



# **"Gendered Vulnerability In Conflict And Displacement: Ethnic And Communal Violence Against Women And Girls Worldwide And In North-East India".**

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## **Abstract**

Any type of conflict, whether it is war, riots, ethnic strife, or armed conflict, comes from at least two groups involved in contesting powers, victories, and revengeful acts. In all of these conflicts, it is the male folk who initiate and actively get involved in the violent conflicts, resulting in damage, property loss, lives, and human atrocities in various dimensions. It has come to the serious observation that women and female genders have always been the softest and harshest targets for atrocities. Men often assume that a violent conflict gives them the opportunity and liberty to prey on women's bodies. Histories of violence from around the world have witnessed a wide scale of sexual violence against women, and even girls as minors are not being spared. The aftermath implications of violence seem to be reeling, as the internally displaced community, especially the female gender, faces more hardship than the male folk in the course of the proper rehabilitation and settlement process.

The paper aims to present the intensity and nature of atrocities that women and girls have to go through in conflict violence, citing cases from international to North-East India contexts. It also wants to derive the reasons and motives behind the various types of sexual atrocities committed on women and girl children by the male folk. The paper will also analyze and list several hurdles and challenges that the female gender faced in the course of being an internally displaced community, as caused by the violent conflicts.

**Keywords:** Female Gender, Women & Girls, Sexual violence and atrocities, Conflicts and Violence, internally displaced people (IDP)

**I. INTRODUCTION:** During wars and internal conflicts, violence against women in general and sexual violence in particular has a history as old as the conflict itself. "War magnifies the already existing gender inequalities of peacetime .... A just peace involves the reworking of the gender status quo" (Manchanda, 2001, p. 28). Tragically, rape and other forms of violence against women are common in everyday life. Its character, however, becomes even more savage and ubiquitous during violent battles. Armed groups frequently utilize sexual violence as a tool of fear during instability and disorder, subjecting women to unimaginable tragedies. The breakdown of law and order exacerbates these crimes, rendering women more vulnerable to physical and psychological harm. Conflict not only makes gender violence more violent but also makes it more difficult for women to get the help and justice they need, which feeds a vicious circle of misery. According to a United Nations assessment, wars, conflicts, and riots cause a wave of atrocities that disproportionately harm women by subjecting them to various sorts of violence, uprooting them, and putting them through difficult circumstances. In these tumultuous times, women become prime targets for gender-based violence, leading to physical and psychological trauma that scars generations (United Nations,

"Women and Armed Conflict," 2020). Displacement is indeed a grim reality for women during conflicts and crises. Forced to flee their homes, they often find themselves in overcrowded refugee camps with limited access to healthcare and heightened risks of gender-based violence (UNHCR, "Women and Girls at the Heart of the Response to the Syria Crisis," 2020).

The Northeast of India, which is infamous for its many ethnic disputes as well as its armed battles between insurgencies and security forces, has also been the scene of several crimes against women. The violence resulting from conflicts frequently causes some groups to be internally displaced, raising more challenges for women and girls than for men and boys. The violence from conflicts, which frequently causes some groups to be internally displaced, raises more challenges for women and girls than for men and boys. The paper contains horrifying tales of the horrors endured by women and girls who were brutally treated during continuing conflicts and in the wake of violence. The paper looks at cases from around the world that are pertinent to situations in Northeast India. In the context of the discussion, the cases of internally displaced Bru-Reangs from Mizoram in Tripura for more than two decades need to be mentioned, along with the shocking incidents of women being paraded in public naked by miscreants' mob in Manipur and, in the recent past, tribal girls stripping off in the streets of Guwahati, Assam.

**II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:** It has become clear that throughout any form of violence or conflict between two or more disputing communities or entities, women and girls suffer more and are more frequently targeted than their male counterparts. The thrust of this paper is to derive the reasons and motives behind the atrocities committed on women and girl children. The grimness of internally displaced communities as a result of Conflict violence creates additional hurdles to the survival of the female gender. The paper aims to list and analyze those natures of hurdles as posed by biological differences in respective state and role of females in male chauvinistic society.

