CONTEXTUALIZING EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY OF MEITEI WOMEN INVOLVED IN POTTERY WORK IN THONGJAO, MANIPUR

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Certificate

This dissertation entitled *"Contextualizing Empowerment: A Study of Meitei Women Involved in Pottery Work in Thongjao, Manipur"*, is submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of **Master of Philosophy (M.Phil)** of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University and is her own work.

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We recommend that this dissertation shall be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Women in the Midst of Smoke and Dust

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgement i

List of Maps ii

List of Tables iii

Chapters

Chapter I:
Conceptualization and Methodological Framework of the Study 1-23

Chapter II:
Women's Empowerment: Contextualizing and Understanding the Concept 24-45

Chapter III:
Exploring Women's Lives in the Context of Empowerment 46-89

Chapter IV:
Relating and Revisiting Women's Lives 90-102

Chapter V:
Conclusion 103-105

Annexure 106-108

Bibliography 109-113

LIST OF MAPS

Figure 1: Village Map – Thongjao 15A

Figure 2: Kakching Sub-division Map 15B

Figure 3: District Map – Thoubal 15C

LIST OF TABLES

Table Headings	Page No.
Table 3.1: Profile of the First Group in First Category	47
Table 3.2: Impact of support system in income earning	49
Table 3.3: Profile of the Second Group in First Category	50
Table 3.4: Impact of support system in income earning	51
Table 3.5: Profile of the Third Group in First Category	52
Table 3.6: Impact of support system in income earning	53
Table 3.7: Profile of the Second Category	54
Table 3.8: Impact of support system in income earning	55
Table 3.9: Profile of the Third Category	56
Table 3.10: Affected group in the politics of profit making	60
Table 3.11: Discrimination against the female child	74
Table 3.12: Availability of options other than pottery work among the third category respondents	85

Chapter I:
Conceptualization and Methodological Framework of the Study

Introduction:

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw a series of women's movements, first around social issues like women's education and widow remarriage and then around the freedom struggle itself and currently in many different platforms, the issue around the status of women. The concept of women's empowerment throughout the world has its roots in women's movement. In India, the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) was a landmark for the cause of women. This is the time when the concept of women and development was introduced for the first time. Sen views development as a process of expanding the real freedoms the people enjoy. In this approach, expansion of freedom is viewed as both (a) the primary end and (b) the principal means of development. He further elaborates that the lack of substantive freedoms relates directly to economic poverty, which robs people of the freedom to satisfy hunger, or to achieve sufficient nutrition, or to obtain remedies for treatable illnesses, or the opportunity to be adequately clothed or sheltered, or to enjoy clean water or sanitary facilities.[1] Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny; poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation; neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states[2].

Sen's emphasis on the importance of freedom and liberation for self-growth and decision-making is because greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help

[1] Sen, A. 2006. *Development as Freedom*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press
[2] Ibid.

themselves and also to influence the world, which are central to the process of development. The classical understanding of development saw the poor people as "*beneficiaries*" but since the mid-eighties, the development discourse has changed where the poor has recognized as "*partners of development*". Manju Dhall raises a valid point of discussion that is 'Can Women's Empowerment be packed into a span of 12 months?' referring to the declaration of "Women's Year of Empowerment" by the Finance Minister in 2001[3]. Here is a need to look little deeper while discussing the concept of empowerment because support coming from outside may bring empowerment of the women; this is a kind of another welfare handout, something governments or agencies do on behalf of people. Now, the risk here is the likelihood of emphasizing exclusively the provision of services or access to external resources, without focusing on the strategies that will create spaces particularly for women to build self-confidence in order to manage or control those services. The shift in the developmental policy had occurred due to the imbalanced economic development, increased class inequality, gender segregation in a big way and sharp downward mobility of a vast section of the population along with increased levels of poverty, illiteracy and ill health differently among men and women.[4]

In the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) came up with a statement which says that

> *"Empowering women means: extending choices: choices about if and when to get married, choices about education, employment opportunities, controlling the social and physical environment; choice about if and when to get pregnant, and ultimately about family size. Empowerment requires that husbands, partners, family members and communities help to promote a healthy environment free from*

[3]Dhall, M. 2002. 'Amartya Sen and the Women's Year of Empowerment', *Mainstream* 40(19) pp 17-18.
[4] SinghaRoy, D.K. (ed) 2001. *Social Development and the Empowerment of Marginalized Groups-Perspectives and Strartegies*. New Delhi: Sage Publications pp. 13-14.

coercion, violence or abuse, in which women are free to use community services on a basis of equality" (Sadik, Popline July-August 1994:3)[5].

