. This officially made India the administrator of Manipur (South Asia Terrorism Portal n.d.). When the merger came into force on October 15, 1949, an India-appointed administrator, Major General Rawal Amar Singh, replaced the Manipur Darbar and Maharaja. Manipur went from being an independent principality to being a Schedule C state in the Indian Union. Pradip Phanjoubam (2015) writes that Manipur “began its postcolonial history as a wounded society”. The first dissenting voices were muted, but this changed as the perception grew that merger with India had diminished the status of an independent nation and its people.

There are two striking differences between the Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord and the Manipur Merger Agreement. Both the Nagas and Manipur saw themselves as independent states negotiating with India, but while in the case of the Naga accord there was care taken to include eleven Naga tribes in the agreement and recognition of the role of the Naga National Council, the Manipur Merger Agreement was coerced and the Manipur Darbar was sidelined.² Neither the Nagas nor Manipur became a state in the Indian Union at the time of their accession. However, the Naga rejection and resistance to merger with the Indian Union was immediate while it took longer to crystallise in Manipur where it has still has not taken the form of secession.

The Naga resistance began with a plebiscite in 1951 and a boycott of the 1952 General Elections. By the mid-1950s, it had become an armed resistance. This was the rationale for the enactment of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (Assam and Manipur) 1958 which later became the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).³ From the outset, the law applied to Naga Hill areas in Manipur, in addition to Assam.

² In 1947, the Manipur Constitution Act transformed Manipur into a constitutional monarchy where the king would function in consultation with an elected legislature, the Manipur Darbar. In 1949, the king was summoned to Shillong and made to sign the Merger Agreement while in detention. While the political consensus in Manipur was in favor of merger with India, the way this was forcibly extracted left a bad taste that lingers.

³ The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act empowers the army in “disturbed areas” to prevent gatherings, to use force, to stop, search and arrest and ban the use of firearms. Inasmuch as it empowers the forces, it grants them impunity so that they are not accountable for their actions. See Amrita Patel, “Security Laws in India with Special Reference to AFSPA: A Gendered Perspective,” in Asha Hans and Swarna Rajagopalan, *Openings for Peace*, Sage, 2016

The Sixteen Point Agreement, 1960

The Sixteen-Point Agreement was a resolution drafted over three Naga tribal conventions held between 1957 and 1959 (South Asia Terrorism Portal n.d.). It was signed by the Government of India and the Naga People's Convention. It granted Nagaland statehood and placed it in the charge of the Ministry of External Affairs, rather than Home Affairs. The Agreement laid out administrative arrangements for this new status but it did not address any of the core issues between the Nagas and India.

However, the demarcation and establishment of the state of Nagaland created a border that cut through Naga areas in Northeast India. Some communities acquired a state of their own, and some became minorities in other states (Livemint 2016).

For Manipur, which became a Union Territory in 1956, the lesson of the Sixteen-Point Agreement was simple – nothing is as effective as violence. Armed rebellion had got the Nagas statehood and respect. The statehood movement in Manipur had not been violent or effective. The first secessionist organisation emerged in the 1960s (the United National Liberation Front) and from this, emerged the Sylhet-based Revolutionary Government of Manipur which chose armed struggle for independence. Manipur eventually became a state in 1972.

The Shillong Accord, 1975

By 1975, several factions of the Naga insurgency had gone underground and the accord was signed by the Nagaland government and six unnamed representatives of the 'underground organisations'. The first point was capitulation by the Nagas: "The representatives of the underground organisations conveyed their decision, of their own volition, to accept, without condition, the Constitution of India." (South Asia Terrorism Portal n.d.)

The other two points simply said that arms held underground would be surrendered and that the representatives of the 'underground organisations' would take time to formulate other issues to be resolved in a final settlement. The Shillong Accord decimated the credibility of the Naga National Council.

In 1980, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) was formed and the idea of 'Nagalim' entered the Naga discourse; denoting a greater Nagaland that embraced Naga communities outside Nagaland state. NSCN split into factions and each negotiated separately with the Indian government and with the state governments of Nagaland and Manipur. Over the decades, internecine rivalries, trans-ethnic operational networking and battles with the state (the Indian Union and state forces) have continued apace.

The Assam Accords

Assam too borders Manipur and was the conduit for Manipur's initial interface with both British India and newly independent India. Before the creation of Nagaland state, it was the unrest in Naga areas that cut across today's Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur that prompted the passage of AFSPA's predecessor.