**III. LITERATURE REVIEW:** Numerous papers, journals, and reports from the Human Rights Council discuss the impact on women and girls during ongoing conflicts and the aftermath of violence in various refugee camps. In this paper, some notable and relevant papers on the topic concerned are being assessed from International to North-East India, as available from various journals and newspaper reports. Here are some of the reviews made. H. Patricia Hynes (2004), in her research article titled 'on the battlefield of women's bodies: An overview of the harm of war to women,' illustrated how women are primarily being targeted for sexual violence, citing various cases and events from international contexts. Singh Malik, Namita (2020), in Reflections on the continuity of violence against women amidst war and internal conflicts: Global perspectives, gives a detailed account of the plight of women during conflict violence from a global perspective. Ward & Marsh (2006), in their reports on 'Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in War and Its Aftermath: Realities, Responses, and Required Resources,' compiled and reported measures, intensity, and variability of violence committed on women and girls. Jones, Nicolas et al. (2004), in their research report on 'The fallout of rape as a weapon of war: The life-long and intergenerational impacts of sexual violence in conflict,' have psychologically discussed the tactics of war.

Swami, Indu (2021), in the article titled 'Armed Conflict and Women: Experiences from North-East India,' presents the general account of cases of various atrocities committed in the region and what women and Girls go through during the conflicts and combat between security forces and Insurgencies of North-East India. The report on 'inter-tribal conflict and its impact on Women and children' conducted by the Assam Institute of Research for tribals and scheduled castes, Guwahati presents and reveals the facts that Women and children experience during various inter-tribal and Ethnic conflicts of the conflict-stricken North-East India. In her 2009 Ph.D. titled 'Ethnicity and Displacement—The Reangs of Mizoram,' Barnali Thakur presented a detailed account of the nature of conflicts and how the community as a whole suffered as a displaced community. The cases of women and children from Bru-Reang displaced people from Mizoram in Tripura for the last two decades in the refugee camp, and they had been through struggles as female genders faced different and greater hardships of modesty than their male counterparts. All these accounts present the panoramic view of understanding the impact of Conflicts and violence on female Gender folk.

**IV. OBJECTIVES:** The main objectives are implied in two aspects as follows

- (i). To highlight the nature and severity of violence faced by female genders during conflicts and their aftermath in global and North-East Indian contexts.
- (ii). To explore the motives behind male-perpetrated atrocities against women during conflicts and examine the struggles of women and girls in refugee and IDP camps.

**V. METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCE:** The paper draws its evidence and facts from a variety of sources, including newspapers, journals, papers, event happenings, and human rights reports on gender atrocities caused by violent conflicts. The paper attempts to link the case study of Internally Displaced Bru-Reangs from Mizoram in Tripura based on field investigations and observance and cite other various shocking incidents of ethnic violence in Northeast India that have occurred in the recent past. The facts and cases of Gender violence in Women and Girl Children are then analyzed from the social setup of a male chauvinistic society, psychological war tactics, and biological differences.

**VI. RESULTS AND FINDINGS:** Wars and armed conflicts have always entailed gender-targeted violence, whether it was state-managed or pursued as a part of state policy. Women always bore the brunt if they were on the losing side; their villages were pillaged, houses were burnt, and rape came as a natural corollary. The destruction of women's pride and life used to be juxtaposed to the killing of their men: fathers, brothers, husbands, or even small children (Brownmiller, Susan 1975). Women often become the primary victims of the horrors of atrocities during conflicts and crises, enduring unspeakable acts like rape and being paraded naked.

Tragically, even minor girl children are not spared from these heinous crimes. In times of violence and chaos, armed groups may target women and girls to inflict fear, humiliation, and suffering upon communities. Such violence often results in the forced displacement of entire communities. After being uprooted from their homes, women and children suffer disproportionately, often becoming refugees with limited access to shelter, food, and healthcare. Such vulnerable circumstances, they face increased risks of violence and exploitation. The happenings in the international and North-East India contexts are listed and cited below.

