

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

IN NORTHEAST INDIA

**H. Sudhir
Jubita Hajarimayum**

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Violence Against Women in Northeast India

with special reference to Assam,
Manipur and Tripura



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Violence Against Women in Northeast India

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Foreword

This present volume *Violence Against Women in Northeast India* (with special reference to Assam, Manipur and Tripura), is a product of a three-day regional seminar under the same name, a first-of-its-kind of venture in India's Northeast, organized by the Erema Gender Empowerment and Resource Centre, Manipur under the sponsorship of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi at Imphal, Manipur during 21-23 August, 2003. The seminar was conceptualized on collaborative partnership for government, non-government, institutions of civil society, social researchers and activists representing the three sister states of this region viz., Assam, Manipur and Tripura as a part of our odyssey to have a deeper understanding of this serious problem, to develop integrated strategies, to respond effectively to it and to enhance prevention intervention in this vulnerable social target group—Women. Stemming from the conviction that the progress of the society in the northeast today also has its practical meaning in understanding the issue, the seminar represents one forward step in the process of assembling a human resource of the region committed to ushering in a culture of progress. The uniqueness of the seminar is in its dedication in expediting to bridge the wide gulf between the research findings and practices.

Though this region has shown a growing instance of violence against women in varying degrees, this serious issue has to remain for long unfocused. Sensing urgency to sensitize this crucial issue and a need for a creative thought that can

facilitate to a better understanding of this violent issue, the perspective of the seminar was crucially designed to create a platform to explore and discourse upon the extent, dynamics and problem of violence against women in the region; examine the overall impact at varying degrees; impact of advocacy and public awareness campaign; social attitude; evaluate national and state responses; and develop viable intervention strategies for effective implementations. It is indeed a matter of joy that this initiative bore fruit in the form of bringing forth this present anthology of revised seminar papers as a piecemeal contribution to the larger phenomenon of the issue of violence against women. I am hopeful that this volume will be invaluable for social researchers, academicians, policy makers, administrators, practitioners and activists in India and abroad.

March 8, 2005
Imphal

Jubita Hajarimayum
Secretary
Ereima Gender Empowerment and
Resource Centre

Preface

One area of primacy as a parcel of the broader analysis of the gender issue is the serious concern of violence against women in the northeast region of India. As part of its objective to provide a forum for cordial relationship and interaction among the people from varied professional expertises in the search for a creative understanding of the current scene of violence against women in the northeast, the Ereima Gender Empowerment and Resource Centre (EGERC), sensing it a need of the hours, initiated a three day regional seminar on Violence against women in Northeast India (with special reference to Assam, Manipur and Tripura), under the auspices of the Indian Council of Social Science Research ICSSR), New Delhi during 21-23 August 2003 at Imphal, Manipur

The seminar was structured aiming at shedding light on the state of violence against women in this part of India. Broadly, the seminar aims to develop enabling collaborative platform for different professional backgrounds to respond effectively to the problem of violence against women in the region. Specially the seminar aimed to sensitize the problem of violence against women in the region, create a platform to explore the issue by accessing information from different resource persons, organizations and individuals regarding the extent, dynamics and problem of the gender based violence, monitor and evaluate the impact of advocacy and problem awareness, disseminate the experiences, wisdom and findings of various organizations, institutions and individuals in the region to challenge the issue successfully.

Despite the higher social role and status of women in this region against her counterparts in other parts of India, women here face a variety of violences in varied forms due to a number of contributing factors in different contextual settings, which are explored herein by the paper contributors.

The present volume is a compilation of selected papers after revision and modification in the light of the discourse during seminar. The successful organization of the seminar and its translation into this crystallized current shape owe to many capacities for their support and co-operation in various forms. We acknowledge with gratitude to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi for the financial assistance through which the initiative could be materialized successfully.

We are grateful to all the resource persons for the sacrifices made to come all the ways to present the papers personally and handing over their revised papers for publication. We are grateful to the support staff at the center for their unrelenting co-operation in the successful organization of the seminar and towards translating it into this present shape of the volume. Mention may be made of Rk Joyshree, Bhavina Sharma, Lakhikanta, Bimol, Sushil and Suresh. We thank Mr. M.P.Misra of Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi for his keen interest and warm co-operation in publishing the volume.

The publication of this volume has been a little delayed because of the time given to the authors to modify and revise their papers and tedious editorial challenge.

A painstaking editorial task has been carried out yet it can be once more shared in the meantime that all the views expressed in the articles are of the authors entirely and they do not reflect the ideas of the editors or the institute.

H. Sudhir
Jubita Hajarimayum

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Note on Violence Against Women

—*Vasudha Gupta*

INTRODUCTION

The term 'violence against women' means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Accordingly, violence against women encompasses, but is not limited, to the following:

- ❖ Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- ❖ Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

In addition to the above, there could be acts of violence against women, which include forced sterilization and forced abortion, coercive/forced use of contraceptives, female infanticide and pre-natal sex selection.

Acts or threats of violence, whether occurring within the home or in the community, instill fear and insecurity in women's lives and are obstacles to the achievement of equality and for development and peace. The fear of violence, including harassment, is a permanent constraint on the mobility of women and limits their access to resources and basic activities.

The strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action suggest adoption of a 'holistic and multi-disciplinary approach to the challenging tasks of promoting families, communities and state that are free of violence against women'. There has been extensive recognition by Government and society of the growing trends in cases of violence against women.

There are altogether international efforts for addressing violence against women and the main instruments are: UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), World Conference on Human Rights - Vienna, UN International Conference on Population and Development - Cairo and UN Fourth World Conference on Women - Beijing, 1995.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN - SITUATION IN INDIA

Women in India are vulnerable to various forms of violence based on gender due to unequal relationship between men and women.

- Because a woman is considered a weaker sex both in terms of physical strength and in having a say in the socio-cultural set up. They are subjected to physical violence like rape, female infanticide, and sex-related crimes. This reason is the understanding of society of female sexuality and its role in social hierarchy.
- Because of her relationship *vis-à-vis* man, a woman is vulnerable to domestic violence, dowry murder etc. This reason relates to society's concept of a woman as the

property and dependent on a male protector, father, husband, son etc.

- Because of the social group to which she belongs, a woman, in times of war, riots or ethnic, caste or class violence, may be raped and brutalized as a means of humiliating the community to which she belongs. This also relates to male perception of female sexuality and woman as the property of man.

The National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India has been collecting and recording data on gender based violence. The statistical data compiled by the Bureau on crimes against women during the years from 1990-2001 (Annexure A) show that there is an increasing trend in violent acts committed. The increase may, to an extent, reflect the effect of spread of literacy, awareness generated among women to their rights and legal protection that have been strengthened in the last two decades and the willingness of women to come out and seek help be it violence by third party or from within a family. On the other hand, judicial activism, NGO intervention, and law enforcement agencies' willingness to take cognizance of crime against women have together contributed to an increased reporting of cases. Women now approach police or courts more freely for remedy.

LEGISLATIVE MEASURES - LEGAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Women could also be victims of forced violence or crime commonly recognized such as 'Murder', 'Robbery', 'Cheating' etc. The crimes, which are directed specifically against women, are characterized as 'Crimes Against Women'. These are broadly classified under two categories: -

(1) The crimes identified under the Indian Penal Code (IPC)

- (i) Rape (Section 376 IPC).
- (ii) Kidnapping & abduction for different purposes (Section 363 - 373 IPC).

- (iii) Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths or their attempts (Section 302/304-B of IPC).
- (iv) Torture, both mental and physical (Section 498-A of IPC).
- (v) Molestation (Section 354 of IPC).
- (vi) Sexual harassment (Section 509 of IPC) (referred to in the past as Eve-teasing)
- (vii) Importation of girls (upto 21 years of age) (Section 366-B of IPC).

(2) The crimes identified under the Special Laws

Admittedly not all laws are gender specific, but the provisions of various laws, which affect women significantly, have been reviewed periodically and amendments carried out to keep pace with the emerging requirements. Some Acts which have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests are:

- (i) Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 (3 of 1988).
- (ii) Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (28 of 1961).
- (iii) Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986.
- (iv) Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.
- (v) Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 (34 of 1971).
- (vi) Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 (19 of 1929).
- (vii) Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 (25 of 1955).
- (viii) Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (3 of 1956).
- (ix) Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970 (37 of 1970).
- (x) Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 (25 of 1976).
- (xi) Factories Act, 1948 (63 of 1948) as amended in 1976.
- (xii) Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, (53 of 1961).
- (xiii) Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983.
- (xiv) Special Marriage Act, 1954.

- (xv) The Family Courts Act, 1954.
- (xvi) Employees State Insurance Act, 1948.
- (xvii) Plantation Labour Act, 1951.

STEPS TAKEN TO CURB VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Under the Constitution of India law and order is a state subject. The responsibility for dealing with enforcement of the concerned acts, therefore, rests with the state governments. The registration cases, investigation, detection and prevention of the crimes against women are primarily with state government/union territory Administrations. However, the Government of India has initiated a number of measures apart from legislative changes in the relevant acts. Instructions/guidelines have been issued to the state governments/union territory administrations to effectively enforce legislation relating to crimes against women and monitor the enforcement.

The Minister of Human Resource Development has written, during August 2000 to all State Home Ministers stressing the need for including gender sensitization modules as a component of training courses for enforcement machinery in the state level police training academies and also on the need for gender sensitization of judiciary. NGOs have been constituted to monitor the implementation of the Supreme Court's guidelines.

Various statutes exist, which recognize women specific crimes, both social and physical and the need to combat it. This has led to various proactive and preventive measures including protective legislation for women. The impact of these measures and legislation, however, requires to be strengthened. The Government has also been strengthening the existing legislations and developing new institutional machineries through extensive research and review. In addition to gender sensitization of law enforcement personnel and so forth on one hand and on the other, it has set up and running projects that provide support to vulnerable women like short stay homes, hostels for working women etc and rehabilitation of victims of violence. The Central Social

Welfare Board is implementing the scheme of Family Counselling Centres (FCCs) to provide preventive rehabilitative service to women and children who are victims of atrocities and family mal-adjustments. At present, 17 FCCs are running in district police headquarters in different states. 19 FCCs are functioning in Police Headquarters at Delhi. Kerala, West Bengal, Orissa, Tripura, Pondicherry, Assam, Karnataka, Manipur, Goa, Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Uttar Pradesh, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh.

