

Women Community and State: North East India

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Map of India



I N D I A N O C E A N

Map of North East India



Backdrop of Conflict

“We in the Arambam Somorendra Trust appreciate Mr. Iralu’s response deeply and share his perception and practice of good neighbourly relations. We regard this as an act of statesmanship, considering the fact that it would have been more “politically correct” for a Naga/ Nagas to decline such an invitation at a time when the twin politics of “Naga Integration” and “Manipur’s “Territorial Integrity” have bedevilled relations between the neighbours”-----Thounaujam Tarunkumar (2009)

- **The above statement explains the tensions that plague the “political” crisis of state sovereignty of Manipur and Nagaland on one hand and assertion of the “ethnic identity” on the other. While in most cases political dialogues are ways of enveloping and evolving a mechanism of solidarity; in case of North East India the political dialogues since the colonial times have been enmeshed with tensions on cultural and ethnic identity. The historiography of North East India, particularly Manipur and Nagaland is vivid with “treacherous” accounts of accession by the “Indian state” post the declaration of independence of the Indian dominion by British crown on 15 August 1947.**
- **Most of the armed resistance groups are fighting for autonomy under the leadership of many who believe in the right to self –rule.**

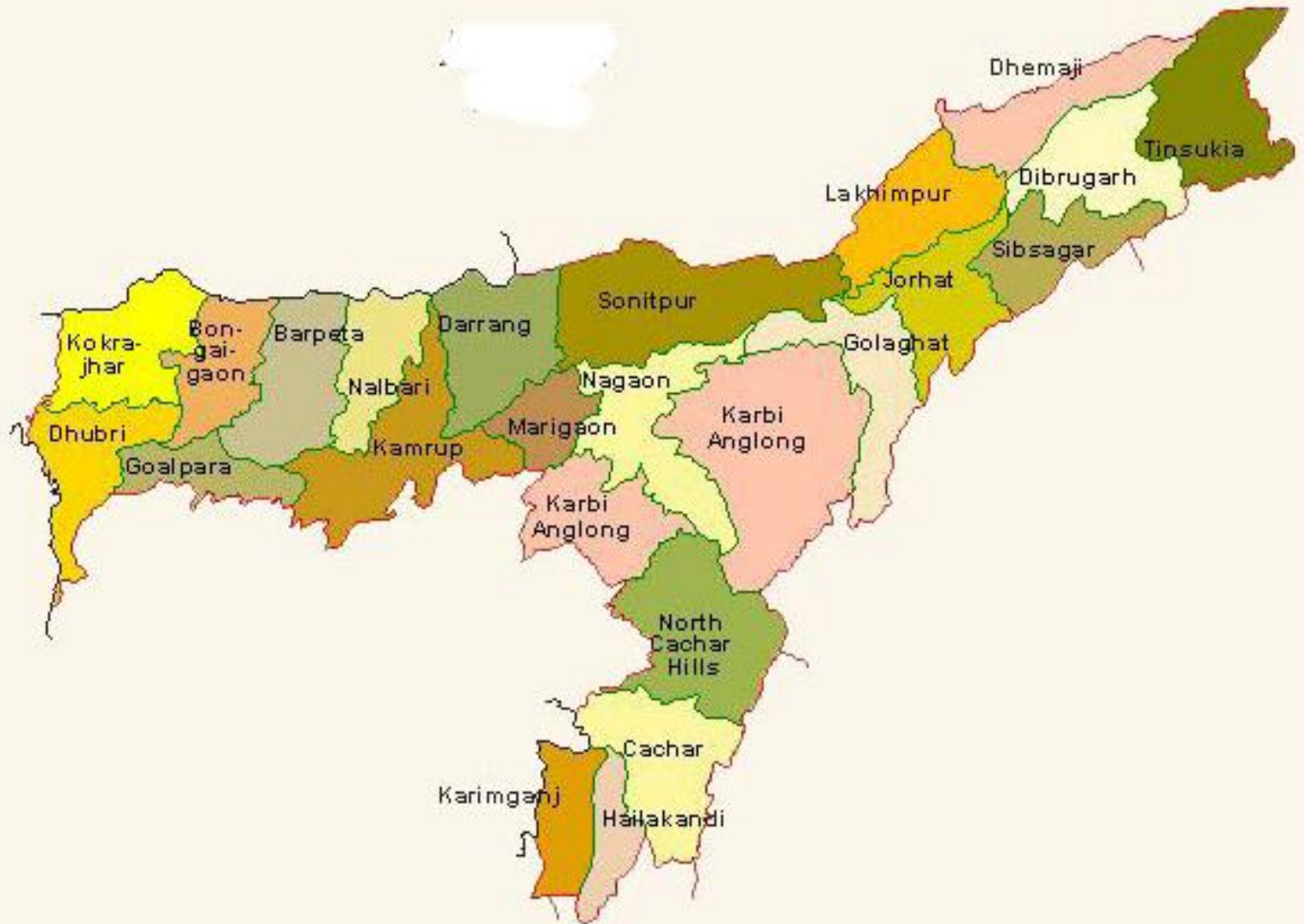
Violence in NE

- ***Testimonies* bear evidence to the multi layered gendered nature of violence, physical, emotional and social. All these three forms are interrelated and informs the political and social subjects.**
- **The state has often appealed to the women to be agents of peace reasserting their role as mothers and sisters. The evocation of “feminine” values is couched in the hierarchisation and reproduction of male / female divide based on masculine and feminine values which never gets resolved and addressed when women’s movements resort to patriarchal rhetorics of “motherhood” and fails to take a political standpoint against patriarchy.**
- **The testimonies below reveal some of the contradictions of the women’s movements and also highlight how women’s political engagement either in democratic political institutions or voluntary organizations provides the scope to bring in their perspective in managing conflict situations and carries the possibility of transgressing stereotypes which often centres around the control over sexuality**

Typologies of Peace Groups

- **1. Issue Based Groups Such as Matri Mancha of Assam**
- **2. Partisan Groups Such as Bodo Women's Action Forum**
- **3. Independent Groups Such as Meira Paibi and NMA**

