

Exploring the Women's Community Movement in Manipur, India: A Review Based Analysis

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국문초록

이 연구는 인도 마니푸르 주에서의 공동체 여성 운동이 경제적, 사회적, 변혁적 측면에서 미치는 기여를 다각적으로 분석한 것이다. 본 연구는 다음 두 가지 주요 목표를 지침으로 삼았다. 첫째, 지역, 국가, 세계적 맥락에서 여성의 공동체적 역할과 기여에 관한 기존 문헌을 비교·분석하는 메타분석을 수행하는 것이다. 둘째, 마니푸르 여성의 독특한 문화적, 사회적, 정치적 틀 속에서 이들의 구체적인 역할과 기여를 비판적으로 검토하는 것이다. 연구는 데이터 저장소를 통해 다양한 자료를 수집하여 참고문헌 검토를 수행하고, 글로벌, 국가, 지역 차원에서 비교 분석을 진행하였다. 보고서, 학술 논문, 온라인 자료, 도서 등에서 수집된 이차 데이터를 활용하여 서술적 방법론을 채택하고, 연구 목표와 일치하는 분석을 진행하였다.

연구 결과, 특히 사회적, 경제적, 지속 가능성 영역에서 마니푸르 여성의 기여를 인정하는 것이 매우 중요하다는 점이 드러났다. 또한, 마니푸르 여성의 역할을 더 광범위한 발전 담론에 통합하고 이를 공식적으로 인정할 필요성이 강조되었다.

주제어 : 여성 기여, 경제·사회 기여, 여성 기업가, 여성 운동, 마니푸르, 인도

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I. Introduction

The roles of women in Manipur are often described as multifaceted, encompassing cultural, political, economic, athletic, and social dimensions. The contributions of women have increasingly become a central focus across various academic disciplines, driving greater attention to research centers dedicated to exploring these contributions. Despite this growing interest, a comprehensive review of the literature remains notably absent, particularly concerning the ongoing marginalization of women's roles. To address this gap, it is essential to not only more fully recognize women's contributions but also to provide well-substantiated implications and actionable recommendations. While research on women's roles in a global context has sought to identify prevailing trends and underlying factors, it highlights the need for more rigorous investigation. This underscores the importance of region-specific studies, as global research alone fails to capture the complexities and nuances of women's roles within distinct cultural and socio-political contexts. Despite the widespread adoption of common terminology, a more nuanced exploration of the research perspectives on women's roles is urgently needed. Additionally, the methodologies employed in these studies merit further scrutiny, reflecting the growing significance of this field of inquiry. The roles of women in the region are undeniably significant, spanning various domains such as societal leadership

through matrilineal structures, economic contributions in entrepreneurship, agriculture, and handicrafts, and high levels of educational attainment. Women have also made remarkable strides in sports, with participation in global events like the Olympics, and have emerged as influential figures in politics and social activism. These achievements underscore the positive contributions and responses of women in the region. This study aims to investigate and examine the multifaceted roles of women in the region, with a particular focus on Manipur. Positioned strategically with both international and domestic borders and blessed with rich natural resources, Manipur highlights the prominent roles of women. However, despite their evident contributions, research in this area remains limited, warranting deeper exploration.

II. Aims and Scope

This study aims to examine women's contributions to societal well-being in the context of global movements advocating for gender equality and empowerment. As women's roles increasingly serve as key indicators of societal progress, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive review of existing research on women's roles across diverse global and regional contexts. While substantial research has been conducted on this topic,

there is a significant gap in synthesizing findings from various geographical and socio-political settings. This paper intends to address this gap by critically analyzing research from different regions, states, and global contexts, with a focus on regional, state, and international collaborations. The primary objective is to uncover the underlying factors contributing to the under-recognition of women's contributions, offering insights into how this disparity can be mitigated. The analysis will draw on reliable data sources, such as Dimensions, to deepen the investigation and provide a more nuanced understanding of these issues.