**(i) Facts from the international scenario, past and recent:** A simple peek into the recent past displays what conflicts mean to women. Throughout history, women from different communities have been kidnapped and kept as captives, even in the so-called religious conflicts that are expected to bear human morality and goodness. It's a type of sexual assault intended to terrorize and punish communities, push people out of their homes, and break social bonds. The Second World War, due to its massive scale of destruction, reveals the condition of women in the face of an invading army. Japanese army raped and murdered women at will; some reports claim that between 20,000 and 80,000 women were abused sexually during a six-week period in late 1937 (Chang, 1997; Askew, 2004).

The Pakistani military and religious militias raped Bangla-speaking Muslim and Hindu minority women during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. It resulted in unintended pregnancies, the birth of war babies, and the victims' permanent exclusion from society. The Bangladeshi government's rape statistics place the number at 200,000, but current sources estimate it to be twice that amount (Brownmiller, 1975; Saikia, 2011; Mukherjee, 2015). 50,000 women experienced "systematic rape" and "sexual enslavement" throughout the Bosnian war in 1992–1995 (Allen, 1996; Human Rights Watch, 2000; Niarchos, 1995). In imprisonment in rape camps, women of all ages were raped until they became pregnant. Rape in several African conflicts, notably the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur, and South Sudan, have used rape as a weapon of war. Rapes are frequently carried out by armed groups such as militias or rebel forces (El Jack, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2009; Meger, 2016; UN Security Council, 2014).

Rape is used to terrorize and punish communities, drive people from their homes, and break down social links. Some terrorist organizations, such as Boko Haram, have been accused of utilizing rape and sexual violence as a form of warfare (Amnesty International, 2015; UN Women, 2017). It has been reported that they target women and girls from other communities.

**(ii). Facts from Northeast India and other conflict-stricken areas:** Ethnic conflict plagues the northeastern region of India, often referred to as a conflict-ridden area between ethnic groups and communities is a common occurrence in the region. Recent ethnic conflicts between the dominant Meitei Manipuri and Kuki communities of Manipur have once again unravelled the sexual atrocities on women as the prime target by the menfolk. The shocking incident of two women paraded naked in broad daylight on May 4, 2023, by a miscreant mob from the community accompanied by large groups of men has seriously drawn the attention of both the Indian and international communities (Human Rights Watch, 2023; BBC News). Besides in the past, there have been several incidents similar to this in 2007, a tribal girl was ripped off her clothes and paraded naked on the streets of Guwahati, Assam, for participating in a local protest demanding inclusion of her community in the Scheduled Tribes list for better access to education and jobs

(The Hindu, 2007; BBC News, 2007). All these incidents prove that women become the victims and ethnic major community using for shaming the contesting weak community.

The presence of Insurgencies and their conflicts, as sometimes causes of rape by security forces, most often happens during crackdowns and cordon-and-search operations, during which men are held for identification in parks or schoolyards while security forces search their homes, either in Kashmir or in North-East conflicts-stricken areas (Asia Watch & Physicians for Human Rights, 1993; Human Rights Watch, 2006). Besides rape, women have been used as human shields too. Women have been disproportionately affected women. have been targeted for sexual violence, forced to marry militants, and prevented from accessing education and healthcare (Baruah, 2005; Manchanda, 2004; Goswami, 2015).

**(iii). Cases of Internally Displaced Bru-Reangs from Mizoram in Tripura:** The internally displaced were caused by several ethnic conflicts in the past, highlighting those women faced more problems and struggles than their male counterparts. The tales of Bru-Reangs Internally Displaced People from Mizoram in Tripura, who have been residing there since 1997, reflect the hurdles that the women and female gender have to go through in the course of the proper rehabilitation and settlement process. The prolonged displacement of Bru-Reang communities in Tripura since 1997 has disproportionately affected women, who often experience additional barriers in accessing rehabilitation services, healthcare, and safety (ACHR, 2011; Choudhury, 2015; Ghosh, 2021). Due to biological differences, the male gender faces challenges in hygiene, sanitation, and other maternal health risks. The young girls in the refugee camps face traumas such as early pregnancy and a lack of clothing to cover their bodies. It has been observed from the investigation that the young girls were often taken as house maids and also being trapped in the flesh trades in the big cities in India.