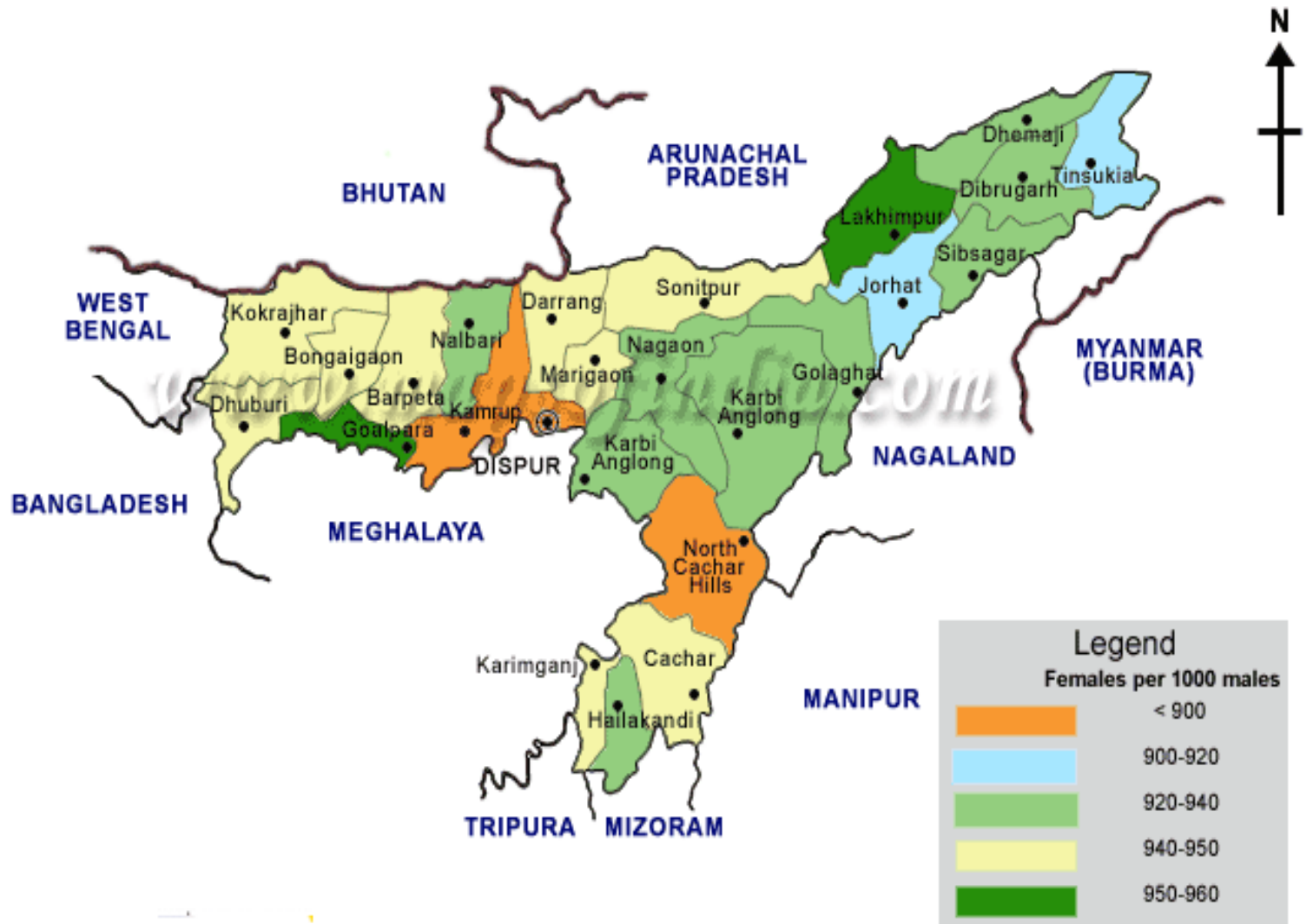
Map of Assam



Literates & Educational Level of Assam

	Persons	Males	Females
Literate without Educational Level	302,290	188,402	113,888
Below Primary	4,106,789	2,332,683	1,774,106
Primary	3,189,339	1,822,109	1,367,230
Middle	2,575,642	1,441,104	1,134,538
Matric /Secondary	2,351,739	1,402,118	949,621
Higher Secondary/Intermediate Pre-University/Senior Secondary	785,043	506,051	278,992
Non-Technical Diploma or Certificate not Equal to Degree	1,258	1,033	225
Technical Diploma or Certificate not Equal to Degree	21,732	19,493	2,239
Graduate & Above	678,887	473,802	205,085
Unclassified	2,635	1,902	733

Sex Ratio Map of Assam



Issue Based groups

- **Issue Based Groups are often targeted by both the State and the rebels. They are active for a short time and then they disperse. They come together again when another issue emerges. These groups are largely to be found in the villages.**

Map of Manipur



State Torture

- **We are three sisters. My father was a head teacher. My father was taken away to a detention centre in the month of July – August 1990 with 13 men, of which 12 men were detained for three days and my father detained for 5 days. Army grouping was a common feature. Whenever we heard the noise of the “vehicles” we ran away. We used to shout the devil is here and we would rush back to our homes. Our culture does not treat us as equals. It is with great difficulty I could inherit some property after I fought for my case in Tanghkul Naga Long Court. Our culture does not accept women to take up decision making roles.**

(Name not disclosed at the request of the interviewee, Ukhrul Town, Focus Group Discussion on 13 June 2009)

Conflict Widow

I lost my husband who was a van driver in March 2000. He was killed by the commandos after he was found carrying a UG. The official account was when the commandos asked him to stop, he did not stop. Eye witness of the account told me that he was tortured before he was killed. I never received any monetary assistance from the UG or the Government.

I became blind after my elder son's birth. Following this, I stayed back with my husband in my parental home owing to the long history of family feuds. I feel inheritance rights are the only resort for physically challenged women like me. I will fight for property rights. I live for my sons.

Manipur has witnessed an increasing number of widows. The daily killings have increased. Widows need to get together. If we come together, we need to stand against indiscriminate killings, we could demand trials.