1. Objectives

- To conduct a cross-comparative meta-analysis of existing research on women's community roles and contributions across regional, state, and global contexts.
- To examine and critically analyze the specific roles and contributions of Manipuri women within their cultural, social, and political contexts.

2. Method

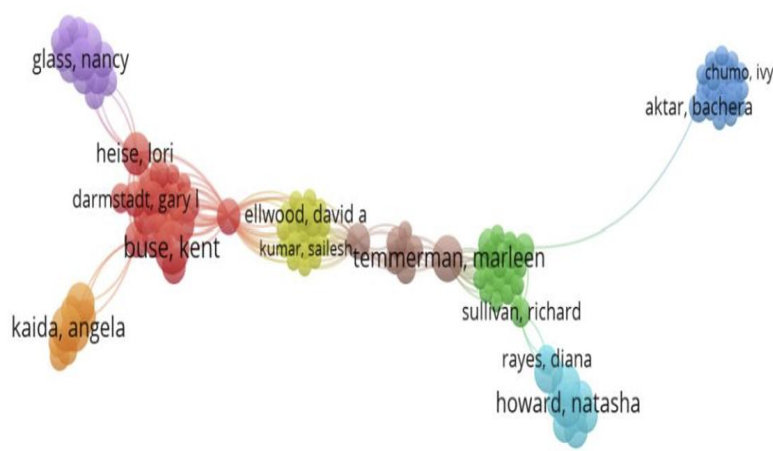
Given the limited research on the under-recognition of women's contributions in male-dominated societies, this study aims to address this gap, as illustrated in Figures 1, 2, and 3. To explore these gaps and answer the research questions, a

descriptive methodology is employed. Secondary data is gathered from diverse sources, including academic journals, books, reports, and reputable websites. A qualitative approach is adopted, focusing on critically evaluating the roles and contributions of women, with particular emphasis on addressing gender disparities. The study is descriptive in nature, aiming to offer a comprehensive understanding of women's societal roles. Despite the growing body of literature, as highlighted in Tables 1 and 2, there remains a notable absence of collaborative research that yields meaningful, actionable insights for addressing these issues.

III. Investigative Approach with Bibliographic Analysis

Limited research has been conducted on comparing women's roles across regional, state, and global contexts. To address this gap and enhance the depth and visibility of the study, bibliometric visualization techniques have been utilized. The scope of the investigation is defined within the time frame of 2015 to 2025, focusing on key literature from academic articles, book chapters, and edited volumes. Data sources include reputable databases such as the UGC Care List, DOAJ, and PubMed. Data visualization was carried out using VOSviewer, with supplementary data obtained from the Dimensions database. The primary

keyword for this study is “roles of women.” Given the limited research available within the chosen time frame, the analysis presented in Tables 1 and 2 is confined to this specific study period, providing a focused examination of existing scholarly contributions. The visualization provides a clear depiction of various research contributions identified in the review analysis based on the thematic search in the data bank. The dots represent individual research contributions, with larger clusters indicating closely related research areas and scopes. The distances, as represented by the lines, further illustrate these relationships, where shorter distances signify stronger associations between research contributions.



