

# Empowerment of Women: Problem and Issues faced by Manipuri Women

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## ABSTRACT

Empowerment of Women is a major social phenomenon which requires an understanding of its multidimensional influence. It is the key to strengthen socio-economic development of the nation. Empowerment accelerates the growth and the development of the society. But the inequalities between men and women create a numbers of problems which made women to face continuous challenge in their life. Women should be enable to participate without inhibition, at par with men in all activities as individual members of the family, society, state and up to international level. The principal of empowerment is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble Fundamental Rights and Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2019 reported that on India's Gender Inequality Index (GII) of 0.501 which reflecting inequality in achievement between men and women reproductive, health, empowerment and the labour market. We are in the midst of 21<sup>st</sup> Century but still a lot needs to be done for the upliftment of women, who constitute half of the population of the country.

This article is an attempt to find out the problem and issues faced by women of Manipur and what steps are taken up at National and International level.

**Keywords:** Women, Empowerment, Issues, Discrimination, Violence

*'A nation which does not respect women can never be great'*

— Swami Vivekananda

The Indians, particularly the Hindus, worship female deities like *Saraswati* as the Goddess of Knowledge, *Lakshmi* as the Goddess of Wealth, and *Kali* as the Goddess of Power and Strength. Though there are shreds of evidence of women enjoying a high status in society during the Vedic period, later on, their position has been lowered to a state of second-class citizen and no right bestowed to participate in the matter of education, law-making, etc. They were treated as downtrodden, neglected, and relegated to the background in a male-dominated society. And coming to the home front,

Manipur, a small state of India on the North-East bordering Myanmar, the women were placed in a high esteem and given to them the status symbol of Mother or the '*Emma*'. Hence, the word '*Emma*' is prefix to the name of the popular local deities e.g. *Emma Emoinu Ahongbi*, *Emma Panthoibi*, *Emma Phouoibi*, *Emma Leimarel Sidabi*, etc.

Later on, the status of women was lowered to a

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great extend. Women have to take care of household duties like child care, the well-being of the in-laws, taking care of the need and comfort of family members. Women started facing violence at home and in society because of the male-dominated, patriarchal society system and traditional practices that discriminated against women by and large. Is women-only child-bearer? To the general concept, it is not. Women are not simple reproductive machines, but they are the architect for their children's future and lead them to the success of their careers. They are indeed women by birth, but the social discriminations of sub-human treatments received by them for the sake of their birth cannot be acceptable. The country's overall development depends significantly on the inclusion of women in its development process. They are the transmitter of culture in all societies. And the status of women in society is an accurate index of its cultural, social, religious, and spiritual level. When such dignity of a woman is lost, the 'nation's integrity belongs to is also lost. So, 'Women's Empowerment is an unavoidable one in the process of development of a community. This indirectly helps them to join the mainstream of development in the country.

**Empowerment:** Empowerment is a process of giving awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to decision-making power, control over transformative action. It is a challenge that could make anyone, group or individuals realize their true self and identity in society. Empowering is the development of skills and abilities to manage better. It also requires an entirely new way in which the stereotyping of women and men no longer limits their choices but gives way to a new philosophy that regards all people as essential agents of changes that views development as a process of enlarging the choices of both sexes, just not one. And for women is very much in need.

**Women Empowerment:** Women empowerment is fast emerging as a vital slogan and issue throughout the world. Empowerment of women means recognizing their contribution, helping them to fight their fear, feeling out inadequacy and inferiority, and promoting self-respect and self-dignity, to make them economically independent and self-

reliant, reducing the burden of work primarily, especially at the home front, etc. Gandhi believed the success of women's empowerment depends on threefold revolution i.e. (i) to change 'people's hearts (ii) to create a change in their lives (iii) to change the social structure. Gandhi's vision of Women's Empowerment is one way, i.e. *Sarvodaya* – the Welfare; of all through Cooperation and Trusteeship in the economic sphere, equal participation in the political sphere, and mutual aid in the social sphere irrespective of caste, creed, color, and gender. Gandhi wanted men to realize that women's empowerment is not a threat but a way to improve families and societies. In a country where all the machinery of exploitation and extortion are somewhat lined up against women. Gandhi focused on women's issues required vigorous study and attention. For him, the question of upliftment of women was to create an ongoing dialogue for the dignity of women. And it should be both an end and a means of development. It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have a more remarkable ability to plan their lives, and the freedom from shackles imposed on them by costumes, beliefs, and practices. Briefly, empowerment; is the process that allows one to gain knowledge, skills, attitude needs to cope with the changing environment and circumstances in which one lives.