(Interview with Gangarani in a Capacity building workshop with conflict survivors organized by WAD in Imphal on 17 June 2009)

Conflict Survivor

- **My husband died in January 2006 in a firing. He went out of the house saying he would be getting money from the bills of his contract work. My house is at Thongu Part II close to Manipur University. I made no demand for ex- gratia. I had never worked before my husband's death as he never allowed me to go outside though I was always interested in social work. What would I have done with ex-gratia? After I became a Gram Panchayat member, all eyes are on me. I am now a public face. People come to me with appeals of funds release for NREGS jobs card, allocations, pay etc. BPL cards do not even reach people. Women should be encouraged to take part in decision making process. I have set an example, people say. When I go for Sports Meet and share the dais with other members they always point towards me. I feel proud when I hear words of appreciation from school children.**

Now that I am aware of the schemes in place I realize that schemes do not even reach the people who need them. Housing schemes meant for widows and deprived people are often easily accessible if people are able to establish right contacts. Widows are looked down upon socially. When we dress smartly, people comment on our morality. People constantly try to monitor our movements but I don't care. We are usually forbidden from using lipstick, nailpolish or going for short haircuts and wearing bangles. We need to look into our customs and norms. There has to be equity. Why look down on widows? Women's pain across cultures is same. They are easy targets within their community and outside. There should be a forum for sharing this pain and venting out what is happening in reality.

AFSPA should be repealed. Moreover, the UGs should also be taken into account for terrorizing people.

(Name requested not to be disclosed; Gram Panchayat Member, Imphal District in a interview on during the Capacity building workshop organized by WAD in Imphal on 17 June 2009)