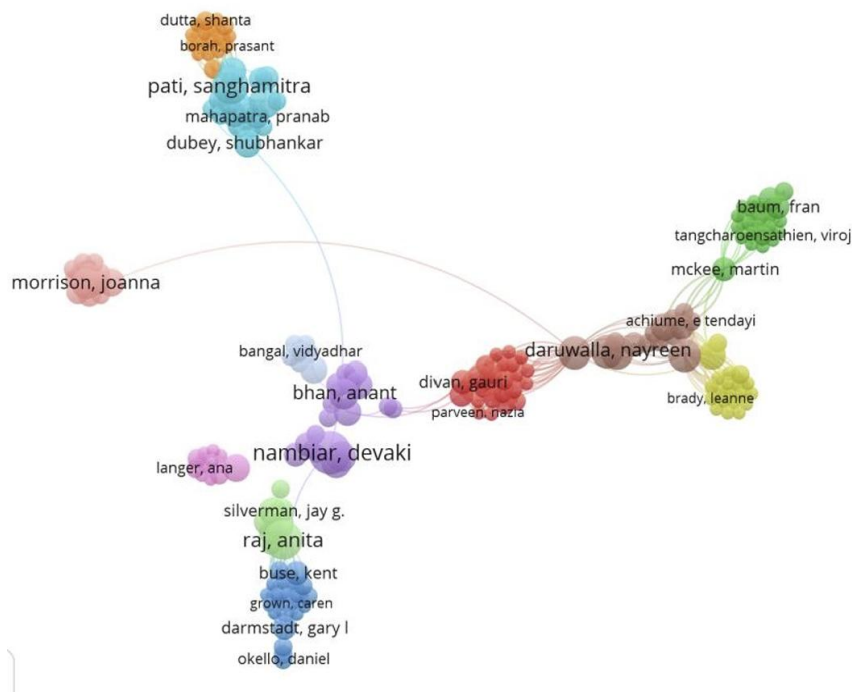
〈Figure 1〉 Contribution made on community movement of women in Global

Source: Data Available from secondary data

The role of women in society can be traced from both ancient and cultural perspectives. As highlighted by Smith and Sinkford(2022), women play a pivotal role in bridging the gender gap, improving healthcare, and leading gender-transformative initiatives. Acknowledging women's roles and responsibilities catalyzes societal change, fostering a wave of positivity and progress(Rajaram & Singh 2024). However, challenges and barriers faced by women have been mounting; particularly in default state contexts, as noted by Khari(2022) and Rana(2017). Women's contributions to development, starting from the family level, are well-documented, and these efforts have a profound societal impact (Fawad 2023; Hans & Govindaswamy 2024; Oláh et al. 2018). Shukla(2023), Mojumder(2020), and Tabassum & Nayak(2021) further emphasize that woman's dedication leads to positive change in society. As Novotney(2024) asserts, women have also proven to be exemplary leaders in the corporate world, signaling a shift in gender dynamics. Research shows that women outperform men in marketing-related activities(Mehta 2023; Ritson 2009; Sladovnik 2024), highlighting their strong capabilities in leadership roles. With the ongoing movements for women's empowerment, gender equality, and the support of international policies, there is a growing recognition of the need to reconsider women's contributions. The term "representation" has emerged as an effective theme in advocating for women's special position and contributions in society. Remarkably, it has been

observed that the traditional roles of women are shifting from the family structure toward roles that were once predominantly male-dominated(Sundari 2023; Srivastava & Uma 2017; Mookerjee 2019; Holmes 2008). However, this shift has not been widely acknowledged or mirrored by the male counterparts. Women's roles and contributions are critical for sustaining and accelerating development(Revenga & Shetty 2012; Tanu 2024; Blog 2023; Mulla 2023; Thomas 2024; Özdemir 2023; Njuki & Gollub 2024). The roles of women are still underexplored and in need of redefinition. In the context of business, women's contributions foster creativity and innovation(Mari et al. 2024; Thomas 2024). To further investigate women's roles, an investigative approach was adopted to analyze their contributions in purchasing power, leading to steady progress in economic balance and socio-economic development(Juyal & Singh 2009; Križan et al. 2022; Bakshi & Paras 2021). Despite growing recognition, this study aims to further develop the understanding of women's evolving contributions to societal progress. From Figure Map 1 and the literature discussed above, our research highlights the limited collaborative efforts observed in addressing the roles of women globally across various aspects.