In order to address the phenomenon of domestic violence, which is widely prevalent but has remained largely invisible, the Government has introduced a legislation titled 'Protection from Domestic Violence Bill, 2002' in the Lok Sabha on 8th March, 2002 to empower magistrates to grant protection orders to victims of domestic violence and provide other relief. The Bill envisages that the protection officers would assist a victim of domestic violence to be secure from violence and help her access shelter homes, health care, legal advice etc.

'Crimes Against Women's Cells' have been set up in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and in the union territories of Chandigarh, Delhi and Pondicherry.

During the Women's Empowerment Year, 2001, the department has written to all state governments to set up district level committees headed by the district magistrates to review and monitor cases of crimes against women. State governments such as Andhra Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Haryana, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Orissa, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh have reported to set up such Committees.

The Government of India has also initiated steps to organize an effective campaign to sensitize the public about violence against women and also initiated action to compile and collate statistical information pertaining to seven types of crimes against women. These are (i) rape (Section 376 of

Indian Penal Code), (ii) causing miscarriage (Section 312 to 316), (iii) harassment, both mental and physical in a marital relationship and offences relating to marriage (Chapter XX of IPC, (iv) dowry death (Section 304 B), (v) molestation as defined by Section 354 of Indian Penal Code, (vi) kidnapping and abduction (Section 366), and (vii) procurement of minor girls (Section 366 A).

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Ultimately one of the major causes e.g., the economic dependence of women and lack of financial independence leads to atrocities against women. The need to make them economically independent has, therefore, been given utmost importance in recent schemes, projects and programmes over the past two decades. The Government has launched many schemes such as Women's Economic Programme (NORAD), Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP), Socio-Economic Programme (SEP), Condensed Course for Vocational and Educational Training (CCE&VT) etc. for their uplift and self-sustenance.

The scheme, 'Women in Difficult Circumstances (Swadhar)' launched by the Department of Women and Child Development is an innovative approach to cater to the requirement of various types of women in distress in diverse situations under different conditions. The schemes provide shelter, counseling and training for women in difficult circumstances who do not have any social and economical support.

A social advocacy-cum-legal literacy drive through 'Education Work for Prevention of Atrocities on Women' is being implemented by the department since 1982. It provides financial assistance to voluntary organizations working for the upliftment and betterment of women and for the prevention of atrocities against women, for propaganda, publicity and research work. Production of publicity materials like pamphlets, booklets, hoardings, posters, slogans, surveys/studies on particular aspect of violence/atrocities against women qualifies for financial assistance under this scheme.

Since 1996 the Government has sought to involve the state governments and NGOs to confer economic empowerment through the vehicle of Self Help Group formation. The Swashakti Scheme being implemented by Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India in nine states with ultimate objective of making Self help groups self sustaining units and economically viable. The economic strength, thus, garnered will enable women to understand domestic and external operations.

Legal literacy has been made part and parcel of all the programmes that have been launched by Government of India in the recent past, such as Swashakti (Rural Women's Development and Empowerment Project) and Swayamsidha.

There is also a programme to generate general awareness among the rural and poor women, the Awareness Generation Programme (AGP). The broad aim of this programme is to create awareness among the rural and poor women on various social issues so that they can realize their potential in the family and society. Since 1993-94, special emphasis is being given to the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and their role in national integration and communal harmony.

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM

Department of Women and Child Development

The Department of Women and Child Development was set up in the year 1985 as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to give the required impetus to the development of women and children. In its capacity as the nodal agency looking after the advancement of women and children, the department formulates plans, policies, and programmes; enacts/amends legislations affecting women and children and guides and coordinates the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations working field in the of women and child development. Apart from this, the Department of Women and Child Development also implements certain innovative programmes for women and children. These programmes are in the areas of employment

and income generation, welfare and support services, gender sensitization, training for employment and income generation and awareness generation.

National Commission for Women

The Government has set up a statutory body called National Commission for Women (NCW) with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the Constitutional and legal safeguards provided to women; review the existing legislations to suggest amendments wherever necessary; and to look into complaints involving deprivation of the rights of women. NCW is receiving complaints relating to dowry/atrocity cases, dowry related suicides/death/murder etc. These cases are duly processed in the commission under Section 10(1) (f) and 10(1) (g) of the NCW Act, 1990 and referred to the appropriate authorities such as police, district magistrates etc with the Commission's recommendations for expediting action under the criminal laws and bringing the guilty persons to trial in the Court. These cases are tried in courts having criminal jurisdiction under Sections 304-B, 498-A, 302 etc. of the Indian Penal Code. NCW has conducted Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalats as a form of alternate dispute resolution with the help of NGOs and Legal Aid Boards at state and district levels to facilitate access to law enforcement systems and faster justice delivery to poor women in case of family dispute, dowry harassment etc.

Immediately after enactment of National Commission for Women Act, 1990 on 31st August, 1990, the Government had, by way of D.O letter dated 30.10.90 from the then Minister for Labour and Welfare, requested the chief ministers of all state governments to consider constitution of State level Women Commissions with functions and powers similar to that of NCW. Since then, the government has been requesting the state governments to set up State level Women Commissions. D.O letters at the level of Minister-in-charge of the Ministry of Human Resource Development/Department of Women and Child Development have been issued on 22.2.93, 24.8.95, 25.10.96, 4.6.99 and on 20.8.2001. The issue

of setting up of State Women Commissions is also taken up with the state governments/union territory administrations during the meetings held by the Government periodically with state ministers and secretaries-in-charge of Women & Child Development.

Central Social Welfare Board

The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) is an apex national organization involved in programmes for the welfare and development of women, children and disadvantaged groups. The Central Social Welfare Board was set up in 1953, with the objective of facilitating a bridge between government and the voluntary sector in the country to reach benefits of Government schemes to the backward sections of our society. At present, the CSWB is engaged in supporting thousands of voluntary organizations all over the country to implement programmes for disadvantaged groups of women and children.

Rashtriya Mahila Kosh

The National Credit Fund for women called Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) is a poverty alleviation strategy, which is using the Self-Help Group concept successfully. RMK is poised to expand, with support from the national budget to its corpus fund, its loaning programme from the present level of about Rs. 190 million to Rs. 1000 million per year by March, 2003 and will be catering to a variety of micro-credit needs of about half a million borrowers.

National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD)

Since 1986, a separate Women's Development Division has been functioning in the Institute. The Institute has been sensitizing enforcement machineries, training NGOs and pursuing legal advocacy and literacy. It has been acting as a Lead Training Agency (LTA) for 'Swashakti' and is Lead Agency for implementing 'Swayamsidha' which aims to make rural women economically independent giving them strength to combat violence against them.

Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women

A Parliament Committee on Empowerment of Women has been constituted in 1997 for considering the reports of the National Commission for Women, to examine the measure taken by the government to secure women's equality and to report on the working of welfare programmes for women etc.

Non-Governmental Organizations

In India, NGOs and umbrella organizations are powerful and active agents in gender advocacy and training. In areas such as women's rights, economic and political empowerment of women and violence against women, the contribution of voluntary sector and the government's collaboration with them have brought about positive results. Increase of women in parliamentary and local government levels has come about as a result of government policies including legislations, ably supported by NGO advocacy. The NGOs in India have taken up a number of programmes to prepare women to contest elections and occupy elected positions.

The CSWB acts as an umbrella organization networking through State Welfare Boards and through them thousand of voluntary organizations.

FUTURE PROGRAMMES

Action Plan for implementing the National Policy for Empowerment of Women

The Government of India has adopted a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women. The goal of the Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women by creating an environment through positive social and economic policies and programmes for development of women in all spheres of life. Para 7.1 of the Policy lays down as under:

- 7.1 Institutions and mechanisms/schemes for assistance will be created and strengthened for prevention of such

violence including sexual harassment at work place and customs like dowry; for the rehabilitation of the victims of violence and for taking effective action against the perpetrators of such violence. A special emphasis will also be laid on programmes and measures to deal with trafficking in women and girls.

The Government is drafting a National Plan of Action (POA) to implement the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women. The POA will focus on creating support infrastructure to compliment legislative efforts, creating a conducive environment to women for reporting cases related to violence against them. Gender sensitivity among the policy makers will be strengthened along with awareness on the prevention of atrocities on women.

Enactment of Protection from Domestic Violence Bill, 2002

In order to address the phenomenon of domestic violence which is widely prevalent but has remained largely invisible in the public domain, a legislation titled 'Protection from Domestic Violence Bill, 2002' has been introduced in Lok Sabha on 8th March, 2002 to empower courts to grant protection orders to victims of domestic violence and provide other relief. The Bill has been referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee attached to the Ministry of Human Resources Development for examination and report.

Drafting of Bill on sexual harassment at workplace

The Supreme Court of India, in its judgment dated 13.8.97 in a civil writ petition, laid down detailed guidelines to be followed by employers at all working places to prevent sexual harassment of women. The guidelines, inter-alia, stipulate that committees will be set up by each employer to handle complaints of sexual harassment. In accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court, the government has initiated action to constitute complaints committees in all ministries/departments of the central as well

as state governments, public sector undertakings etc. So far 58 ministries/departments of Government of India and 24 state governments and union territory administrations have reported setting up of complaints committees. The Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules have been amended to include sexual harassment as a prohibited conduct. In order to ensure implementation of the guidelines in the private sector, Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 has been amended.

The National Commission for Women is drafting legislation relating to prevention of sexual harassment of women at workplace.

Crime and Violence Against Women : The Situation in Assam

Trend, Dimension, Police Action and Societal Reaction

Dr. Archana Sharma

Ms. Indranoshee Das

INTRODUCTION

Home sweet home; there is no place like home. But what happens when your own home turns out to be a prison? What happens when your own near and dear ones turn your worst enemy? What happens when you know your enemy, but have to live and tolerate him lest you should be blamed, lest your action should be termed blasphemous? What happens when you are forced to learn some truths of life well ahead of time, so much so that even chocolate turns bitter before you can taste its sweetness? Yes, this is what happens to hundreds and thousands of women in our country. To use National Family Health Survey statistics, one out of every five Indian women and one out of every seven women in Assam, face one or the other form of domestic violence. In majority of the cases of domestic violence, the perpetrator is none other than the husband, yes, the husband with whom she had taken the sacred oath of remaining together through thick and thin, throughout her life, until death. Yes, the 'Husband' who is

supposed to give her shelter, love and respect! And, she is not supposed to tell anyone about it, for she is beaten for her fault, yes, she deserves that because may be she had not cooked properly, may be she does not have a male child, may be she has not been attentive to her children and there can be many more such trivial reasons, but there is nothing wrong in beating a wife, at least that is what two out of every three women believe. Or were they taught to believe? In fact, in most societies domestic violence against women is not perceived as a crime. It is seen as a matter of individual responsibility. In most cases, the perpetrators get acceptance in the society while the victim continues to be looked down upon, as if she herself was responsible for her plight. The victim has no other way but to suffer in silence. (ICRW, May 2002, *Domestic Violence in India: Exploring Strategies, Promoting Dialogue.*)

Women in Indian society have been victims of ill treatment, humiliation, torture and exploitation as long as written records of social organization and family life are available. But regretfully, female victims of violence have not been given much attention in the literature on criminal violence. (Ahuja R, 1998) The attitude of indifference and negligence can be attributed to factors like general acceptance of man's superiority over women because of which violent acts against women were not viewed as violent or deviant and the denial of violence by women themselves owing to their socio-cultural values and attitudes.

