

# Women, Conflict and Human Rights Violations: A Gendered Analysis of the Manipur Crisis

Ms. Lucky Dey

Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, CDOE, Assam Don Bosco University

## Abstract

The northeastern state of Manipur has been characterized by ethnic conflicts, political tensions and a long history of insurgency and militarization. It has witnessed numerous crisis situations that continue even today. This is due to a variety of socio-economic and political factors that have deepened divisions between different communities and groups. During such crisis situations, it is the women that become the most affected and vulnerable section as compared to men. Women face multiple forms of abuse and discrimination, such as sexual violence, rape, slavery, displacement, domestic violence, etc. which has resulted in grave violation of their human rights and also degrade the social fabric of the society. This paper explores the different forms of human rights violation experienced by women during the Manipur crisis. It argues that these violations are not accidental, rather they are systematic in nature and linked to pre-existing gender inequalities that often tend to intensify during conflicts. This paper also studies the gap between legal provisions and their real-world implementation. It highlights the need for a gender-sensitive approach to conflict resolution and measures for safeguarding women's human rights.

**Keywords:** women, exploitation, human rights, crisis, manipur

## Introduction

The northeastern state of Manipur popularly referred to as the "Land of Jewels" is situated in the east of Bangladesh and shares international border with Myanmar. The state has a long history of ethnic disputes, political conflicts, insurgency and militarisation. Socio-economic inequalities, political exclusion, marginalisation, geographical isolation, etc. have fostered a sense of alienation and resentment among the privileged and marginalized groups. These conditions have led to the emergence of different forms of crisis, which continue to persist even today. The crisis in Manipur has led to widespread violence, large-scale destruction of property and villages, forced displacement, significant loss of lives, and deepening social instability across communities and groups. Its impact has been highly unequal, with women constituting one of the most vulnerable populations. Women have been subjected to physical violence, as well as multiple forms of sexual violence, psychological trauma, loss of livelihoods and increased insecurity in both public and private spheres. The breakdown of law and order along with the disruption of community ties, has further heightened their vulnerability. This paper

Published: 31 May 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/SPIJSH.2026.v3.i5.45770>

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

argues that the human rights violation of women in Manipur is gender-specific and often deeply connected to the nature of the conflict. The deep-entrenched social inequalities and weak protection mechanisms make women more vulnerable in such situations.

### **Historical Background of the Manipur Crisis**

Manipur is home to diverse ethnic groups, each seeking to safeguard its identity, land and rights. The ongoing crisis in Manipur has a long history rooted in ethnic tensions, political instability, and disputes over land, identity, and autonomy. The origins of this conflict date back to the colonial era, when the British administration divided the region into “Hills” and “Valleys”. This administrative division intensified ethnic and religious differences between the predominantly Hindu Meiteis, who inhabited the valley, and largely Christian tribal communities such as the Kukis and Nagas, who resided in the hills. After independence, these divisions further deepened due to the granting of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to hill communities while excluding the Meiteis, which has since then emerged as a major source of conflict.

The Meiteis’ demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status has intensified concerns among the Kukis and Nagas, who fear the erosion of their constitutional safeguards and political influence. This demand coupled with a High Court directive, contributed to the outbreak of violence in Manipur in 2023. Apart from these precipitating factors, various other structural issues have greatly impacted the ethnic crisis. The government-led eviction drives in forest areas, officially aimed at curbing encroachment and poppy cultivation, were perceived by the Kuki community as unfairly targeting them, leading to increased animosity. Then, the influx of Chin refugees from Myanmar combined with strict government enforcement measures further escalated tensions. Additionally, issues related to land rights - such as restrictions on Meiteis purchasing land in hill areas - have amplified feelings of injustice and marginalization among the affected groups.