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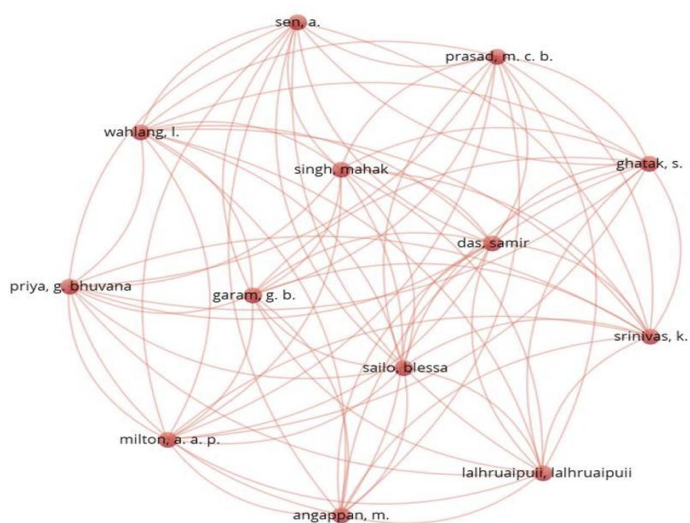
〈Figure 2〉 Contribution made on community of women in India

Source: Data Available from secondary data

Rajaram Mohan Roy, alongside William Carey, pioneered efforts toward women’s education in India, encouraging women to take responsibility, which played a pivotal role in redefining feminism in the country(Samuel 2009). This initiative laid the foundation for broader social reforms, with increased participation of women in the freedom struggle and the promotion of gender equality(Team 2023; Dewan 2024). Bhat and Wani(2022) conducted a comprehensive study on the role of women in India before and after independence, revealing that voluntary efforts within the women’s community significantly contributed to their

growing impact in society. Women's roles have been primarily recognized in political, community, and economic spheres(Thakur 2012). India's first wave of feminism saw the emergence of English-educated women advocating against practices like child marriage, widow burning, and infanticide(Patel 2019; Kumar 2015). Post-independence, parliamentary reforms recognized women's contributions, further integrating them into broader social recognition. Policies like NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform have fostered economic empowerment, leading to a surge in women-led entrepreneurship(Roy 2022; Mittal 2024). Recent statistics indicate that 20% of businesses in India are owned by women(Sharma 2023), reflecting a significant increase in job creation, economic sustainability, and improvements in living standards(ABP 2023; Mukherjee 2024; Mathur 2020). One of the key features of the Figure 2 map is the use of color to uniquely identify closely related research contributions. These contributions highlight an engaging domain that emphasizes the roles of women and encourages their active participation. This focus aligns with the pressing issues of women's empowerment and upliftment. Additionally, various government schemes and sponsorship programs in India have been introduced to provide special attention and support to these initiatives.

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〈Figure 3〉 Contribution made on community movement of women in Northeast India
Source: Data Available from secondary data

Women in Northeast India face many of the same challenges as women in other parts of the world. However, their struggles are further compounded by the region's geographical terrain, which limits literacy rates and opportunities for cross-cultural exchange. Despite these challenges, the technological and economic transformation in the region has begun to have a positive impact. The region's rich cultural diversity, along with its abundant flora and fauna, has attracted significant attention from tourists (Barman & Zimik 2021; Zimik & Barman 2021). Women's contributions in Northeast India can be categorized into entrepreneurship, agriculture, and financial inclusion(Das 2012; Mahanta et al. 2023). Additionally, women have played vital roles in leadership and community

organization(Khosla et al. 2020; Bhattacharya 2018; Islam & Ali 2021). A significant study by Zimik(2023) provides a regional assessment of women's status, identifying areas for further improvement. Although numerous studies have examined women's contributions in the region, it is important to note that serious research on women's participation in societal development remains limited. Due to inadequate documentation and record-keeping, the historical contributions of women have often been overlooked, with only a few rare incidents being recorded in folklore and tales. Much of the existing research tends to focus on these exceptional events, which may be shaped by factors such as male dominance, cultural norms, and societal paradigms. This study aims to go beyond these rare occurrences, focusing on the broader and ongoing contributions of women to the region's development, without being constrained by traditional narratives or gender biases. One of the notable features of women's roles in the region is their significant contribution to achieving equality and creating opportunities for women to participate in development and economic sustainability. Women's involvement in entrepreneurial ventures and various social activities is both evident and pragmatic, reflecting their active participation in socio-economic and cultural spheres. However, when comparing figures, it can be observed that the contributions of women in the Northeast region show significant divergence and lack uniformity. This disparity can be attributed to the diverse

