

The Aftermath of Ongoing Ethnic Conflict: A Socio-Economic Analysis of the Manipur State.

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Abstract

This paper explores the socio-economic aftermath of ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur, India, focusing on its profound impacts on displacement, economic stability, healthcare, education, and social cohesion. Since May 3, 2023, ethnic clashes between the Kuki and Meitei communities have forced over 50,000 people into displacement across 349 relief camps, straining limited resources and intensifying socio-economic challenges. Rooted in long standing grievances and escalated by demands for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status by the Meitei, the conflict has exacerbated existing inequalities and disrupted critical sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, textiles, and tourism, significantly inflating costs and reducing income levels. The educational landscape has also suffered, with widespread school closures affecting thousands of displaced students and hindering long-term opportunities for Manipur youth. Healthcare infrastructure, already stretched, has been further weakened by attacks on facilities, staff shortages, and restricted access, leaving vulnerable communities exposed to health risks. This study underscores that displacement disrupts socio-economic equilibrium and imposes a heavy psychological toll, especially on vulnerable groups like women, children, and the elderly due to the precarious and harsh conditions in relief camps. By examining these interconnected issues, this analysis emphasizes the urgent need for coordinated humanitarian aid, targeted policy interventions, and inclusive peace-building efforts to foster sustainable recovery and resilience within Manipur diverse communities.

Keywords: Ethnic violence, Kuki-Meitei conflict, Manipur, Socio-economic impact, Displacement and migration, Healthcare challenges.

1. Introduction

The ethnic violence in Manipur, ignited on May 3, 2023 has since continued between the hill-dwelling Kuki tribes and the valley-dominant Meitei community" (Amnesty International, 2023). Due to the prevailing ethnic violence in Manipur, more than 50,000 individuals have been forced to abandon their homes, seeking refuge in makeshift accommodations. These displaced individuals are currently spread across 349 relief camps established throughout the state, where they are facing challenges related to overcrowding, limited resources, and inadequate access to basic necessities and healthcare (Business Standard, 2023). The ethnic unrest in Manipur stems from long standing grievances between the Meitei and tribal communities for resource control issues, and it was intensified by recent demands for Scheduled Tribe status by Meitei (Karmarkar, 2023). According to *The Economic Times* (2023), the violence in Manipur was sparked by a "Tribal Solidarity March" organized to oppose the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status, which had recently gained support from a Manipur High Court order.

The Scheduled Tribes status would grant the Meiteis, who primarily reside in the valley, access to protected hill lands and special quotas in government jobs, a move perceived by the hill-dwelling Kukis as a direct threat to their land and rights. The initial protests escalated into armed clashes, with police armories raided and at least 56 casualties recorded within days. This violent outbreak reflects deeper socio-economic strains within the region, where resource scarcity and limited economic opportunities intensify competition between communities. Moreover, the political landscape, with the Manipur Meitei-led government under Chief Minister N. Biren Singh aligning with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has fueled perceptions of favoritism and marginalization, further deepening divides and resentment (Raj & Travelli, 2023). As it has been more than 545 days since the outbreak of ethnic violence, the people of Manipur continue to face the devastating impacts of this ongoing conflict. Entrenched in longstanding ethnic tensions and heightened by recent legal and political decisions, the violence between the hill-dwelling Kuki tribes and the valley-dominant Meitei community has permeated every aspect of life for the state's diverse population. This paper conducts a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic consequences, focusing on impacts to livelihoods, healthcare, education, and social cohesion. By examining the challenges faced by displaced individuals and disrupted communities, this study explores how the conflict has magnified the existing inequalities and created new social and economic challenges, posing significant obstacles to sustainable peace and reconciliation.

2. Scope of the Paper

To understand the full extent of the socio-economic impact, this paper assesses the socio-economic impacts of the ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur, specifically analyzing displacement, economic disruption, education, healthcare, and social cohesion. It explores how forced migration has affected land ownership, examines economic losses affecting employment and local industries, and assesses the disruption to education with long-term effects on youth opportunities. The study also addresses healthcare challenges, including

infrastructure damage and public health system challenges, as well as the mental health toll and social fragmentation among affected communities.

3. Methodology

A qualitative methodology, focused on secondary data analysis, forms the basis of this study to understand the socio-economic impact of the ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur. Given the sensitivity and logistical challenges of collecting primary data in a conflict zone, secondary data sources provide a comprehensive and reliable foundation for this analysis. Data were gathered from government publications, reports by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), peer-reviewed academic research papers, and credible news articles. Together, these sources capture both statistical and narrative insights into the socio-economic consequences of the conflict. This multi-source approach allows for a balanced perspective on the historical, social, and economic dimensions of the conflict, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact on communities and socio-economic structures of Manipur. While secondary data offer a broad view of the conflict's socio-economic effects, this approach limits the study ability to capture real-time, localized experiences and personal impacts. Future research incorporating primary data, such as interviews or field surveys, could further enhance the depth and specificity of understanding in this area.

4. Ethnicity and the Dynamics of Ethnic Violence

Ethnicity refers to a shared social identity based on common cultural characteristics, such as language, ancestry, religion, customs, and traditions, which distinguish one group from others. It is often associated with a sense of belonging and can shape social interactions and relationships within diverse societies (Smith, 1986). Existing literature on Ethnicity has not “clearly spelled out the difference between ethnic conflict and ethnic violence” (Kipgen, 2011, p. 1043).