These factors have caused violent clashes between communities and groups, leading to significant loss of lives and property, widespread devastation of villages, and forced displacement. In such situations of instability and uncertainty, women face severe forms of hardships and brutality. The absence of effective state control mechanisms, weakening of institutional safeguards, and collapse of law and order make them vulnerable to myriad forms of violence and exploitation.

### **Human Rights Violations against Women**

The Manipur crisis has led to multiple forms of violations of women’s human rights. These violations are closely linked to the nature of the conflict, power struggles, and existing social inequalities.

**Sexual Violence** – One of the most serious forms of human rights violations has been sexual violence against women. It is often used as a tool to dominate and control individuals and entire communities. In conflict situations, women’s bodies often turn into symbolic battlegrounds, serving as sites through which power is exercised and messages are communicated to opposing groups. This leads to severe consequences, causing physical harm,

emotional distress, social exclusion, and disrupting survivor's recovery, while also adversely affecting women, their families and communities.

**Forced Displacement** - Another significant consequence of the Manipur conflict is the large-scale displacement of women or forced migration, which results from violence, insecurity, and destruction of property. This migration exposes women to greater risk of different forms of vulnerability and alienates them from their established social and cultural settings. Women lack access to basic resources such as food, clean water, healthcare, sanitation, and other livelihood facilities thereby undermining both privacy and safety of women.

**Loss of livelihood and Economic Hardship** - Conflict situations often disrupt the economic activities and livelihoods of women, particularly those engaged in small businesses, agriculture, informal employment, and daily wage work. The destruction of property, displacement, and restrictions on movement limit access to employment opportunities and income-generating activities. As a result, many women become financially insecure and increasingly dependent on their male counterparts for survival. Thus, the loss of livelihood not only weakens their economic stability but also limits their ability to meet basic needs and requirements, support their families, and maintain autonomy.

**Psychological Trauma** – Women endure severe psychological and emotional trauma due to conflicts. They often live in a constant state of fear and insecurity. This situation leads to emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, and feelings of helplessness. These psychological effects are long-lasting and may continue to persist, restricting women's ability to rebuild their lives, maintain relationships, and participate in society.

**Lack of Access to Justice** – Women lack access to justice, particularly in conflict-affected regions like Manipur. They refrain from reporting crimes due to factors such as fear of retaliation, social pressure, and cultural stigma. Further, poorly conducted investigations, lack of empathy among authorities, and judicial poses significant challenges to justice delivery. This leads to underreporting and non-resolution of cases, allowing offenders to escape punishment, thereby perpetuating a cycle of impunity, and weakening public confidence in the judicial system.

This shows that women in conflict-affected Manipur face multiple challenges such as – physical, economic, psychological, and legal. These issues can be addressed through robust legal frameworks, proper implementation, greater social awareness, and a gender-sensitive approach to conflict resolution.

### **Gendered Analysis of the Crisis**

The violations experienced by women during the Manipur crisis highlight the significant role played by gender in shaping conflict dynamics. It is due to their gender that women are disproportionately affected and often specifically targeted. Numerous acts of violence are employed as an instrument for instilling fear in their minds, dominating, and controlling them. This systematic violence reflects the persistence of deeply entrenched patriarchal structures within societies. The crisis also underscores that conflict reinforces existing gender inequalities, severely restricting women's access to safety, resources, healthcare, and justice.

Furthermore, displacement intensifies their vulnerability, increasing the risk of exploitation, abuse, and social exclusion, particularly within relief camps. Moreover, the state's response has been inadequate in addressing these gender-specific challenges that undermine the dignity and social status of women. Therefore, adopting a gender-sensitive framework is essential for understanding the complexity of such conflicts and formulating solutions that promote gender equality and empower women.

### **Challenges in Protecting Women's Rights**

Conflict-affected regions like Manipur are characterized by various structural, social, and institutional barriers and constraints. As such, safeguarding and protecting women's rights becomes extremely challenging.