Assam has been party to several accords that have addressed issues within the state, many of them creating new autonomous districts and councils. It has also been affected by accords with other parties that resulted in the carving out of new states from areas that were once part of Assam.

Assam's accords have not affected Manipur directly, but the variety of Sixth Schedule arrangements set up by each of its accords with the Bodos (1993, 2003 and 2020); with the Rabha-Hasong, Tiwa, Mishing and Karbi-Anglong (1995) offer a precedent for Manipur's own inter-ethnic rivalries. The compromise solution promised by the Indian government in the most recent negotiations appears to involve setting up Naga autonomous districts, instead of carving out a greater Nagaland with areas presently in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.

The Mizo Accords

Mizo mobilisation was based initially on a geographic definition but over time, it acquired a multi-ethnic inclusive character, including both Lushai and non-Lushai tribes. This was one reason for the success of the Mizo Accord (1986). However, because the accord gave up the demand for a Greater Mizoram, Hmar on the Manipur side of the border were left outside Mizoram. A Memorandum of Settlement in 1994 set up the Sinlung Hills Development Council as a Hmar region within Mizoram.

The Naga Peace Accord/ Framework Agreement, 2015 (Parliament of India 2018)

A much-anticipated and much-lauded agreement was signed in 2015, whose text is not in the public domain at the time of writing. However, in a Parliamentary briefing, there are enough details to clarify that this was indeed a 'Framework Agreement,' merely setting the terms for a future accord. (Parliament of India 2018). That accord was anticipated in end-2019 but has still not been signed.

The Government Interlocutor for Nagaland, RN Ravi (Parliament of India 2018), told the Parliamentary Committee that in the Framework Agreement the NSCN had moved from saying that it could be 'with India and not within India' to agreeing to be within the Indian federation with special status. Further, he reported an agreement that the Nagas would give up a demand for a greater Nagaland and leave existing state boundaries untouched, while special arrangements would be made for Nagas outside Nagaland. The interlocutor flagged the challenge of getting all Naga groups on board the talks. As the Committee understood:

The framework agreement was just about the recognition of the uniqueness of Naga history by the Government of India, and an understanding that inclusive settlement will be within the Indian federation with due regards to the uniqueness of the Naga history. However, the Interlocutor stated that it was implied in the agreement that some special arrangement will have to be made for the Nagas. (Parliament of India 2018, 19, 3.1.8)

There was every expectation that a final peace accord was imminent in 2019 but it has not materialised. The interlocutor's reassurances to the Parliamentary Committee have not reached the people of Manipur. In late October 2019, contradictory statements from Naga groups and the government did not help the situation and Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur both sought reassurances from the Indian government.

Manipur is home to Meiteis, Nagas and Kukis. Whatever the final settlement is, someone is going to be placed at a disadvantage and someone is going to be discontent. That a Naga peace accord is apt to exacerbate both conflict with the Indian state as well as inter-ethnic conflict is evident from the tense atmosphere reported in anticipation of such an accord in 2019.⁴

In January 2020, a news report in *The Assam Tribune* (Choudhury 2020) quoted the Ministry of Home Affairs as saying that accord was ready and it only remained for the Government, National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M) and the Naga National Political Groups (NNPG) to sign it. There would be no integration of Naga areas in other states, into Nagaland, but two Naga autonomous councils would be set up in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule.

Anticipating that a definitive settlement with the Nagas will include autonomy arrangements for Naga majority areas in other states, Mizos have demanded that the same must be extended in Manipur to the Mizo-dominated areas (Outlook 2017).

For Meiteis who live mainly in the Manipur Valley, this reinforces the fear of being dominated by people from the hills. Pradip Phanjoubam discusses the friction between hill and valley peoples as an important source of conflict in Northeast India (2015, 73-76). If Naga areas were to be set apart with special arrangements, and a similar demand arise from Mizos and Kukis, the reach of the Manipur state government would be relatively limited. Redrawing district boundaries would limit to some extent such consequences. In 2016, Manipur created seven new districts by bifurcating seven of its original nine; five of which were hill districts and four, valley (Livemint 2016). All five hill districts that were bifurcated had Naga or Kuki majorities. Whether prescient or not, these changed lines will blunt the consequences of any internal arrangements mandated by a Naga Accord.