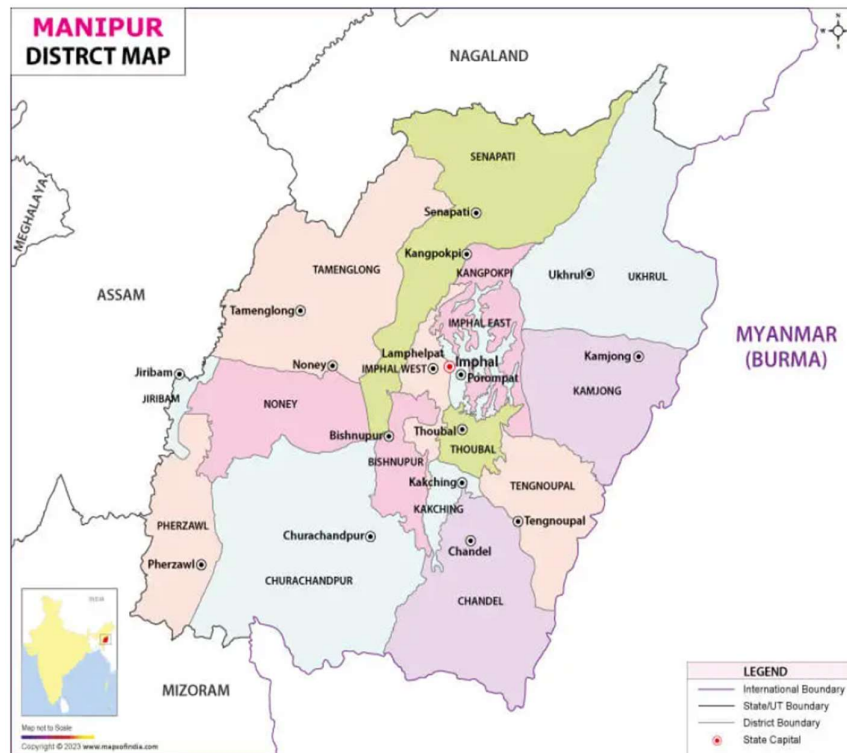


Figure. 1: Administrative Districts of Manipur State

Source: <https://compass.rauias.com/gk/districts-in-manipur/>

Ethnic violence refers to conflict that emerges from ethnic distinctions and tensions, though it has traditionally been under-theorized in comparison to broader studies of collective or political violence. Within ethnic conflict, violence is often treated as a degree or form of conflict rather than a distinct analytical category. Ethnic violence typically arises when cultural or social identity distinctions, such as ethnicity, are the basis for violent actions or hostility, often reflecting underlying political, economic, or social issues that exacerbate tensions between different ethnic groups (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998). In the context of Manipur, ethnic distinctions between the Meitei and Kuki communities have similarly evolved into violent conflicts, reflecting the dynamics discussed above. These tensions, rooted in historical, social, and political factors, have intensified over time, leading to a destructive cycle of violence that impacts all aspects of life in the state.

5. Ethnic Composition of Manipur

Manipur, located in the northeastern region of India, is one of the original “seven sister” states, now totaling eight with the addition of Sikkim. Once a princely state, Manipur merged with the Union of India in 1949. This landlocked state is bordered by Nagaland to the north, Mizoram to the south, Assam to the west, and shares an international boundary with Myanmar to the east. Geographically, Manipur lies between latitudes 23°83’ N and 25°68’ N, and longitudes 93°03’ E and 94°78’ E, covering a total area of 22,327 square kilometers. According to the 2011 Census of India, its population stands at 2,855,794. The state has a diverse ethnic makeup, broadly divided into three major groups: the Meitei, who primarily inhabit the valley,

and the Naga and Kuki communities, who reside in the surrounding hill regions (Kabui, 1995). In terms of racial characteristics and language, these groups belong to the Tibeto-Burman family group (Sian, 2019).

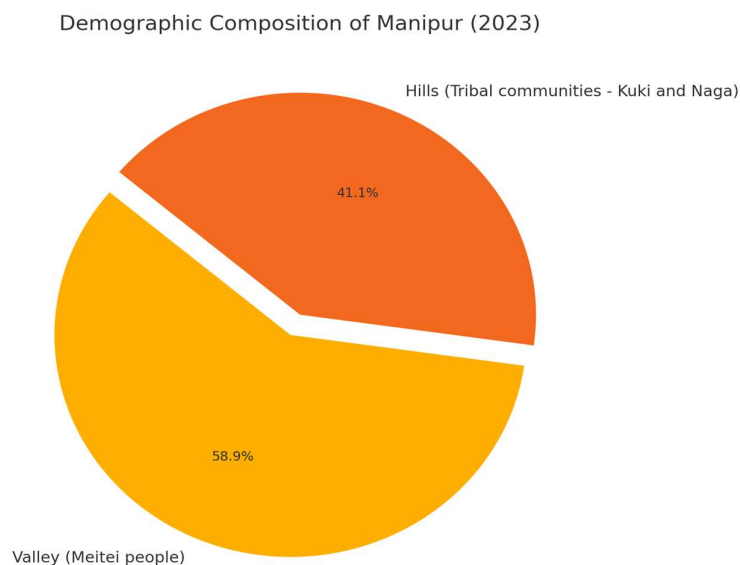


Figure. 2: Demographic composition of Manipur

Source: <https://blog.mygov.in/a-glimpse-of-the-indigenous-tribes-of-manipur-part-1>

The demographic composition of Manipur is split between the valley, representing 58.9% of the state's population and predominantly inhabited by the Meitei people, and the hills, which account for 41.1% of the population and are primarily home to various tribal communities (MyGov, 2023). Manipur is divided into 16 administrative districts, each comprising various sub-districts and blocks that support the state's governance structure. The valley region includes Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West, and Thoubal, known for their dense populations and cultural significance. The hill districts, rich in tribal diversity and unique cultural heritage, include Chandel, Churachandpur, Senapati, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul. Newer districts, established to improve governance and resource distribution, include Jiribam, Kakching, Kamjong, Kangpokpi, Noney, Pherzawl, and Tengenoupal. Together, these 16 districts reflect Manipur's diverse demographic and geographical landscape, each contributing to the state's distinct identity and socio-economic fabric (Integrated Government Online Directory, n.d.).