Violence has surrounded a women's life from birth to death and has become a routinized affair in all societies of the world since innumerable centuries. A narrow concept of violence may suggest an act of illegal criminal use of physical force, but it also includes exploitation, discrimination, upholding of an unequal economic and social structure, creation of an atmosphere of terror, a situation of threat reprisal and other forms of political violence (Sinha N, 1989).

Violence runs along the lines of power in the sex/gender system. Still more agonizing is the failure of the control system in modern India due to which the intensity, frequency and

type of violence against women are increasing day by day. Many victims cannot face endless, time consuming litigation. A timely visit by the police would do wonders... But we dare not trust them. (*The Hindu*, Oct.9, 2002). Violent incidents are so numerous that no eyebrows are raised when a new incident is added to the long list. Crimes against women seem never ending.

Crime against women in India is broadly classified under two categories: 1. crimes identified under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and 2. crimes identified under the special laws (SL). The crimes under the former category include eight types:

- Rape (section 376 IPC)
- Kidnapping and abduction (sections 363 and 373)
- Dowry homicides (section 302 and 304 B)
- Torture-physical and mental (section 498 A)
- Molestation (section 354)
- Eve-teasing or sexual harassment (section 509)
- Importation of girls (section 366 B) and
- Murder (other than dowry homicides) (section 302).

The crimes under the latter category include four types:-

- Immoral trafficking (1956 Act)
- Demanding dowry (1961 Act)
- Commission of *Sati* (1987 Act), and
- Indecent representation of women (1986 Act). (Ahuja R, 1998)

Domestic violence cannot be eliminated altogether. The incidence of domestic violence against women is the highest among all the forms of violence, where the perpetrator being none other than someone known to the victim, someone closes to the family, someone near and dear to the victim. Many such cases go unreported out of fear that the victim and the victim's family will be castigated and/or alienated from the society. With increased awareness about women's rights and

the changing gender concepts under the influence of feminist thinking, there has, however, been a change in the societal outlook towards such incidents. The intervention of women's organizations, social workers and NGOs also has contributed to such positive changes.

Various UN agencies have been highlighting as well as raising their voice against the worldwide trend of violence against women. In India not only is wife beating a common practice but also three out of every five women (56 per cent) believe that wife beating is justified for six specific reasons. The NFHS -2 has revealed that 40 per cent of the women agreed that neglecting the house or children justified the thrashing. Other commonly accepted justifications include the wife going out without telling the husband (37 %); the wife showing disrespect for in-laws (34 %) and the wife being unfaithful (33 %). Less acceptable reasons include the wife not cooking the food properly (25 %) and the woman's parents not giving expected money, jewellery or other items (7 %).

The Domestic Violence (Prevention) Bill is a significant step forward in recognizing the problems of women, children and other family members living in an atmosphere of violence. When it is finally enacted, it will provide protection against domestic violence by obtaining protection, residence and monetary relief orders. *The Protection from Domestic Violence Bill suffers from a number of defects. One of them is that it does not provide a clear and comprehensive definition of domestic violence, and leaves much to the discretion of individual judges. (The Hindu, Aug 04, 2002)* There is more to domestic violence than physical abuse. Emotional trauma can be far more crippling and a new bill seeks to recognize that. *(The Week, Feb 03, 2002).*

Crimes against women can be studied under three clusters - social, personal and psychological and legal. (Saxena S, 1995). Social causes include causes like inferior status of women due to social conditioning, patriarchal structure of society, lack of proper training, broken homes, too much interference by parents, etc. "Men are consciously taught to

be aggressive and tough while women are conditioned to be submissive and docile”.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present paper are to find out:

- Dimension and trend in the incidence of crime and violence against women in India with special reference to Assam.
- a) The inter-district pattern in crime and violence against women in Assam.
- b) Action/inaction of the lawmakers and the societal reaction to such incidents.

COVERAGE

The paper covers a period of six years from 1997 to 2002. For inter district analysis, all the 23 districts of Assam has been included.

METHODOLOGY

The paper uses both analytical and descriptive methods. Quantitative techniques like finding out simple percentages as well as more rigorous techniques like regression equations and curve fitting on the basis of linear regression analysis also have been used.

DATA SOURCE

The paper depends largely on primary source of data - the source from the office of the DIG, CID, Assam. National Family Health Survey -II have also been used.

For the case studies, newspaper reports have been used.

THE CRIME SITUATION IN INDIA

Like most offences, Crime Against Women (CAW) is steadily on the rise in India. Of the total crimes reported in

the country seven percent constitute CAW. The all-India rate, number of crimes per 100, 000 population reported to the police, was 13.8 during 1999. This may not be alarming at first sight but the point is many crimes are not reported. Hideous forms of violence in the subcontinent prove that women are still powerless. (*The Hindu*, July 14, 2002)

Violence against women and the girl children, both domestic and at the workplace has been showing an alarming trend. As per the data (1999) published by the National Crime Records Bureau, New Delhi, the total number of crimes committed against women has been increasing year by year from 1.21 lakh in 1997 to 1.31 lakh in 1998 and 1.36 lakh in 1999. Of the total 1.36 lakh crimes against women in 1999, torture claims the highest share of 32.3%, followed by molestation (23.8%), kidnapping and abduction (11.7%), rape (11.4%), sexual harassment (6.5%) and dowry death (4.9%); immoral traffic (6.9%) and others (2.5%).

Amongst the states, while Madhya Pradesh reports the highest incidence of 12.6 % of the total crimes, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra followed suit with 12.5 % and 10% respectively. (Five Year Plan, 2002-2007, Volume II)

Of the 23 big cities, Chennai accounted for 21.2 per cent followed by Delhi at 12 per cent. Among the six metros, Kolkata is the safest for women. As much as 31.2 per cent of dowry deaths were from Uttar Pradesh alone, followed by Bihar with 15.2 per cent. But incidence of torture accounted for 12.3 percent in UP and only 3.2 per cent of cases reported in Bihar. Harassment for dowry is noticed only when the authorities are confronted with bodies of the helpless women. In cases of rape, victims knew the offenders in 84 of every 100 cases. Neighbours were accused of rape in three of every 10 cases. The aspirations of a woman trapped in a murderous marriage and seeking relief from its bondage do not find reflection in any of our laws. Irretrievable breakdown of marriage is not a ground for divorce in India. Courts also use archaic methods to settle disputes over custody of children, marital property, return of *streedhan*, maintenances that often weigh heavily against the interests of the woman.

One in every five murders in 1999 was of women. Personal enmity, property disputes, love intrigues, dowry and gain are the major reasons for murdering women. Kidnapping and abduction of women account for 67 per cent of the 23,864 cases reported. A significant feature is that 54 per cent of the victims were less than 18 years old.

The failure of the investigating agency can be seen from the fact that 36 per cent of the cases remained under investigation, without finalization, till the end of the year. These are cases in which victims remained untraced or the investigation was under way to establish the charge. The police closed as many as 4,229 cases of kidnapping and abduction as false, mistake of fact or law. This signifies the shifting stand taken by the victim or her family towards the crime and the criminal in view of the existing social environment.

The number of sexual harassment cases, referred to as eve teasing in the past, rose by 10 per cent in 1999. More than 25 per cent of these cases were reported from Uttar Pradesh, followed by Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh contributing 20 per cent each. It is natural to expect a significant co-relation in the pattern of rape, molestation and sexual harassment cases reported from a State. But, this pattern is not reflected in the statistics. Madhya Pradesh recorded the largest number of rape and molestation cases but ranks much lower in the reporting of sexual harassment cases. The reason for Uttar Pradesh recording far lesser number of rapes and molestation cases than other States but recording the highest number of sexual harassment cases is an issue for serious study. This is suggestive of the failure of the criminal justice system to inspire confidence in the victims and their inability to speak out. It also raises serious doubts about the correct recording of cases as they occur and the shocking apathy to gender issues.

The significantly large number of sexual harassment cases reported from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh are perhaps a pointer to the drive taken up by these States against gender crimes.

A study of the figures of cases reported under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act implies that prostitution thrives in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka as 90 per cent of the cases have been reported from here. (*The Hindu*, Sept., 01, 2002, Tejdeep Kaur Menon, *Inspector General of Police, Special Protection Force, Andhra Pradesh.*)

The high incidence of dowry deaths, torture or cruel treatment of women in northern India including Delhi and some Union Territories such as Chandigarh, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands may all be contributing factors leading to relatively shorter life spans among adult women. Better sex ratios are noted among the southern states, some hill regions and in states where tribal groups are a significant proportion of the population.

CRIME SITUATION IN ASSAM : AN ANALYSIS

Because of an actual increase in the crime rate, the number of reported cases of crime and violence against women has increased considerably all over the country during the last decade. The North East and Assam are no exception. Mizoram recorded the highest and Arunachal Pradesh recorded third highest in rape rate in India during 1991 to 1997, and in both the states it is still rising. Assam is following the pattern of Mizoram at lower level. Molestation rate in Sikkim, Tripura and Mizoram is higher than the national average throughout the reference period; however, there is constant decline in Tripura whereas Nagaland remained at lowest level in the region. Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have the kidnapping and abduction rate quite higher than the level of national average; however, in Manipur it is declining constantly. Contrary to this, Assam has shown constant upward trend. Except Mizoram, all other states are having total cognizable crime rate below the national level. Manipur showed constant decline whereas, Assam showed opposite trend and is rising at much faster rate than the national

increase rate. (Pralip Narzary's paper on *Crime against Women in North East India*, submitted in the National Seminar on Women in the North East: Challenges and Opportunities for the 21st Century organized by the WSRC, Gauhati University)

Insurgency, internal conflicts, societal structure, political instability, lax administrative control, increasing poverty and lack of proper economic development are identified as the roots of growing social evils of the region. These evils also include the increased incidence of crime and violence against women. It is, however, paradoxical and very pathetic that the region, where even today women have a much higher rate of autonomy than their counterparts in the rest of the Country is attracting attention for having high rate of violence against women.

