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## **Addressing Sexual Harassment in Manipur: A Critical Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In India millions of women's lives are negatively impacted by sexual violence. Both domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault against women (SAAW) in public spaces continue to be significant problems facing Indian society. Gender and caste discrimination combine to make marginalized women most likely to be affected by sexual violence. The criminal justice system struggles to both try and convict perpetrators. Practices that are most effective at changing attitudes towards gender norms target both genders, with a particular focus on males. Effective victim support provides ways for victims to reassume valuable, contributing roles in their community. This research is a descriptive study based on the Secondary data in which necessary facts have been collected through books, journals, magazines, newspapers, reports, the internet, publications and various websites etc. Objectives of the study are 1) To study

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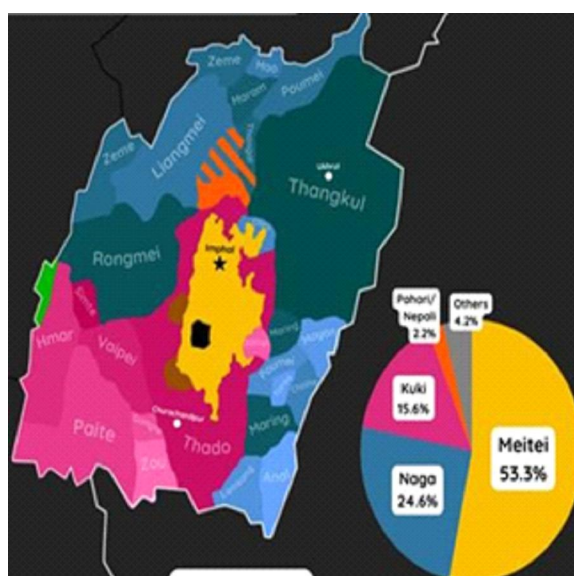
the sexual assault in Manipur. 2) To identify the causes behind sexual assault and its consequences in society. 3) To promote healthy masculinity and sex education. Conclusion- The root cause behind sexual assault to show masculinity by suppressing other gender. The toxic mentality can be reshaped and reformed only by appropriate education and awareness camp for reducing gender based violence.

**About Manipur:** Manipur is a state in northeast India, bordering Myanmar to its east and south. It consists of the Imphal Valley, associated with the Manipur kingdom, and the surrounding hills populated by hill tribes<sup>1</sup>. The **Manipur Kingdom** was an ancient kingdom at the India–Burma frontier. Historically, Manipur was an independent kingdom ruled by a Meitei dynasty. But it was also invaded and ruled over by Burmese kingdom at various point of time. It became a protectorate of the British East India Company from 1824, and a princely state of British Raj in 1891. It bordered Assam Province in the west and British Burma in the east, and in the 20th century covered an area of 22,327 square kilometres (8,621 sq mi) and contained 467 villages. There is one past but many histories<sup>2</sup>. Currently, The Manipur state has 16 districts in total. The names of the 16 districts of Manipur are Bishnupur, Churachandpur, Jiribam, Imphal East, Kamjong, Senapati, Imphal West, Tengnoupal, Ukhrul, Thoubal, Noney, Pherzawl, Chandel, Kakching, Tamenglong and Kangpokpi<sup>3</sup>. Geographically, the State of Manipur could be divided into two regions, viz. the hill and the valley. The valley lies in the central part of the State and the hills surround the valley<sup>4</sup>. The hill areas of Manipur are predominantly inhabited by 38 scheduled tribes; these tribes fall into the Naga, Kuki or Zomi categories, or those who stand to retain their respective community identity. There are also other small pockets in the hill districts that are inhabited by certain sections of Meiteis, Gurkhas and others<sup>5</sup>.

