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Who Are Meira Paibis, Manipur's 'Torch-Bearing' Women Activists

Why In The News?

- In A Video Posted On Twitter On Monday (June 26), **The Spear Corps Of The Indian Army Accused Women Activists In Manipur** Of "Deliberately Blocking Routes And Interfering In Operations Of Security Forces" As The State Struggles To Contain The Weekslong Waves Of Rioting And Unrest.
- Since The Beginning Of May, Violence Has Erupted Mainly Between The **Valley-Dwelling Majority Meiteis And Hills-Dwelling Kuki Zomi Groups** After The Old Meitei Demand For Inclusion In The List Of Scheduled Tribes (STs) Escalated Dramatically.

Who Are The Meira Paibis Of Manipur?

- The Meira Paibis, Also Known As **Imas Or Mothers Of Manipur**, Are Meitei Women Who Come From All Sections Of Society In The Imphal Valley, Are Widely Respected, And Represent A Powerful Moral Force.
- The Meira Paibis Are **Loosely Organised**, Usually Led By Groups Of Senior Women, But **Have No Rigid Hierarchy Or Structure,** Or Any Overt Political Leanings.
- They May Become More Visible During Certain Times, But Their Presence And Importance In Manipuri Civil Society Are Permanent And Palpable, And Their Role As **Society's Conscience Keepers** Is Widely Acknowledged.

- During His Recent Visit To Manipur As Violence Raged In The State, Home **Minister Amit Shah Met With The Meira Paibis** As Part Of His Meetings With Various Civil Society Groups.

Genesis Of Meira Paibis Movement

- **Meira Paibi** (Women Torch Bearers) Is A Women's Social Movement In The Indian State Of Manipur. Referred To As The **"Guardians Of Civil Society",** Meira Paibi Dates To 1977 In Present **Kakching District.**
- It Derives Its Name From The **Flaming Torches Which The Women Carry While Marching Through City Streets**, Often At Night. They Do So Both As A Patrol, And In Protest, Seeking Redress Against Human Rights Violations Committed By Paramilitary And Armed Forces Units Against The Innocent.
- Contextualized, Meira Paibi Was Founded At A Time When The People Of Manipur Were Fighting For **Self-determination, Political Autonomy, And Independence.**

Major Actions Undertaken By These Women

- The Meira Paibi Women Were The Active Support Base Of **Irom Sharmila**, The Activist Who Remained On A **Hunger Strike In The State From 2000 To 2016** To Protest Against The **Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA),** Which Gives The Armed Forces Immunity Against Action In "Disturbed" Areas.

- In 2015, The State Saw Tensions Over Demands For **The Inner Line Permit (ILP) System** To Be Introduced There, Requiring Outsiders To Obtain A Permit To Enter. Protesters Contended That This Was Necessary **In Order To Protect Local Interests, Culture, And Commercial Opportunities** Available To Them.

- Meira Paibis Were Part Of A Bandh After First Time **BJP MLA Heikham Dingo Singh** Was Accused Of Going Back On His Promise To Marry A Woman, The Woman Approached The Meira Paibis In Her Locality. **The Women Stormed Into Sekmai Town And Stood In Front Of The MLA's Gates.**

- The Meira Paibis Have Been Reported To Play A **Role In The Current Crisis** As Well. The Armed Forces Recently Apprehended 12 KYKL Cadres With Arms, Ammunition And War-Like Stores During An Operation In Itham Village In Imphal East, But Were **Forced To Release The Men**, Reportedly After Pressure From **Women Activists Who Confronted The Security Personnel**.

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