An analysis of the data for the state and for her 23 districts reveal that during the period 1997-2002, there has not only been an increase in the number of crimes and violence against women in Assam (Table 2.1 and 2.2), but also the incidence of crime is well spread over all the districts. Crime rates were, however, much higher in some of the districts. Overall crime rate in the State has increased by approximately 36 per cent over the period.

Among the different forms of crime, total case of kidnapping is the highest followed by cruelty by husband and rape. Dowry deaths comprise a small percentage of total crimes. On the contrary, the rate of increase over time in dowry death and that of cruelty by husband are alarmingly high, whereas the rate of increase in kidnapping is much lower. Another form of crime that had increased at a galloping rate is immoral trafficking. The different forms of crime recorded, viz., kidnapping, rape, molestation, cruelty by husband, dowry death and immoral traffic rates increased by 10.42%, 23.29%, 09.91%, 101.29%, 181.81% and 100.0% respectively (Table 2.2).

Table 2.1
CRIME AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ASSAM: 1997-2002*

Year	Type of Crime						Total
	Kidnap- ping	Rape	Mole- sta- tion	Cruelty by hus- band	Dowry death	Immoral traffic	
1997	1113	717	686	775	22	10	3323
1998	1117	744	648	739	32	12	3292
	(+4)	(+27)	(-38)	(-36)	(+10)	(+02)	(-31)
1999	1149	703	720	843	40	9	3464
	(+32)	(-41)	(+72)	(+104)	(+08)	(-03)	(+172)
2000	1101	762	777	978	50	15	3683
	(-48)	(+59)	(+57)	(+135)	(+10)	(+06)	(+219)
2001	1070	817	850	1248	59	4	4048
	(-31)	(+55)	(+73)	(+270)	(+09)	(-11)	(+365)
2002	1229	884	754	1560	62	20	4509
	(+159)	(+67)	(-96)	(+312)	(+03)	(16)	(+461)
Total	116	167	68	785	40	10	1186
increase/ decrease from 1997- 2002	(10.42)	(23.29)	(09.91)	(101.29)	(181.81)	(100.0)	(35.69)

Note : Figures in parentheses in rows 2 to 6 show increase/decrease over the previous year, figures in brackets in row 7 shows percentage increase/decrease between 1997 and 2002.

* Source: Office of the DIG, CID, Assam.

Looking at the inter district differences (Table 2.3) in the crime rate; it has been observed that all forms of crime had an increasing rate in all the 23 districts. Kamrup, Cachar and Nagaon happened to be the three worst districts in terms of crime against women, followed by Sonitpur and Dhubri. With respect to rape cases, Kamrup is immediately followed by Sonitpur, while in case of dowry deaths Cachar leads, followed by Barpeta and Kamrup. Incidence of immoral trafficking is negligible elsewhere but as high as 44 in Kamrup. The cultural pattern of the particular district, the rate of urbanization and growth rate of slums seemed to have

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Violence against Women in Manipur

—*Esther Chinnu*

Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which led to domination over and discrimination against women by men. The World Women's Conference, Beijing, 1995 shows the platform of action towards women's full advancement. Women, the world over, face violence due to the patriarchal structure present in the society. The reality and threat of violence is a hindrance in a woman's life and limits her ability to participate and contribute fully to the society. In the North East India, women enjoy greater mobility and visibility than women of other communities in the country. Also practices such as dowry and bride burning are not very prevalent in the region. The above, however, is often cited to portray a picture of equity between men and women in the region. This has also given rise to the presumption that violence against women is not a major issue of concern in the northeast region.

Violence against women can be of any form such as wife beating, marital rape, dowry related violence, sexual abuse, desertion, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization and abortion, coercive use of contraceptives, female infanticide, prenatal

Violence Against Women in Northeast India

selection, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in the educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution etc.

North East Network (NEN) is an organization that believes that women's collective action will bring about a societal change. It is committed to gender justice, changing perspectives of the women of the region from needs to rights and ensure the framing of gender just policies. NEN believes in the progress of society on peace both inside and outside the homes, creating a culture of peace by women's active and informed involvement and by enhancing women's leadership roles.

North East Network conducts research works, field surveys on any of the topics related to our work and also provides training, networks with different women's groups in the regional, national and international levels. NEN works directly in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.

Data collected by North East Network (from field reports, inputs from monthly health collectives meetings, conferences, workshops and surveys which the organization has been conducting over the past couple of years), however, suggest that violence against women, particularly domestic violence, is on the rise in the region. It is a critical area of concern. Registered cases of crimes against women in Manipur reflect that instances of domestic violence are steadily increasing. It is important to note that more than half of the incidences of violence against women is never reported to any enforcement agency or to the authorities. Therefore data collected on such incidences are underreported and cannot represent the current situation of the state.

Violence against women has an impact on the health of women too. According to Dr. R. K. Lenin, Assistant Professor, Psychiatry Department, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal, 'Mental health of women is lower than men. Mental problems are two times higher among women and only a fraction of it takes treatment. Ten per cent of the total

Violence Against Women in Manipur

population suffers from mental illness out of which 1% is very severe'. He elaborates to say that women go for treatment only in extreme cases when pathological problems manifest in the forms of severe headache, backache, depression or general ill-health. The study conducted by North East Network also showed that they lack of support systems to address the problems of mental health. Several NGOs have initiated efforts to help restoring the above issue. One such effort has been that of the North-East Network. With a view to build community level support services to address trauma being faced by women, North East Network has held an intensive training of trainers on Trauma Counselling (over three phases) for women's groups representing different communities (both tribal and non-tribal) in Manipur.

The breakdown of the formal health care services in certain areas due to the ongoing conflict is the other major area of concern. This has specially affected women, as they have to travel for several kilometres to meet their health needs. The ongoing-armed conflict situation and unrest prevalent in the Northeast has intensified the violence faced by women, which takes the forms of sexual, mental or physical abuses or killings and clashes. There have been ethnic conflicts between different groups in the state. The local aspirations and needs not being understood or paid heed to the region became a cauldron of conflict with demands and counter demands. The region has, thus, been witnessing a low intensity war like situation for the past few decades. Although all members of communities are impacted in situations of armed conflict, it has special repercussions on the status of women. The impact on women and girls is far worse because of their status in society and their sex. The region has witnessed a resurgence of patriarchal values and norms which brought about along with new restrictions imposed on the movement of women, dress they wear and more overtly physical violence such as rape, which is systematically used as a tactic against a particular individual or community.

It is noteworthy that women in Manipur play a critical role in economy and trade in the state. Women also control large proportions of trade in the state in essential commodities. The market places are central to women's community life and organizing activities. Women of Manipur have their own spaces in the central market famously known as the IMA KEITHEL. The market women have led many of the mass movements, which characterize the history of the early part of the 20th century in Manipur. Women's hold over economy has been a major contributory factor in their ability to function as agents of change in society. However paradoxically, their economic contribution has not resulted in a corresponding position of influence in political participation and decision-making.

Despite the fact that there has been very strong women's activism in the state of Manipur starting from the early part of the century, the women in Manipur are the worst affected by the ongoing conflict. It has led to the increased instances of violence against women, wherein women are targeted both by state and non-state actors due to their status in society and their sex. Women have been victims of mental, physical and sexual violence in the whole process. It has been estimated that 3 to 4 rape cases occurring in situations of conflict go unreported. The myths attached to rape linked with concepts of 'chastity', 'morality' and 'family honour' and the code of silence maintained by the society leave the victim vulnerable to shame and social stigma. There have been instances where women who resisted rape by perverted *father-in-law*, *uncle-in-law* or *brother-in-law* were beaten and later deserted on some other grounds. Child sexual abuse is on the rise. Newspaper reports in Manipur have filled the daily columns of children being abused not only by strangers but also by trusted family members and relatives.

It has been reported that some jawans of the 6th Manipur Rifles posted at the complex of the Guwahati High Court, Imphal Bench tried to rape two minor girls after they were forcefully abducted from the gate of the court room

number 2. The Imphal Free Press, English Daily reported on 15th March 2003 that a case has been registered at the Manipur Human Rights Commission on the basis of a petition filed by a house wife of Haorang Sabal regarding the rape of her minor daughter in February 2003 by a 22 year old youth. The Imphal Free Press also reported on 26th March 2003, that a man identified as Khwairakpam Gulamjit apparently disappointed over the birth of a baby girl tried to abandon the child after smuggling her out from the Gynaecology ward, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal. Fortunately for the child and her mother the alert security personnel of the hospital came about upon the child near the isolated ward of the hospital and rescued her. The Sangai Express, on 26th February 2003 reported that a PIL has been filed by a group of NGOs in connection with raping of one Meinam Bina Devi of Luwangshangbam Matai Mamang Leikai by personnel of 25 Assam Rifles on October 6th 2001. The Zalen Banner (a kuki newspaper) reported on 13th August 2002 that a 7 year old girl had been raped by K. Ibocha Singh, 51 years at Moirang Pansang, Bishnupur District of Manipur. The Sangai Express reported on 20th February 2003 that Laimayum Ram Sharma, Communication Officer, Regional Health and Family Welfare Training Center, Porompat tried to sexually molest her daughter in-law on November 14 the earlier year and has been suspended from 23rd November. The source also mentioned that Ram's wife Binodini Devi, who admitted taking her son into confidence and instigated the victim girl to undergo abortion twice so that she would remain childless was arrested following a complain filed by the victim. Binodini also confessed the charges of ill-treating her daughter-in-law and not even allowing her to cook meals or to touch water of the family as she belongs to lower middle/lower caste. Husband of the victim Laimayum Rakesh Sharma who had eloped with another girl namely K.Reena Devi has been absconding.