The concept of empowerment can be viewed as an ongoing process and also the result of the process itself. Empowerment is essentially a process of acquiring greater control over one's life and life-choices. It is one kind of power an individual possesses that is 'power from within'. It is the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each individual and makes truly human. Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals. Empowerment is not only greater extrinsic control- control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes), but also a growing intrinsic capacity- greater self-consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology (Gita Sen & Batliwala cited by Ashish Bose)[6]. It is made quite clear here that it is nothing to do with control over others or 'power over' where one person, or grouping of people, is able to control in some way or other the actions or options of another. So, power is both the source of oppression in its abuse and the source of emancipation in its use.[7] It is important to understand as the process of empowerment is inevitably rooted in and stems from a state of disempowerment, characterized by a number and variety of denials in life and life choices.[8] Naila kabeer[9] also pointed out that people exercising a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful but they are not empowered because they were never disempowered

[5] S.G. Neidell. 1998. "Women's empowerment as a public problem: A case study of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development", *Population Research and Policy Review*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Netherlands, June 17(3): 247-260.
[6] Bose, A. 2004. *Women Empowerment through Capacity Building.* New Delhi: Samskriti.
[7] Rowlands, J. *A Word of the Times, but What Does it Mean? Empowerment in the Discourse and Practice of Development* in Afshar, H.(ed) .1998. *Women and Empowerment: Illustrations from the Third World.* London: Macmillan Press Ltd. pp. 11-33.
[8] Bose, opcit.
[9] Kabeer, Naila.1999. 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', *Development and Change, May*, 30(3): 435-464.

before. So, the notion of empowerment is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment.

The socialization of women in the family and in the school reinforces "gender roles", that is, cultural definitions of the traits and behaviour that are considered appropriate for men and women. In terms of clothing also, girls look good with pink and boys with blue. Women as a subordinate group in society have internalized "self-sacrificing" and "expressive" values and developed in a "false consciousness" which includes "beliefs in the appropriateness of lower pay leading to low leadership positions and politics.[10]Inequalities of gender are more deep-rooted historically than class systems; men have superior standing to women even in hunting and gathering societies, where there are no classes. Yet class divisions are so marked in modern societies that there is no doubt that they 'overlap' substantially with gender inequalities[11]. While looking into the intra-household stratification, it is mostly confined to gender stratification within the household- the differential power of men and women. One major contribution of feminist scholars has been to draw out attention to the importance of power followed by control that determines the subordinate position of women in society. In concrete terms, this notion of power or control manifests in the *patriarchal ideology* which exists in all societies.[12] Different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct *"rules of the game"* and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression.[13] Women strategize within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define and this according to Deniz Kandiyoti, is

[10] Tapan, N., *Gender Discrimination* in Tapan, N.(ed) 2000. *Need For Women Empowerment* : Jaipur Rawat Publications: 44-71.

[11] Giddens, A. 2001. *Chapter10: Class, Stratification and Inequality* in Anthony Giddens. Sociology. U.K.: Polity Press. pp: 280-306.

[12] Nanda, B. and Mangalagiri, A. *Patriarchal Ideology and Women's Oppressio* in Kaushik, S. (ed). 1985. *Women's Oppression: Patterns and Perspectives*. New Delhi:Shakti Books pp.11-22.

[13] Kandiyoti, D. 1988. "Bargaining with Patriarchy", *Gender and Society*, September 2(3): 274 -290.

termed as *'patriarchal bargain'* in any given society which may exhibit variations according to class, caste and ethnicity[14].

Women's empowerment according to Naila Kabeer, is the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability[15]. Inorder to have choice there needs to be alternatives available for the choice to be taken. Kabeer finds a logical association between poverty and disempowerment because an insufficiency of the means for meeting one's basic needs often rules out the ability to exercise meaningful choice. Empowerment is about change and it refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Gender stratification within the household - the differential power of men and women can be taken as evidence of inequalities which further impedes the capacity to make choices in life. Unequal gender relations imply that men not only have and can exercise greater power than women in almost all spheres of functioning; they also have culturally and often legally sanctioned power over women and have greater control of and access to resources and information. This inequality in gender relations is embodied in various social institutions, but is reproduced daily in the household[16].

