

08.11.2025

Moving beyond Revenge and Retribution to Truth, Justice and Reconciliation
"How to read the IPT's Report – An Explainer"¹

Brought out by the PUCL – Secretariat of the Tribunal

Preface

Ever since the Independent People's Tribunal (IPT) Report on the Manipur Conflict was released in Delhi on 20th August, 2025, the Report has attracted very strong and differing responses from various groups in Manipur. The responses, in a way mirrors the highly polarised politics of the state. The sheer animus, antagonism and acrimony between the various ethnic groups often seem irreconcilable and unbridgeable. But this baggage of historical hostilities and contemporary conflicts is precisely what needs to be acknowledged, accepted and addressed, if the people of the state have to move forward and seek an end to the conflict so as to start the arduous and challenging task of ensuring justice and accountability as a step to bring about peace and reconciliation.

What needs to be kept in mind is that as of November, 2025, peace has not returned to the state despite the announcement of President's Rule in February, 2025. Over 60,000 people still reside in IDP Camps with very little hope of returning back to their homes and villages, to pick up the threads of their lives, shattered and broken by the conflict that erupted on 3rd May, 2023. Hundreds of houses of both communities – the Meiteis and the Kukis – have been destroyed; thousands of students have had their education cut short; the elderly, women, children, differently abled live in camps devoid of nutritious and healthy food, medicines, health facilities and welfare provisions. There still exists strong feelings of distrust amongst members of different communities. The state still lives a divided life – the Meiteis in the Valley and the Kukis in the Hills.

Thousands of FIRs remain uninvestigated. Thousands of more crimes have gone unreported. Houses abandoned in the wake of the violence, especially in Imphal city, remain out of bounds for the owners. There exists a strong feeling that the State had totally abdicated its responsibilities. Truth, justice and accountability, necessary building blocks for peace and reconciliation, do not even appear in the horizon.

¹ *Independent People's Tribunal (IPT) Report on the 'Ongoing Ethnic Conflict in Manipur'* , <https://pucl.org/manage-reports/independent-peoples-tribunal-on-the-ongoing-ethnic-conflict-in-manipur/>

Irrespective of ethnic or community identity, it is the ordinary people of the state who continue to pay the price of the deadly conflict. Many of them yearn for peace and a return to their homes and lands.

All these issues were quite apparent even in March, 2024, 10 months after the conflict erupted, when the PUCL decided to constitute an 'Independent People's Tribunal' (Tribunal for short) consisting of eminent jurists, academicians, journalists, former IAS/ IPS officers, lawyers, women's right and human rights activists. The Terms of Reference of the IPT was to document in a detailed manner, the violations suffered by the people of Manipur including loss of life, sexual violence and violence suffered by vulnerable social sections, study and analyse the roots of the present conflict, examine the role of constitutional functionaries – the government officials, security forces and others, and to come out with recommendations "to repair the torn social, cultural and political fabric of the state". (page 42).

Distinction between the IPT and PUCL

At this juncture it is necessary to point out that the IPT consisted of a 14- member Jury, who are independent of the PUCL and who come from different parts of India. The jury members between themselves brought in a wide range of expert knowledge, insights and expertise to the fact-finding exercise undertaken by the IPT. The 14 Jury members were joined by a 3-member panel of experts of specific areas. (pages 43-44).

The IPT was indeed constituted by the PUCL, but the Tribunal itself is independent of PUCL. The report released on 20th August, 2025 is the Report of the IPT.

What the PUCL offered to the Tribunal is assistance in the conduct of the Tribunal through a Secretariat consisting of both PUCL members and non-members who volunteered to work on this issue. The Secretariat gathered written testimonies and reports from persons belonging to various communities, collected documents like FIRs, court documents, official reports, media accounts, research papers and so on and shared them with the IPT members, who were experts in different fields. Members of the Secretariat also visited Manipur along with Jury members and attended the Delhi hearings as also the virtual hearings.

In view of the numerous requests for clarifications and answers to queries about the Report, this Note is being circulated by the Secretariat and not by the IPT.

The Tribunal Process Explained

The IPT decided to travel to Manipur and visit the various affected districts so as to interact with victims and survivors, officials, media persons and local groups and organizations and hear first-hand both what they had suffered and also to understand the background events which resulted in the spiral of violence. The IPT visited Manipur between 28th May – 4th June, 2024. Since many persons could not meet us during this visit for various reasons, including floods, additional sittings of the Tribunal were held in Delhi on 6th and 7th July, 2024 where again the jury met persons from both communities. Even after this a few online meetings with those who wanted to depose were organized for the jury members upto September, 2024.

It needs to be borne in mind that the report largely deals only with the first year period - 3rd May 2023 till July, 2024, and a little time more - of the dispute and whatever is mentioned about the later events is only in the nature of some updates.