nature of research problems and the dichotomous feasibility of studies in this area. Despite this, attributes such as hospitality, social acceptance, openness, and local friendliness-key elements of tourism(Zimik & Barman 2023; Zimik & Barman 2024; Zimik & Barman 2023; Zimik & Barman 2024; Zimik et al. 2022)-underscore the critical role of women in sustaining the region's socio-economic fabric. The community movements of Manipur's women further highlight their pivotal contributions. These include their symbolic role as torchbearers in measures against human rights violations, participation in the Nupi Lal uprisings during the British era, economic contributions through platforms like Ima Keithel(the Mothers' Market), representation in global sports, conflict resolution through hunger protests, and anti-drug campaigns. Interestingly, with the male-to-female population ratio being nearly equal, the prominence of women's roles in the region becomes even more evident and crucial for its overall development.

To these days it can be noted that the roles of women in Manipur, apart from the social media and newspaper, there are no evidence of scholarly approach in comprehending the roles of women in Manipur. After a thorough investigation on the roles of women in Manipur in the data base, there is no serious research contributed. This has made the study to identify the research gaps as to why the contribution of women in Manipur in various proficiency and profession witness.

IV. Women Social Contribution in Manipur: A Case Study Approach

The contributions and roles of women have often been undervalued across various cultures, with their personalities suppressed, freedoms restricted, and services either exploited or outright denied. It is well-documented that women have been despised and demeaned in many societies. However, the status of Manipur women presents a notable exception. They have been known for courage, skill and active involvement in cultural, socio-political and economical activities besides all their household responsibilities. Within their families and communities, these women have traditionally been held in high regard. From an early age, girls are expected to assist in household duties, including tasks in the kitchen, around the house, and in the fields. In addition to these responsibilities, they often care for younger siblings, adopting the role of a “little mother” within the family. Despite the overarching patriarchal structure of ethnic society, among them as an example the Naga women were legally subordinate to men; they were neither treated as property nor as slaves. Instead, Naga women enjoyed a significant degree of personal freedom throughout their lives. Haimendorf(1939) notably observes that in comparison to women in more “civilized” parts of India, the women of the Naga Hills were envied for their high social status and relative autonomy. He

argues that if one were to measure the cultural advancement of a people by the social position and personal freedoms of its women, the Naga people would deserve a more favorable assessment than commonly given by outsiders, often dismissing them as “savages”.

The princely state of Manipur once lived with peaceful harmony until the 18 century. During that era, there were no such organizations as women's civil groups. The unfortunate conflict, unrest, social evil began in the ethnic society of Manipur when the kingdom came under British administration, both in pre and post-independence period of India. During this time women organization emerged to advocate for social justice in the society. In 1904, the first Nupi Lal broke in response to an order by the British colonial authorities to send men from Manipur to Kabow Valley to fetch timber for rebuilding the Police Agent's bungalow, which had been burn down. A total of 5,000 women participated in the protest.

1. The Nupi Lal

In 1939, during the Second Nupi Lal, the King of Manipur imposed restrictions on forced labor and the free export of rice, leading to famine and severe economic hardship for the people of the region. Women, in particular, struggled to support their families and feed their children. Throughout Manipur's history, women have played a crucial role in driving meaningful societal change.

Displaying immense courage, they have moved from one community to another, protesting against injustice, and their efforts quickly spread across all corners of Manipur. These women, united by a shared philanthropic spirit and working without formal funding, have demonstrated their power in instigating social change through advocacy and action. Today, this women's civil organization remains strong, following in the footsteps of their courageous foremothers. Known as “guardians of society” and “women torchbearers”(translated from Meira Paibi), they continue to fight for justice.

2. The Meira Paibi (Torch Bearers)

Women in Manipur carry torches(flames), often at night, to patrol their localities for protection. They monitor individuals involved in drug use, alcohol sale and consumption, and remain vigilant against any violations of the rights of innocent people. Their efforts also include defending human rights and addressing social issues, such as the misuse of military power by the Indian Army and the implementation of the Armed Forces(Special Powers) Act, 1958. The current unrest in Manipur, which began in 2023, has significantly affected women, who are steadfast in their commitment to safeguarding their communities in both the hills and the valleys. These women volunteer throughout the night to protect their neighborhoods, remaining alert and sounding alarms when necessary.