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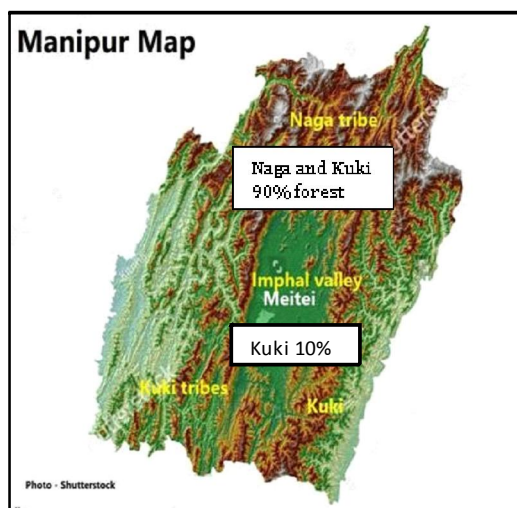


**Figure 1 shows the Location of the state of Manipur, India, and its nine districts. The outer five districts are considered hill districts while the inner four are lower elevation valley districts.**



**Figure 2 shows the percentage of population of different communities. 53% of Meitei, 24.6% of naga, Kuki- 15.6%, Nepali- 2.2%,other – 4.2%.**

(Source: [www.MapsofIndia](http://www.MapsofIndia))



**Figure 3 shows that out of the three native communities present in the state, Meiteis live in the valley districts on 10% of land while Nagas and Kukis live in the hill districts on 90% of forest land.**

**(Source: Shutterstock)**

**Table 1: The native communities Meitei, Naga and Kuki has their own rights and demands**

Community	Rights	Demands
Meitei (Urban)	Cannot purchase land in Forest  Don't get reservation	The Meitei community, led by the Scheduled Tribes Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM), has been demanding ST status since 2012, asking to provide them with constitutional safeguards to preserve their culture, language, and identity <sup>6</sup> .
Kuki	Can buy land in Urban  Get ST reservation	They are demanding a separate administration under the Constitution", saying "our people can no longer exist under Manipur and to live amidst the Meiteis again is as good as a death" <sup>7</sup> .
Naga	Can buy land in Urban  Get ST reservation	The framework agreement signed between the government of India and Naga leaders in August 2015 was for a special settlement of Nagas within India with a "special status". Naga groups are demanding a certain arrangement for co-existence within the Indian territory. Apart from Naga-dominant areas of Manipur, they are demanding certain parts of Assam as well, which are contiguous to Nagaland and where Nagas are dominant inhabitants <sup>8</sup> .

**Keywords:**

**Violence**—violence, an act of physical force that causes or is intended to cause harm. The damage inflicted by violence may be physical, psychological, or both. Violence may be distinguished from aggression, a more general type of hostile behavior that may be physical, verbal, or passive in nature<sup>9</sup>.

**Sexual assault**—The term sexual assault refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include:

- Attempted rap.
- Fondling or unwanted sexual touching.
- Forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body.
- Penetration of the victim's body, also known as rape. (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)<sup>10</sup>.

**Introduction**

**Wartime Sexual Violence**—Sexualised violence against women and girls during wars has always been a part of human history. It occurs every day, all over the world. The predominantly male perpetrators include soldiers, paramilitaries and police officers, but also civilians. In a series of resolutions and accords, the international community has pledged to protect women from violence and strengthen their rights. However, the political will is still lacking to actually fulfil these promises and implement the agreements. Unless we manage to eradicate the misogynist structures underlying sexualised violence and create gender justice in their place, women and girls will not be able to live in dignity and free of violence.

**1. World war II**—The term “comfort women” is a euphemism for the estimated 200,000, mostly Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Burmese, Japanese, Taiwanese and Filipino women who were forced to serve as sex slaves in Japanese military brothels during World War II.

Chuo University professor Yoshiaki Yoshimi states there were about 2,000 centers where as many as 200,000 Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Taiwanese, Burmese, Indonesian, Timorese, Papuan, Micronesian, Dutch and Australian women were interned and used as sex slaves. The Japanese forced Vietnamese women to become comfort

women and with Burmese, Indonesian, Thai and Filipino women they made up a notable portion of Asian comfort women in general. Japanese use of Malaysian and Vietnamese women as comfort women was corroborated by many different testimonies. The Japanese destroyed many documents related to their rape of Indonesian Javanese girls at the end of the war so the true extent of the mass rape is uncountable, but testimony witnesses records the names and accounts of Indonesian Javanese comfort women<sup>11</sup>.