The Sangai Express reported on the 30th March 2003 about the gruesome murder of Mayanglambam Sumatibala

of Tera Tongbram Leikai on December 15th 2002 by Kiran who revealed that he had fallen in love with the deceased and had been having illicit relation since some years back and on the virtue of it, she pursued him to marry her at the earliest, it said. Kiran being already married kept on postponing and the girl had asked him to compensate her financially; unable to cope with the pressure Kiran killed her. The Sangai Express reported on 29th October 2002 about the rape of a mentally challenged girl of 14 years by unknown culprits who caught her and repeatedly raped her. A cloth was stuffed inside the mouth of the victim to silence her cries of protest. The Sangai Express reported on 16th July 2002 about the rape of a social worker by one Pheiroijam Babu Singh, PSO to a political leader in the house of one policeman at Utlou Makha Leikai. The victim also reported that three other police personal and three civilians assisted the PSO in raping her. The Imphal Free Press reported on 14th January 2003 that a woman identified as Mayanlambam Sobhapati Devi, 20, of Urup Arapti Makha Leikai under Singjamei police station, Imphal narrowly escaped death when she was hacked by her husband. According to reports, Manihar, 35 years of age, son of Yamjou committed suicide after attacking his wife. The Imphal Free Press reported on 5th July 2002 about the forced abortion done on a young unmarried girl by her boyfriend and his mother in order to avoid marrying the girl. The foetus was two months old.

Manipur does not have a State Commission for Women to handle crimes against women and to lend a voice to the women in the state. The Manipur Human Rights Commission (MHRC) constituted on 27th June 1998 is a state institution, which has been handling cases of violations of Human rights. As on August 2002, 648 cases pertaining to Human Rights abuse had been registered with MHRC. (*The Telegraph*, 28th August 2002).

Table 4.1
THE NUMBER OF RAPE CASES REGISTERED
WITH THE MHRC

Year	Number of cases
2000	15
2001	8
2002	5.(till July)

Source: Resource Directory North East Network Manipur. 2003.

Table 4.2
STATISTICS ON CRIME AGAINST WOMEN,
1999-2000 (UP TO AUGUST)

Crime Head	No. of cases reported during the year			
	1999	2000	2001	2002 (Up to Aug)
1. Murder	11	11	2	2
2. Rape	10	12	16	7
3. Molestation	14	29	36	24
4. Kidnapping	42	40	69	56
5. Assault	12	9	12	29
6. Suicide	8	11	4	-
7. Women Burning	-	-	-	1
8. Others	8	7	8	15
Total	105	119	147	134

Source: Resource Directory North East Network Manipur. 2003.

5

Alcohol and Drug-Related Violence against Women in Manipur

—*Salam Irene*

To effectively address the issue of violence against women (VAW) one needs to build an understanding of the structural causes of violence, and also to take into account the gender dimensions of the same. Young women are especially vulnerable to coerced sex and rape. Many such women are under the age of twenty. Short changing girls is not only a matter of gender discrimination, it is bad economics and bad social policy¹. But women suffer violence all throughout their life cycle. Census figures, 2001 show that there are 933 Indian women for every 1000 men. So, where are the missing girls? Gender-based violence and exploitation continues unabated. Most girls' sexual encounters are coercive and violent, especially when the partners are under the influence of drugs/alcohol. Estimates place the number of Indian girls sold to brothels at 5000-7000 annually. The practice has been extended beyond national borders. Simultaneously, the number of girls and young women affected and infected by HIV/AIDS is increasing². Women's low economic and social status leaves them vulnerable to unwanted sexual activity

and negates access to accurate and adolescent friendly reproductive health information. More than 6 million of the estimated 10.3 million young people infected with HIV/AIDS are girls. In Manipur, there is a definite co-relation between injecting drug use (IDU) and rapid transmission of HIV to IDUs partners and children. The AIDS pandemic in Manipur has assumed a new dimension with a large section of people in the productive age group, 21- 30, beginning to fall prey to the disease. The number of HIV positive pregnant women is on the rise viz., 2.4% in March 2003³. Of the 14,937 blood samples tested positive in Manipur, 2,178 samples are of women.

In one of its editorials in a local daily paper, *The Imphal Free Press*, it had correctly reported that one of the factors that is throwing the state into total atrophy is the fact that increasingly the idea of violence as a language is being given legitimacy precisely by lack of credible and effective governance. There is a general failure to recognize the systematic nature of women's subordination. There is a tendency to view abuse and violation of women's human rights as individual aberrations rather than as gender-based violence. The reluctance to characterize the subordination of women as human rights violation is a result of deep-rooted cultural, traditional and age-old practices. Even the state, which is generally ready to regulate and intrude into most areas of civil life especially with regard to freedom of expression, is singularly averse to interfering in the private area of family.

Key issues which women's groups in India identified during the Beijing process included the need for transformative education, reproductive rights, freedom from violence and women's human rights. In totality, the UN Beijing Conference in 1995 identified a substantial agenda of actions needed to enable women to enjoy full human rights, to have access to critical resources like land and water and to realize their potential contribution to national development. It is now well documented that more enlightened gender policies and investments in women's education and health

lead to higher human development and economic growth. But, while human rights violations occur largely in the public sphere and are perceived as perpetuated and redressed by the state, the private sphere is inferior to the public sphere. And it is in the private sphere that most alcohol and drug related violence against women occurs.

The average age at which Indian men develop alcohol dependence today is 29 years. Forty four per cent of middle level executives stress for their higher level of alcohol consumption. Despite prohibition being in force in Manipur for more than a decade and drug use being recognized as public health emergency (in 1995), alcohol and drug use is common among all sections and strata of society. Use of liquor is also customarily related with traditional rituals and festivities, especially in the hill areas of the state (home brewed rice liquor). Practically in every village liquor is brewed according to the requirements of its populace.

Women are especially vulnerable to alcohol and drug related violence. There is a definite link between increase in alcohol intake and increase in wife and child abuse. Any individual under the influence of alcohol loses his inhibitions and in an inebriated state doesn't think twice about inflicting insults, humiliations viz., verbal, physical, psychological, emotional upon family members who are usually already asleep or partly asleep when the intoxicated family member returns home in the late evening or night. And intoxicated individuals have a habit of raising their voices, repeating the same phrases/sentences over and over again until they are successful at provoking or goading other family members especially wives into an argument/quarrel. The breath and body odour of alcoholics is generally nauseating and unpleasant to women and children, a source of humiliation and embarrassment before members of the extended family/locality. Very often the alcoholic is unsteady on his feet and falls down flat on his face ignominously. The alcoholic's irresponsible behaviour becomes public knowledge. Women and children in the family become timid, subservient, afraid and emotions are born out of sense of shame.

A survey of an International Institution of Population Studies revealed attitudes that justify, if not condone wife beating. Women are not just beaten, but psychologically, sexually and emotionally abused. As a part of alcohol related violence, male drug users are not as a rule physically violent, instead they have recourse to manipulation in which they possess great proficiency and often forcing their partners into coerced sex, which results not only in the spread of communicable diseases like STD's and HIV, but also in unwanted or early pregnancy, unsafe abortion, early unplanned marriage. Early marriages before women have developed sense of autonomy result in unequal relations between women and men rendering women more vulnerable to VAW.

The International Centre for Research on Women estimates that 60% of women face violence at some point in their marriage. What is abuse? A woman is often easy prey to abuse within her relationships. Physically and financially weaker, she takes on the role of the less aggressive partner. Wrapping her identity around her marriage, she holds on to this fragile sense of security for life. When children step in, the woman makes more space for them and less even emotionally for herself. In her new role as a tigress protecting her cubs, she is more willing to maintain the harmony in her home⁴. Usually, women affected by alcoholic abuse assume this mantle of tigress. Most women urban/rural for years bear alcoholism and abuse silently and they are unable to stand up against their own husbands. But in a specific act of abuse, can good women collectively act in defence of their interests. Whimpering wives stoically bearing out beatings and humiliation, can turn the table over, and beat their own menfolk - a humiliation, no man wants to undergo. Some women are prodded into action because of the fear that their grown-up sons may take to drinking like their fathers⁵.

Manipur is a state with a society in transition in which traditional social support systems have given way to the emergence of nuclear families, where both working parents have inadequate time generally to inculcate/reinforce sound

moral values in their offspring. However, it is in their teen years that adolescents needed to be provided proper guidance, so as to cope with the changes taking place in the bodies at puberty. Young women including teenage girls are simultaneously the fastest growing risk group with regard to HIV/AIDS because of their generally lower status, inadequate empowerment with reference to decision-making and social norms of acceptable behaviour, which have been handed down over centuries. They lack access to preventive interventions and technologies, treatment, care and support. A general lower quality of health of many Indian women also increases their vulnerability to infection, thus becoming a major factor in the spread of the epidemic⁶.

This is even more pertinent to women suffering from STI's. Where violence is seen as a means of monitoring and correcting women's behaviour, women may be as likely as men, to believe that it is appropriate to beat a women for certain transgressions, including covert contraceptive use. But most young women have inadequate knowledge/information on reproductive health and rights and are easily manipulated through control over their sexuality and fertility. Even for women who possess this knowledge, there is a constant contradiction between the need and desires of the individual and the demand of society. Moreover, no other area is as potentially risky when involving men than counseling and testing for STI's especially HIV. Women are justifiably fearful of partner violence or abandonment if they are found to have an STI or be sero-positive.

This should not blind us to the fact that the historic focus on services for women has led to neglect of men's need for reproductive health information and services, often to the disadvantage of both women and men. Men are often less knowledgeable about anatomy and physiology than women, but more reluctant than women to show their ignorance. Often, as a result of this ignorance, young men in college and even teenage boys in schools get their girlfriends pregnant. A survey in India documented that even educated men lack knowledge about reproductive issues. But taking

advantage of a young women's naivete and innocence to coerce her into a physical relationship, is a form of VAW practiced on young women especially by intoxicated men, on a 'high' from drugs/alcohol, or both together. Although while intoxicated, these men are resistant/oblivious to the concept of gender equity, fearing to lose power/manliness, to which they feel entitled, there is an urgent need to promote change in gender dynamics. It is also important to look at young women separately, especially high school and college students, as their knowledge and attitudes are likely to be different from that of older women, as also their sources or lack of sources of information. They generally have limited access to information, and smaller social networks, more so, in the hill areas of Manipur.

The use of mind-altering substances goes back to the historical records we have from several early cultures and civilizations. The first sanskrit texts of ancient Indian civilization, the hymns and the poems of the Vedas describe the use of a still-mysterious agents, soma, which some scholars regarded as being hallucinogenic mushrooms and others, as more likely to have been either an opiate or marijuana derivative. Marijuana itself is described in the Ayurveda as useful for poets, musicians, singers, saints and manual labourers. A review of history suggests that in many cultures and times, mind-altering agents were not only a part of public life but a significant component of religious and ritual life.