The presence of inequalities show the operation of power in two ways: either as an absence of choice on the part of women as the subordinate group or as active discrimination by men as the dominant group usually finds in the patriarchal society. It appears that when the women themselves choose to live with these inequalities, they do not take the situation as a problem. This is mainly because they have internalized their social status as persons of lesser value. This is quite important to note and understand while dealing with the concept of women's empowerment. Such behaviour can have

[14] Kandiyoti, D, opcit, p.4
[15] Kabeer, opcit, p.3.
[16] Kishor, S & Gupta, K. 2004. 'Women's Empowerment in India and Its States: Evidence from the NFHS', *Economic and Political Wekly,* February, 39(7): 694 – 712.

adverse implications for their own well-being as well as for the well-being of other female family members.

The perception of self-worth of members within the household is an important component in determining their bargaining power. Within the bargaining approach, intra-household interaction is characterized as containing elements of both cooperation and conflict[17]. Women's contributions to the household income are usually undervalued mainly due to her gender. Often, women's needs are sidelined and assumed to be subordinate to or even overlapped with the 'family's' needs, whereas for men the distinction between family and personal needs is widely accepted and sanctioned. These dual factors affect intra-household allocations and bargaining power especially of the women. This would further reinforce gender-related deprivation. In an investigation conducted by Stephan Klasen on excess female mortality among married adults during 1740-1860 in rural Germany (in 60 villages), it was found that excess female mortality, which was particularly severe among land-owning married peasants was mainly due to inequalities in the intra-household distribution of survival-related resources that can be best understood in terms of a bargaining model of marriage[18].

According to Amartya Sen, in any household there is an ongoing, often implicit, negotiation amongst the members for long-term, stable and positive environment. The final selection of alternative outcomes will reflect the bargaining power of different members within the household. A person in a household will have less autonomy if she/he attaches less value to her/his own well-being relative to the position of members and their role perceptions influence their bargaining power in the household ("perceived interest response"), this tends to be especially so in 'traditional societies' such as India, where

[17] Bina, A. 1997. 'Bargaining and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household', *Feminist Economics,* 3(1): 1-51.
[18] Klasen, S. 1998. 'Marriage, Bargaining, and Intrahousehold Resource Allocation: Excess Female Mortality among Adults during Early German Development, 1740-1860', *The Journal of Economic History*, June, 58 (2): 432-467.

women may tend not to think in terms of self-interest or of their individual well-being. Women who generally have a low sense of self-worth have weaker bargaining and fallback positions (Young cited by Mandakini Pant, 2000)[19]. If at all cooperation failed, a member's bargaining power depends on the member's fall back position-options available outside the household and it is also termed as *'threat point'*[20]. Power to influence in family decisions will have greater say in the overall relationship. Men have the authority and power over the women. Looking closely into the intra-household structure, men or husbands are more likely to come from the *'order-giver'* class whereas wives or women from the *'order-taker'* class[21].

Men and women spend their income in different ways with women holding back less for themselves. It is undeniable that income confers power, power relations within the families are so complex that income earnings women enjoy less control of their earnings than men in the same position. The socially assigned role of women as wives and mothers can be very satisfying if the interrelationships are smooth and the economic condition of the family is secure.

With the raise of global network in fast track and much of the emphasis has been on economic growth and profit-making be the ultimate end where the public services have cut in huge chunk that has direct impact on the condition of poor, marginalized particularly more on women and children. As women form an integral part of the life of a community, a close look and exploration indeed become meaningful and important. Women play multiple roles in life but they are not being seen as a complete human being on the other side, which therefore calls special attention. Their needs are either being sidelined or are often overlapped with family's needs but men's needs are taken separately

[19] Pant, M. 2000. 'Intra-household Allocation Patterns: A Study in Female Autonomy', *Indian Journal of Gender studies,* January- June, 7(1): 93-100.
[20] Kishor & Gupta, opcit, p.5.
[21] Collins, R. 1991. *Women and Men in the Class Structure* in R.L.Blumberg (ed), *Gender, Family and Economy: The Triple Overlap.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp 52-72.

from family's needs. The concern over women's issue gained more importance in the nineties, with liberalization and privatization of the economy when the old concept of *'growth with social justice'* was replaced with the new concept of *'development with empowerment'*.