Firstly, during crisis situation in Manipur, the law enforcement mechanisms tend to become significantly weak. The administrative system often becomes unstable, and police or security personnel may be either biased or overburdened. As a result, crimes against women are often inadequately investigated, thereby leading to delay or denial of justice.

Secondly, deep-entrenched patriarchal values and norms discourage women from reporting crimes and instil a sense of fear in their minds. Women who raise their voice against the crimes are often stigmatized, blamed or even retaliated. Due to this prevailing culture of silence, numerous incidents remain unreported, leading to inadequate responses to violence against women.

Thirdly, there is an absence of accountability for perpetrators which adds another challenge. In conflict situations, perpetrators and agents of violence often operate with a sense of impunity. Weak and ineffective judicial mechanisms, procedural delays, political influence, or lack of proper investigation processes allow offenders to escape punishment, thereby perpetuating recurring cycles of violence and human rights violations against women.

Finally, poor and unhealthy living conditions in relief camps, overcrowding, lack of privacy, limited access to essential services, etc. poses additional challenges for women. This reinforces a cycle of marginalization and disadvantage of women, making them more vulnerable to harassment, abuse, and gender-based violence.

The diverse challenges faced by women during crisis highlights that the presence of laws alone is not sufficient. In the absence of proper implementation, accountability, and monitoring mechanisms, legal provisions fail to produce meaningful outcomes. Therefore, to ensure the protection of women's rights, it is imperative to build stronger institutions, promote gender-sensitive governance, and create greater social awareness.

### **Legal Framework and Policy Measures**

India has implemented several laws and constitutional provisions to safeguard and promote women's rights. These are firmly rooted in the Indian Constitution and are reflected in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles of State Policy. The Constitution of India guarantees equal rights and opportunities for women and also empowers the State to implement affirmative measures to support them. Furthermore,

India has reinforced its commitment to upholding women's rights internationally by supporting various international human rights agreements. Significantly, India ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. Furthermore, India is a signatory to major international human rights agreements such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which enhance the protection of fundamental rights and promote gender equality.

However, despite India's robust constitutional provisions and international commitments, the scenario in Manipur remains distinct. There exists a clear gap between legal provisions and their real-world implementation. This is mainly due to factors including weak enforcement mechanisms, inadequate institutional response, delayed investigations, corruption, lack of accountability, lack of awareness, and inadequate monitoring. Additionally, systemic issues such as political instability, bureaucratic inefficiency, and deep-rooted social divisions exacerbate this gap, making it challenging to ensure timely justice and protection for affected individuals, particularly women. As a result, laws designed to guarantee safety and equality often fail to yield meaningful outcomes, underscoring the urgent need for stronger enforcement, greater transparency, and institutional reform.

### **Conclusion**

The Manipur crisis highlights the profound impact of conflict on gender, with women emerging as the primary victims of violence, displacement, and system injustice. These issues are often neglected, resulting in grave violation of women's human rights. Addressing these challenges necessitates stronger implementation of existing laws, greater institutional accountability, and inclusion of gender-based policies in conflict resolution. Despite India having established a strong legal and constitutional framework aimed at advancing women's rights and fostering gender equality, there still remain significant gaps in the execution of these laws. Therefore, the need of the hour is to pursue legal reforms and societal transformation, effective enforcement, and continuous awareness initiatives to achieve gender justice. Safeguarding women's rights is both a constitutional duty and a moral imperative, fundamental to achieving lasting peace, justice, and national development.