Militarization in Manipur and its Gendered Impact

Pradip Phanjoubam writes that the physical location of Northeastern India, “a landmass wedged between China, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar,” (Phanjoubam 2015, 31) and the unresolved nationality questions among its many communities which have led to violent separatism, contribute to militarisation of this region. While the Naga, Assam and Mizo accords are not singularly responsible for the militarisation of Manipur, they have contributed by ratcheting up the insecurity of various ethnic groups in the state.

Since the 1960s, militant groups have proliferated, mobilising around three kinds of causes: in assertion of ethnic group rights; in response to situations created by accords signed elsewhere; and as a reaction to the Indian military presence and its lack of accountability, which has also led to separatism. In a chicken-egg dynamic, their activities and their internecine wars have given the state justification to maintain a strong military presence, even as that presence itself

⁴ See for instance: Mazumdar, Prasanta. Naga Peace Accord: “Seven Sisters” Caught in a Flux. *The New Indian Express*. Last modified November 2019. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/thesundaystandard/2019/nov/03/naga-peace-accord-seven-sisters-caught-in-a-flux-2056284.html>. Saikia, Arunabh. Anxiety over Naga Settlement Sparks Protests in Manipur – and Even a “government-in-exile”. Scroll. Last modified October 31, 2019. <https://scroll.in/article/942145/anxiety-over-naga-settlement-sparks-protests-in-manipur-and-even-a-government-in-exile>. *The Sangai Express*. Protesters Demand Disclosure of Naga Peace Agreement While Staging Public Alert Protests and Rallies in Different Parts of BPR. E-Pao!. Last modified 2019. <https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=16..141119.nov19>.

is a rallying-point for insurgent groups. The people of Manipur have been caught between the violence of the militant groups and the violence of state military and paramilitary forces. Neither non-state nor state actors are accountable to anyone, the latter because of AFSPA, which is common cause across all ethnic affinities. (Patel 2016; Hans 2016)

In 1980, all of Manipur was declared a 'disturbed area' and AFSPA extended across the state.⁵ This notification was issued by the Government of Manipur, the Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs 2018 report to Parliament stressed (Parliament of India 2018)

The reason AFSPA has been around for all these years in Northeast India may have more to do with the logic of path-dependency – an inability on the part of our state institutions to break away from past habits. A 'disturbed area' declaration is very rarely a response to what anyone can reasonably call a challenge to the authority of the Indian state. It is designed to provide utmost flexibility to the security forces in its operations against 'insurgent groups' – big and small. That a decision that effectively suspends fundamental freedoms can be made so casually in a democracy has just not been part of the conversation; at least not in non-AFSPA states. (Baruah 2017)

AFSPA places the people of Manipur in a politically uncomfortable place. The excesses of the Indian security forces make it hard for them to oppose the underground rebel groups that proliferate. While they may seek protection from these internecine wars, they also oppose the licence and impunity with which the forces are able to shoot, torture and kill civilians in the name of counter-insurgency operations. (Rehman 2017, 103-104)

In a 2016 report to the UN Human Rights Council, the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights stated that around 50,000 Indian soldiers were deployed in Manipur, in addition to police, mercenaries and intelligence forces (Civil Society on Human Rights in Manipur and the UN 2016). The report also states that armed forces have occupied sacred cultural sites, schools, health centres, local government offices and prime agricultural land, referring to the discovery of mass graves in at least one school (Civil Society on Human Rights in Manipur and the UN 2016, D.iii.29). Political detenus from Manipur constitute 64 percent of the all-India number even when Manipur has under 1 percent of India's population (Civil Society on Human Rights in Manipur and the UN 2016, D.iv.48).

More than six decades of steady militarisation have had a predictable gendered impact. The UNFPA's 2015 State of the World's Population Report summarised the different gendered consequences faced by men and women (United Nations Population Fund 2015; Anderlini 2010). Trauma, distress, bereavement, disruption of life, breakdown of community and loss of property are common across genders (Buvinic, Das Gupta, Casabonne, and Verwimp 2013).

Men are more likely to be killed; injured and left with lasting disabilities; detained or missing (disappeared). (A.L Strachan and Haider 2015; Sivakumaran 2010; Manivannan

⁵ For an argument in favor of AFSPA, see: Kamboj, Anil. "Manipur and Armed Forces (Special Power) Act 1958." Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Last modified 2004. https://idsa.in/strategicanalysis/ManipurandArmedForcesSpecialPowerAct1958_akamboj_1004.