Empowerment as a concept has been using quite loosely because it's meaning defers depending on the context of the study. Not a single definition has been defined clearly till date. When we analyze and break up the word empowerment, we find power in it. So to understand power itself is varied. In this study, we would only focus on the existing differential power relationship between men and women in the society at large and also at the individual level. There is a need to treat each person as an end and not as a mere tool of the ends of others based on each person's capability. Women are not too often treated as ends in their own rights, persons with dignity that deserves respect from laws and institutions. Instead, they are treated as mere instruments of the ends of others – reproducers, caregivers, sexual outlets, agents of a family's general prosperity[22]. We will discuss power in a more positive way of understanding the relationship between man and woman but not in an abusive way of understanding power i.e., 'power over'- controlling or dominating another person against their will. We also need to keep in mind in understanding empowerment as a concept and process that women's cultural, ethnic, historical, economic, geographic, political and social location; more specifically her place in the life-cycle, her life experience and most importantly the interaction of all above with the gender relations that prevail around her. Against this background, we would be exploring a group of Meitei women in Manipur, which is in the North-Eastern region of the country.

Meitei women's collective power and solidarity in the public domain have been recognized in the past around the struggle for independence against the British Raj and in

[22] Nussbaum,M.C. 2001. *Introduction: Feminism and International Development* in Martha C. Nussbaum. Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach. U.K.: Cambridge University Press. pp: 1-33.

this contemporary time - women's collective voice about the removal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) of 1958 from the State. They not only play important roles in the subsistence economy but also in marketing and trade for which they can sometimes be compared with those of some West African societies, such as the Igbo, Nupe, and Yoruba of Nigeria; the Ga, Akan, and Ashanti of Ghana, and finally with the Mende of Sierra Leone[23](Cited by Sircar:8). A quotation from Dunn[24]about the Meitei women's active role in the economy stated that, ***"Most of the work of the State, except the heaviest, is performed by women, and they are consequently the mainstay of the family circle. All marketing is done by women, all work of buying and selling in public, and carrying to and fro of the articles to be sold; while at home they are engaged with household chores"*** (Cited by Sircar:4). The statement can be interpreted in two ways: one is Meitei women's relative freedom with women in other regions irrespective of the class or caste and on the other is about their major share of contribution in family income yet their low status in the family as well as in the society in larger context as the ideology of socio-structural superiority of men coexist **[emphasis added].** The social structure offers men the position of authority, as fathers and husbands. Patriarchy is not the same everywhere. Its very nature differs in different classes in the same society; in different societies and also in different periods in time. Though Meitei women's free position in terms of movement in and around the public places has been recognized and documented in the research works done in the Meitei society and its related areas but they do faced oppression and discrimination in one or the other ways like women in other patriarchal societies face. Meitei society, being a patriarchal society, women do more of contributory work and on the other side, they are not being accepted as complete human beings.

There is a saying in Manipuri *(Meiteilon - lon means language)* – ***'Nupigidi Yumnak Leite'*** - which means *'the woman has no clan'*. On the other side, ***'Nupadi Taragi Mapuni'*** –

[23] Sircar, M.C. 1984. *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley.* New Delhi:Shakti Books.
[24] Ibid.

which means *'Man is the master of many'* indicates gender discrimination against the women and girls and also of bias nature towards the men in the society. Sons are considered ritually and economically desirable. They are desirable not only to light the funeral pyres of their parents, but also to ensure continuation of the lineage and family name. This is to do with future security they expect in their old aged from their sons. Among Meitei women in Manipur, a woman's self-worth is dependent on her personal achievement in life as a mother and as a provider for the family.

Empowerment is about change and it refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where their ability was previously denied to them. It is also about giving power to those who are powerless. In any society, there always exists the differential power between men and women and women are less powerful than that of men in the same position even if they both put same labour or even put more by the women. Henceforth, to study and understand women's empowerment in the developmental context become quite relevant as their rights have been denied in different forms and ways which have been documented in the past and also presently in many studies. The developmental discourse has changed in the contemporary times as it accounts every individual as equal partners in the process of development rather than treating them as beneficiaries in the past and to bring equality among men and women in practical terms and not in theory or in paper is an urgent issue to be tackled.

Operational Definition of Empowerment:

- In this study, the concept of empowerment is discussed as an ongoing process although it is the result of the process itself. The concept itself is quite complex and is multidimensional in nature. Therefore, it appears to be very difficult to neatly outline the points to be included in examining the concept in the context of women's lives involved in pottery work in Thongjao village. Hence, the concept is used corresponding to the context in which the study was conducted.