The process of development in society could not be successful without the active participation of women. Considering the women's situation, the United Nations, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 had proclaimed its faith in the dignity and the worth of human beings in the equal rights of men and women. Given the number of resolutions passed by the United Nations to promote equality of rights between men and women in the judiciary, education, politics, economy, employment, social customs, labor activities etc. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the abolition of all customs, regulations, and practices in daily life based on the inferiority of women or discrimination against women (UN, 1973), Observed International Women's Year, 1975 and declared 1975

- 1985 as Women's Decade. After that, the United Nations have adopted several measures to improve the status of women. World Conference, 1985, UN Declaration focused on women's participation in politics and decision making, equality before the law, equal condition of work and remuneration, social security and control over fertility, etc. The Beijing Platform, 1995 listed 12 critical areas to protect the right of women. Likewise, various world bodies showed their solidarity to sound the 'Women's Empowerment. The United Nations observed the year 2000 as Women Empowerment Year and subsequently in India, the year 2001 was declared as the 'Women's Empowerment Year. The apparent reasons for observation of different years as Women Empowerment Years are always occupy an inferior and subordinate position as being prescribed by the social norms and practices. Women were put to inferior positions; saying that, 'a girl is to be under the protection of her father during childhood, after marriage by her husband and in case she becomes a widow by her son. Such beliefs and norms need to be changed by empowering women.

### Ways to Achieve Women's Empowerment

It is to make women understand:

- ⊙ Making 'women's contribution to society,
- ⊙ Having decision-making power of one's own,
- ⊙ Affirming women's knowledge, skill, and experience in other areas of this involvement,
- ⊙ Creating a sense of an environment that gives women self-esteem and self-confidence,
- ⊙ To create opportunities for girls, provide quality education, employment, skilled training, capacity building with adequate support, and guidelines to enable them self-sustenance and take decisions for discarding their old tradition independently.
- ⊙ Enhancing women's participation in the political process at all levels,
- ⊙ Making available all facilities and resources to ensure empowerment;
- ⊙ Enabling women to give access to and control over property means of production, resources, labor, and income,

Women have to empower themselves from grass-roots levels. By that time, it could bring a change in values, behavior, and outlook for their 'self's sustained livelihood. It is an active process.

### Components of Women Empowerment

Only when women understand and apply the rights provided by the constitution of India in a practical way will automatically improve the status of women. They are:

- (i) To live with a sense of self-worth, respect, and dignity;
- (ii) To make their own choices and decisions;
- (iii) To have the power to control their own lives both within and outside the home;
- (iv) To determine financial and economic choices; and
- (v) To get equal education opportunities.

The above five components apply to the economic sphere, where women's economic empowerment; can be achieved by giving economic opportunity through skill development. Economic empowerment; of women is fundamental to their overall Empowerment. It could imply a better quality of material life through sustainable livelihood owned and managed by women.

### The Problem and Issues Faced by Women of Manipur

The struggle faced by women to achieve their equal rights and privileges may be defined as women's issues. They may varied from women to women but include women's sexual and reproductive health, child care, domestic violence, equal pay for equal work, marital law, welfare policies, and education. And some other social issues faced by women are violence against women, gender gap, sexual abuse, lack of education, harassment at the workplace, and much more. Above all women, women create problems and make their problems. They are:

1. **Psychological Problem:** Psychological problem is the one on top of all worries faced by women. Most women suffered a common disease, which

led them to think of as weak, incompetent, and ever dependent i.e. inferiority complex. Even the labor rate of daily wagers paid to women is lower than the amount paid to men. They fail even to understand their contributions to society, which is at par with those men. There is a popular saying that men make the house and the home made by women. The stigma of male domination in society is women's handwork by which they make themselves a victim. If they want a break, they should stand up together to end this stigma.

**2. Malnutrition:** Malnutrition is the fundamental reason that causes development problems and factors faced by women. As per 2012 study have proved that the rate of malnutrition increases for women as they enter adulthood, and it's more to ever-married women compared to non-married women. Women are self-neglect and self - denial, e.g., boys and men tend to be first for whatever there is on the day's menu. Left over's go to the womenfolk. Most of the time, Manipuri women used to do fasting and performed '*puja*' for the welfare; of her husband and children the whole day without eating anything, but did not neglect the household chore. That is their belief and taboo. Negligence of daily food intake, which lacks adequate doses of vitamins and minerals, causing malnutrition amongst women during pregnancy, particularly in rural areas, severely affects not only their physical well-being but also the child. Because, women play the primary role of caregivers in the family. Although she is in charge of production of food and manages the family's nutritional needs, poverty, cultural norms regarding food intake, and allocation of food within the household impacts the nutritional status of women and her health. And adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, old-aged women, disabled women, and women who had given birth to daughters are particularly affected by inequitable food allocation, making them more prone to malnutrition, diseases, iron deficiency - anemia. Women 80% suffer anemia leading to low birth weight among babies and a high incidence of premature neo-natal birth. If it continues in this way, then maternal mortality will not be overcome. It should be understood by the

women. 'That's why, globally targeted for maternal, infant, and child nutrition, with a commitment having anemia prevalence in women productive under the age group 15-49, by 2025, from 2011 (65<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly).