Despite a traditionally patriarchal society, the role of women in Manipur remains pivotal. They are responsible for both household chores and agricultural work, contributing alongside men in the fields. The birth of a girl as the first child in a family is seen as an auspicious event, with the mother often regarded as fortunate. Women also serve as mediators and diplomats, holding considerable influence in political matters, both directly and indirectly. A woman's diplomatic role is particularly significant if she holds the position of Phukhreila, a title given to women married into another village. These women had the unique privilege of intervening in inter-village conflicts and, with the consent of their husband or the village council could mediate during wartime, earning the title of "Peace Maker" or "Bearer of the Torch of Peace"(Shimray 1986). In 1974, women's organizations, notably the Tangkhul Shanao Long(TSL), emerged in response to the sexual assault of women by Border Security Force(BSF) personnel, including the tragic suicide of Miss Rose from Ngaprum Village. The TSL played a crucial role in protecting the community and advocating for women's rights, solidifying their vital role in the region's social and political landscape.

3. Rani Gaidinlui: A symbol of a freedom fighter

The efforts of Haipou Jadanong, along with those of other Naga women, are emblematic of the region's rich tradition of female leadership, which extends to various

tribal communities in North-East India struggle against the British. To this day, the Zeelianrong Hreaka Pailei Baudi(Zelianrong Heraka Women Society), founded by Haipou Jadanong and nurtured by the revered freedom fighter Ranai Gaidinlui, continues to uphold the traditional beliefs and cultural practices of their ancestors and her courage to stand against the mighty British emperor. At the same time, other women's organizations, such as Lunphum, have emerged, advocating for justice and protection, with the shared mission of empowering women and defending civil rights. In Meghalaya, for instance, the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes practice a matrilineal system, in which inheritance and family leadership pass through the youngest daughter, ensuring that women hold a unique and respected position in society. Women in Manipur have long been central figures in both social and political life. From healers and spiritual leaders to political figures, women in the region continue to play vital roles.

V. Women Socio-Economic contribution with reference to Ima Keithel (Mother's Market)

Manipur women continue their normal daily work during working hours to support their families and feed their children. As night falls, they stay alert, ready for any circumstances or challenges that may arise within their

families or locality. The primary economic sources that women depend on her gifted hand, be it in gardening, handloom weaving, art and crafts, fishing or farming, whatever they produce is sold in the market or door-to-door to generate their income for their daily need and over 60 percent generating more than 2600 USD annually in the year 2015(Pukhrem 2015). To secure stalls within the main buildings of the market, vendors are required to pay an annual municipal fee averaging approximately USD 20. Other vendors operating in designated areas are reported to pay a monthly fee of about USD 01. However, many women selling in open-air spaces are believed to be unlicensed, leaving them vulnerable to losing their right to sell at any time. The market's annual turnover was estimated to range between USD 5.3–6.6 million(Seneviratne 2020). Women in both the hills and valley they follow this same pattern. In the hill areas, the market has also been rebuilt where women from different villages gather to sell their goods. Similarly, in the valley, the so called “Ima Keithel”(Mother market) which has already been there since 16th century hosting 5,000–6,000 women vendors, sell varieties of their hard work and it does stand still and is renowned as one of the largest all-women market in Asia(Yeung 2023). This market is run only by women since the beginning, with male vendors strictly prohibited and subject to punishment if found. The motivation behind these market was through Lallup-kaba, a force labor system in Manipur kingdom,