2013; Sudhakar 2011). They suffer sexual and gender-based violence such as sex-selective massacres, rape and torture and it is also likely they are forced to perpetrate sexual violence on others as part of the fighting. Conflict brutalises them and at the end of the war, it is hard for them to find work so they might end up being recruited into criminal activities. Given gender stereotypes about 'toughness' and 'resilience', men may find it harder to seek and get help to get over conflict trauma. Moreover, rehabilitation programmes may overlook their emotional and psychological trauma.

Women make up around half of the world's refugees⁶ and internally displaced persons.⁷ When men go into battle, women are left behind to look after families single-handedly. Their bodies become battlefields as they experience rape, trafficking, forced marriage and forced pregnancies. Girls are vulnerable to abduction and exploitation by soldiers as sex slaves or as support workers. Conflict and militarisation also increase the likelihood of domestic violence. Women suffer sexual and reproductive health problems, in addition to trauma. However, for women, one positive outcome of conflict is that with men away fighting, they gain access to decision-making, both in the household and in the community.⁸

While there are few empirical accounts yet, we know that sexual and gender minorities face discrimination and violence at different stages of conflict and flight. An International Alert study lists the following ways in which they are targeted in conflict and peacetime: targeted violence, including killing and sexual violence; policing of gender norms; blackmail and extortion; and rejection by family and other community members (Myrtilinen and Daigle 2017, 17). The more visibly individuals stand out as belonging to sexual and gender minority groups, the more vulnerable they are at the hands of both conflict actors and civilians. Moreover, lack of legal-institutional recognition—for example, in the planning of rehabilitation and refugee camps—mean that survival depends even more on blending in.

What are some illustrations of the gendered impact of conflict and militarisation in Manipur?

Given the proliferation of armed groups and the heavy deployment of state forces, the death toll over the years in Manipur has been heavy. Statistics about death and disability-causing injury that cover the many decades of conflict are hard to come by, and what is in the public domain is not gender-disaggregated. Knowing what we know about men being more likely to be killed, it is to be assumed most deaths are of men and boys.

In a 2017 Public Interest Litigation, the Extra Judicial Execution Victim Families Association (EEVFAM) told the Supreme Court that 1,528 people were killed in encounters by security forces in the state between 2000 and 2012 (Dutta 2017). These killings were possible because of the impunity granted by AFSPA.

⁶ https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/in_safety_and_dignity_-_addressing_large_movements_of_refugees_and_migrants.pdf, B.17. page 6

⁷ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/202003-twice-invisible-internally-displaced-women.pdf> page 5.

⁸ There is a large body of literature on the impact of conflict and militarisation on women. Rehn, Elisabeth, and Ellen J. Sirleaf. Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-Building (Progress of the World's Women 2002, Vol. 1)." UN Women. Last modified 2002. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2002/1/women-war-peace-the-independent-experts-assessment-on-the-impact-of-armed-conflict-on-women-and-women-s-role-in-peace-building-progress-of-the-world-s-women-2002-vol-1#view>.

A Manipur newspaper report (*The Sangai Express*, 2014) cites Ministry of Home Affairs data to say that between 1980 and 2010, security forces killed 2106 insurgents and insurgents killed 1218 security personnel. Non-state actors killed 2405 civilians, it said.

According to the most recent Parliamentary report, between 2012 and 2016, in 1483 incidents 163 extremists, 56 security forces and 91 civilians were killed in Manipur. The striking fact, noted by the Parliamentary Committee, is that while the number of killings has been on the decline in Manipur, still they make up 54 percent of the killings in the northeast in 2017, and that the numbers have doubled between 2016 and 2017.

South Asia Terrorism Portal (2020): provides estimates of numbers based on news reports. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Year	Incidents of Killing	Civilians	Security Forces	Terrorists/ Insurgents/ Extremists	Not Specified	Total
2000*	44	46	31	60	0	137
2001	98	48	16	101	2	167
2002	103	30	44	106	21	201
2003	102	23	23	153	6	205
2004	104	39	51	130	13	233
2005	203	140	51	135	9	335
2006	195	74	38	146	28	286
2007	257	130	58	240	33	461
2008	309	113	10	349	24	496
2009	276	76	19	329	8	432
2010	90	29	6	102	1	138
2011	42	23	9	31	2	65
2012	67	23	12	77	1	113
2013	33	21	6	28	0	55
2014	36	22	10	23	0	55
2015	52	18	24	52	3	97
2016	25	14	13	9	0	36
2017	37	23	9	22	1	55
2018	21	7	7	9	0	23
2019	7	4	0	5	0	9
2020	1	1	0	0	0	1
Total**	2138	904	437	2107	152	3600

What these number mean in real terms is that over more than three decades, all sections and communities in Manipur have lost young men and boys to senseless fighting. For families to recover from the trauma of this bereavement takes generations.