### **References**

- Akoijam, W., & Singh, R. (2024). Feminist perspectives in Manipuri movements: Women's agency and collective action. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 12(4).
- Baruah, G. (2025). Rights of women in India: A human rights perspective. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 12(3).
- Boruah, D., Khaund, K. K., & Pradhan, S. Y. (2021). Gender and society in Northeast India: A study of women in Assam. *Ilkogretim Online – Elementary Education Online*, 20(6).
- Chandler, R. M., Wang, L., & Fuller, L. K. (Eds.). (2010). *Women, war, and violence: Personal perspectives and global activism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Das, S. (2024). Bearing the brunt: A study on women's rights violations in the conflict landscape with special reference to Manipur. *Indian Journal of Integrated Research in Law*, 4(2).
- Devi, T. P. (2026). Political violence and human rights violations: Women's pursuit of peace in Manipur. *Journal of Advance and Future Research*, 4(1).
- Dhere, V., & Badwe, V. (2025). *From neglect to empowerment: Strengthening legal rights for senior citizens in India*. *International Journal of Legal Research and Analysis (IJLRA)*, 2(7).
- Dutta, A., & Bhuyan, R. (Eds.). (2008). *Women and peace: Chapters from Northeast India*. Akansha Publishing House.
- Forster, C., & Sagade, J. (2020). *Women's human rights in India*. Routledge.
- Giles, W., & Hyndman, J. (Eds.). (2004). *Sites of violence: Gender and conflict zones*. University of California Press.
- Human Development Society. (n.d.). *Role of women in conflict management: A study of insurgency in valley areas of Manipur*. Bureau of Police Research and Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- Jambholkar, R. (2023). Beyond the headlines: Understanding gender-based violence in 2023 in light of the Manipur conflict. *Journal of Legal Research and Juridical Sciences*, 2(4).
- Kahkeshan, S., & Ansari, M. J. (2022). Women's rights and the Indian Constitution: A comprehensive study. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 9(3).
- Kaushal, T. (2023, September 10). *Women as weapons: Exploring mob behaviour in Manipur and its devastating impact on human rights*. LHSS Collective. <https://lhsscollective.in/women-as-weapons-exploring-mob-behaviour-in-manipur-and-its-devastating-impact-on-human-rights/>
- Khurajam, K., Singh, R. K., & Yumnam, T. (2022). A study on violation of rights of transgender in Manipur. *International Research Journal of Commerce Arts and Science*, 13(12).
- Mallapur, G., & Tadasad, K. (2024). Women human rights in India. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 11(1).
- Mazurana, D., Raven-Roberts, A., & Parpart, J. L. (Eds.). (2005). *Gender, conflict, and peacekeeping*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Mhatre, R. V. (2025). Women's rights and gender justice in India: Laws, policies, and challenges. *Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research*, 7(2).
- Michael, S. J. (2020). A study of women rights in India. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 8(4).

- Milind, P. (2021). Women human rights in India: Violation and awareness. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR)*, 8(10).
- Mohapatra, N., & Das, D. (2024). Ethnic violence and human rights violation in Manipur in 2023: A scrutiny of majority-minority model of conflict. *Sampratyaya*, 1(2), 26–42.
- Naamat, T., Porat, D., Pesina, E., & Quer, G. M. (Eds.). (2020). *Legislating for equality: A multinational collection of non-discrimination norms* (Vol. 4: Asia and Oceania). Brill.
- Rajput, M. (Ed.). (2012). *Social and cultural stratification in North East India*. Manak Publications.
- Reilly, N. (2015). *Women's human rights: Seeking gender justice in a globalizing age*. Rawat Publications.
- Sayyed, M. (2025). Constitutional rights of women in India. *Indian Journal of Legal Review*, 5(3), 36–38.
- Shastri, A. (2025). Struggles for dignity: Women's human rights in India. *Quest Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 13(6), 17–20.
- Shaw, S. M., & Lee, J. (2022). *Gendered voices, feminist visions* (8th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Singh, S. (2022). Women and human rights in India: A research perspective. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 27(2), 79–85.
- Tripura, B., Vijaylakshmi, V., Gupta, J. K., Kharbithai, M., & Shameera, T. (2023). Constitutional rights and social justice in India: An analysis. *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 35(S1), 3128–3158.
- Trivedi, T. (2013). *Women rights and duties*. Jnanada Prakashan.