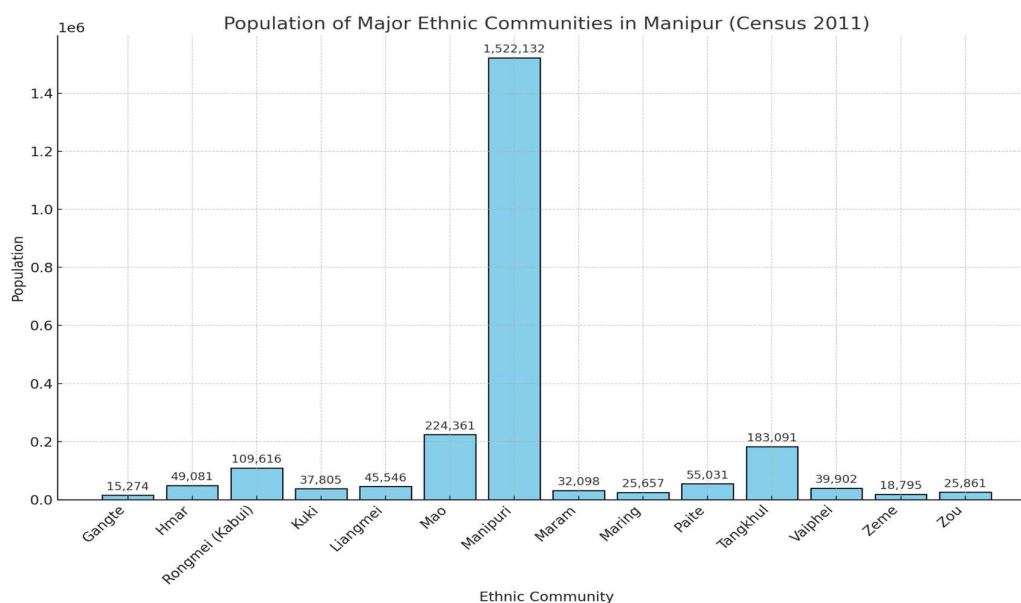


Figure. 3: Population of Major Ethnic Communities in Manipur.

Source: Population by mother tongue, Census of India, 2011.

6. History of Ethnic conflict in Manipur

6.1 The Naga-Kuki Conflict

The Naga-Kuki conflict, which began in 1992, marked a period of intense ethnic violence in Manipur, primarily between the Naga and Thadou-speaking Kuki communities. The conflict quickly spread across the five hill districts—Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong, and Churachandpur—engulfing both Naga and Kuki communities in violent clashes. Chandel witnessed some of the most tragic incidents, with massacres in villages like Joupri and Talao, resulting in approximately 2,000 deaths and widespread displacement. Over 500 villages were attacked, and 7,000 homes destroyed, displacing around 15,000 families (Singh, 2009). According to the United Naga Council (UNC) and other Naga organizations, the primary cause of the Naga-Kuki conflict has been the Kukis' demand for establishing a separate revenue district as their homeland, along with the creation of the Sadar Hill Autonomous District under the North East Reorganization Act of 1971 (Phukan, 2005). The conflict reinforces long standing ethnic rivalries, emphasizing the need for peacebuilding efforts that address deep-rooted issues of territorial claims and political representation.

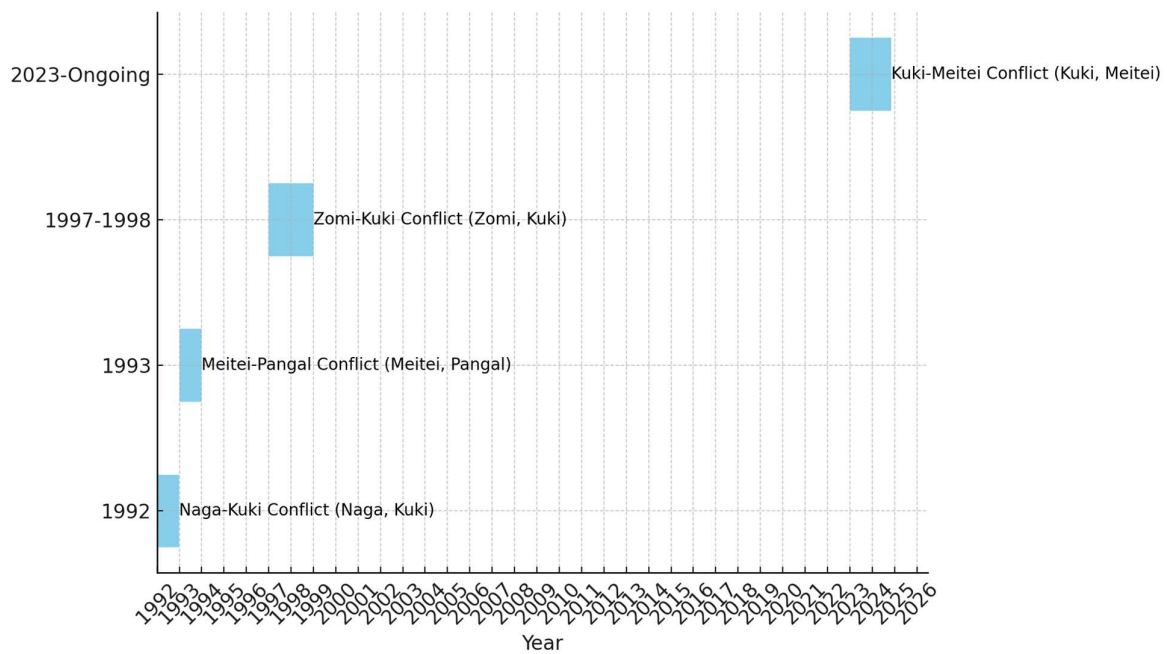


Figure. 4: Timeline of Ethnic Conflicts in Manipur post 1990.

