

## Chapter 20

# Nupi-Lal and Women Empowerment: A Study of the Meetei Women of Manipuri Society

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Manipur, one of the North-Eastern states of India, has been in an active phase of turmoil since the British colonial period and its subsequent annexation to the Indian Union. Insurgency and the resulting implementation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958), issues of drug trafficking, unemployment, and gender-related issues have continually plagued the people of Manipur and women in particular. Manipuri women living in a conflict-zone region have always involved themselves in every socio-economic and political situation of the state since historical times, and Nupi-Lal, which is the first ever women oriented movement, shows the glorious and painstaking journey of women empowerment. Even in today's modern society, these empowered women are still trapped in the dark veil of political conflict and social dystopia. The chapter is an attempt to study the social constructs of Manipuri society and to recapture the causes, reasons, and results of the First and Second Nupi-Lal of Manipur and their accumulative impact on the women of present day Manipuri society.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Studies on women have gained a strong foothold and an unbeatable interest among the present generation. It all started from the second wave of feminism dating from 1960 to the present day. Since then, the topic of women in every field of study continued to grow and expand to broader areas of study courses and programmes. Women studies is different from gender studies from the perspective that women's studies focusses only on women's issues, their lives, experiences, attitudes, expectations, problems and prospects as well. While gender studies is more of an inclusive term and is a social construct that includes both men and women, LGBTQ's and other queer theories. As time progresses, 'women' as a concept or 'women' as a study have gained new insights of learning featuring race, class, sexuality, movements, activities, region, media, religion, ethnicity, political and ideological convictions as well. However the study of women is very much related with society and women itself is regarded as the mirror and model of the society. By observing certain fundamental ways of a society, we can decipher the place and position of women in that particular society.

Society at large depends on the progress of women and the type of position that women enjoy in the society also brings out the fundamental social spirit of the age and the region to which women are subject to. However it is not enough to just assess the position of women in the current times and it is important to have a prior idea and understanding of the women's situation from the historical perspective. Over the years, each and every country of the world has their own fair share of incredible men and women but it's been always the tales of extraordinary women that creates interesting pages of history. Stories of brave and daring women transcend all barriers to prove their might, influence and capabilities regardless of time and space.

## **MEETEI WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE IN THE SOCIETY**

Manipur, one of the eight states of North-East India was once a strong and independent Asiatic kingdom. The state has two distinct physical regions: hills, which compose of 90% of the entire land and a narrow valley that occupies the rest 10% of the total land area. The hills are inhabited by different tribal communities and the Imphal valley, which is the capital of the state, is mainly inhabited by the Meeteis along with a mixture of the other communities as well viz. Meetei Pangals (Muslims), Naga and Kuki tribes. In the history of Manipur, much have been seen and heard of the great and endless contributions made by women in the social, political, economic and cultural developments of the state. Living in a patri-oriented society, women of

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