**2. 1971 genocide in Bangladesh—**During the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, numerous women were tortured and raped by the Pakistani army. Exact numbers are not known and are a subject of debate. Most of the women were captured from Dhaka University and private homes and kept as sex-slaves inside the Dhaka Cantonment.

Australian Doctor Geoffrey Davis was brought to Bangladesh by the United Nation and International Planned Parenthood Federation to carry out late-term abortions on rape victims. He was of the opinion that the 200,000 to 400,000 rape victims was an underestimation. On the actions of Pakistan army he said “They’d keep the infantry back and put artillery ahead and they would shell the hospitals and schools. And that caused absolute chaos in the town. And then the infantry would go in and begin to segregate the women. Apart from little children, all those were sexually matured would be segregated. And then the women would be put in the compound under guard and made available to the troops. Some of the stories they told were appalling. Being raped again and again and again. A lot of them died in those [rape] camps”.

Anthony Mascarenhas, published a newspaper article in June 1971, in The Sunday Times, ed London on 13 June 1971 titled “Genocide”. The article was the first that exposed the brutal crackdown by the Pakistan army. It also highlighted the rape of Bihari women and other atrocities committed against them by Bengalis. The Sunday Times editor Harold Evans wrote “He’d been shocked by the Bengali outrages in March, but he maintained that what the army was doing was altogether worse and on a grander scale”<sup>11</sup>.

**3. 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine—**During the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian officials, rights groups, and international media reported growing evidence of sexual violence used by Russian military against Ukrainian women. Survivors of Russian occupation of the areas around Kyiv, such as Bucha, reported gang-rapes, assaults taking place at gunpoint, and rapes committed in front of children. In

October 2022, a UN official stated that Russia was using rape as part of its “military strategy”, and that the actual number of victims was likely far higher than the official statistics<sup>11</sup>.

**4. 2023 Hamas-led attack on Israel**—During the October 7, 2023 attacks by Hamas on Israeli towns, Israeli women and girls were reportedly raped, assaulted and mutilated by Hamas militants. Hamas was accused of committing acts of gender-based violence, war crimes and crimes against humanity in keeping with the recognition of The International Criminal Court (ICC) that sexual violence is a war crime and a crime against humanity<sup>11</sup>.

### **Manipur Sexual Violence**

For decades, sexual assault has been recognized as an issue in India. On 3 May 2023, ethnic violence erupted in India’s north-eastern state of Manipur between the Meitei people, a majority that lives in the Imphal Valley, and the Kuki-Zo tribal community from the surrounding hills<sup>12</sup>. Violence first broke out on May 3 between the majority Meiteis and Kuki people after a Tribal Solidarity March was organized by the Kuki-Zo tribals. The Kukis were protesting against the proposal to grant Scheduled Tribe status to the Meiteis, who constitute 53 percent of the population in the state. While the majority of the Meiteis are Hindus settled in the Imphal Valley, the Kuki-Zo tribals are Christians living in the hills<sup>13</sup>.

Two days after three women were disrobed and paraded naked, one of whom was raped, in Manipur’s Thoubal district, a 45-year-old woman was stripped and set ablaze in Imphal East on May 6. A photo of the charred body of the woman surfaced on social media. 10 Manipur legislators from the Kuki-Zo community, including seven from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), released a statement mentioning at least four other incidents where women belonging to their community were either raped or murdered since May 3<sup>14</sup>. According to government figures, as of 15 September, 175 people have been killed in the violence. 1,108 others were injured while 32 are missing. 4,786 houses were burnt and 386 religious structures including temples and churches were vandalized. The violence left more than 70,000 people displaced from their homes. Unofficial figures are higher<sup>12</sup>. This incident sparked a national conversation about gender inequality and sexual violence that continues today. Sexual assault in India primarily affects women. It is a serious public health problem that profoundly impacts lifelong health, opportunity, and well-being. Sexual violence impacts every

community and affects people of all genders, sexual orientations, and ages<sup>15</sup>.