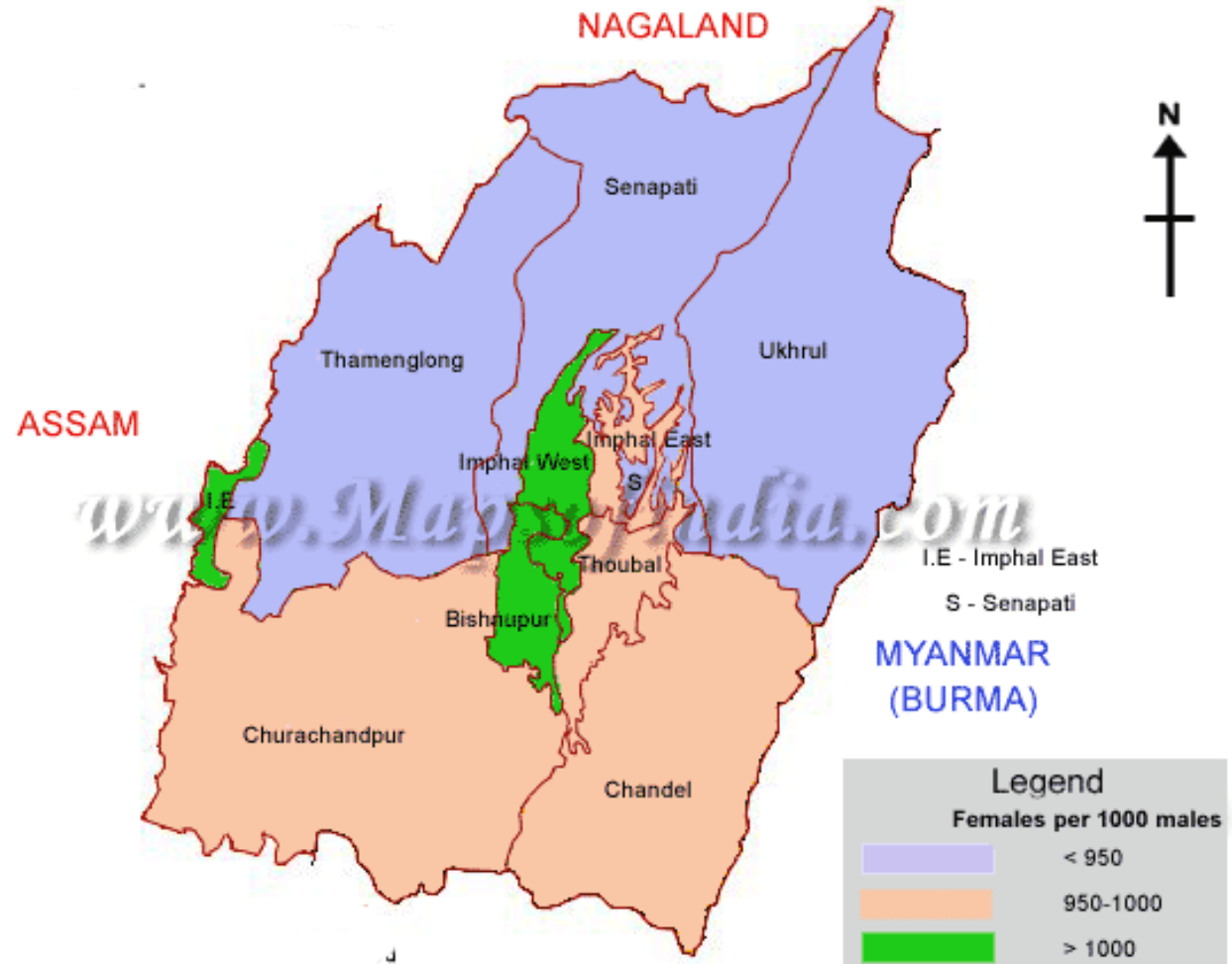
Women and Decision-making

- **The masculine and feminine roles prescribed by the society in the public private domains get reconstituted as “men are expected to withdraw from civic life for compulsions of war and self-defense” (Banerjee 2008 : 206).**
- **With the reorganization of gendered roles of public and private places women emerge as important civic actors through institutions like Naga Mother’s Association, Naga Women’s Union of Manipur, All tribal Women’s Organisation and Tangkhul Shanao Long.**

Literates & Educational level of Manipur

	Persons	Males	Females
Literate without Educational Level	37,486	21,376	16,110
Below Primary	209,287	110,301	98,986
Primary	259,393	139,630	119,763
Middle	307,529	181,974	125,555
Matric /Secondary	218,159	131,373	86,786
Higher Secondary/Intermediate Pre-University/Senior Secondary	129,602	74,868	54,734
Non-Technical Diploma or Certificate not Equal to Degree	142	117	25
Technical Diploma or Certificate not Equal to Degree	2,278	1,727	551
Graduate & Above	146,306	91,875	54,431
Unclassified	352	225	225

Sex Ratio Map of Manipur



Elections in Manipur

- **In the 1996 Parliamentary elections in Manipur female voters, who were 6,47,422 in number, out numbered male voters, who were 6,38,438 in number, yet the number of women candidates were only two among a total of twenty eight. Recent elections have not improved the situation of women candidates in Manipur.**

Map of Nagaland



Literates & Educational level of Nagaland

	Persons	Males	Females
Literate without Educational Level	32,467	18,164	14,303
Below Primary	229,652	121,699	107,953
Primary	310,520	166,630	143,890
Middle	229,783	129,968	99,815
Matric /Secondary	184,401	111,442	72,959
Higher Secondary/Intermediate Pre-University/Senior Secondary	85,536	51,450	34,086
