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## Migration and (im)mobility of women in Manipur

By Beauty Kumari Shaw | <u>Issue 23</u>





The north-eastern region of India, comprising states such as Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura, is renowned for its vibrant landscapes, rich cultural diversity, and historical significance. However, this scenic beauty conceals long-standing issues of violence, justice, and inter-state tensions that have persisted for decades. This article focuses on the state of Manipur, which has recently faced significant violence, with a particular emphasis on the inequalities, discrimination, and violence faced by women in the region. Manipur, like many other states in the area, has a complex history of armed conflicts and insurgencies, resulting in a challenging socio-political environment. The state's women bear the brunt of this violence, facing not only physical harm but also systemic discrimination and limited access to justice. Understanding and addressing these issues is crucial for promoting gender equality and fostering a more peaceful and inclusive society in Manipur.

Manipur, with its unique culture, colourful traditions, and diverse socio-economic conditions, has a history marred by violence, inequality, and migration. Economic scarcity has forced many people to migrate to nearby villages and rural regions, often leading to tensions and increased discrimination and violence. Historically, women have been among the most <u>marginalised and discriminated groups</u>, resulting in heightened violence against them. A lack of employment opportunities, limited freedom, and restricted access to education, women's rights, and a safe environment has created a precarious environment that exacerbates the vulnerabilities of marginalised communities of Manipur.

One significant incident that highlights these inequalities and discrimination is the Manipur violence that occurred on 3 May 2023. The clash between the Meitei majority community and the Kuki tribal community led to unfortunate deaths, with women being the most vulnerable targets. In this incident, three women from the Kuki tribal community were sexually assaulted, stripped naked, and paraded by men from the Meitei community. These women experienced double marginalisation – both as women and as members of a minority community. This incident triggered outrage and tensions across the nation, and the situation persists, with inadequate protection and safety for women.

This incident underscores the power dynamics at play in India, especially the north-eastern region. Reports indicate that women in conflict zones are especially vulnerable to sexual

harassment, assault, and rape. The <u>silencing of women's voices</u> due to patriarchal structures and power domination is exacerbated in states like Manipur, where women lack freedom and face violence. In Manipur, as in many other conflict zones, women's freedom and agency are curtailed, and they often lack the ability to speak out against violence. The vulnerability of migrant Kuki women has made them targets for assault. Tragically, this incident is not an isolated one: hospital nurses and workers have also been targeted by the Meitei community. The economic need to migrate compels indigenous women to leave their homes, only to face such brutal fates. They are subjected to gruesome violence based on their identity and ethnicity. In Manipur, as in many other conflict zones, women's freedom and agency are curtailed, and they often lack the ability to speak out against violence. The silencing of women's voices, driven by power dynamics, perpetuates their victimisation and hinders efforts to address the issue effectively. The people of the northeastern regions are often judged based on their ethnicity and appearances. The state is marked by complex political changes and interactions among various ethnic communities, leading to ethnic tensions and brutal violence. Ongoing conflicts and violence have created an atmosphere of insecurity and fear, affecting peoples' mental and physical well-being.

Ethnic tensions between different communities, such as the Nagas, the Kukis, and the Meiteis, have caused the loss of lives and the displacement of communities. Unfortunately, women bear the brunt of these conflicts due to exclusion, marginalisation, and displacement. It is especially challenging for women to relocate because they are often the primary caregivers in their families, making them victims of inevitable loss. The Manipur violence of May 2023 stands as a stark reminder of the power dynamics at play in the region and the vulnerability of women, especially those from minority communities. Addressing these issues is crucial for the well-being and safety of all individuals in the north-eastern states. It is imperative to challenge stereotypes, promote gender equality, and foster an environment of security and justice for everyone.



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