## **Objectives**

- To study the sexual assault in Manipur
- To identify the causes behind sexual assault and its consequences on society
- To promote healthy masculinity and sex education

## **Sexual Assault in Manipur**

The picturesque northeast Indian state of Manipur, literally the “land of gems,” has been engulfed in a violent ethnic conflict for three months. Initial clashes soon flared into rioting, killing, and the burning down of churches, houses, and villages. Women in particular were subjected to the most horrific mob violence, publicly stripped, sexually assaulted, gang raped, and even murdered. One of the most disturbing aspects of these brutal crimes against women is that it was not men alone who were the perpetrators; survivors have recounted several instances of women participating and inciting the men to rape and kill.

Case 1. The killings, rapes, and rioting in the state since May, unsurprisingly, did not merit the attention of the national media, until a horrific video from Manipur went viral on 20<sup>th</sup> July. The 26-second clip showed two Kuki tribal women paraded naked by a mob of men who were groping their genitals and assaulting them. The horrific video has since been removed from YouTube.

The extremely disturbing video of the two women has managed to do what 79 days of bloody conflict could not: put the spotlight on Manipur and on the inaction of the authorities in preventing the ongoing violence<sup>13</sup>. The 44-year-old survivor is the wife of the village chief while the other woman was her 21-year-old neighbor. Although they had managed to flee their homes before the buildings were burnt down, they were caught by Meitei mobs. The men first lynched the younger girl’s father and then lynched her brother, who had tried to protect his sister. Thereafter, the mob forced the two women to strip, and paraded them naked while groping and assaulting them. The woman’s nightmare was unending; she was forced to strip not once but twice and brutally beaten when she resisted<sup>13</sup>.

Case 2. After the horror video emerged, several other incidents of



gruesome violence against women during the conflict came to light. On May 4 itself, in yet another incident, two young Kuki nursing students were dragged out of their hostel and assaulted by a mob of Meitei men. The young nursing student, too, had recalled to scroll how Meitei women had egged on the men to “rape and kill and not keep them alive.” The student said it was painful to hear women talking like this<sup>13</sup>.

Case 3. In another incident, a 19-year-old Kuki girl who had just stepped out to withdraw money from an ATM in Imphal was raped on May 15. She recalled how Meitei women were part of the mob and they were the first to assault her. “Why are you beating me. Am I not your sister?” she had cried out.

A women fact-finding team from the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) visited Manipur. Annie Raja, the general secretary of NFIW. *“What is most glaring in these atrocities is the weaponization of women’s bodies,” Raja said. “Women have been used as instruments to exact revenge on the other community, and all this is happening in a modern society! This has to stop.”*

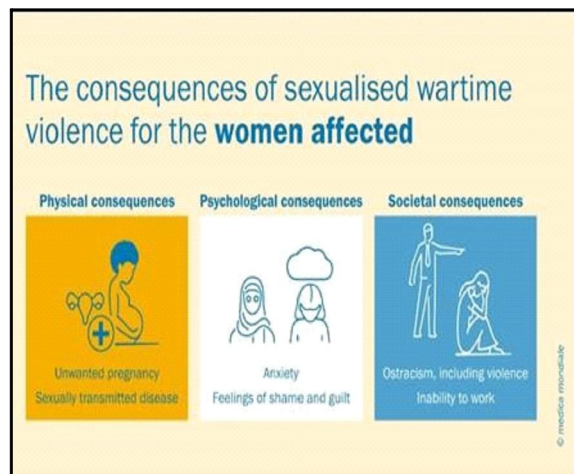
*“Whether they be Kukis or Meiteis,” asserted Raja of the NFIW, “the common factor is that women and children are the worst sufferers of this conflict”<sup>13</sup>.*