6.2 The Meitei-Pangal Conflict (1993)

The Meitei-Pangal conflict on May 3, 1993, was a violent clash between the Meitei community and the Meitei-Pangal (Manipuri Muslim) community in Manipur. This conflict resulted in the tragic loss of 140 lives and left 25 others permanently injured. The Meitei, the majority ethnic group in Manipur, primarily reside in the valley regions and predominantly follow Hinduism. They hold a significant cultural and political presence in the state and are considered one of Manipur indigenous communities. On the other hand, the Meitei-Pangal are a smaller community of Manipuri Muslims who share linguistic and cultural ties with the Meitei but practice Islam (The Sangai Express, 2015).

One of the outcomes of the clash was the formation of two militant organizations within the Muslim population: the North East Minority Front (NEMF) and the more prominent People's United Liberation Front (PULF). The conflict, instigated by an unfamiliar militant group such as the People's Revolutionary Army (PRA), resulted in the loss of many lives. Additionally, numerous Muslim villages were burned down; however, these villages have since been rebuilt and restored to their original residents (Phanjoubam, 2007).

6.3 The Zomi-Kuki Conflict in (1997-98)

The Zomi-Kuki conflict was an intense intra-ethnic clash between the Kuki and Zomi communities in Manipur, lasting from June 1997 to October 1998. Although both groups share ethnic roots as part of the broader Chin-Mizo/Zomi-Kuki identity, tensions over nomenclature and territorial control led to bloody confrontations. The immediate trigger occurred on June 24, 1997, when the Kuki National Front (KNF) attacked Saikul Paite Zomi village, killing 10 people and injuring 5, accusing the villagers of sheltering Naga insurgents. In retaliation, the

Paite Zomis attacked Kuki villages, sparking widespread violence. The conflict left a devastating toll, with 352 people killed, 136 injured, and 50 villages destroyed, displacing thousands. Although peace was formally restored in October 1998 through symbolic reconciliatory gestures, deep-seated mistrust remains between the communities, impacting their social and political relations to this day (Siamkhum, 2011).

6.4 The Kuki-Meitei Conflict (Ongoing)

The ongoing ethnic conflict in Manipur has severely disrupted daily life, bringing deep sorrow and pain to families who have lost loved ones. Even after 545 days since the outbreak of violence, tensions and mistrust persist between the warring communities. Many people remain displaced within their own state, living in makeshift shelters as they await restoration of peace and a chance to rebuild their lives. The violence stems from long-standing ethnic divisions between the majority Meitei community, predominantly Hindu and residing in the Imphal valley, and the primarily Christian tribes living in the surrounding hill regions. These tribes, mainly Nagas and Kukis, make up approximately 40% of the state's 3.5 million population (Dhillon, 2023).

The recent violence in Manipur was sparked by long-standing ethnic tensions between the Meitei and tribal communities, further compounded by recent legal and political developments. The conflict reached a tipping point on March 27, 2023, when the Manipur High Court instructed the state government to consider granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the Meitei community, the majority population in the state (Baruah, 2023). Such a designation would provide the Meiteis with constitutional protections and expanded access to benefits, which include reservations in government higher education institutions and government positions. The Meitei community campaign for ST status dates back to 1981, gaining momentum with the formation of the Scheduled Tribes Demand Committee of Manipur Valley, which submitted memoranda to the state's Governor and met with the Prime Minister to advocate for their cause (Alam, 2023). Despite years of advocacy, tribal groups like the Kuki and Naga communities have consistently opposed this status change, fearing it would deepen ethnic divisions and infringe upon their rights.

Following the court ruling, tensions escalated further on May 3, 2023, when the All-Tribal Students Union of Manipur organized a protest rally against the directive. During the rally, reports emerged that the Anglo-Kuki War Memorial Gate had been burned, sparking immediate violence. In response, Kuki groups reportedly retaliated by burning Meitei villages in Churachandpur, which prompted counterattacks by Meitei groups in the Imphal Valley, targeting Kuki localities. The resulting violence led to significant destruction and casualties on both sides (Leivon, 2023). While the court ruling served as an immediate catalyst, underlying factors had been brewing for years. The state government's handling of Indigenous land rights and forest reserve policies has been seen as disproportionately affecting the Kuki communities, leading to evictions and land disputes. Furthermore, there is an ongoing imbalance in land ownership laws; Meiteis are restricted from purchasing land in the hill areas, while tribal communities like the Kukis and Nagas have the ability to buy land in the valley. This disparity has intensified existing grievances, contributing to the broader unrest in Manipur (Nepram & Schuchert, 2023).

Amidst the escalating violence, the response from both the central and state BJP governments has been widely criticized as inadequate and delayed. Despite rising ethnic tensions and violence primarily targeting the Kuki minority, the central government's initial reaction was muted. The BJP-led state government, dominated by the Meitei community, has faced accusations of enabling violence against the Kuki population by allowing Meitei groups to act with apparent impunity (Ellis-Petersen, 2023).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi remained publicly silent for months following the outbreak of violence and has not yet visited Manipur. It was only after a video surfaced showing two Kuki women being stripped, assaulted, and allegedly gang-raped by a Meitei mob that Modi addressed the issue. Condemning the incident, he stated that “what happened to the daughters of Manipur can never be forgiven” and acknowledged that the “entire country had been shamed by the incident” (Ganguly, 2023). However, Modi’s remarks have drawn criticism for focusing solely on this incident without addressing the broader conflict or the lives lost in the violence. Some critics allege that the Hindu nationalist stance of the BJP government is a factor in its lack of intervention to protect the predominantly Christian Kuki community from the majority Hindu Meitei community. In response to criticisms, particularly those which condemned the state’s handling of the crisis, the Manipur government released a statement, doubling down on its position. The government reiterated that it was not targeting any specific ethnic group and claimed that its drive to identify and address illegal immigration was a contributing factor to the violence. The press release, issued by the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), emphasized that the state government’s stance on immigration was consistent with central government directives and was not aimed at any particular community (The Hindu, 2023).

