



# Vulnerability of Meitei Women IDPs and Government Initiative: Impact of Ethnic Turmoil 2023

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**Abstract**— Meitei women, in particular, bear a heavy burden, facing heightened risks of displacement and gender-based violence. They encounter numerous challenges in overcrowded camps, where they shoulder caregiving responsibilities. Amid their struggle for survival, the concept of dignity often fades away. This paper critically evaluates government initiatives designed to support Meitei women, focusing on relief efforts, rehabilitation programs, and policies that address their socio-economic and psychological needs. The study identifies significant gaps in these interventions, challenges in reaching the most marginalized populations, and the broader implications for women's empowerment in conflict-affected areas. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines qualitative in-depth interviews with displaced women and key stakeholders, alongside an analysis of existing government programs and their outcomes. A sample of 10-20% of displaced women from 5-10 displacement camps across five valley districts will be selected for the study.



**Keywords** – Internally Displaced Persons, Vulnerability, Ethnic Turmoil, Challenges.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since Meitei-Kuki conflict in Manipur in May 2023, in particular, the displacement of Meitei women has been a devastating consequence, exposing them to heightened insecurity, trauma, and socio-economic hardships (BBC news, July 20, 2023). This conflict, rooted in deep-seated socio-political and ethnic tensions, involves the Meitei, the majority ethnic group in the Imphal Valley, and the Kuki Zo tribal communities, who primarily inhabit the hill districts. The large-scale destruction of poppy plantations by the current government appears to have contributed to the outbreak of violence, as reported by several local newspapers. Tensions further escalated following an April 2023 directive from the Manipur High Court, which urged the state government to consider granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the Meitei community (Reuters, July 21, 2023). This proposal was met with strong opposition from the Kuki community, who feared that extending ST status to the Meiteis would threaten their land rights in the hill areas. The resulting clashes sparked a wave of unprecedented violence, including killings, arson, and mass

displacement, beginning in Churachandpur District and quickly spreading to other districts inhabited by both the Meitei and Kuki communities (Hindustan Times, December 15, 2023).

### Internally Displaced women in Manipur:

Internally displaced women in Manipur are those who have been forced to flee their homes within the state due to conflict, violence, or other crises, without crossing international borders. In Northeast India, women traditionally experience greater mobility and visibility compared to other parts of the country, with practices such as dowry and bride burning being uncommon. This has often been cited to suggest gender equity in the region and to downplay concerns about violence against women. However, a recent survey by the Manipur State Women's Commission reveals that the ongoing armed conflict has intensified violence against women, including sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. The conflict has also reinforced patriarchal norms, imposing new restrictions on women's freedoms and increasing incidents of gender-based violence. These issues are further exacerbated by the

prolonged social, economic, and psychological trauma of living in a conflict zone. Internally displaced women face unique and multifaceted challenges in this context. The psychological trauma of witnessing violence and destruction has been immense, yet access to mental health support remains limited. Many women have lost their livelihoods, rendering them financially dependent and vulnerable to exploitation. The *Report on the Impact of Ethnic Conflict on Women in Manipur (2023)* by the Manipur State Women's Commission underscores the severe challenges faced by women amid the Meitei-Kuki conflict, including mass displacement, increased vulnerability to violence, and economic hardships. Thousands of women now reside in overcrowded relief camps, where access to healthcare and reproductive services is severely restricted. The report concludes with recommendations to enhance security, legal aid, healthcare, and economic rehabilitation for affected women (Human Rights Watch, September 24, 2024).

#### **Statement of the problem:**

Displaced women in Manipur face significant challenges in accessing essential services, rebuilding their livelihoods, and reintegrating into their communities. Despite efforts by government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), rehabilitation and reintegration processes remain insufficient. These women continue to experience vulnerability due to economic insecurity, loss of livelihoods, limited job opportunities, and dependence on aid, which often leads to malnutrition and health problems. Social isolation worsens their psychological trauma, fostering feelings of abandonment and discrimination while excluding them from decision-making processes.

#### **Scope of the Study:**

This study focuses on the conflict in Manipur, India, between the Meitei and Kuki communities, which has led to widespread displacement, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of displaced Meitei women. Targeting women aged 18 to 60, the research explores how displacement has affected their personal lives and their vital roles as caregivers and economic providers within their families and communities. It highlights their experiences over the past year, examining both the immediate challenges they face and the coping strategies they have adopted amid heightened tensions and changing living conditions.