**3. Drudgery:** Women, assume the twin roles of producer and housekeeper. Most women are negligent about their health. Most of the Manipuri families, they are busy with household chores. They work from early morning till late in the night. They are first to get up and last to sleep in the family. As home-makers, women were expected to look after domestic chores such as cooking and serving food, food processing and storage of food, sending children to school, childcare, looking after livestock, fetching water from the pond or any place for drinking, washing clothes, cleaning home, including the cord yard. If she is a working woman, she had to cope with household and official work also. She has to take health care for all. In this way, she always remains in a hurry and has no time for her. She is neither caring for her food nor about her health.

**4. Health:** Health status is the most critical indicator of development in society. Women's health is an example of a population health scenario. WHO defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. Often treated as simply women's reproductive health, better expressed as "The Health of Women." Because women's health is influenced not just by their biology but also by conditions such as poverty, employment, and family responsibilities, the health problem of women is another crucial area not given the required attention. Over 100,000 Indian women die each year from pregnancy-related causes. Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) being 739/1,00,000 births, 13% of death due to toxemia of pregnancy, 23% due to excessive bleeding, 30% of birth are being low birth weight (LBW), 52% of Indian children under five years of age are malnourished (UNICEF). Declining in the sex ratio is a disturbing phenomenon in the context of the status of women caused by (a) preference for formal infant (b) consequent neglect of female infant health, the adverse impact of frequent and excessive childbearing on the health of women.



Indian women have particularly high mortality from cardiac disease. Indians account for 60% of the world's heart disease burden, despite accounting for less than 20% of the world's population.

Sex Ratio is the indicator of the health and social status of females in society. The child sex ratio of Manipur was 957 in 2001, which has now decreased to 936. As per the report of 2011 census, the child sex ratio indicates unequal treatment even among girls is more high in rural areas than urban areas, i.e. 966 in rural while 1038 in urban.

The National Population Policy, 2000 mission, "Safe Motherhood" targeted with an objective – (i) 80% of all deliveries should take place in the institution by 2010, (ii) 100% deliveries should be attended by trained personnel, and (iii) the maternal mortality ratio should be reduced to the level below 100/100,00 live births. In the context of Manipur, the report was not a satisfactory one because the institutional delivery rate decreased from 44.6% in DLHS-2 to 41% in DLHS-3 (2007-08), with a variation among the districts i.e., 87.32% in Imphal West, followed by Thoubal 83.5% and Imphal East 82% respectively. And the lowest one, 14% in Tamenglong District, the most underdeveloped district, facing many problems related to women like-lack of well-trained health facilitators, transportation, maternal health careless, negligence of consulting doctor or health worker timely, illiterate, ignorance, poverty, etc. which could not afford the requirements. Women have long been disadvantaged in any respect, such as social and economic power, which restricts their access to the necessities of life, including health care.

**5. Women Vs. Women:** Women face ill attitude and behavior of the male members above all from older member including mother-in-law. There is a common saying when the setup of a particular family is in disparity that the problem so created would be the handwork of the women, pointing the cursing finger to a woman, either the newly wedded bride or the mother-in-law or her daughter. Mother-in-law exploits daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law ill-treated widow mother-in-law, mother exploits female children entrusting to household chores, child care, etc. In the patrilineal setting,

boys have been claiming superiority over girls regarding the right to inheritance and succession. For daughter, it has been customary to get 'Kanya-Dan' or some compensation only on the marriage day in Manipur society. The parents understood girls as "a bird of passage," "another's property," "a guest in parent's home," "a thing to be preserved for an outsider," or "a thing which had to be given among" are the some of the common descriptions of a daughter, such example can be multiply, but they only indicate inferior rights of a daughter. What we call anti-female is by no means limited to low-income families. Women should empower from within themselves by acquiring knowledge and skill through education. First, we need to empower girls as the beginning of Women's Empowerment.