Despite the loss of more than 100 lives and the displacement of tens of thousands of people in the first two months of violence, the central government’s intervention has largely been reactionary. It was only after the shocking video went viral that the BJP leadership in Manipur, including Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, took notable action, announcing arrests and defending the delayed response. Singh explained that hundreds of similar cases have taken place, using this as a justification for the extended internet shutdown in the state, a measure he claimed was necessary to control the situation.

7. The Socio-Economic Impact of Ethnic Violence in Manipur

Socio-economic refers to the interrelation of social and economic factors, encompassing how social behavior and structures interact with economic activity and influence each other. This term describes the combined impact of social and economic conditions on individuals, communities, or regions. In Manipur, the socio-economic conditions have been severely affected in all aspects of life due to the ongoing ethnic violence. The conflict has led to significant internal displacement, forcing people to migrate to other cities and disrupting local economic activities. Moreover, community relations and ethnic tensions remain high, as the conflict has yet to be resolved. This section examines how the violence in Manipur has affected various aspects of daily life since the start of the current ethnic violence, including displacement and migration, economic disruption, education, healthcare system, social cohesion and psychological trauma.

7.1 Displacement and Migration

Migration involves individuals changing their place of residence, either by crossing international borders (international migration) or relocating within their country to another region, district, or municipality (internal migration). Individuals are typically considered migrants if they stay outside their original place of residence for at least three months. Displacement, a particular form of migration, occurs when individuals are forced to move against their will; if this movement happens within their country of origin, it is termed internal displacement (Shamsuddoha et al., 2012). In the context of Manipur, continuing violence has left many people homeless, compelling both the Meitei and Kuki communities to undertake large-scale internal migration within the state, while those with resources have sought refuge in other states. According to the Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) 2024 by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), of the 69,000 South Asians displaced due to conflict and violence in the past year, an overwhelming 67,000 were from Manipur. This staggering figure highlights the severe impact of ethnic violence on the region, primarily affecting the Meitei and Kuki communities. The displacement crisis in Manipur represents one of the largest internal migration events in South Asia over the last year, underscoring the need for urgent humanitarian aid and policy intervention to address the complex socio-political and economic challenges that have fueled the crisis (IDMC, 2024).

Interviews have highlighted the severe hardships faced by internally displaced women in Internally Displaced Person camps, particularly in their efforts to secure stable livelihoods. Many start their mornings under the constant fear of assault, having arrived at the camps without essential belongings, including clothing and sanitary supplies. It is crucial to recognize that India lacks specific legislation to protect women and children during conflicts, leaving these vulnerable groups without adequate safeguards (Guhathakurta, 2023).

The displacement has forced individuals from both communities to seek safety, often enduring severe hardships. For instance, residents of Bongbal Khollen, surrounded by Meitei villages, chose a mountainous route to avoid confrontation. A group of 288 people, including infants and a woman who gave birth en route, undertook a two-day journey of 70 kilometers through dense forests to reach the safety of Itham Tangkhul, a Naga village. Civil society organizations have helped transport them to a relief camp at Keithelmanbi government high school, where over 250 displaced individuals now reside in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions, with limited access to sanitation and shared cooking responsibilities (Chirayath, 2023).

Local civil society organizations have played a crucial role in providing immediate assistance to the displaced, offering emergency supplies and temporary shelter for those who fled their homes. However, as the displacement continues, the sudden relocation of thousands has placed a strain on the resources of host communities and disrupted local economies, leading to further economic challenges that ripple throughout the state. These economic disruptions will be further explored in the following section.

Kuki residents from the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley have largely resettled within Manipur in areas such as Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, as well as in Aizawl in the neighboring state of Mizoram. Many others have sought refuge in major Indian cities, including

Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Guwahati, and Shillong. Meanwhile, displaced Meitei individuals from Kuki-dominated areas have primarily been relocated to relief camps within Manipur itself. Migration to cities outside the state has predominantly been undertaken by those with sufficient financial means, while a majority of the displaced population remains in Manipur due to limited resources, heightening the need for targeted support for these vulnerable impacted populations (Bhattacharyya, 2024). These realities underscore the urgent need for targeted support, humanitarian aid, and policy interventions to address the displacement crisis and its ripple effects on Manipur's socio-economic fabric.

7.2 Economic Disruption

The ongoing conflict has disrupted several key sectors of Manipur economy, including agriculture, fisheries, textiles, tourism, and more, intensifying the economic hardship faced by the local population. The initial impact of displacement was felt through widespread economic disruption, as individuals engaged in various sectors were forced to abandon their businesses and livelihoods, prioritizing safety in the early days of the conflict. In Manipur economy, the agricultural sector plays a vital role, with approximately 52 percent of the population engaged in cultivation. The state practices two main types of agriculture: permanent cultivation, primarily in the valley districts, and terrace cultivation in the hill regions, where shifting and jhum cultivation methods are widely used. Major crops include rice, maize, oil seeds, potatoes, and pulses. As the staple food of Manipur, rice is the most extensively cultivated crop across both the hills and plains, underlining its importance in the state agricultural landscape (Rahman & Shereen, 2012). However, the ongoing violence has deeply affected the farming community, forcing many to abandon their villages and fields, especially in peripheral areas where the conflict is most intense.



Figure. 5: Fishing Household Income Before and After Conflict in Pumlun Lake Area.

Source: Meitei, O. M. (2024).

Similarly, the fishery sector, especially around Pumlun Lake, has also been severely disrupted. Many households in this region depend on fishing as a primary source of income,

catching a variety of fish species that contribute to both local sustenance and economic stability. Before the ethnic violence began, households involved in fishing earned an average daily income of Rs 496.67, with earnings ranging from Rs 350 to Rs 600. However, after the conflict erupted on May 3, 2023, market sheds were temporarily closed, halting economic activities entirely. This market was predominantly operated by local women who protested against narco-terrorism in the area, leading to further delays in reopening. Currently, fishing households earn only Rs 253.33 on average, with income ranging from Rs 100 to Rs 400, reflecting a stark reduction in both earnings and sales. The conflict has not only disrupted market access but also led to a decline in fish catches due to the expansion of *phumdis* (floating biomass formations), which have reduced the available fishing area in Pumlen Lake (Meitei, 2024).