#### **Objectives:**

- To evaluate the experiences and challenges faced by displaced Meitei women in Manipur.
- To examine the effectiveness of these policies in addressing the specific needs of women.

- To explore the socio-economic, psychological, and cultural impacts of displacement on Meitei women.

## **II. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION**

The ethnographic approach is particularly suited for exploring people's perspectives and beliefs. This methodology employs unstructured questions, in-depth interviews, and participant observation as key data collection techniques. To gather secondary data, the researcher will conduct a thorough analysis of policy documents and an extensive review of relevant academic literature, including scholarly articles from reputable journals and reports from newspapers.

#### **Research design:**

Mixed- methods approach: Quantitative data collection: Surveys to gather demographic information and assess needs.

Qualitative data collection: In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with displaced women.

Case study approach (in-depth analysis of selected displacement camps).

#### **Sampling:**

- 10-20% displaced women from 5-10 displacement camps in 5 valley districts of Manipur.
- Inclusion criteria: women aged 18- 60(working age), displaced for more than 6 months.

#### **Data collection:**

- Survey questionnaire (structured and semi- structured)
- In-depth interviews
- Observational studies (displacement camps, community centres)
- Library and internet sources.

#### **Ethical considerations:**

- Informed consent.
- Anonymity and confidentiality.
- Cultural sensitivity.

## **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Murthy (2002), Internal displacement: A conceptual analysis provides a thorough exploration of the phenomenon of internal displacement, focusing on its definitions, causes, and implications. The author critically examines various frameworks and theories surrounding displacement, offering valuable insights into the complexities of the issue. By analyzing case studies and

socio-political contexts, the book highlights the urgent need for comprehensive policies and support systems to address the challenges faced by internally displaced populations.

Yousafzai (2019), *We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls, Around the World* offers a poignant exploration of the lives of refugee girls. Combining her personal experiences with the stories of young women from various backgrounds, Yousafzai highlights their struggles, dreams, and resilience. The book emphasizes the importance of education and empowerment in overcoming adversity. With compassion and clarity, Yousafzai sheds light on the urgent need for global awareness and action to support displaced communities.

Basumatary (2016), *Impact of Conflict Induced Displacement in the Kokrajhar District of the Bodoland Territorial Council, Assam*, offers a comprehensive study of the socio-economic and psychological effects of conflict-driven displacement in Kokrajhar. Focusing on the Bodo and non Bodo communities, the book examines the struggles of displaced individuals, including loss of livelihood, trauma, and inadequate rehabilitation. Basumatary highlights the failures of resettlement programs and calls for more effective, long-term solutions to address the ongoing challenges faced by displaced populations in the region.

Rao (2012), *The Role of Women in Peace Movement*, examines the significant contributions of women to peace-building efforts globally. The book highlights historical and contemporary examples, showcasing women's activism, resilience, and leadership in promoting peace and conflict resolution. Rao emphasises the unique perspectives women bring to peace movements, advocating for their inclusion in policymaking. Through comprehensive analysis, the book underscores the critical need to empower women in peace processes, making it an essential resource for scholars and activists alike.

Shimray (2015), *Women in Conflict: Manipur's Displaced Women*, provides an insightful exploration of the struggles faced by women displaced by ongoing conflict in Manipur. The book highlights the unique challenges these women encounter, including socio-economic hardships, loss of agency, and psychological trauma. Through personal narratives and empirical research, Shimray emphasizes the resilience and strength of these women amidst adversity. This compelling work is crucial for understanding the gendered impacts of conflict and the need for inclusive policies to support displaced communities.

Siddique (2017), *Conflict Induced Displaced Persons in Assam: A Sociological Study of Resettlement and Rehabilitation*, provides a thorough examination of the displacement caused by ethnic and communal conflicts in

Assam. The book delves into the socio-economic hardships faced by displaced individuals, particularly during resettlement and rehabilitation processes. It highlights the inadequacies in policy implementation and the persistent struggles in accessing basic services. Siddique advocates for more inclusive and sustainable rehabilitation efforts to address the long-term needs of these displaced populations.

Phukan (2012), *Internally Displaced Persons in Northeast India with Special Reference to Assam: A Socio-Legal Study*, provides an insightful analysis of the legal and social challenges faced by displaced individuals in Assam due to ethnic conflict and violence. The book highlights the gaps in legal frameworks and the inadequacies of state interventions in addressing displacement. Phukan emphasizes the need for stronger legal protections and more comprehensive rehabilitation policies to safeguard the rights and dignity of internally displaced persons in Assam and beyond.