Non-Technical Diploma or Certificate not Equal to Degree	456	342	114
Technical Diploma or Certificate not Equal to Degree	1,779	1,484	295
Graduate & Above	57,511	38,902	18,609
Unclassified	218	120	98

Sex Ratio Map of Nagaland



Naga Mother's Association

- **NMA was formed on 14 February 1984 at Kohima with the motto “Human Integrity”.**
- **The main aims and objectives are – to uphold womanhood, to serve as a channel of communication for Naga Women’s mutual interest and welfare, to fights against social evils prevailing in the state.**
- **NMA is a mass based organization with no membership fees.**

Naga Mother's Association

- The agenda followed by Naga Mothers established their reputation as an Independent Force. These included:
 1. Taking up contentious social issues.
 2. Writing pamphlets such as *Shed No More Blood*.
 3. Organising a day of mourning.
 4. Forming peace groups.
 5. Arbitrating in local conflicts.

Tangkhul Shanoa Long

- **TSL was formed on 8 May 1974 as a platform to safeguard the rights, modesty and dignity of the women. On 3 March 1974, a number of women of Grihang and Kumram (Ngapurum) were sexually assaulted by the B.S.F. personnel. Among the rape victims was Ms. N.S. Rose of Ngapurum (now Kunmram). She committed suicide.**
- **As P. Veronica Zinkhai(1996) states, “ This was only one out of the many incidents in which security forces had behaved towards Naga women like beasts. Realising that unless a platform of women is formed, the same torture, harassment, assault etc. would continue in the days and years to come”.**
- **Initially TSL was known as East District Women Organisation. While membership comes from every villages the main concentration is in Ukhrul and Senapati districts (Manipur).**
- **The two village units in Shirui and Lunghar of TSL has been instrumental in redefining peace and conflict prevention in the recent times.**