Beyond agriculture and fisheries, the conflict has driven inflation to unprecedented levels. Retail inflation in Manipur has reached an all-time high of 11.63 percent, significantly impacting both the local population and businesses. This surge in inflation has aggravated the economic hardships caused by the ongoing conflict. According to the Secretary of the Manipur Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the business environment has been "completely ruined," and predicting a return to normalcy remains challenging (Singh, 2024).

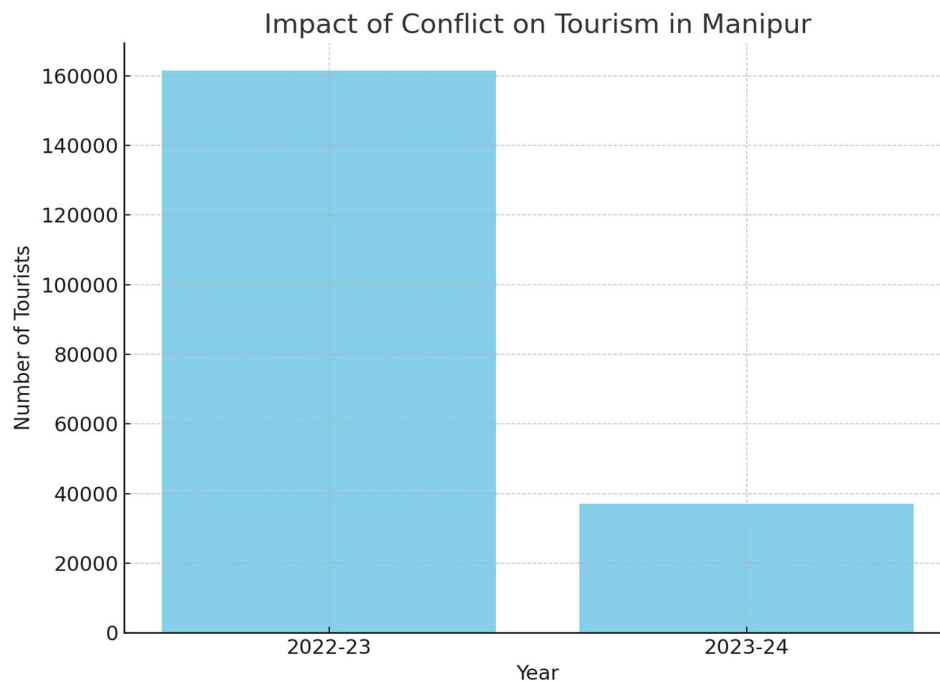


Figure. 6: Decline in Tourists Falling in Manipur due to the Ongoing Kuki-Meitei Conflict.

Source: Meitei, O. M. (2024).

The strain on the economy is further reflected in the state's GST collections, which declined by 24 percent in FY24 to Rs. 1,095 crore. This stands in stark contrast to India's overall GST growth, which registered a healthy double-digit increase. The tourism sector, a critical component of the state's economy, has also been significantly impacted. According to

data from the State's Tourism Department, the number of tourists dropped drastically from 1,61,420 in 2022-23 to just under 37,000 in the following year. This steep decline underscores the detrimental effects of the conflict on Manipur economic steadiness and its reputation as a safe destination (Mukherjee, 2024).

Manipur is also renowned for its traditional fabrics, such as *moiraingphee*, *leirum*, *lasingphee*, and *phanek*, which are in high demand across international markets, including the United States, Europe, and Singapore. However, the ongoing violence has led to an 80 percent reduction in the state's exports of handwoven textiles, medicinal plants, and food items. This downturn has severely impacted Manipur weaving community, which comprises over 462,000 weavers—making it the second-largest weaving population in India—and approximately 280,000 looms, ranking it fourth in the country (Ghosal, 2023). The disruption in trade has delivered a substantial blow to this vital sector, threatening the livelihoods of countless artisans and families across the state. Collectively, these disruptions across multiple sectors highlight the profound economic toll that the ongoing violence has taken on Manipur, jeopardizing both current and long-term growth.

7.3 Educational Impact

The Right to Education is recognized as a Fundamental Right in India under Article 21-A of the Constitution, introduced by the Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002. This amendment mandates that all children between the ages of six and fourteen are entitled to free and compulsory education. This rights-based framework imposes a legal obligation on both the Central and State Governments to provide free education, thus safeguarding children's right to education as an essential component of their constitutional rights (Ministry of Education, 2019). However, in situations of conflict, such as those currently affecting Manipur, this fundamental right faces significant challenges, with children at risk of losing access to stable and quality education.

The violence has severely disrupted the education system in Manipur, impacting thousands of students, teachers, and staff. Many students were forced to abandon their schools as they and their families fled their homes, becoming internally displaced. Government data indicates that over 14,545 displaced students from five of the most severely affected districts—Imphal West, Imphal East, Bishnupur, Churachandpur, and Kangpokpi—are now residing in relief camps. Among them, more than 3,000 children are under the age of five, highlighting the broad and deeply concerning disruption to early childhood and elementary education in the state (Zaman, 2023). The conflict led to school closures for over two months, with 96 out of 4,617 schools in the state repurposed for relief efforts. When schools reopened on July 5, 2023, attendance was notably low, with only 40% of students returning due to safety concerns. In addition, several schools, including Mount Olive School in Churachandpur, were burned during the clashes. Resource shortages and psychological trauma have compounded these challenges, as displaced students struggle with limited supplies and emotional distress, affecting both their academic progress and well-being (Kumar, 2023). The conflict has also created significant psychological distress among parents, who express fear and anxiety over their children's safety. Many worry about their children being exposed to or even involved in the ongoing violence. *Bandhs* (strikes) and blockades have physically and psychologically affected students, disrupting their educational routines and mental health. Some students have even been directly

involved in these activities, missing school and losing focus on their studies (Karbar & Somokanta, 2016).

