



Women in Manipur: Problems and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The role of women in the various spheres of society is the most distinctive feature of Manipur, which is home to a number of ethnic groups. This paper aims to analyse Manipuri society in general, with a focus on the contributions made by women in particular. The study is based on primary and secondary sources, and it analyses the major contributions made by women in Manipur as well as the problems and challenges that they face. It all offers some recommendations for improving their situation. The purpose of this study is to gather information on the real situation and societal constraints that Manipuri women face primarily when pursuing their education and other significant facets of the State. This paper additionally attempts to address the appropriate and essential process for resolving and eliminating this significant issue.

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INTRODUCTION:-

Manipur is a state under the Indian Union and is situated in the strategic triangle of northeast India which borders with Assam in the West, Nagaland in the North, Myanmar in the East and Mizoram in the South. Manipur is geographically divided into a centrally located valley and the surrounding hills, with the valley comprising about one-tenth of the total area. This division plays a crucial role in shaping the socio-political and historical development of various communities, leading to plurality of settlements, the emergence of distinct ethnic identities, and fostering interdependence among the people both economically and politically. The state is a rich tapestry of ancient traditions and cultural diversity,



prominently showcased through its classical and folk-dance forms, particularly Manipuri dance, which is one of India's six classical dance styles. Renowned for its natural beauty, hand-woven-crafts, vibrant markets and rich heritage, Manipur remains a secluded yet culturally rich part of India.

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES :-

This current study examines the status of women in Manipur, a northeastern state in India, highlighting their socio-economic and political roles, as well as the challenges they face. It aims to provide a holistic view of the status of women in Manipur, integrating statistical analysis with narratives to highlight the complexities of their socio-economic and political realities. The findings will contribute to understanding the challenges and opportunities for women's empowerment in the region, forming policy recommendations for enhancing gender equality. The study adopts a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the status of women in Manipur.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES TO WOMEN EDUCATION :-

Education for women is crucial to the nation's appropriate social and economic development. In the same way that men and women are two sides of the same coin, they are also two wheels of the society. The foundation for achieving equality worldwide is girl's education. Serious problems in the state include male inheritance and property ownership, early marriage, dowry, honour crimes, girl's lack of education, witch hunts, violence against women and human trafficking. Educated women are more likely to break free from the constraints of traditional gender roles and contribute actively to the economy, helping lift their families out of poverty. When women are educated, they tend to make informed decisions about their health, family planning, and overall well-being, leading to healthier and more prosperous communities. Educated women in Manipur can serve as role models, inspiring the next generation of girls to pursue education and realize their full potential. When a girl child is born in a family some of the parents consider them as a burden or a liability to them. Women in Manipuri society generally face issues not only in the field of education but also, issues of sex discrimination, female infanticide, dowry system, etc. are prevalent. Issues including female infanticide and selective abortion, the dowry system, domestic abuse, educational inequality, underage marriage, poor nutrition, sexual harassment, and more are quite prevalent. The primary problem hindering women's education in Manipur is the deeply entrenched patriarchal mindset that prioritizes boys' education, leading to issues like early marriage, domestic responsibilities placed on girls, lack of access to quality education in rural



areas and inadequate support systems for girls pursuing higher studies, particularly in the hilly regions, further exacerbated by poverty and social norms that devalue female education. Women's lack of social awareness, the dearth of female educators, inadequate facilities, financial hardships, and the lack of passion and motivation of state education officials. Even while women's literacy in the state has been steadily rising over the past few decades, it is still lower than men's literacy. Girls continue to drop out at a significant rate. They are more focused on meeting their immediate needs than they are on pursuing higher education.

1. LACK OF ACCESS TO SCHOOL

Manipur is hilly region, and many villages in remote and hilly areas are hard to access due to poor roads and hilly terrain. Girls often face difficulties while travelling long distances to reach schools. Lack of schools with proper infrastructure and conducive environment often deter girls from attending school and have a negative impact on the quality of education. Girls need separate restrooms for menstrual hygiene, and without them, they frequently miss school due to social stigma associated with menstruation. Inadequate facilities, especially the absence of separate restrooms, for girls, changing areas, and access to safe drinking water, are major factors discouraging girls from attending school.

2. CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage is a common problem of our society since many years especially for poor and middle-class families in rural and urban areas. Girl children are getting married even before attaining full mental and physical maturity. Though child marriage in Manipur is not as alarming as compared to other states, there are still significant cases and the public must be aware of the Prevention of Child Marriage Act. Like many child marriages in other parts of India involve children below the legal marriage age, the issue often revolves around early marriages involving girls under 18 and boys under 21. Within the state, Thoubal District reports the highest number of early marriage cases in the state, followed by Imphal West and Bishnupur Districts. Early Child marriages often impact the health of young mothers and can lead to crisis due to their emotional and physical immaturity. It is uncertain if adolescent motherhood is actually a result of early child marriage, despite the fact that it undoubtedly contributes significantly to the high rate of infant and child death. Married mothers who are minors are more socially vulnerable, which puts their kids' health at greater danger. Studies conducted on young adult women have revealed that, in comparison to those who do not record child marriage, those who do not have greater rates of newborn and child death as well as low infant birth weight well into their



majority years. Although, it has been demonstrated that adolescent women are more likely to remain impoverished, illiterate, and in rural areas, as well as to have limited access to health care, all of which raise the risk of infant and child morbidity and death, than those who marry as adults. Additionally, women who marry and start having children earlier in life are more likely to have more children overall, which is also associated with a higher chance of poor health outcomes for mothers, babies, and children. These marriages frequently result from elopement, which, if complaints are filed, may have legal ramifications under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

3. ABORTION AND FEMALE INFANTICIDE

Even though female foeticide and female infanticide are not reported or common in Manipur, many couples especially couples and families prefer male child. Women who could not give birth to male child often face domestic violence. This may be one of the reasons for early abortion and female foeticide leading to declining sex ratio. This decline in sex ratio means that the society is not just depriving girls of human rights, but also their right to live. Abortion and the practice of killing newborn female infants, is a tragic consequence of gender discrimination and preference of male child in some communities. Efforts to address female infanticide include raising awareness about gender equality, empowering women and girls, and implementing policies and programs to combat gender-based discrimination.

4. GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Gender discrimination and other issues have hampered chances for women in Manipur. Women are deemed a weaker element of society than men and are given less prominence. So, gender inequality is evident in the case of female offspring. Many families do not allow women to work or serve, nor do they allow them to pursue higher education. A revolutionary change in social and cultural beliefs, as well as behavioral patterns, is required to facilitate the process of establishing gender equality. As soon as women believe that they have the power to manage the society in the same term as mentioned, achieving gender equality will no longer be a faraway goal.

5. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Women in our society are facing various kinds of violence on a daily basis. Many of them are facing domestic violence within their families by their husbands, relatives or other family members, for dowry related issues, harassment, marital rape, sexual abuse, deprivation of healthy food, etc. and outside the



family as well like kidnapping, rape, murder, forced prostitution, trafficking of women, etc. The violence against women has primarily been located with the family itself and therefore, seems to be outside the purview of the public and largely remain invisible. But this issue of crime and violence against women needs to be treated as a social problem. Domestic violence against women is very high in the state of Manipur compared with other states in the North East India. According to the data from NFHS-4 (2015-16), the risk of domestic violence experienced by the women in the age group 15-49 belonging to various socio-economic and demographic groups shows that 52.6 % of ever-married women experienced physical violence, 22% sexual violence, 14 % emotional violence and 8 % reported severe physical violence in Manipur. Efforts to address violence against women in Manipur include advocacy for gender equality, legal reforms to protect women's rights, awareness campaigns to challenge societal attitudes that perpetuate violence, and support services for survivors of violence. Community based interventions, empowerment programs for women and collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and civil society organizations are crucial in combating violence against women in Manipur.

6. DOWRY

It is another problem generally faced by women of low or middle-class families during or after marriage. Even though the issue of dowry in Manipur negligible as compared to North Indian states, there has been an increase in the prevalence of the dowry system among upper middle class and rich families. This has an adverse effect among the lower or below middle-class families. Despite the enforcement of Dowry Prohibition Act, many married women in Manipur are being ill-treated by their in-laws for not bringing enough dowry, even to the extent where these poor women suffer mental breakdown from the constant harassment and snide remarks. Most of the families in Manipur are directly or indirectly a part of this not so fascinating practice. Earlier, the concept of "*Awunpot*" or "*awong awun tamba*" used to be fond practice in our community in which parents affectionately gifted their daughters with what all things they could afford. Today, it has become more of an evil practice.

7. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

Women are constrained in certain ways by the social taboos and customs that still exist in the traditional and patriarchal Manipuri society. Another social evil that is prevalent in Manipur is polygamy. In fact, many of the present VIPs and MLAs have multiple wives. Women essentially control the state's internal trade and commerce. Although they are able to run their businesses with a great deal of hard work and



diligence, they have relatively little control over their income, which prevents them from investing a sufficient amount of capital in their small business. Gender bias, or gender inequality, it is a common form of alienation of Manipuri women in the family and society. Subsequently, they become victims of the moneylenders, are at their mercy, and are perpetually sellers. Lack of capital and funds, inability to obtain cheaper raw materials, lack of factories and mills, lack of infrastructure, lack of managerial and administrative skills, lack of labour to meet growing demand, low wages for their weavers etc., are some of the other issues that the women entrepreneurs face in their handloom and handicraft industries. Because of these issues, industries continue to operate as cottage industries, and large-scale manufacturing is impeded. Furthermore, Manipuri clothing is typically not patented, primarily because others are unaware of the process. Conversely, the Ima Keithel does not represent liberation in its entirety, even as it serves as a symbol of economic empowerment. Women are motivated to pursue to the economic endeavours more out of poverty and conflict than out of personal preference.

8. REPRESSION PROBLEMS

Both state and non-state governmental repression of women occurs, and the female body serves as a battlefield for the fight for nomination, repression, and the assertion of masculine dominance. Male and population proportions in Manipur are about equal. The sex ratio in Manipur is superior to that of India's mainland. A state that has a greater gender disparity score has less gender inequality than the rest of India. Manipur's women are involved in civil society campaigns for justice and human rights. They experience less discrimination than other regions of the nation. Traditional patriarchal structures and social taboos restrict women's roles and decision-making powers, often leading to their exclusion in family affairs and inheritance. The presence of AFSPA and other anti-terrorism laws have been used to suppress dissent and silent activists, including women who are actively engaged in social and political movements. The ongoing ethnic conflict in Manipur has resulted in widespread violence, including sexual violence against women, and displacement, further exacerbating the existing challenges. Despite legal frameworks, women's rights are often not adequately protected and perpetrators of violence against women are often not held accountable. The experience of violence, conflict and repression can have severe psychological and emotional consequences for women, including post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. Addressing the repression problem of women in Manipur requires a multi-pronged approach that includes addressing the root causes of social inequality, conflict, and state repression, as well as providing comprehensive support and protection for women.



MEASURES FOR IMPROVING WOMEN'S CONDITIONS:-

A significant percentage of human life is contributed by women. Since women make up a large portion of the State's population, their empowerment is essential to the State's development. The foundation of communities and families is women. They are vital to children's growth and offer their families love, support and care. In addition, women frequently assume leadership positions in community organisations and contribute significantly to the development of communities. Not only in the community and society, but also in the care of ageing parents and family members, the upbringing of children, and the management of home. They oversee every aspect of household chores. One cannot fathom life without women. Therefore, women's wellbeing is essential to the state's expansion and advancement. Improving women's conditions in Manipur involves addressing economic empowerment, social justice, and overall development, including education, healthcare and legal protection. This can be achieved through policies that promote equal access to resources, services, and opportunities, as well as addressing gender-based violence and discrimination. To uplift women's status in Manipur, a multi-facet approach is needed, including economic empowerment, access to education, and legal protections. The government have been taking up various schemes and programmes for giving encouragement to them. Initiatives like the SWAYAMSIDHA Project, which supports self-help groups for women, are crucial for building confidence and awareness, while also providing access to micro-credit. Furthermore, promoting gender equality in development planning and implementation, alongside strengthening the legal system against violence and discrimination are essential. The government's initiative and policy alone are insufficient for this, social co-operation and participation are also required. Only then will it be completely successful to eliminate this issue at the root level.

CONCLUSION:-

Although Manipuri women's current social standing is encouraging, in order to fully empower them, an inclusive ecosystem that includes more chances for creative, skill based ideas, increase access to new market components, and financial capital must established, all the while guaranteeing women's active participation. Women's exclusion issues must be addressed from the very beginning in domestic and family affairs. Mothers must possess the enlightenment to view their sons and daughters equally. Additionally, men need to be sufficiently enlightened to comprehend the idea of equality with women in all spheres of life. They must acknowledge the importance of providing women with adequate physical and emotional space. In order to empower women economically and allow them in gaining political



empowerment. When individuals begin to consider improving their perceptions, it is likely that gender bias and the exclusion of women will decrease. Nonetheless, women continue to encounter several challenges in accomplishing their objectives, and the available remedies are insufficient to tackle their limitations. Programs for the human resource and skill development of women are still in their infancy and should be given priority in order to produce more fruitful and revolutionary outcomes.

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