**VII. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:** The discussion on the plight of Women and girls during conflicts and violence from the International and North-East India contexts helps us to understand the various genres of violence against female genders. Bombs and missiles kill men and women indiscriminately, but other aspects of war affect women and girls disproportionately (Ashford & Huet-Vaughn, 2000, p. 186).

(a). Findings on the nature and genres of sexual violence and other atrocities against women and girls. Here are some of the atrocities committed as follows: -

(i) Sexually violence against female folk is as old as the conflicts. In the past, violence against women has been observed in a variety of conflicts, including wars between nations, ethnic conflicts, and riots between racial or religious communities of these, women were subjected to various types of sexual crimes. The Male folk target the female folks of the opposite contesting conflict community.

(ii). The woman suffers different types and measures of atrocities during the ethnic conflicts, wars, and riots. Incidents from the International and North-East India reveal the cases of rapes, held captives, and paraded naked shaming of female bodies as to cause to inflict on the contesting community.

(iii). During ethnic conflicts, sexual violence, including rape, can target people of all ages, including minor girls. This is a particularly horrifying aspect of such conflicts, as it results in severe physical and psychological harm to the most vulnerable members of society.

(iv). The cases of gang rape and women's private body parts being mutilated and attacked with sharp weapons, which often take the lives of victims, are some of the shocking scenarios that female folk face during conflict violence.

(iv). Ethnic Violence, war, or riots often result in the forced displacement of entire communities. Uprooted from their homes, women and children often become refugees with limited access to shelter, food, and healthcare. These vulnerable circumstances, they face increased risks of violence and exploitation.

(b). Now, it is to deal with the reasons why the female gender becomes the prime target during conflict violence. Here are some of the findings on social setup and psychological processes involved.

(i) Women and girls often become disproportionate targets in ethnic violence for a variety of complex reasons, which can include the strategic use of sexual violence, deeply ingrained patriarchal norms within societies, and historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors.

(ii). In normal society, sexual violence, including rape and domestic violence, unfortunately, exists, and during ethnic conflicts, the breakdown of law and order can create opportunities for some rapists and ill individuals, leading to the committing of such heinous acts with impunity and more intensity.

(iii). Sexual violence had long been accepted as an inevitable, albeit unfortunate, reality of armed conflicts areas. Male chauvinisms revenge has always been directed against women. Rape and Sexual assault and sexism serve as tools to demoralize and shame entire populations. Elements of these behaviours lead to the perpetuation of fear and the humiliation of the opposing community.

(iv). Sexual violence, generally in ethnic and communal violence conflicts utilize this tactic to demoralize and instil fear in the targeted population, especially women and girls often seen as vulnerable and symbolic targets, making them more likely victims of such violence.

(v). According to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, sexual assault, is frequently used as a weapon of war. Armed groups often employ these acts to terrorize and demoralize communities, leaving women and girls vulnerable to unspeakable horrors (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, 2000).

**(b). Findings on the ordeal of women and Girls in Displaced refugee camps:** Even after the ethnic hostilities are gone, the suffering and tribulations that the women endure continue. The violences that forces a community relocating to other refugee camps affects women more severely than men. The following is a list of the various obstacles and difficulties that women face when ensuring the survival of refugee camps. The ordeal that women endured persisted long after the ethnic conflicts of violence. The aftermath of violence inducing the community to displace in some other areas of refugee camps affects more the female folk than their male folk. The several hurdles and challenges that women go through in the sustenance in refugee and IDP (Internally Displaced People) camps as evident from various reports are listed as follows:

(i) Women and girls are at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, domestic violence, and harassment from within the camps and communities.

(ii). Inadequate security measures can make refugee camps dangerous for women, particularly during nighttime.