Buongpui (2013), *Women's Rights for Promoting Gender Equality in a Traditional and Armed Conflict Society*, critically explores the intersection of gender, tradition, and conflict in societies plagued by violence. The book highlights the systemic inequalities women face in patriarchal and conflict-ridden environments, emphasizing how armed conflict exacerbates gender-based discrimination. Buongpui advocates for strengthening women's rights and gender equality, underscoring the need for legal reforms and socio-political initiatives to empower women in these challenging contexts. The study offers valuable insights into gender justice in conflict zones.

Priyanka (2021), *Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Pakistan: A Case Study of North West Pakistan*, explores the challenges faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North West Pakistan due to conflict and natural disasters. The book analyzes the effectiveness of national and international protection frameworks in addressing the needs of IDPs, emphasizing gaps in policy implementation and support. Through detailed case studies, Singh highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach to enhance the protection and integration of displaced populations.

#### **Government policies and rehabilitation programs:**

Displaced women in Manipur face numerous challenges, including violence, trauma and socio-economic instability. The government has implemented various policies and programs aimed at addressing the specific needs of internally displaced women, particularly in the context of ethnic conflicts and displacement caused by violence. Here are the key policies and programs relevant to internally displaced women in Manipur:

- **Re-building of destroyed houses:** Economic packages amounting to Rs. 10 lakhs for pucca houses, 7 lakhs for

semi-pucca, 5 lakhs for kutch houses and 50% of the packaged amount for repairing are being provided for the burnt houses for a smooth rehabilitation process.

- **Handloom sector and traditional loom:** Looms, yarns and loom machine (fi-sa-kon) are also being provided free of cost and also at subsidised rates to the women inmates to support their livelihood. For unskilled weavers they are provided training and later provided with necessary weaving materials. Traditional hand embroidery courses are also being conducted in collaboration with ICM, Imphal free of cost for the inmates of Relief camps.
- **Pre-fabricated houses as a temporary shelter:** Around 320 pre-fabricated houses are being constructed at Kwakta, and another at Utlou, for Bishnupur District, 200 houses at Sajiwa Central Jail Complex, Sawombung, and another at Imphal East I CD Block Sawombung campus for Imphal East district, 400 houses at Yaithibi loukon, Kakching District, 700 houses at Kangpokpi District and 800 houses at Churachandpur District (The Sangai Express, August 24, 2023).
- **Skill training and human resources:** Kouna making training, kouna bamboo crafts training, training for making dishwash, phenyl, copper ware/ brassware cleaner, Bori-making training, food processing, agarbatti-making, candle-making, beauty & parlour management training etc. are being provided to interested inmates in the relief camps.
- **Inclusion of IDPs in CMHT for one year:** The state cabinet approved inclusion of IDPs (excluding government employees and pensioners) in the state sponsored health insurance scheme CMHT (Chief Minister Hakshelgi Tengbang) covering a sum of Rs. 2 lakh.
- **Counselling services:** As recommended by Supreme Court appointed committee headed by Justice (Retd) Gita Mittal on Review of Relief and Rehabilitation Efforts, One Stop Centre (OSC) in the districts are to conduct counselling services for the women inmates of the Relief camp twice a month in collaboration with Shakti Sadan (The Hindu, August 09, 2023).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This research examines the pressing social issue of conflict and displacement, with a focus on the unique challenges faced by women, particularly in conflict-affected regions such as Manipur. It underscores how displacement affects women differently from men, providing gender-specific insights to support the development of targeted interventions. The findings carry important policy implications, offering guidance to policymakers and aid organizations in designing effective support strategies.

Furthermore, understanding the processes of rehabilitation and reintegration not only fosters community healing but also informs economic livelihood programs for displaced women. The study emphasizes human rights, social justice, and gender equality, while addressing mental health needs, social support systems, and the preservation of cultural practices. This study enhances the field of displacement and migration studies by focusing on internally displaced women, while also offering valuable insights into public policy and governance, emphasizing the need for more effective, gender-responsive interventions. The findings may also contribute to conflict resolution and peace-building efforts, with the potential for comparative analysis to deepen global understanding of displacement and rehabilitation. Additionally,

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