Shirui Seize - 2009

We braved the cold winter and kept a vigil near the main thoroughfare fearing every moment that there might be a shoot out. Around 2000 women had taken part in the vigil from 20 January -2 February 2009. We took turns to keep a vigil. We walked up and down from the Tourist lodge to the village almost 5-7 times. For the first two days only women from Shirui participated in the day long vigil; later women from other villages also participated. We made repeated appeals to the Indian Army to withdraw to avoid conflict”.

----- Sorin, TSL President Shirui Village

Shirui village is located about 13 km away from the district hadquarter of Ukhrul. Shirui is a popular trekking point and is famous for the world famous Shirui Lily. According to Sorin, President, Shirui Shano Long, “NSCN (IM) cadres stayed in the Government Tourist Lodge within the village for almost two years. We had no idea that NSCN (IM) cadres were not allowed to stay here” . Incidentally there are three camps in Manipur for NSCN IM one each in Tamenglong, Chandel and Senapati District. On 19 January 2009 reportedly around 2 am the villagers realized that the 17 Assam Rifles had laid seize of the village with the jawans surrounding the camp and the village. Their main objective as Sorin states was to pull out the NSCN cadres located in the periphery of the village.

Fight Against Chromite Mining

- According to NPMHR (South) annual report (April 2008-March 2009), in the mid 2008 the public was informed of a proposal to start chromite mining at the Phangrei and Shirui Kashong range. The report states that at the request of the Research Committee on Conservation of Natural Resources, Shirui Village, NPMHR South provided assistance in writing a response paper to the Forest and Environment Ministry of the GPRN to demand a review of the proposal to start mining. It is against this backdrop we need to situate the conflict over resources in this case the conflict between Lunghar village and Shihai village over control over Phangrei Hills. Both Lunghar Village and Shihai village had claimed ownership over Phangrei Hills. Chromite deposits are found to be high in Phangrei Hills.
- The villagers have been preserving the hills and water near the village as it provides them with the source of livelihood. The villagers realized that chromite mining will lead to environmental degradation; particularly the only source of water the Kashong river water might be contaminated.
- When the NSCN came to know the Lunghar Village is in a dilemma to allow chromite mining in Phangrei Hills and might oppose the proposed mining activity the Sihai village offered Phangrei to the NSCN which resulted in further confusion of the ownership of Phangrei. According to the villagers, Administrator General. Retd. V.S. Atem, Emissary to Collective Leadership, NSCN taking advantage of the situation issued an order that the headmen of the two villages have to appear for water judgments as there was no substantial evidence regarding the ownership of the Phangrei Hills.

Water Judgement

- **NSCN also issued a threat to Lunghar and Sihai that whosoever refuses to participate in the water judgment will be deemed as a loser. Clause 8 of the water judgment clearly states that “if any part of the body is visible out of the water level then it shall be deemed as floating hence disqualified”.**
- **In this case when the two headmen of the two respective villages, Lunghar and Shihai underwent the trial and the Shihai village headman’s feet was visible. Seeing this according to a press release by Lunghar Village the NSCN Emmissary raised a voice but certainly remained silent.**
- **The Shihai village headman was declared the winner and a fine of Rs 5000 was imposed on the Lunghar Village. The villagers refused to pay the fine and published it in the local Tangkhul media; following which an arrest warrant was issued to the Village Secretary and Headman of the Lunghar Village on 16 November 2008. The NSCN Cadres led by Ukhrul Town Commando reportedly came rushing to the Headman’s house with full weapons and the women unit of Lunghar Village stood a vigil for thirty days holding torches.**

Lunghar Shanoa Long

When NSCN cadres came to attack them women said “you bought guns with our money and now time has come that you will kill us with our guns!” L W Joyly, President, Lunghar Shanoa Long recalls that for a month women of all ages took part in night vigil fearing that NSCN cadres might resort to violent tactics . Women constructed a gate at the main entrance to the village and kept a vigil with torches. She recalls with joy that the women could manage to secure their livelihood rights through this struggle to reclaim Phangrei Hills. She further asserted that though they are devoid of landed property rights they depend directly or indirectly on the natural resources available in and around the area and hence their main foci is to preserve the natural reserves.