(iii). Limited access to reproductive healthcare, maternal care, and sanitary facilities can lead to health risks for women.

(iv). In some cases, girls may be forced into early marriages due to economic hardships and cases of early pregnancy on the rise.

(v). Some women and girls are at risk of human trafficking and exploitation.

(vi). The cases of the Bru-Reang Displaced Community, originally from Mizo, had resided in Tripura since 1997 up to 2020 following violent conflicts between the dominant Mizos and the Bru-Reang minority in Mizoram. These conflicts have resulted in significant social and economic challenges for the displaced community for two decades is putting women and girl in precarious conditions than males in the midst of crowded refugee camps. On investigation, to some spots, it has been learned that women and girls in relief camps often fall victim to various forms of violence, such as sexual violence, lack of privacy, female hygiene sanitation exploitation, and abuse of a variety of factors.

Some of the sufferings that has been noticed from refugee camps and UN reports on Refugee camps livelihood bears similarities in the contexts of Bru-Reang displaced from North-East India. They are as follows: -

- The camps are frequently overcrowded and under-resourced, making proper security for women and girls challenging.
- Women are naturally distinct and frail, necessitating delicate attention in female hygiene, as well as during pregnancy and the maternal process. Lack of clothing to hide their bodies properly has attracted the attention of ill-folk males to commit sex crimes.
- The camps may be located in areas of continuing war or instability, increasing the danger of violence.

- Women and girls may be displaced from their homes and communities, making them feel alienated and vulnerable.
- The camp staff may not be adequately trained to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls.

**VIII. CONCLUSION:** The study on the implications of conflict violence on women and girls from the cases of international and North-East India has presumed us in listing the different types and natures of atrocities done on female gender folk. The gang rapes, shaming women's bodies publicly, and mutilation of female private parts are gender-based evident violence. As the sexual violence is not only restricted to women and ladies but also equally to minors and girls who don't seem spared from sexual atrocities. The paper also derives the reasons behind sexual violence as the predominant acts in any type of conflict and war. There are many psychological tactics, social sets, and male-chauvinistic wars involved in targeting female folk of the contesting communities. The absence and chaos of laws induced many ill, sexually driven men to commit sexual crimes. Women are not passive victims of ethnic violence; they are often targeted deliberately and systematically to destroy communities, spread fear, and maintain control. The aftermath violence also inflicts women and girls living in refugee camps through various hurdles. Even among those living in the same community, the ordeal of domestic violence, sexual atrocities, and early pregnancy, sending domestic maids to other families in the city or employing them in prostitution rackets, seems to be reeling.

Women and girls are biologically different; they suffer from sanitation and female-related health risk problems. Moreover, women and mothers primarily take the responsibility of family livelihood and raising children. The ordeal increases the more they lose their husbands during the conflicts. Their burden for family bearing sometimes didn't lessen with a husband partner, as most male folk in the refugee camps are irresponsible and alcoholic idle persons. While both men and women face challenges in life, it is essential to recognize that women often encounter unique and systemic hardships rooted in gender inequality. Most of the outbreaks of ethnic conflicts are driven by male folk. But the ironic fact is that women often suffer for the sins and wrongs committed by their male folk. Hence, it is apt to state and validate those women and girl, in fact, the female gender collectively, are affected more with serious consequences than their male counterparts during the ongoing conflicts and aftermath violence. Therefore, any community living in refugee camps needs to be addressed and given permanent settlements in safe areas and in spacious environments, where women and girls will be liberated from the congested space and instantly embrace education, secure economic sustainability, and stand on their feet as their counterparts' male folk.

Addressing these disparities requires a concerted effort to promote gender equality, challenge harmful stereotypes and practices, and create opportunities for women to thrive in all aspects of life. Achieving a more equitable society benefits everyone and can lead to a world where both men and women can fulfil their potential and lead fulfilling lives free from discrimination and inequality. It is important to remember that violence against women is a human rights issue. It is not just a problem in Northeast India, but it is a problem all over the world. We all have a role to play in ending violence against women.

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