**6. Domestic violence:** Nowadays, there have been profound changes in moral and social norms involving human behavior in Manipur society. In the news, there are lots of cold cases displayed in many forms such as wife-beating, rape, dowry-related violence, sexual abuse, dissertation, force pregnancy, force abortion, coercive use of contraceptives, female infanticide due to prenatal selection, sexual harassment, and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution, etc. Where do women experience violence, and what is the specific nature of experience? Why has it not, thus far, been regarded as an issue of human rights? Women's experience of violence has been located primarily within the home, out of the purview of the public, invisible. But the issue of crime and violence against women needs to be transformed from a private one to a social problem. Domestic violence and which is generally referred to as violence against women is a pattern of assault and coercive behavior, including physical, sexual, and psychological committed, by a person against their intimate partner. Domestic violence against women is very high in the state of Manipur compared with another state in the North East. 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 experience physical violence, 22% sexual violence,

14%- emotional violence and 8% reported severe physical violence in Manipur. Domestic violence is significantly associated with alcohol consumption, religion, number of children born, education of both boys and girls, and wealth of the family. The patriarchal system, economic dependency on men, inequality, male ego, etc., are factors responsible for such violence. Though wife-beating and other forms of domestic violence are so severe, no women come out and dare to complain about her husband to the police or court. But would rather suffer pain and agony silently than make it public.

**7. Mental Problem:** To perform all the responsibilities of the home, women always suffered mental problems. The mental problems are two times higher among women, and only a fraction comes for treatment. 10% of the total population suffers from mental illness, which 1% is very severe. Generally, the women living in rural areas are ignorant of the necessary rituals concerning health and hygiene. That's why today, most women became the worst sufferers in society due to exertion, ill health, illiteracy, deprivation, and humiliation. The backwardness of women is a sign of poverty and ignorance.

**8. Selective Abortion and Female Infanticide:** The twenty-first century has witnessed an increase in female feticide, leading demographers to predict a worsening. Unfortunately, in the last two years, we have witnessed female infanticides as a standard practice. It is a clear sign of human surgery of sending a 'girl's child from womb to tomb, which could be created a severe demographic imbalance shortly. However as a sign, if relief, the medical identification of fetus while inside the womb, is now banned. Diagnostic team with ultrasound scanners which detect the sex of a child advertise with catchline by spending 1000 rupees now and save lakhs of rupees in later. 'India's Gender-Equality Index (GII) of 0.501 showed the growth rate relating to males and women, which was a clear sign of women's discrimination regarding health care, labor, and status they occupy in the society. The situation worsens with the practices of pre-birth sex determination of the baby by the medicos as

a ploy to abort female fetuses prematurely. More alarmingly, the practices were very much on the rise in rural areas too. So, the women empowerment slogan came into being and reshaped women for their welfare and development. Ensuring gender equality by removing gender discrimination is the key to real empowerment.

However, today, a dramatic change in society is visible that impacts the 'people's mindset more and more. It is true in the case of Manipur too, where the women are placed in high esteem by tradition. Every woman enjoyed political and economic rights in their day-to-day affairs. Many women can go and work in the private and public sectors. Despite the above-stated qualities, the honor, and respect reserved for the women, they are inescapable from the social taboos and stigma and atrocities hurled at them. There are various cases of gender discrimination like male domination and sex cruelties against women as a natural consequence of patriarchal society. Above all, the armed conflict within the state exploited women and girls in the form of rape, force impregnation, sexual servitude, and intentional spread of HIV/AIDS, etc.

They are often considered as soft targets, often introduced against their moral and social respect. Women have been abused and exploited, and the crime rate is increasing year by year as we move to 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As a proposal of these facts, the question of 'women's empowerment had been automatically raised to stop the atrocities against women.

## CONCLUSION

Women's Empowerment is a very tricky issue, widely debated all over the world. The intensity of various right movements and individuals has turned into a big noise in India. The country's political groups have joined the bandwagon with their catching slogans, most prominently during election time. But still, the main issue has remained disillusioned. The proposed 30% of women's reservations in the Parliament Bill is still failing. The much talked Triple Talaq, Love Jihad..., etc. enacted in the parliament also not fully satisfactory.

Therefore, the question is to find out the possible root cause of 'women's problems and way out from miseries. Lack of education, poverty, casteism, etc. is the main disadvantages faced by women. Mostly in rural areas and taking this lacuna, the local chauvanists of the male-dominated society attempt to downsize the 'woman's right and their place in the society. The Government of India (GoI) launched the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) on the International 'Women's Day, the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2010, with a holistic vision to promote the all-round development of women, which aims to facilitate the process of coordinating 'women's welfare and socio-economic development. Empowerment is meant not only to improve the rate of literacy and economic conditions but it is a means to overcome their inferiority complex by increasing self-confidence. And make them understand that they are not inferior to men under any condition. In other words of Mahatma Gandhi, "Bravery is not the monopoly of men, but women should also feel just as independent as men." Therefore, it may simply conclude that the strong avocation of the Father of Nation to empower women socially, politically, and economically is a point of the highest epitome of Gandhian Ideas and Thoughts, which

earned the global acclamation of the highest order. "Today, the world is ready for us; the the question is 'DO WE READY.' They had been given a strong legacy. It is up to us to internalize the revolution and take it the right way forward" (Sabarwal, 2020).

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