To address these educational disruptions, various initiatives have been implemented to support displaced students. Many children have been re-admitted to schools free of charge in accessible locations, with the Ministry of Education reporting that 93.5% of displaced students are now back in school. Schools have also started providing counseling and psychosocial support to help students cope with the trauma they have experienced. The state education department, in collaboration with Samagra Shiksha, a central government initiative, has distributed essential supplies such as textbooks, notebooks, pens, pencils, sports items, and uniforms to displaced children, ensuring they have the resources needed to continue their studies. Support has also extended beyond Manipur. The Karnataka school education minister, Madhu Bangarappa, has encouraged students from Manipur to seek admissions in schools and colleges in Karnataka, providing them with new educational opportunities amidst prolonged ethnic conflict. Similarly, the Delhi Education Department has introduced guidelines for provisional admissions for children from Manipur affected by the violence. Many of these students have joined government schools in Delhi as part of a special program focused on helping them rebuild their lives and regain confidence through education (Singh, 2023). These initiatives demonstrate ongoing efforts to mitigate educational disruptions caused by the conflict. However, the scale of displacement and psychological trauma presents significant challenges, requiring ongoing support to fully restore educational access and quality for Manipur displaced students.

7.4 Physical Health System

The ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur has inflicted severe damage on the state health system and deeply impacted the psychological well-being of affected communities. As thousands of people from both the Meitei and Kuki communities have been forced to flee from their homes, they now reside in makeshift relief camps that struggle to meet even the most basic health and safety standards (Rights and Risks Analysis Group, 2023). These camps, overseen by the state government and supported by local civil society organizations, are frequently overcrowded, lack adequate sanitation, and provide limited access to clean water and healthcare resources. Such conditions have increased health risks, creating an environment where diseases and poor nutrition are prevalent, and where access to healthcare is increasingly compromised.

The ongoing violence has also disrupted essential healthcare services, with reports of attacks on medical facilities, looting of supplies, and threats against healthcare workers. Such conditions have considerably weakened Manipur healthcare infrastructure, leaving displaced communities without the essential support they urgently require. The current scenario raises pressing concerns over how well-equipped the healthcare system is to cope with ongoing and future challenges. Health facilities and supplies have been frequently targeted, with seven incidents of looting reported, including an August attack on a vehicle transporting children's vaccines. On May 4, multiple healthcare centers—such as a gynecology clinic, diagnostic center, and hospital—were looted or damaged, and a women's rehabilitation facility was burned. Healthcare workers have faced significant dangers, including two fatalities, assaults, and abductions. Road blockades have further restricted access to essential medicines,

compounding health crises. Access to healthcare has been particularly limited for Kuki-Zomi civilians, who can no longer reach hospitals in Imphal. Churachandpur district hospital, the only major facility in the region of Kuki dominated area, is overwhelmed by resource shortages and understaffing, forcing many to seek costly specialized care outside the state. In many peripheral health facilities, expensive medical equipment remains underutilized due to staffing shortages, further limiting healthcare access in these regions. Maintenance of equipment is also a significant issue; the absence of dedicated staff often leads to underuse or poor upkeep of vital medical tools. Shri L. Jayantakumar Singh, the Minister of Health & Family Welfare, has previously highlighted concerns regarding the under-utilization of essential medical machines in facilities such as the District Hospital in Senapati (Yumnam, 2023).

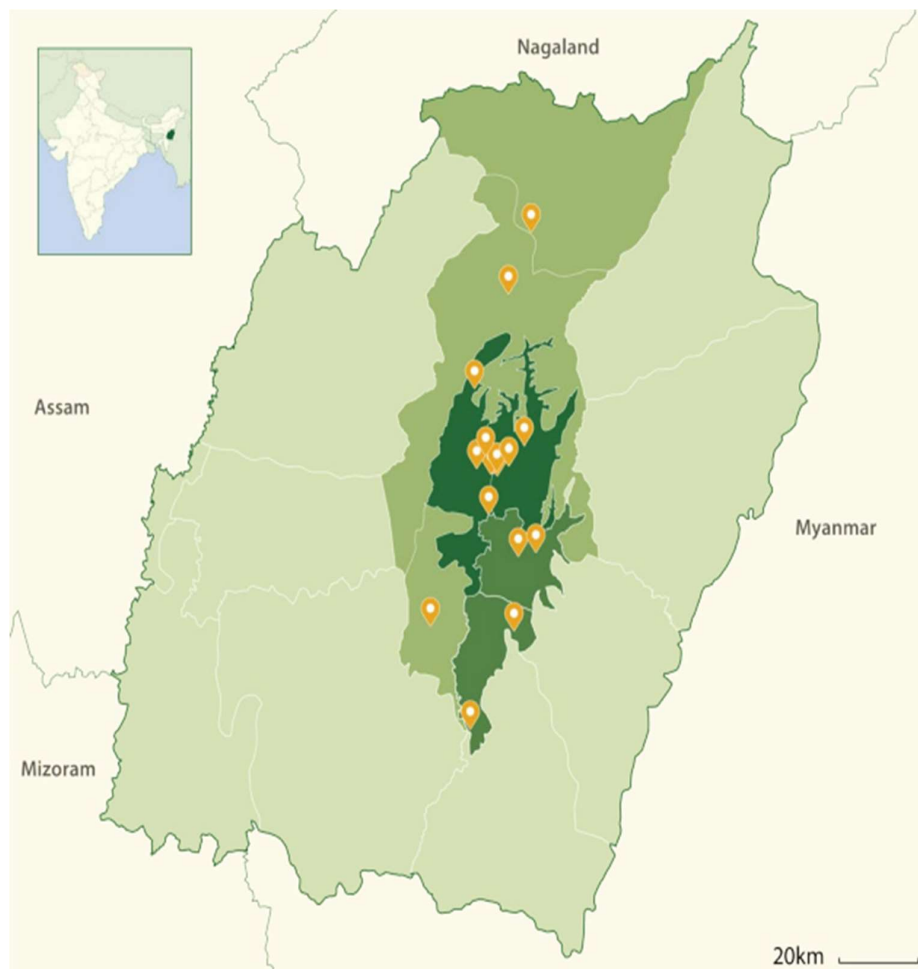


Figure. 7: Reported incidents affecting the health care in Manipur State, 2023.