Every year, over 300 people go missing in the North Eastern state of Manipur. The pattern is recurrent. Late at night, security forces break into homes, arrest “suspects”, and take them (often blind-folded) to a place of detention. Some days later, a body is found. Sometimes, people are shot dead while going to work, school or to the bank, and their belongings robbed. On such occasions, the security generally alleges that the deceased was killed in an armed encounter. Most of these cases go unreported. When families attempt to file a complaint, they are often intimidated and discouraged from taking the case further. If cases are ultimately filed, they are not investigated by state agencies. (Video Volunteers 2011)

Kidnappings and forced disappearances also disproportionately affect men.

Every other day 3 to 4 people are killed in this conflict; that means 300 to 400 people every year, whether by the army, police or unidentified insurgents. And many of those men killed come from the poorest families, leaving behind the women to suffer. (Singh, 2012)

People cannot sleep at night because they are scared of a knock on the door. Everyone is responsible, not just the army. These are people that snatch sons from their mothers. The brutality is beyond limit... The army people are also human beings. We are mothers. There is no reason not to love them. When we were young the army used to make us feel safe and secure. But now they are behaving like beasts... We are not saying that the UGs should not be arrested. But why rape? Why kill? We can no longer look upon these people as mothers. (Ganguly 2008)

The precarity of life, the waste of youthful energy and talent, the brutalisation and the trauma of living with conflict transform society from the roots. Generations grow up with a different sense of what is normal—the presence of armed soldiers, everyday violence and lack of accountability.

There are two intertwined narratives about Manipur's women. The first one highlights how they have suffered in these decades and the second depicts their heroism, from the Meira Paibis to Irom Sharmila. They exist symbiotically. That is, it is their suffering that has moved Manipur's women to activism.

The events of July 2004 illustrate this. On the night of July 11, 2004, Thangjam Manorama was pulled out of her home by security forces. She was beaten and tortured in a corner of the courtyard, then taken into custody and finally found dead early the next morning a few kilometres away. She had been shot in the legs while trying to escape, the army said. There were sixteen bullet wounds in her genitals, none in her legs, and traces of semen found in the autopsy suggested rape.

On the morning of July 14, 2004, at a meeting of members of Macha Leima (formally, Manipuri Chanura Leishem Marup), a women's organisation:

Someone brings up the death of Manorama and, as if on cue, all eyes moisten. She reconstructs the shocking details of the rape, the torture and finally, the killing by security forces. She tells them how Manorama's body was found mutilated—full of cuts, a cloth inserted inside the vagina. 'They even shot at her vagina to destroy all evidence of rape,' she says in anguish. (Rehman 2017, xxx-xxxii)

The gathered women were moved to act, to do “something strong which reflects their anger”. “The women of Macha Leima finally come to the decision that they are all Manorama's mothers, and that they will collectively take the oath to strip naked, in full public glare, in front of the gates of the Assam Rifles headquarters at Kangla Fort in the heart of Imphal”. (Rehman 2017, xxxiii)

The next morning, twelve women carried out the planned protest, coming to symbolise the resistance of Manipuri women to state repression.

Laishram Gyaneshwari describes the protest:

I had no awareness of anything. I was in my own world, shouting slogans, screaming at the Indian army to rape us, take our flesh. All that filled my mind was the image of Manorama's corpse...

We confronted the men in uniform with fire in our hearts. It was like the climax of the rage and agony we had harboured for years. We challenged them to come out and rape us before everyone. We urged that they tell us what they were stationed here for: to protect our people or to rape our women. (Rehman 2017, 137)

Again and again in the twentieth century, Manipuri women had been in the forefront of social protests. The first Nupi Lan (women's war) in 1904 was a protest against forced labour. The second Nupi Lan began as a protest against government policies that exacerbated famine conditions and provided the foundation for a reformist campaign, which ultimately transformed Manipur into a constitutional monarchy. In the 1970s, women led a campaign against growing alcoholism and drug addiction (nishabandh). The 1980s saw the emergence of the Meira Paibis, or torchbearers, women who would keep vigil against security force excesses. Several of the women who participated in the Kangla Fort protest were Meira Paibis and veterans of the nishabandh campaigns. In three instances, Manipuri women had directly taken on the state.