The Lunghar Shanoa Long through taking on the role of human shield and stepping in to contain conflict has managed to break the boundaries of the Village Council which has been exclusively a male domain of village governance. After the night long vigil the village council recognized that women are important stakeholders in the crisis management and passed a resolution which said that in the coming years there will be provision for two -third participation of women the village council.

Events in Nagaland



Events in Nagaland



Relay Hunger Strike

Interview with Keisam Ongbi Taruni (78 year old) Founder Member, Nupi Samaj, (one of the many Meira Peibies)[\[1\]](#)

Who are Meira peibies?

Meira Peibies trace their history to the social reform movement. The first time women came together was to protest and ban alcohol in the state. The women felt the need to come together to put an end to the violence in homes and outside due to alcoholism. All Manipur Social Reformation and Dev Samaj were formed. These were the some of the first groups to look into women's issues. Women from each locality were asked to form groups. Then in 1980 Armed Forces Special Powers Act cam in and forced disappearances of young men became a regular feature. In 1980 there was a firing by the army at a football ground near Heirangoithong. Four people died and many others were injured. The Army picked up one young boy on false charges. This young boy had just appeared for the physical fitness examination as a part of (Check up) police/ army recruitment process. We charged to their camps asking them to set the child free. He was set off after our intervention. He had been brutally tortured. This marked our movement.

Has the group thought of taking legal recourse for justice?

No. We do not have any faith in the legal system. Its timetaking. It's all money

- [\[1\]](#) *The interview was conducted by Chitra Ahanthem in Manipuri in presence of the author.)*

Events on 11 July 2004 in Manipur

In the early hours of July 11, 2004, a young woman named Thangjam Manorama was allegedly raped, tortured and murdered by members of the Assam Rifles, who had arrested her a few hours back. Protest against this heinous act took the character of a mass uprising. The Meira Peibies (women torchbearers) were in the forefront of this protest. In an effort to justify their act the Assam Rifles called Manorama an activist of the banned People's Liberation Army and said that she was killed when she was trying to flee from custody. The Meira Peibies and other civil liberties organizations remained undeterred. They claimed it to be merely the most recent state action against women in Northeast India, a border region, where women have faced multiple injustices from the colonial period onwards. They also claimed that the brunt of injustices came after the passage of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Northeast India in 1958.

Events in Manipur in 2004



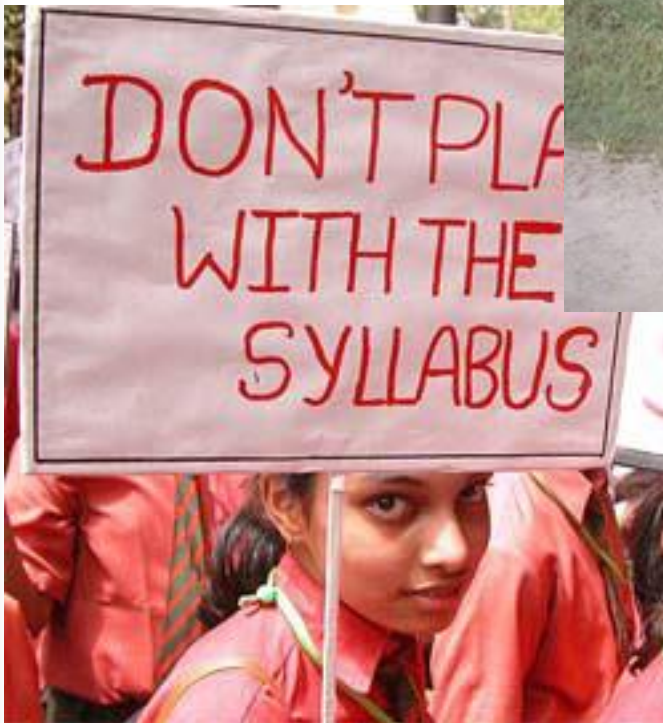
Events in Manipur in 2004



Events in Manipur in 2004



Events in Manipur in 2004



Women's Peace Movements

- **Women's Peace Movements can only succeed if it transforms existing power hierarchies.**



Thank You