Neither alcohol nor drug use is a recent phenomena in Imphal. Opium and ganja were used from the early times. But few people use these substances today, although the cultivation of ganja is still continuing both in the valley and hill districts of Manipur. Alcohol use is associated from early times with many rituals and festivities especially in the hill areas. But to understand the morphology of drug use, we need to refer to the history of opium, the parent agent of all opiate narcotics, including heroin, the drug of choice in Manipur. At the start of the last millennium it was arguably the most effective agent mankind had. While the opiates had many medicinal uses, they have probably always been

addictive. The historical spread of poppy cultivation into South East Asia can only be guessed at, but by the time European explorers penetrated mainland South-East Asia from the 1600's onwards, opium was known and was used for its medicinal values. The most significant change in the history of opiate use came about in the late 18th/19th centuries, and involved interestingly financial issues raised by another psychoactive agent - tea. Both the British and the Dutch East India Companies were involved in the lucrative tea trade, then China's major agricultural export. Tea became more than popular in Europe and the demand for tea was immense but Ching dynasty, China had little demand for British goods. China wanted to trade tea for European and British silver. The result was a rapidly growing trade imbalance. Desperate to address the trade imbalance, and to find a product of interest to Chinese consumers, the British began importing increasing quantities of opium to China from Bengal then a British Indian colony.

For China, the results were devastating. Opium imports led to what may be one of the world's first and best-documented epidemics of opiate addiction. China banned opium trafficking but failed to control it. In 1840, China responded to this crisis with the farmers dumping of 20,000 chests of British opium into the South China sea. The victory of the British in the first opium war and the European victory in the Second Opium War, the dramatic expansion of poppy cultivation in Colonial India and the fortunes made in controlling the shipping and distribution of opium into China, the first great narcotics economy was born. As in China, colonial economic forces (French) created in Laos another narcotic based economy. While these historical events are well-documented, they are little understood or noted in today's debate on drug use. Two further interventions were to change the history of opiate use the syringe and heroin. Opium is not an ideal agent for injection but in the 1930's, morphine was methylated. Adding fat-soluble methyl groups made the new compound heroin and able to enter the brain much more quickly and efficiently. Through the 1930s and 1940s heroin,

a pain agent, increasingly left the hospital and moved to the streets.

After the World War II, with the collapse of colonial empires and the emergence of Communist China, the opium industry in Asia went through profound changes. The defeated remnants of the Chinese National Army, the Kuo-Min-tang, who did not make it to Taiwan, fled into the hills of Northern Burma and began to develop the Shan, the Kokang and Wa regions, now so dominant in Asia's heroin trade. The Vietnam War era brought the Asia trade a gain into world focus. Burma, after General Win's coup, partnered with the KMT to supply the growing heroin demand among the United States forces in Indo-China. The next great change in opium came with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; the Afghan resistance, desperate for funds to buy munitions, turned to poppy cultivation and using opium to fund their war effort.

There is no accurate data about when the use of opiate and pharmaceutical drugs started in Manipur. Use of drugs like Prodom, Mandrax, Calmpose etc. among the youth started in the early 1970's. Towards the end of 1970's, there was a transition towards injecting of morphine, norphine and pethidine. In the early 1980's, there was a scarcity of morphine in Imphal and the morphine injectors started using heroin as a substitute. Injecting of heroin is more economical than smoking or chasing it⁷.

The Indo-Myanmar border of 1643 kms touches four states of the North East including Manipur (398 Km). The terrain along the border belt is densely forested. The border is almost open. There are numerous jungle routes across the border, which are being utilized by smugglers, drug traffickers and other trans-border criminals without fear of detection by the security forces or the enforcement agencies. The population along the Indo-Myanmar border is tribal and almost all tribes have trans border ethnic contiguity. Mutually the residents are economically dependent and are in constant touch. Hill tribals inhabiting the border areas in India and Myanmar have traditionally enjoyed the facility of free

movement up to 40 km either side of the border. The long and porous nature of the Indo-Myanmar border and the facility of movement without travel documents have led to the growth of smuggling activities on this border. Contraband goods enter India concealed in permissible head loads carried by the tribals. Many tribals viz., Nagas, Paites, Kukis, Lushais, Hmars etc. are inhabitants on both sides of the border. Identification or detection of illegal entrants is very difficult. Moreover, there is a substantial production of opium in Myanmar⁸.

To decrease/ eliminate drug related violence against women, the reasons for drug use need to be understood. Drugs are easily available in many parts of the Northeast India and different vested interests continue to ensure their entry and distribution. Reasons for drug use are many - peer pressure, curiosity, lack of fear in experimenting with drugs, unemployment, lack of opportunities, disappointments and frustrations at home or outside the home, defiance, rebellion, lack of or no communication within a family (especially nuclear families), low self-esteem, poor decision-making skills, lack of social skills, lack of impulse control etc. Moreover the environment of Manipur characterized by a failing/bankrupt economy, lack of law and order, corruption in every sphere, have exacerbated the problem. Young people have nothing to look forward and are vulnerable to drug use and abuse. This tendency gets a further impetus from causative factors like relationship difficulties, illness, financial problems, academic failure, depression, poor mental health etc⁹.

VAW is escalating to the extent that it is becoming a commonplace occurrence. Incidents of VAW are regularly reported in the local dailies. Although society and individuals do not dispute the fact that perpetrators of violence should be brought to book, such is the lacunae in our judicial system that very few culprits are actually punished and generally they are free to strike again with impunity. It is equally difficult for a woman victim of violence to file an FIR with the police. In order to curtail and gradually eliminate VAW, we must all analyze its causes.

Young men, especially adolescents in their late teens are sensitive, vulnerable, secretive, impatient, and defiant, yet possessed of a dynamic energy. This energy has to be channelled correctly and creatively so that disappointments resulting from a quarrel or rejection by a girlfriend, parents' refusal to purchase sundry articles demanded and deemed necessary by young men e.g., a motorcycle, car etc. Restrictions on mobility for example do not result in these young men/adolescent boys, finding solace in 'chasing the dragon, injecting illicit/licit drugs, drinking unrestrained quantities of alcohol. Such practices are regarded among peer groups as a form of deep bonding; deviations and non-participation being frowned upon. Under the influence of drugs/alcohol, many young men dating young women at 'Restaurants' in and around Imphal especially where seating arrangements place the couple in a compromising position, place these women at risk, as drugs and alcohol induce a state of euphoria where inhibitions have no place, and risky behaviour is the norm.

Young men and adolescent boys are unable to discuss their hopes, fears, ambitions, desires, sexual drive, insecurities with their parents/family members/community elders, they are also wary, hostile, unreceptive to advice/reprimand, and because of the traditional taboos on discussions on sexuality. There is an unmet need for counseling services so as to enable them to make an informed choice, while at the same time, respecting women's rights and choices. It is important to give young men a sense of self-worth so that they can define themselves, instead of letting others define them. However, women deserve special consideration from a biological, social and economic standpoint, especially when their health is at risk, by limiting their ability to use birth control without the partner's permission. The anti-retroviral drug nevirapine is administered free of cost to HIV infected pregnant mothers at JN Hospital, Imphal, to prevent parent-child transmission of HIV. Most women are infected through sexual transmission of the virus usually through no fault of their own (most women have only one life partner, who they believe

to be mutually faithful). Although Nevirapine prevents parent-child transmission, after the birth of the baby, the infected mother finds it near impossible to access antiretroviral for herself because of the high cost of the regimen, and because of the discrimination, stigma, taboos associated with the disease. Despite the state-wide, mass awareness campaign on 'safe sex', it is important to remember that such emphasis with little understanding of the context in which safety is provided, is meaningless, for sexual and reproductive decisions are made against a backdrop of personal values, desires, morals, apprehensions, relationship and social pressures. The reality of women's lives is that they lack the power to say 'no' to unsafe sexual practices. Few young women have the opportunity/freedom to discuss issues of sexuality, desire, confusion, passion, doubt - they are instead socialized to be submissive and reticent, which leaves them unable to refuse sex or insist on safe sex with male drug and alcohol users. More and more young people are jeopardizing their lives, by smoking, ingesting, injecting drugs and drinking alcohol. It is a reality however, that drugs and alcohol have an appeal for young people at a susceptible time in their lives. Many young women, especially college students between the age of 17-25, have contracted STD's from their boyfriends or through promiscuous behaviour. According to an article in a popular daily, these infections are contracted at 'licentious parties' in the cities, mushrooming restaurants where drugs/alcohol are freely available (despite the ban on its use) and parties turn into sexual orgies, where the chances of girls (young women) becoming infected with STD, HIV, AIDS is very high, because of low or no condom use, and multiple sexual pairings¹⁰. Despite great strides in research and treatment in the field of medicine, nobody knows for sure, how long patients on new antiretroviral regimens will survive, before the virus finally out mutates the current armamentarium.

When teenagers begin to distance themselves from parents and family, the latter have to persist and ensure that lines of communication between them remain open. This

is usually a disheartening and ungratifying exercise, but parents, despite sullen, provocative, aggressive, defiant behaviour of their offspring, must continue to support and demonstrate affection for their offspring during these crucial changing and turbulent years. This is of paramount importance especially in nuclear families, where parents provide the only support system. Changes in values, faster pace of life, competition, rivalry, and jealousy - all contribute in making young women sexually active much earlier than their peers, just a decade or two ago. Such young women are often physically attracted to male drug users, who in the prime of their youth are physically attractive, charming, and adept at manipulating emotions; as that proficiency/ability has already been finely honed to source money from parents, friends, girlfriends to buy their daily 'fix'.

To minimize VAW, raise greater awareness on the issue, mothers and daughters could come together to evolve practical strategies in 'ma-beti' (mother-daughter) melas, where through focused group discussions, women not only become aware of their rights, but know how to ensure that these rights are not infringed upon, either in private or public spaces e.g., how to fend off an unwelcome advance from an intoxicated person while commuting for work in public transport buses. Women must all possess management and livelihood skills, because economic independence is a vital tool for women's empowerment; women also need to acquire skills in networking, so that a victim of violence can easily and promptly access support mechanisms. As women work long hours, both in the house and outside, they are vulnerable not just to communicable diseases, but because of their 'double burden', to anaemia, physical and emotional stress, gynaecological problems etc. That is why, knowledge of reproductive health and rights should be about helping women and adolescents regulating their fertility safely and effectively, to conceive only if they so desire, and when they desire.