Source: Safeguarding Health in Conflict Report, 2023.

Despite Manipur's relatively high per capita public health expenditure at Rs 1,364—almost triple that of Uttar Pradesh and double the national average—health coverage in the state remains minimal. Only 3.6% of households have any member covered by health insurance, far below the national average of 28.7%. Coverage is even lower in hilly districts like Senapati, Ukhrul, and Chandel, with 0.6%, 1%, and 1.1% of households covered,

respectively. Consequently, the majority of people in Manipur pay for healthcare out of pocket, placing a heavy financial burden on households and limiting access to quality care (Mohan et al., 2023).

7.5 Psychological Impact on Displaced Communities

The health challenges faced by the affected communities in Manipur have not only strained physical health resources but also led to considerable psychological trauma. This trauma is especially pronounced among those who have directly witnessed the brutal reality of ethnic violence and now endure the hardships of displacement. Forced from their homes, many are now struggling with the psychological toll of adjusting to harsh conditions, with anxiety and stress especially high among vulnerable groups which include children, women and elderly. Studies conducted among those affected by previous episodes of violence in Manipur indicate that exposure to trauma has led to high rates of psychological disorders, with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) being particularly prevalent. Among trauma-exposed individuals, PTSD was reported in 60% of females and 21% of males, with widows being the most severely affected. The younger age group (under 35 years) showed a higher susceptibility, with 63% affected, while rural inhabitants and those with lower levels of education were especially vulnerable, with an incidence rate of 87%. Depression and anxiety were the most common comorbidities in PTSD patients, followed by somatoform disorders (Loitongbam, 2023).

The conditions in the relief camps have further intensified the psychological trauma among those displaced by the ethnic violence. The dire circumstances within these camps where children have already spent nearly three months are likely to leave lasting scars. Growing up in an environment marked by food scarcity and unsanitary conditions, children are missing critical school and college education, while the lack of sufficient toilets and medical help adds further strain. The absence of privacy compounds the trauma, as men, women, and children are all crowded under one roof with no personal space. Although being together provides some comfort and reduces fear, the long-term effects of such cramped and communal living conditions are expected to have a profound psychological impact on all individuals. These harsh living conditions underscore the urgent need for both medical and psychological support to address the enduring trauma caused by disrupted lives (Mathew, 2023).

The ethnic violence in Manipur has left deep psychological scars on many, leaving numerous individuals with lasting trauma. Bonny, a young woman from Churachandpur, was shot on May 5, 2023, during a violent clash as security forces arrived to evacuate Meiteis. Though her physical wounds are healing, she remains haunted by nightmares, unable to sleep, and struggles with severe PTSD despite therapy and medication. Similarly, Chin Neih Hat lost her sister, a nurse, that same night. Hat's mother, still in Churachandpur, awaits her daughter's body for a funeral, suffering from insomnia and grief. Hat herself, now back in Delhi, suffered a miscarriage attributed to the stress and now endures constant anxiety. These cases highlight the extreme psychological toll on Manipur's displaced communities. Mental illness in the region has a prevalence of 19.9%, nearly double the national average of 10.6%, underscoring the urgent need for mental health support for those impacted by the ongoing conflict (Kapoor, 2024). This overwhelming burden of psychological trauma highlights the critical need for accessible and sustained mental health resources for Manipur conflict affected communities.

8. Conclusion

The prevailing ethnic violence in Manipur has left a lasting impact on the state social and economic structure, deepening existing fault lines within communities and bringing significant challenges to daily normal life. Embedded in long-standing grievances and escalated by recent political changes, the conflict has forced tens of thousands from their homes, creating widespread displacement that disrupts family, economic livelihoods, and social cohesion. The overcrowded relief camps, stretched resources, and persistent insecurity have compounded the hardship, leaving both the Meitei and Kuki communities in conditions that undermine their basic needs and well-being. The economic consequences are deeply felt across various key sectors. Agriculture, fisheries, and traditional textiles are among the hardest hit—contributing to spiraling inflation and diminishing income for local communities. The closure of schools and repurposing of educational facilities for relief efforts have created a significant setback for Manipur youth, affecting thousands of students whose educational journeys have been abruptly interrupted. The healthcare system, already under strain, has been further weakened by direct attacks on facilities, staff shortages, and restricted access to medical supplies, leaving many without adequate healthcare and increasing public health risks within relief camps and communities.

The psychological toll on those displaced has been equally intense. High levels of PTSD, anxiety, and depression are prevalent, particularly among those who have experienced violence firsthand, with women, children, and the elderly bearing the brunt of the trauma. Personal accounts underscore the immense challenges of living with ongoing fear and the enduring impacts of disrupted lives, highlighting the urgent need for accessible mental health support and consistent psychosocial care within affected communities. Addressing both the immediate and long term impacts of the conflict is essential for fostering peace and reconciliation in Manipur. There is an urgent need for humanitarian aid, alongside targeted policy interventions and inclusive peace-building initiatives, to begin the long and challenging process of restoring peace and economic foundations in Manipur. By recognizing and addressing these complex challenges, Manipur can work toward a future in which communities are supported in their recovery, empowered to rebuild, and encouraged to move beyond the divisions that have fueled this conflict. Ultimately, fostering cross community trust and resilience will be essential in helping Manipur navigate a path toward lasting peace and social cohesion.

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