

# **The Barbaric Animosity in Manipur**

The ethnic groups in Manipur are still facing communal violences and its harsh impacts everyday. Manipur is a state in north east 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. The Imphal Valley constitutes about 10% of the geographical area of the state with 57% of the population, predominantly Meitei, who are majority Hindus, with minorities of Muslims and native Sanamahism followers. The surrounding hills constitute 90% of the geographical area of the state with 43% of the population belonging to 34 tribal groups broadly categorized as Nagas and Kukis. The Nagas dominate the northern districts while the Kukis are predominant in the south. The tribal people have the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, whereas the Meitei have been accorded Other Backward Caste (OBC) status, with some classified as Scheduled Caste (SC) in certain areas.

The rivalry dispute is between the Meitei people, a majority that lives in the Imphal Valley, and the Kuki tribal community from the surrounding hills. Manipur has long been a region marred by ethnic conflicts, militant insurgencies, and political instability. These factors have created a volatile environment where violence becomes a frequent occurrence. The roots of this violence can be traced to historical and political grievances, as well as territorial disputes among various ethnic groups. As of 29 July, 181 people have been killed in the violence. More than 300 wounded, and approximately 54,488 displaced. As of 1 September 2023 the violence had continued for nearly four months since it began; and the state has become deeply segregated as all Kuki inhabitants of the valley, including government officials, have been displaced to Kuki-dominated hill districts.

## **The Gruesome Incident on May 4**

On May 4 2023, Two women of kuki tribe were subjected to extreme form of sexual violences and gangrape. 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. 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. They were forced to strip twice and the people guardians alias the police were silent bystander to the horrific episode happened to the two women. This shows the inefficiency and aristocratic feudalism of Administrative forces as well as the government authorities. 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.

## **Actions Done By Government**

The government clamped down on internet services in the state. After the video of the two women being paraded naked emerged, two months after the fact, angry citizens remarked that the internet ban was aimed at not allowing the rest of the world to know the ugly truth.

Appalled at the unending carnage, which has dragged on for three entire months, a women fact-finding team from the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) visited Manipur. Annie Raja, the general secretary of NFIW, was part of the three-member team; she spoke extensively to The Diplomat about the trip.

"What is most glaring in these atrocities is the weaponization of women's bodies," Raja said. "Whether they be Kukis or Meiteis, the common factor is that women and children are the worst sufferers of this conflict. 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.”

The complicity of the government in the ongoing mayhem is undeniable. After the horror video emerged, when Chief Minister Biren Singh was questioned about the delay in taking action, he callously declared that ”hundreds of similar incidents” have occurred in Manipur in the ongoing conflict.

Incidentally, the FIR on the video incident was lodged on May 18, but despite clear video evidence of the perpetrators, arrests were made by the police only after July 20, when the video went viral.

## **Conclusion**

Sexual violence in Manipur is a grave issue that demands immediate attention and action. Addressing this problem requires a multi-pronged approach, involving government authorities, civil society organizations, and the community. By strengthening law enforcement, raising awareness, and providing support services, Manipur can work towards a safer and more just society where sexual violence is not tolerated, and survivors are empowered to seek justice and healing. Therefore, the issue must be discussed nationally and the criminals must be punished for their vivacious actions without any bitterness. The Law must be enforced to provide justice.

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