The Tribunal process was conducted taking care that people from all ethnic identities and communities in Manipur appeared before the jury, notwithstanding the many challenges and physical restrictions due to Manipur being divided into buffer zones and ongoing insecurity and the constant threat of violence. Sittings were held by the jury and expert members in different districts in Manipur - including Bishnupur, Churachandpur, Imphal East, Imphal West, Kakching, Kangpokpi, Senapati - and in Delhi. Written testimonies and supporting documents, videos, photographs were also collected from the deponents.

Public announcements were issued with a view to encourage people to participate in the process and efforts were made to actively reach out to civil society members, journalists, authorities and other stakeholders from Manipur to ensure representation and a thorough understanding of the conflict. In an exercise so vast and riddled with multiple obstacles, while we cannot claim to have reached everyone, we took particular care to do everything possible by providing ample opportunity and time for testimony collection over a period of several months.

As has been explained before, the Tribunal was meant to offer a platform for people from the affected communities to share their experiences of the strife and violence they have been subjected to over the last 2 years; to talk about their *“sense of insecurity in being uprooted and displaced while articulating the indignity, fears and insecurity they faced during their exile in relief camps ... and their plea to be seen, heard and acknowledged by the rest of India and the world ... and to honestly report both communities’ cry for justice and yearning for peace ...”* (pages 652-53).

It is important to emphasise that the tribunal process and inquiry was entirely independent and without any external influence or bias, and these efforts were specially taken with a view to ensure the same. The observations and findings of the tribunal are based on the voices of the survivors and deponents from various communities - Kukis, Meiteis, Nagas, Pangals and others - who deposed before the tribunal and the documents placed before the jury as also visits to various relief camps of both communities. The testimonies of the people have been relayed in the report in their purest form, to provide a fair chance to convey their truth. Of course, issues of confidentiality have been kept in mind. Extra care has been taken to ensure a clear path for accountability and peace. Not a single person was turned away from providing their testimonies. Appeals were made to both Meitei as also Kuki support organizations to provide written testimonies, make arrangements for witnesses to depose and also provide follow-up documentation. This elaborate process preceded the writing of the Tribunal’s Report. In fact, one of the reasons why the Report of the Tribunal took time was because of the voluminous material collected which needed to be cross verified, documented and studied.

How to read the Report

The IPT Report is structured around 12 Chapters. Of these, Chapter 1 titled “Setting the context” (pages 45 to 61) elaborates on the situation prevailing in the state at the time of the conflict and subsequently, retracing the mainstream media versions of the immediate reasons for the conflict and in the ‘Search for the Truth’ the importance of going beyond the mainstream narrative. Chapter 2 is a descriptive chapter about the social and demographic characteristics and political-economy of Manipur state. Chapter

3 explores the constitutional status of Manipur as a state and the basis for claims to ST status for its people.

The most important parts of the report which reflect on the ongoing conflict are Chapters 4 to 10. *We would like to point out that it is important to read fully the following chapters*, which describes the full range of testimonies and depositions that was raised before the Tribunal.

Chapter 4: *Events of violence*. (pages 105 to 239).

Chapter 5: *Gender based violence*. (pages 240 to 282).

Chapter 6: *Tracing the causes*. (pages 283 to 349).

Chapter 7: *Popular writings in the print and electronic media*. (pages 350 to 366).

Chapter 8: *Relief, Rehabilitation and Rebuilding Lives*. (pages 367 to 422).

Chapter 9: *Navigating Health and Mental Health Landscape*. (pages 423 to 520).and

Chapter 10: *Justice and Accountability*. (pages 521 to 613).

These chapters, between them cover 508 pages. They have put together testimonies of victims and survivors, witnesses, other local groups supported by documents and other materials, to factually report on the trajectory of violence experienced by various communities of Manipur. It is quite possible that different readers may have a different understanding of events and happenings, but what is very urgently required is an open and honest discussion amongst all sections of Manipur society about events, experiences and situation that had overtaken them in 2023-24.

It will be apposite to point out here that the testimonies and material reported between Chapters 4 to 10 starkly and unambiguously reveal state complicity and failure of the justice system. It is necessary to point here that the Report emphasises that every person who was the victim of the violence deserves justice, and the state has to ensure it; and the state actors who were complicity in the violence and those who failed in protecting its citizens have to be identified and prosecuted. This is a pre-requisite for peace

The Tribunal Report has in Chapter 11: *Strategies for Justice and Peace* (pages 614 to 651) provided a road map for discussion and deliberation. As the Report very poignantly points out, "The conflict in Manipur is deeply rooted in ethnic, political and social issues. A conflict resolution program designed to address the situation needs to be comprehensive, inclusive and sensitive to the complexities of the region". (ref.: pg. 620).