There is as yet, little account of how the militarisation of society impacts LGBTIQ+ persons. In some measure, this is because patriarchy invisibilizes them; we see only masculine men and feminine women and no one else counts. This has consequences for the way we report and count sexual and gender-based violence; plan for evacuation and rehabilitation, and in the social protection, these persons receive. Conflict freezes gender roles and stereotypes, even as it offers counter-intuitive opportunities for agency to women.

We also know too little as yet about the long-term consequences of pervasive militarisation. A 2011 study on the psychological impact of conflict on women in neighbouring Assam and

Nagaland identified seven kinds of trauma experienced (Centre for North East Studies and Policy 2011):

i. *Trauma from personal assault*, such as young girls being stopped and searched on the way back from school or college.

ii. *Trauma through members of family, clan, village etc. as witnesses of torture, killings etc.*, and the stories, common to many conflict areas, of midnight knocks where the young men of the house are pulled out and beaten, shot or disappeared arbitrarily, exemplify this.

iii. *Trauma of belief and faith: this was defined as belief in the “rightness of a cause” and fighting for it in seemingly hopeless and confusing conditions against powerful odds...* In communities, where multiple generations have lived with and fought in insurgencies and conflicts, while belief can inspire, it can also lead to a sense of despair and futility. Women inherit two parallel ways of being—fighting or tending the homestead, both within the framework of the community's norms and values.

iv. *Vicarious trauma – such as that experienced by members of the study team – and among those who were privy to personal traumas of victims.* Women growing up hearing about rapes and murders of other women by soldiers, whether army or militant, internalize trauma and anxiety and it may limit their choices and mobility.

v. *Trans-generation trauma that passed down from one generation to the next through word of mouth.* Family stories are shared by women in the house or by community elders. Each generation learns to feel the pain of its forebears; idealises heroic behaviour, often in gendered ways (such as men fighting, women sacrificing) and present-day choices are conditioned by these memories.

vi. *Trauma of identity and way of life not just a ‘case’ of war and violence.* Local conflicts are often between identity-based groups and inasmuch as they may be about land and livelihood, they are powered by a sense or fear of cultural loss. In patriarchal societies, women embody culture and community honour, so that they are both vulnerable and responsible for preventing this loss:

vii. *Trauma of having to deal with “the other”, of having to adapt to new ways, laws and value systems of social groups which were at times seen as those who inflicted suffering in the first place.* When conflict comes to one of its pauses—through a ceasefire or accord—those who fought the state, have to live with it, depending on its benevolence for justice and for relief.

As security forces, bolstered by the impunity AFSPA grants, fight insurgents and insurgents from different groups fight each other, it is the people of Manipur who pay the price. If people have only known violence and patriarchy for generations, it would seem unlikely that they would be able to imagine and create a peace where gender relations are fundamentally equal. When the availability of guns and the habit of using them are internalised; when impunity becomes the characteristic more than two generations associate with power; and when social solutions are cast in zero-sum terms, what happens to values, beliefs and social relationships, and what sort of gender politics can we expect?

Minimizing Adverse Unintended Consequences

Peace accords matter because they capture the consensus of historical moment. Their success, as in their durability, depends on how inclusive the peace process has been leading up to the accord. While perfect and universal inclusion may appear to be impossible, it is possible through transparency; clear and inclusive communication of updates; widespread consultations on the side, and through patience, to arrive at moments of accord that in substantial measure, do take on board a spectrum of concerns. By building in room for further adjustments and accommodations, too, it is possible to create enduring agreements that can absorb rather than be destroyed by the first criticism levelled against them. Further, going beyond durability, perhaps we should measure the success of an accord by the old development adage, Do No Harm. If an accord does not substantially worsen the situation of conflict or militarisation, perhaps it has already succeeded.

Despite two decades of advocacy around UN Security Council Resolution 1325, it appears to be too much to expect peace accords to be gender transformative in their intent and impact. If however they do not create new conflicts or necessitate militarised enforcement, they will go a long way to sparing civilians great misery.

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