- The concept of empowerment is dealt at the individual and the familial level whereby focusing on the ideological aspects of patriarchy, gender dimensions, power dynamics and authority of men vs. less autonomy of women. The implications due to these aspects on women's lives in making strategic life choices are addressed through the study.
- In the context of this study, empowerment can be understood as the inner consciousness from within by which women become enable to take her own decisions in life so as to enhance her own being that would have an impact on the overall growth of the family and the society at large.

Objectives of the Study:

- To study through narratives the mechanisms adopted by the women involved in pottery work to overcome their hurdles in life as a woman, as a mother, as a wife and also as a member in the society encircled by different norms and values.
- To study the options and choices for women to uplift their status.
- To assess whether economic participation is a panacea for solving the problems faced by the women.

Methodology of the Study:

The study is an exploratory and is based on the qualitative research paradigm which tries to capture the meaning of how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and coping mechanisms adopted by the women in challenging life situations.

Selection of the Group Members for the Study:

There are three categories involved in the study. In the first category itself, there are three groups who are involved with pottery work and also involved with group formation.

Identification of these three groups was done with the help of a woman who is also a member of one of these three groups. These are the only three groups who are working as a group in the whole village; otherwise, women are involved with pottery work either individually or with the family members helping one another in their own houses.

The second category comprises of those single individuals who are involved in pottery work but not in group formation. The third category consists of single individuals who are neither with group formation nor with pottery work. These last two categories were taken with the objective of understanding the socio-economic conditions of women in different categories their life experiences and finally the overall well-being of the individuals depending on their living conditions. By doing so, it is hoped that the study could make comparisons across categories and also within the categories itself. The diagrammatical presentation of these three different categories is given below which will help in getting the clear picture of the group members included in this study.

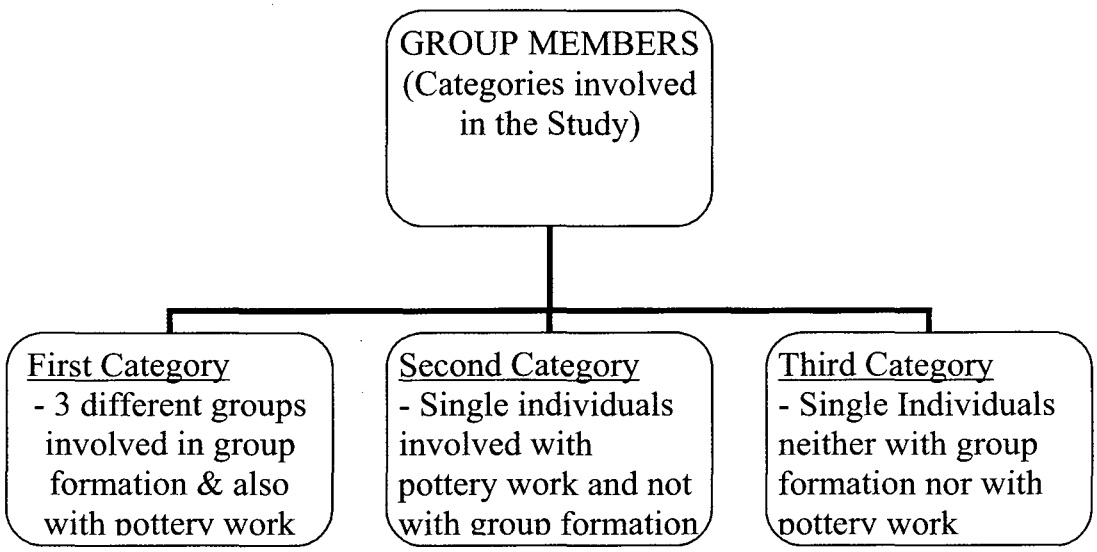


Diagram: This is the diagrammatic presentation of the group members included in this whole study.