where men was required to work on distant lands or serve as army. In their absence, women took on responsibility of supporting the family, households by engaging in activities such as collecting firewood, farming, weaving and other forms of production. They then sold their products in market to sustain their family. According to Begum(2010) pointed out that these Keithel is not just hubs of commerce, but also of information exchange and socio-political processes. Whenever they have a break, they discuss socio-political issues and this flow of information keeps them aware and empowered. It may not be wrong to say that the Nupi Lal or women's uprising against the British in 1904 and 1939 were organized and conceived from the market places. Thus, women vendors here are not simply business women but are leading examples of leadership and revolutionist. This Market is located in the center of the Imphal city called Khwairamband Bazaar Complex that replaces the traditional sheds of the Ima market, which comprises of 3 large building namely Ima Market, Laxmi Bazar and Linthoinganbi Bazar constructed. The women vendors are only for married women whose age are 45-70, and widows whose husbands are killed in fake encounters join the market to earn their livelihood.

The Meira Paibis, a women's collective in the Meitei community, are known for their vigilant patrols against social vices such as alcoholism and drug abuse. Similarly, the Naga Women's Union and the Tribal Women's Union advocate for the protection of their communities against

the abuses of armed forces and act as a formidable force in local resistance movements. The women of Manipur, both in the hills and valleys, play a crucial role in maintaining peace and order within their communities. These groups have been instrumental in organizing protests, demanding justice for victims of state violence, and calling for an end to ethnic violence. Through their activism, these women have also raised awareness about the social issues affecting their communities, including drug abuse, prostitution, and other forms of social injustice. Their unwavering commitment to protecting their people from both external threats and internal issues underscores their vital role in the socio-political landscape of the region. Compared to other parts of the state, it is important to note that Manipur is less affected by male-dominated societal structures. Additionally, there is less distinction between occupations, and the region's historical participation supports women's roles on larger platforms. These factors empower women to assert their contributions across economic, political, and social domains.

VI. Conclusion

The contributions and roles of women have not received adequate recognition, particularly in the context of Manipuri society. Despite living in an era that emphasizes gender equality and women's empowerment, the unique contributions

of Manipuri women serve as a notable example of feminine influence. Historical incidents, such as the Nupi Lal(Women's War), provide a distinctive perspective on feminism, as comparable events are scarce in other parts of the world. In contemporary times, evidence of women's active participation continues to ripple through societal structures, influencing social status and recognition. This study draws parallels with the matrilineal practices of the Khasi community to highlight avenues for acknowledging women's contributions both in extraordinary circumstances and in daily life. It is evident that serious academic research on the role of women in Manipur remains limited, often overshadowed by media narratives. Additionally, the study explores the evolving economic and social status of women in Manipur. The rise of female entrepreneurs and the working-class women's movement has significantly contributed to balancing the region's socio-economic dynamics. This research introduces new perspectives on understanding the situational and environmental factors shaping women's roles in Manipuri society. One key takeaway from the study is the lack of recognition of women's roles, despite the fact that the study highlights their undeniable contribution to the sustainability of the economy. Furthermore, the study strongly recommends amplifying women's voices and contributions by allocating seats or providing representation in policy formulations. The findings clearly suggest that the implementation of women's contributions is highly feasible and should be considered beyond the study regions.

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Exploring the Women's Community Movement in Manipur, India: A Review Based Analysis

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Abstract

This study employs a comprehensive analysis of contributions of community women's movements in Manipur, India, through a multifaceted approach, encompassing economic, social, and transformational aspects. The research is guided by two primary objectives: (1) to conduct a cross-comparative meta-analysis of existing literature on women's community roles and contributions across regional, national, and global contexts, and (2) to critically examine the specific roles and contributions of Manipuri women within their unique cultural, social, and political frameworks. A bibliographic review was conducted using diverse research materials sourced from data repositories, complemented by a comparative analysis across global, national, and regional dimensions. A descriptive methodology was adopted, utilizing secondary data from reports, scholarly articles, online resources, and books to align with the study's objectives. The findings underscore the critical importance of recognizing women's contributions in Manipur, particularly in social, economic, and sustainability domains. This research emphasizes the necessity of further acknowledging and integrating women's roles into broader developmental discourses.

Keywords : Women Contributions, Economic·Social Contribution, Female Entrepreneurs, Women Movement, Manipur, India

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