After a study of similarly prolonged conflicts in other countries, the Report points out, "In Manipur, replacing a Chief Minister or even imposing President's Rule will not automatically resolve ethnic hostilities. *Without grassroots reconciliation, political changes often remain superficial and temporary.... In Manipur, if the government only focuses on short-term political management (negotiations, military deployment or even autonomy deals) without addressing past violence and grievances, the conflict may resurface periodically (and) any long-term solution must go beyond political elite discussions and involve village-level reconciliation, inter-community dialogues and truth-telling mechanisms* Without genuine reconciliation efforts, cycles of violence and distrust will continue, regardless of who is in power". (page 622).

Very importantly, after a study of peace and conflict resolution exercises in other countries, the Tribunal has suggested for consideration, a design for a multi-tiered system for conflict resolution (Chapter 11.4, pages 620 to 629). While emphasising the

importance of 'Stake holder Identification', the Report points out that it is important to identify the multiple stake holders in protracted conflicts like the prolonged conflict in Manipur where historically there have been ethnic conflicts between the Meiteis, Meitei Pangals, Kukis, Nagas and other communities. The Report stresses, "By considering the perspectives and needs of all stake holders, a conflict resolution strategy is more likely to succeed in achieving a lasting and comprehensive resolution". (page 623). Exclusion of key groups can lead to a sense of marginalisation and the potential to reignite the conflict. The Report also stresses that while identifying multiple levels of stake holders including religious and social leaders, CSOs, NGOs, political parties and others, care should be taken to involve in the process militant groups also. The Report points out, "By naming the Militant Group and banning them, the government may signal their strong disapproval of their violent ways of settling scores and their irrational approaches but discarding them totally from discourse will bury chances of peace, which is in peril largely due to their way of attempting to find solutions". (ref. pg. 626). Thereafter, the Report suggests a multi-layered Dialogue Process for Manipur from initiating local – community level dialogues to state and national level discussions to create a charter and basis for justice, peace and reconciliation. (pages 627 to 630).

Very significantly, the IPT Report outlines the steps to "Promoting Peace and Social Cohesion in Manipur" (Ch. 11.8, pages 641 – 651) which includes

- (a) Creating an alternative yet Comprehensive Strategy.
- (b) Establishing Peace Monitoring Committees.
- (c) Identifying Early Warning signs of violence.
- (d) Implementing Restorative Justice Frameworks.
- (e) Facilitating Social Healing and Dealing with trauma.
- (f) Implementing an Active Listening Framework.
- (g) Creating 'Circles of Support' for victims.
- (h) Establishing 'Circles of Hope'.
- (i) Using Moral Imagination to build peace.
- (j) Ensuring equitable resource distribution.
- (k) Utilising social media as a tool for Peace.
- (l) Preventing the weaponisation of religion.
- (m) Promoting civic engagement and secular values.
- (n) Crafting a new narrative for Positive Peace.
- (o) Continuous monitoring and adaptation.

In over 4 decades of work in the civil liberties and human rights field, PUCL has always believed that the process of peace building in a context of conflict can be built only by respecting the dignity and fraternity of people and communities. We also firmly believe that the pathway to peace and reconciliation requires honest and open dialogue and discussion amongst all communities over what happened to all of them; which in turn requires ensuring justice and accountability for victims and survivors, creating safe spaces for people from across communities to share their feelings and experiences so as promote personal and collective healing and finally to move from a sense of 'revenge' to 'reconciliation'.

We would like to point out that there is a difference and distinction between an ethnic community and an armed group constituted of or based on an ethnic community or identity. It is in such a manner that the report has referred to the Arambai Tenggol (AT) or Meitei Leepun (ML), as organisations made up of members from the Meitei community. Numerous testimonies have been collected by the Tribunal supported by media reports, pictures and videos showing AT and ML leaders and cadres, fully armed with modern weapons moving about in the presence of police, and alleged to have participated in violent attacks. There is also widely available evidence of leaders and cadres of such organizations attending meeting with the ruling party politicians, including the former Chief Minister and other ruling party politicians. By seeking an enquiry into the role played by leaders and members of these organizations in particular, in fomenting the present round of conflicts, the request is to investigate their involvement and to prosecute them if there is sufficient evidence is gathered during investigation.

By no stretch of imagination does this mean that the Report believes that all people belonging to the Meitei community are complicit in the conflict or harbour ill-feelings about the other communities or do not desire peace. It has never been our intention to cause such a feeling and we regret if such a feeling has been caused in anyone.

We wish to stress that we have not demonised or painted any community in vile, derogatory or false terms. We would like to emphatically state that this was neither our intention nor has it been done. It is quite possible that there might be a differing opinion or viewpoint. We welcome discussions on the same.

But we should also point out that there has been a tendency to deliberately conflate this distinction and to paint the IPT's Report and PUCL as being anti-Meitei community. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Quite to the contrary, PUCL always believes in the intrinsic goodness and 'humaneness' of all people in general, and believes that even in situations of hostility, bitterness and conflict it is possible to find common ground to bring about rapprochement and harmony through a process of finding the truth, building on peace, initiating dialogue and strengthening reconciliation.

It is in that spirit that we are releasing this detailed explanation to the various comments made about the IPT Report.



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