A brief about the three categories involved in the Study:

In the first category, there are three different groups working as a group together meaning these are the groups involved with pottery work and also with group formation. The first group in this first category, there are 12 members working under an unmarried woman who had completed her M.Tech in Geo-Physics in 2000. It has been working since three and half years. The women members in this group are those who cannot buy the required materials and also do not have proper place for pottery work. They all belong to low socio-economic status and most of them except a few members (2-3 members) are the main bread winners in their families. In the second group of the first category, members comprise of families working together in one place. The members in this group are those families who do not have proper place to work but have capability of buying the required materials of their own. The place they are working is given by one NGO which is located 25 kilometers away from the village. This organization is supposed to be working on "Rural Development", but the organization is doing nothing apart from the place they have given to this village. There are two rooms, one big hall and a slightly smaller room adjacent to the big hall and one fire place. The place is known as "pottery" according to the villagers. For their pottery work, they use the term *"chaphu shaba"* in Meiteilon, the literal meaning is *"pot making"* in English. There are 10 members in this group. This has been working since 20 years and the members have joined in different periods of time. In the third group of this category, the group is under a woman and it has been working since 21 years. The members in this group are those who do not have money to buy the required material and also do not have proper place to work. They are seven of them altogether working in this group. It is quite similar with the first group in the same category in terms of the way it functions regarding the payment of wages and also with their socio-economic conditions. The members in the first and third groups get their wages according to number of pots also depending on the size or the variety they make. There is no fixed wages for them and it all depends on the amount of labour they put in to get what they need for their family expenses because these are the members who are the main bread-winners in their families.

In the second category, the individuals work in their own houses but they are not involved with group formation. These are the individual members who have money and proper place for pottery work. The families in this category are better in the condition of living as compared with the first category families as most of these families have their own share of fields not necessarily they have quite lot of other properties. As they work at their own houses, they work according to their convenient time and also they are relatively free from external pressure unlike the first category where they are bound to work because they have already taken the money well in advance either from the owners meaning those who are the main providers of the materials **[providers, hereafter]** for pot making or from the middle women who sell the finished goods to the market place.

The individuals in the third category are those who are neither involved with pottery work nor with group formation. Except two individual members, the rest are involved with other ways of earning in this third group. They have some kind of support system in terms of family expenditure and they mainly look after the household chores. In this category, those who are originally from Thongjao itself know how to make pots but they do not involve in pot making because they have other choices in life. Their living conditions are far better than the other two categories mentioned above.

Methods of Data Collection:

The study has used semi-structured in-depth interview guide and conducted intensive qualitative in-depth interviews with the three categories involved in the study. This method provides greater opportunity to explore the various aspects of the study in an unrestricted manner. According to Taylor and Bogdan, in-depth interviewing is, 'repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and respondents directed towards understanding respondents' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words'[25]. The respondents were encouraged to talk and share freely

[25] Kumar, R. 2005. *Research Methodology*. Delhi:Pearson Education Pte Ltd. pp. 115-142.

by the researcher during the process of data collection. Through repeated contacts with the respondents and extended time spent in collecting the information, the rapport between the researcher and the respondents enhanced.

All the information in all the categories were collected through writing notes keeping in mind the respondents' convenience and level of comfort in sharing their experiences without any hesitation and reluctance. The study also included the observations made during the process of data collection which is also quite important in doing research. The researcher had planned to use audio tape for collecting the data but it was not suitable for the study area because it involves people's feelings, emotions and relationship between husband and wife and also relationship among family members. Even to use a piece of paper while collecting the information showed suspicion and the respondents were reluctant in sharing their experiences so the researcher had dropped the idea of using audio tape. The researcher checked the data collected at the end of the interview and interacted with the respondents depending on the requirement of the study.