The responsibility of states for acts, which impair the rights of women, is sometimes mistakenly perceived as applying only when state agents or officials are the actual

6

'THE SEEN' AND 'THE UNSEEN' Sociological Dimensions to Violence against Women in Manipur

—N. Vijaylakshmi Brara

INTRODUCTION

War, conflict and aggression have traditionally been associated with men. Many sociologists studying symbolism say that even the shape of the bullet, and its piercing the body has a lot of maleness about it. Rape and wife battering then form a miniscule part of such acculturated notions. Women in such paradigm then become receivers, sufferers and the most effected. When, consequently, the state becomes the aggressor it is the same women who are at the receiving end and the most aggrieved.

What we see in the rest of India is the organizations of women, which are raising their voices against the aggression of the first kind. And what we see in Manipur is the struggle of Manipuri women against the oppressive forces of the state as well as the non-state/private groups who shake the edifice of their society. They have been looking beyond individuals and they hold themselves responsible to maintain the order in their society. But they have not yet raised their heads to look whether this order of the society, which they feel responsible to uphold, is egalitarian, non-paternalist and non-exploitative *vis-à-vis* their own standing.

THE GENERAL SCENARIO

The Visible Groups

In the present scenario we have strong women's front in every community in Manipur. Among the Meitei community (the valley based) it is the Meira-Paibies, the Naga Women's Union among the Nagas, the Kuki Women's Association, Lamkang Women's Union, Moyon Women's Union, Chothe Women's Union, Tangkhul Shanao Long etc. among the various other hill tribes. In short we have organized women's force in each tribe and community.

The 'Meira Paibis' are the torch-bearing women. They hold Mashaals (torch) and roam in the locality to keep a watch on drunkenness and drug-abuse. They are also protectors of the people against the repressive acts of the armed forces. They make a human wall in cases where innocent local youths are forcibly being taken away by the armed forces in the name of containing insurgents. They are the only ones who dare to warn and scold the people in under-ground movement for their excesses. Everybody is cautious of them. They dare to get lathi charged, to sit for hunger strikes and even go to jail for a right cause.

So are the women's groups in the hills. The Naga Mother's Association (NMA) and the Kuki Women's Association (KWA) and other women's groups of the various other tribes are the guardians of their respective tribes. They played a pivotal role during Naga-Kuki clashes, where barbarism of the worst kind got unleashed in its naked proportions in the name of ethnic cleansing. Even infants were beheaded. It was at that moment that NMA and KWA went hand in hand long stretches in the hills (sometimes walking 3-4 days continuously) to meet their respective under-ground outfits to tell them to stop killing each other.

The major activities of these women's groups in the hills include going from village to village preaching about peace and harmony, conducting fasting programmes to end the ethnic clashes, condemning, protesting and demanding compensation and judicial enquiry into killing of innocent

villagers by the security forces. At the same time like the Meira-Paibies, they stand against the drug abuse, prostitution, alcoholism, gambling and the vices affecting their society.

Manipuri women's groups are the watch-dogs of their society. They are the mothers. Like any other mother they can go to any extent to safeguard the lives and interests of their children and their society. Nowhere else, will one find such vast network of organizations of women. Their handling of the most difficult situations in most non-violent ways is remarkable. They are a treasure in themselves. Their organizational skills and their non-violent means even in the face of barbaric violence can be a wonderful learning and sharing experience within the South Asian region.

Women in Manipur are very visible. Besides these socio-political groupings mentioned above, we are also very proud of exclusive women's market called the 'Ima Keithel'. The women here are mostly vegetable vendors and cloth merchants who mostly sell their own produce. No man is allowed to establish his shop here. These market vendors also have a very strong organization. The police are afraid to hassle them. Long time ago, when I was in Delhi, I saw a play about how the Ima-Keithel women successfully protested against their area being converted into a multi-storey building. Presently, the agitation is revived and one can again see them in strength sitting in dharna outside their sheds. If one goes through the history of Manipur it was the Ima-Keithel, which was the launching pad of the two-epoch making Nupi Lals (women's fights). It was here where they organized and pursued their movements and fought against the colonial forces. It is not only an economic base of the Imas, but also their political base.

Formal Political Arena-trying to be Visible

The women's associations are very strong and powerful bodies. But one also notices that empowerment of women, however, is miserably inadequate considering the tremendous works done by them. The representation of women in Panchayat, Zilla Parishad etc. has not cut much ice as the

women representations cannot come out of the corrupt political culture, thus diminishing their effectiveness in these institutions. There is a lone woman MLA in the entire 60-member legislative assembly. In reverse to that we have very impressive representation of women in the lower rung of our democratic institutions. In fact, we often cross the 33% reservations granted to the women, where some women are able to get elected from non-reserved seats. But, it has not changed the scenario. They are struggling to acquire their legitimate power from the patriarchal state machinery and even within the family.

During my long work with the women panchayat members I was often reminded of the film 'The God Mother', in which actress Shabana Azmi rises from a submissive wife to a powerful politician. She rises in her position through various rigors of 'dirty politics' and in the process she herself becomes a power hungry, corrupt and sadistic person. But what happens in the end? She saves the life of a woman whom her own son wants to forcefully marry even paying with her own life. She went through a process whereby she did what most of the male politicians at her genre did and then finally emerged as a woman with her own mind. OK, so what, after all its only a film. So let's go to the real world.

Atombi Devi (name changed) is an upa-gram pradhan. Her husband is a drunkard. He really troubles her. But in his presence she has to say that he fully supports her. Her son was killed by the security forces few years back. Yet, inspite of such hardships, she is vigorously working for the development of the area. Shanti (name changed) is a gram pradhan. Her husband always takes over from her even in her official meetings. His interference is such a nuisance for the villagers that it may hamper her future electoral prospects. Yet she lets him to take the lead. She has no choice. There is another woman gram pradhan by the name Laila (name changed) who was also a member of the local Meira Paibi group. But her pradhanship, which was seen as her entry into official politics was completely denounced by her husband and sons. They even threatened to leave the house if she

contested another election. Recently, I invited one-gram pradhan of a panchayat in Assam for a meeting in Delhi. She hesitated and told me that she should take permission from her husband and also her son for going to Delhi! Talk about devolution of power!

The husbands are often seen trying to influence their wife members. I have been noticing this especially when I am in conversation with the women pradhans. Both the women pradhans and I have learnt to simply nod our heads (we dare not ignore their opinions) and carry on with our discussions. In the other parts of India, a term has been coined for them—Pradhanpati (Pradhan's husband). These unofficial pradhans are much more powerful than the official pradhans themselves. In one of the meetings hosted by Najma Heptullah in honour of women panchayat leaders across the country, many of them voiced unanimously "we can do better if we are not restricted by our male colleagues, male members of the family and bureaucracy."

The women members whom I have been interacting in the field are socially very active. The reservation of the offices of the pradhan and up-pradhan for women has ensured their participation in the affairs of the village. In their official capacity they are effective. Some people in a village told us that women are considered more sincere, less corrupt and less quarrelsome than the male members. The fact that some of them initially are part of the Meira-Paibi movement that gives their curriculum-vitae a facelift. But we should not forget that they are also 'soft targets'. They are marginalized in all spheres of life specially in education and an overwhelming Chatnabis (societal rules) hovering around her telling her that no matter what, her husband and her household come first. Bureaucrats do not take them seriously and the MLAs have a 'Karino Ibemaa' (what is the matter, dear girl) attitude with lighthearted mannerism. In the backdrop of all so strong Meira-Paibies movements one also cannot help overhearing remarks like, "What can a woman do?" or "A woman should look after her children and home rather than running here and

there". If asked to comment on the woman zilla adhayaksha, a smirk comes on people's faces that evade by saying that a "Boss is a Boss". Then there are actually those people who claim that a male adhayaksha is an obvious choice for the people. If reservation has to be given then two posts of adhayaksha should be created - one male and another female! Isn't our Prime Minister mooted this idea too? He mentioned in his Independence Day speech that the reservation bill in the parliament will get an easy acceptance if there is a provision of dual membership- one male and another female!

Now, let us also try to reach the higher power block - the legislature. We have numerous examples of women MLAs/MPs. Some are prominent and some are not so prominent as in other parts of the country. Here we have to realize that most of these are the women who, because of their family backgrounds, did not have to struggle their ways into the political arena. Therefore, they are neither marginalized nor taken lightly because of their 'connections'. But they still work under the paradigms set by the male patriarchs. In fact, Indira Gandhi felt proud when on one occasion she was declared the only 'man' in the Parliament. She even criticized the airhostesses saying that they are not 'attractive'. Most of the women politicians are conscious of not upsetting the traditional role model of women. In other words, not only our women who have barely managed to reach the lower rungs of the governance but also the top women politicians of our country have to work under the Chatnabis (social rules) of their respective patriarchies.

Coming back to the Meira paibis, most of these women are naive and innocent. They work on their instincts. So, whoever can trigger their motherly emotions can get them on their side. This kind of instinctive reaction comes in the way of their role as watchdogs. That is the reason why, in spite of such a strong body, we do not have any leaders among them - leaders of reckoning, not only of the Meira Paibis but also a leader of the whole society.

OF WOMEN SHOULD NOT BE PRESUMED AS FOR WOMEN:

Another problem with these groups as I perceive is that these women are reluctant to rock the social norms of the society. They do not address it. Neither do they have any policy nor any ideology towards domestic violence, polygamous liaisons and other male generated violence, which are prevalent in our societies. Neither do they address to the women's issues in general. They are the organizations only of women but not necessarily for women.

A vacuum in this area was felt very strongly, especially, when I heard the story of Nisha Sharma, a young woman from Noida, Delhi, who handed over her would-have-been husband to the police. I started wondering. Are we in Manipur different? Perhaps yes, but only a bit. We do not demand dowry openly. We do not beat the bride's father. But don't we taunt and humiliate the new bride if she has not brought what we expected? To further my argument let me cite some incidents that I came across during my fieldwork. I will cite two/three recent incidents to clarify my point. One woman fully established in her profession married a man in the age, which we generally call "late marriage". After a long gap she conceived but had a daughter. The boy's mother convinced him to get married again to have a son! The wife considering her status felt extremely humiliated. She went to the local Meira-paibis to complain. But this is how they reacted, "A man can marry four-five times, so what if he is marrying another one." After sometime, the second wife, half his age, also delivered a baby girl. But that's another story. The second incident also relates to the polygamous liaison, but in this case nobody including the wife was objecting to the second marriage. The Meira-paibis were instead impressing upon the husband to give some property to the first wife. The husband getting another wife was not even considered worth discussing. It is high time the Meira Paibis have a serious look into this continuing social practice. We have been witnessing of late the domestic conflicts because of polygamy. Only a few days back there was this report of the wife having four children pouring kerosene over

her self and trying to immolate herself devastated over her husband's eloping with another woman.