### **Causes behind Sexual Assault and its Consequences on Society**

The reason: In societies shaped by patriarchy, violence against women is an expression of unequal power relationships between men and women. So the causes of this violence are to be found not only at the individual level but also, and particularly, at the structural level. In wars, one of the reasons sexualised violence is used against women is to humiliate the men on the opposing side. It is a gruesome, symbolic message with roots in patriarchal ways of thinking<sup>16</sup>. In Manipur where the assault video and other cases that surfaced, highlight the nature of justification of the crime. The root cause is popularly touted as ‘revenge’. “Revenge rape” is a horrific act where sexual assault or rape is committed as a form of against another person or a group. It is seen as a justification for violating another retaliation or revenge person’s human rights. This particularly disturbing form of violence not only inflicts physical and psychological harm on the victim, but it also serves as a tool to exert power, control and humiliation over the victim and their community. The concept of power play in such cases, where the bodies of women are used as battlefields, are gradually becoming an

accepted and integral part of ethnic, local and international conflicts. The modus operandi involves assaulting women and girls, or gang raping them and leaving them for dead after the attack. The justification is revenge<sup>17</sup>.

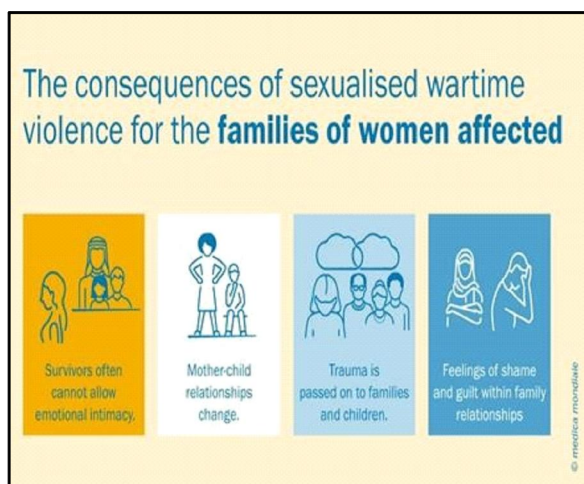
These causes need to be eliminated in order to prevent further violence. Gender justice cannot be established unless misogynist structures are resolved. Only then will women and girls be able to live a life free of violence.



**Figure 4 shows that Physical consequences of violence include infertility, incontinence and psychosomatic disorders such as chronic abdominal pains. For many women and girls, consequences are also an unwanted pregnancy or infection with HIV. Psychological disorders such as extreme anxiety or depression are frequent. In very patriarchal societies, women who have been raped are deemed to have committed adultery, often leading to their imprisonment and/or ostracisation from families or communities. Many even have to fear for their lives. And on top of this, it then becomes almost impossible for them to secure their livelihood and that of their children.**

### Consequences

Violence against women is one of the most frequent human rights violations. It is a threat to women's lives, it puts their physical and psychological health at risk, and it is a threat to the well-being of their children, with consequences for the whole community. The perpetrators can be found in every social and economic milieu, and the majority of them are male<sup>16</sup>.



**Figure 5 shows that Sexualised violence disrupts family cohesion. For example, people affected by rape often find it difficult to permit emotional intimacy with people close to them. The experiences of rape have an absolute or partial influence on the relationships to their children. Some told of the great difficulties they experience in being an emotionally stable parent. Symptoms of trauma, if left unprocessed, can be transmitted within a family and on to the next generations, in the form of excessive irritability or separation anxiety, for example. In post-war societies, the crimes are suppressed and swept under the carpet. Many of those affected keep silent out of shame or fear of stigmatisation and ostracism.**

### **Promote Healthy Masculinity and Sex Education**

Healthy or positive masculinity is the idea that men can be emotionally expressive, have female friends or mentors, and express their emotions without feeling emasculated. 10 tips for promoting healthier masculinities among boys and young men:

1. *Model a full range of healthy emotions.* For boys, it's especially important to see you express a multitude of feelings, including sadness, loss, frustration, delight and happiness.
2. *Express and identify your own feelings.* Children can understand more easily when you give a reason for your reaction, e.g. "I'm crying because I'm sad and upset," "I feel frustrated because I can't find my book," "This thunderstorm scares me."
3. *Discuss gender stereotypes and their impacts.* Explain to boys that not sharing our feelings may make us feel depressed, and



**Figure 6 shows that Numerous fundamental liberties, rights and human dignity are violated by sexualised wartime violence. It seems to be the case that governments accept this and even grant their tacit approval. The deterioration in the life conditions of those affected, both directly and indirectly, lasts a long time. Those with political responsibility are failing to satisfactorily fulfil their duty to acknowledge and prosecute these crimes. The economic costs of wartime violence against women and the transgenerational consequences that result from this are immense. They can even be calculated as running into the billions or trillions of dollars. These include, for example, direct costs of medical emergency provision and subsequent treatment, psychosocial therapies and counselling, investigations by police and courts, as well as the costs of society coming to terms with this. Additionally, many of those affected by sexualised violence are unable to work for a long time and are dependent on welfare from their community or society. Society and the economy also cannot benefit from their skills and individual qualifications, or their labour.**

that not talking about why we're angry or upset may lead us to use violence.

4. *Differentiate between physical strength and strength of character.* Boys need to hear that expressing feelings and emotions is very healthy, and that being strong is as much about being gentle, respectful and kind as it is about muscles.
5. *Encourage and celebrate self-expression.* Let boys know it's okay to step outside the "man box" and take on behaviours and choices associated with any gender.
6. *Celebrate healthy masculinities.* A healthy masculinity is one that's devoid of stereotypes; promotes kindness, empathy and

peaceful interactions; and empowers boys to be confident in their true selves.

7. *Consider positive discipline over punitive discipline.* Controlling a child's behaviour with corporal or punitive discipline practices lead to poor modelling and undeveloped skills in getting along with others. Consider more positive alternatives to gain a child's cooperation, such as logical consequences, acknowledging desirable behaviours and reinforcing forgiveness of wrongs.
8. *Model and teach boys about consent.* It's never too early to talk about consent in broader terms using everyday examples (ask permission to borrow a toy; ask first before giving your friend a hug.) In later years, talk about it as a foundation for healthy and respectful relationships.
9. *Help boys understand gender and sexual diversity.* Teach boys that some boys grow up to be attracted to other boys, some girls are attracted to girls, and some young people don't want to identify as a boy or girl.
10. *Educate boys about gender equality.* Help them learn the definition and value of allyship, and the importance of speaking out against gender-based violence, racism, homophobia, transphobia, etc<sup>18</sup>.

### **Sex Education**

Violence prevention education is being incorporated into comprehensive sex education curriculum. The main goal of this is to give youth the tools and information they need to make informed and responsible decisions pertaining to sexual, romantic, and social relationships.

In learning about healthy relationships, young people learn about positive expressions of intimacy, boundaries, and strategies for avoiding and/or ending unhealthy relationships. Primary themes in comprehensive sex education can include healthy relationships, gender equality, the detrimental impacts of bullying, identity development, and body confidence. Sex education reduces the risk of gender-based violence and bullying through teaching about the impacts these things can have on them or their peers. The programs are designed to build on and draw on skills learned previously.

In addition to violence prevention, age-appropriate comprehensive

sex education is a “powerful vehicle for addressing reproductive justice, gender equity, LGBTQ+ equality, and power and oppression”. Traditional sex education programs educate young people on health concerns such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Historically, sex education and violence prevention programs have been independent of one another. Now, more programs are being modified to include primary prevention, which proactively addresses the root causes of violence<sup>19</sup>.

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