There was yet another incident, which is related to a dictum passed by an under-ground outfit directing Manipuri women to wear only their traditional dress. One girl not taking it seriously went about in a salwar-kameez. Some men very rudely remarked her in the public. The local Meira-paibis reacted to it by scolding the girl as to why she simply could not obey and wear the traditional dress.

It seems here that the Meira-paibis' predominant role in our society is to see that peace and social order is maintained. They are yet to adopt the role of challenging the social customs which are loaded with gender biases and fight for an egalitarian social set-up. The Chatnabis or the social norms are upheld even when they are not women-friendly. Any anormative behavior that goes against the social customs is discouraged and denounced. The traditions and the customs are not challenged and, according to them, not meant to be challenged.

In the socio-political sphere we have the "Meira-Paibis": in the economic sphere we have the Ima-Keithel. If we look at these two public spheres, which generally the social scientists have tended to do, then one gets a picture that the status of Manipuri women is indeed very high because of their high visibility in the public sphere. But are these the only indices through which one can and should analyze the status? Is visibility in public sphere the only criteria?

WHAT ABOUT THE DOMESTIC SPHERE?

What about the social norms as mentioned earlier? True, we do not have female infanticides, dowry deaths, rape and molestation. (But wait! haven't we started witnessing the last two, of late?). Our Niyams are very subtly laid, brushed under the carpet, wrapped with 'ceremonialities', therefore, difficult to pinpoint and therefore difficult to denounce.

THE SUBTLE NORMS : THE UNSEEN

Women, who is married through proper rituals and has a first born son can only lead the ritual procession of marriage

or of the 6th day celebration of the birth of the child or on any other auspicious occasion. It is considered inauspicious if a woman who had married through elopement and does not have an issue or has only a girl child, to hold the gifts of any ritual occasion.

When a girl is born, it is not as catastrophic as probably in the Hindi belt, yet, it brings sympathy from the people, when invariably everybody would say, 'doesn't matter, try for a boy next time'. The pundit in the Swasthipujah ceremony of the girl child holds a ceremony of propitiating the god to "gift" a son next time.

Behavior patterns of the girl child and the boy child are also very clearly defined. A girl child is supposed to be obedient, soft spoken and play quietly. A loud behavior, shouting and jumping is remarked as 'nang nupa raa'? (Are you a boy?). I remember an incident where a small girl wanting to fly a kite was carrying one in her hand. Around 2-3 people whom she met on the way asked her, "Nupi na telanga paibra" (does a girl fly kite?). Needless to say she reached home depressed and confused. The societal behaviour pattern had already condemned her to her expected role. It is here that the oppression starts. Similarly to a boy who is coy and shy, people say he should have been a girl. Contrary to the aggressive image in public in the form of Meira-paibis, submissiveness in the domestic sphere is approved, accepted and desired by the society and even in the face of an aggressive and violent male.

The Meitei marriage ceremony is the embodiment of subjugation of woman by her husband. The term for husband is mapuroiba, which means the master. During the marriage ceremony the bride has to go around the bridegroom and shower flowers on him after each round. Although, the boy's family and the girl's family do not stand in a rigid hierarchy as seen in the mainland, there are certain ritual roles which connote a certain superior status to the boy's family. The newly wed girl is expected to involve herself in domestic chores the moment she enters the groom's house and when all the guests leave. The very next day she

is expected to get up before sunrise and take the reigns of household work. When she delivers a child, it is the mother and other women of her natal home who will be responsible for post natal and child-care. That includes washing all the soiled clothes and cooking the food separately for her, since she as well as her child is under birth pollution for the period of 12 days. Till that time the boy's family will not touch the girl or the child while it is considered all right for the girl's side to contract defilement.

The ritual position of the women in the social gatherings as well as at home is the left side, while the right side is reserved for the men. Social anthropologists would be familiar with the concepts of left and right as propounded by Mary Douglas in her book "Purity and Danger." Left is associated with impurity, defilement, death and women, while purity, auspiciousness, life and men symbolize right. The seating arrangement in the famous Lai Haraoba ceremony (pleasing the deity) or any other public function is based on the similar principle. In the bedroom, the husband sleeps on the right side of the bed. The daughters' room is in the left side of the traditional Meitei household structure. The dead body, which brings defilement, is taken out from the left side of the house.

The role of younger women within the family structure is seen exclusively in the realm of Leishabi (unmarried, marriageable daughter) and Mou (the daughter-in-law). Therefore, if you are neither, people cannot define your position in the society. Women, who decide not to marry and cross the 'age', cannot be defined in any terminological category. In any ritual occasion, the functions and duties are specified for the Leishabies and the mous. The women, who are beyond marriageable age and yet not married, do not know their exact position in the whole set-up. Interestingly, women belonging to such category are increasing in the Meitei social set-up. There are many women, who are professionals and very well established as doctors, journalists, lawyers etc and who are finding it difficult to adjust with the unchanging norms of their society. They say that a mou's role is too demanding. No matter what one is at

Violence Against Women in Northeast India

Table 7.2

**STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES IN ASCENDING ORDER OF
TOTAL CRIME RATE AGAINST WOMEN**

(per million persons)

Low		Upper -Middle	
1. Lakshadweep	0.00	17. Chandigarh	92.15
2. Daman & Deiu	7.48	18. Kerala	95.76
3. Nagaland	25.26	19. Tripura	99.11
4. Meghalaya	29.88	20. Jammu & Kashmir	101.01
5. Pondicherry	31.83	21. Orissa	110.35
6. Punjab	35.81	22. Dadra & Nagar Haveli	111.02
7. Bihar	39.98	23. Sikkim	114.60
8. Manipur	44.59	24. Assam	118.78
Lower -Middle		High	
9. Goa	50.54	25. Haryana	119.41
10. Tamil Nadu	72.03	26. Andhra Pradesh	121.97
11. Karnataka	74.51	27. Mizoram	127.89
12. Andaman & Nicobar	75.18	28. Himachal Pradesh	139.42
13. Uttar Pradesh	77.40	29. Maharashtra	173.81
14. West Bengal	86.77	30. Delhi	197.14
15. Gujarat	89.27	31. Madhya Pradesh	206.97
16. Arunachal Pradesh	91.78	32. Rajasthan	208.16

The above tables directly quoted from the paper written by Chandan Mukherjee, P. Rastogi and N. Krishnaje (Economic and Political Weekly, Oct. 27th, 2001), indicate the position of Tripura in respect of total crime scenario in the Indian states and the position of Tripura in respect of crime against women. As per their analysis, Delhi, Kerala, Mizoram and Pondicherry are in the high crime category. The other in this group includes Rajasthan, M.P., Gujarat and U.P., Chandigarh. And the 'low' crime category states include Tripura, Punjab, West Bengal, U.P., Nagaland, Meghalaya and Bihar. While in case of Tripura, it is obvious that general

Table 7.3

DISTRIBUTION OF STATES/UTs BY LEVEL OF TOTAL CRIME RATE AND CRIME RATE AGAINST WOMEN

Total Crime Rate	Crime Rate			
	Low	Lower-Middle	Upper-Middle	High
	Lakshadweep Punjab Meghalaya Nagaland Bihar	West Bengal Uttar Pradesh	Tripura	
Lower Middle	Manipur	Andaman & Nicobar	Jammu and Kashmir Sikkim Assam Orissa	Andhra Pradesh Haryana
Upper-Middle	Daman & Deiu	Arunachal -Pradesh Tamil Nadu Karnataka Goa	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	Himachal Pradesh Maharashtra
High	Pondichery	Gujarat	Chandigarh Kerala	Madhya Pradesh Mizoram Rajasthan Delhi

crime rate (excluding extremist violence) is very low but in case of Bihar and U.P., the crime rate appears to be too low to be credible. On the other hand, the authors observed that crime against women (as per NCRB data) is very high in Delhi, M.P., Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, A.P., Mizoram, Maharashtra etc. It is notable that all those states, which are big, are especially prone to crime against women.

But there is a common conception that CAW (Crime against women) is directly associated with overall crime. And

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it is true that there seems to be a correspondence between them. But, Tripura, M.P. and Haryana are exception. In A.P. and Haryana, the crime rate is categorized in lower middle group. In Tripura, crime rate is low. But all the three states are notably exception of the common inference that CAW is associated with overall crime rate.

On the other hand, exceptions are Daman, Diu, Pondicherry and Gujarat. On available date collected from Tripura Police (CID) and from the data of registered cases in TCW, I will try to say something about my understanding on high CAW in Tripura in the background of low overall crime rate.

Data Collected from Tripura Police

Table 7.4
DETAILS OF CASES ON DOMESTIC/EXTREMIST VIOLENCE AND RAPE CASE REGISTERED IN WEST DIST. DURING THE PERIOD FROM 1994 TO 30.04.2003

YEAR	NO. OF CASES REGISTERED		DIFFERENT P.S.
	DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	RAPE	EXTREMIST VIOLENCE UPON WOMEN
1994	19	26	2
1995	34	33	N/A
1996	42	23	N/A
1997	30	23	3
1998	19	17	1
1999	23	17	1
2000	40	27	3
2001	80	25	2
2002	76	44	3
2003 upto 30.04.03	34	10	2

Table 7.5

DETAILS OF CASES ON DOMESTIC /EXTREMIST VIOLENCE AND RAPE CASE REGISTERED IN SOUTH DIST. DURING THE PERIOD FROM 1994 TO 30.04.03.

No. of	Cases Regd	In	DIFFERENT P.S.
YEAR	DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	RAPE	EXTREMIST VIOLENCE UPON WOMEN
1994	12	16	1
1995	23	25	N/A
1996	27	30	N/A
1997	32	32	N/A
1998	40	22	N/A
1999	53	28	N/A
2000	43	36	N/A
2001	62	29	1
2002	91	30	2
2003 upto 30.04.03	14	06	N/A

Table 7.6

DETAILS OF CASES ON DOMESTIC /EXTREMIST VIOLENCE AND RAPE CASE REGISTERED IN NORTH DIST. DURING THE PERIOD FROM 1994 TO 30.04.03.

NO. OF YEAR	CASES REGD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	IN RAPE	DIFFERENT P.S. EXTREMIST VIOLENCE UPON WOMEN
1994	09	19	4
1995	11	24	2
1996	7	22	4
1997	10	26	2
1998	12	10	3
1999	08	22	6
2000	10	17	1
2001	09	28	1
2002	06	33	N/A
2003 upto 30.04.03	01	08	1