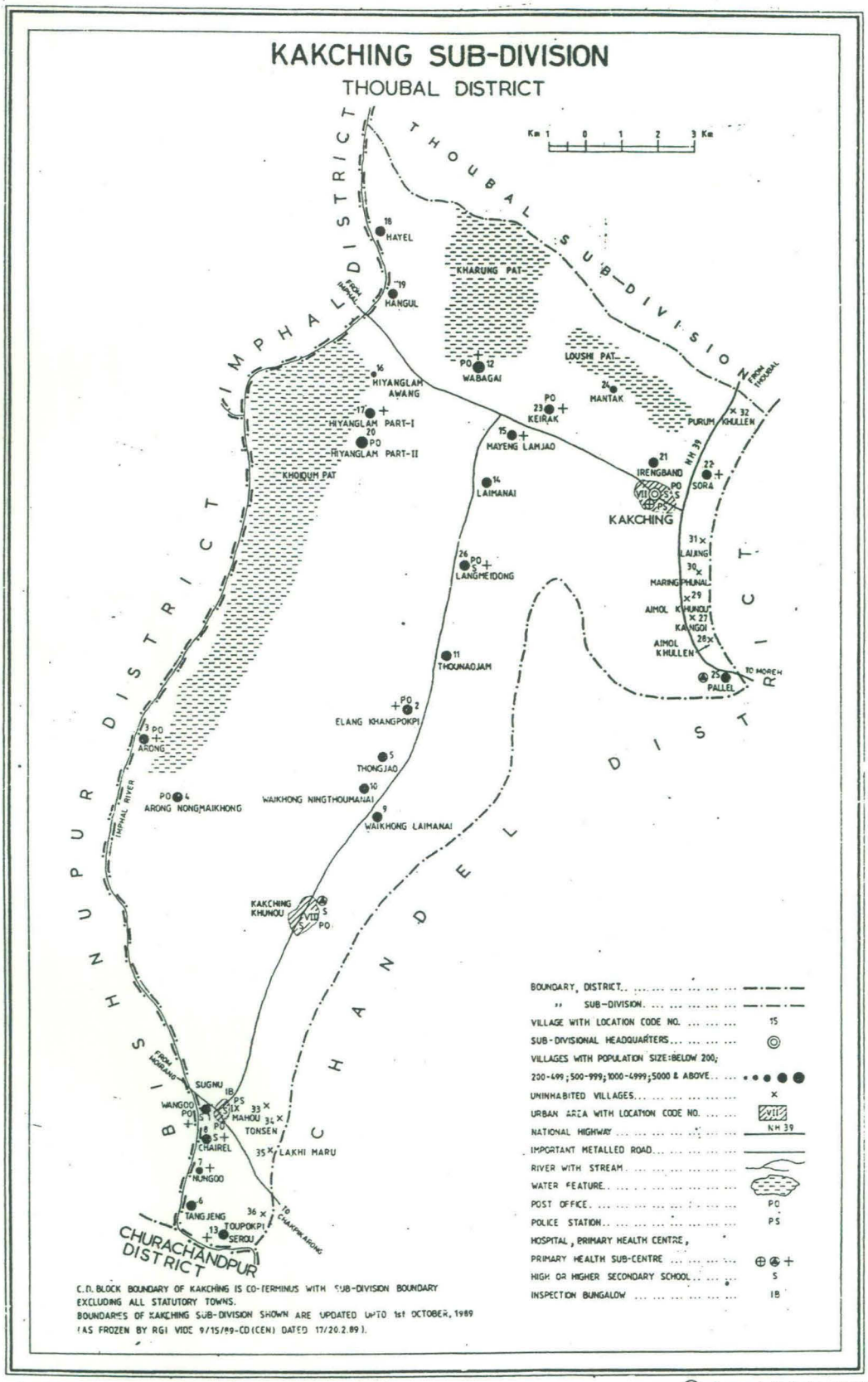
Data Analysis:

In the process of data analysis, the raw data collected from the field through intensive qualitative in-depth interviews with the three categories was transcribed. In the next step, the researcher tried to develop broad-themes emerged from within cases as well as across cases and followed by the identification of sub-themes. In this study, the researcher limited herself to micro-level relationship and its dynamics as well as its implications for women's lives. The study would explore the macro-level understanding of the situation as well.

Site of the study:

The study was conducted in a village called Thongjao which is under Langmeidong Block in Thoubal District, Manipur State. The village is under Kakching Sub-Division which is

(Rural)
সিট নং ৩ এলাংখানপোকপী নং ৭৩
সিট নং ৪ এলাংখানপোকপী নং ৭৩
সিট নং ১
সিট নং ২
বাইথোং লাইমনাই নং ৭৬
সিট নং ৬
লৌকুমচীং
চীং
THONGJAO
থোংজাও সিট নং২
পানা নং ৭৪
পানা ~ লাইফম
থানা ~ থৌবাল
তহশীল ~ থৌবাল
জে.এল নং ~
জিলা~মনিপুর
য়েংগদবা
দলান
ত্রিসীমানা পিলার
অতোপ অতোপ্পা পিলার
ট্রাভাস ষ্টেসন
দলান (মেকম চানায়েক্তবা)
দাগ নং
সিট অসিদা য়াওবা:-
চংখ্রবা :- x
অপুনবা:-
থোং :-
লম্বী:-
পুন্সি:-
স্কেল ১৬" = ১মাইল
অথবা
স্কেল ১মিটার=৩৬৬কিলোমিটার
Made under the authority of the Government of Manipur in 1963 1968 under the Manipur Land Revenue and Reforms Act, 1960, (Act 32 of 1960).
Settlement Officer.
Manipur



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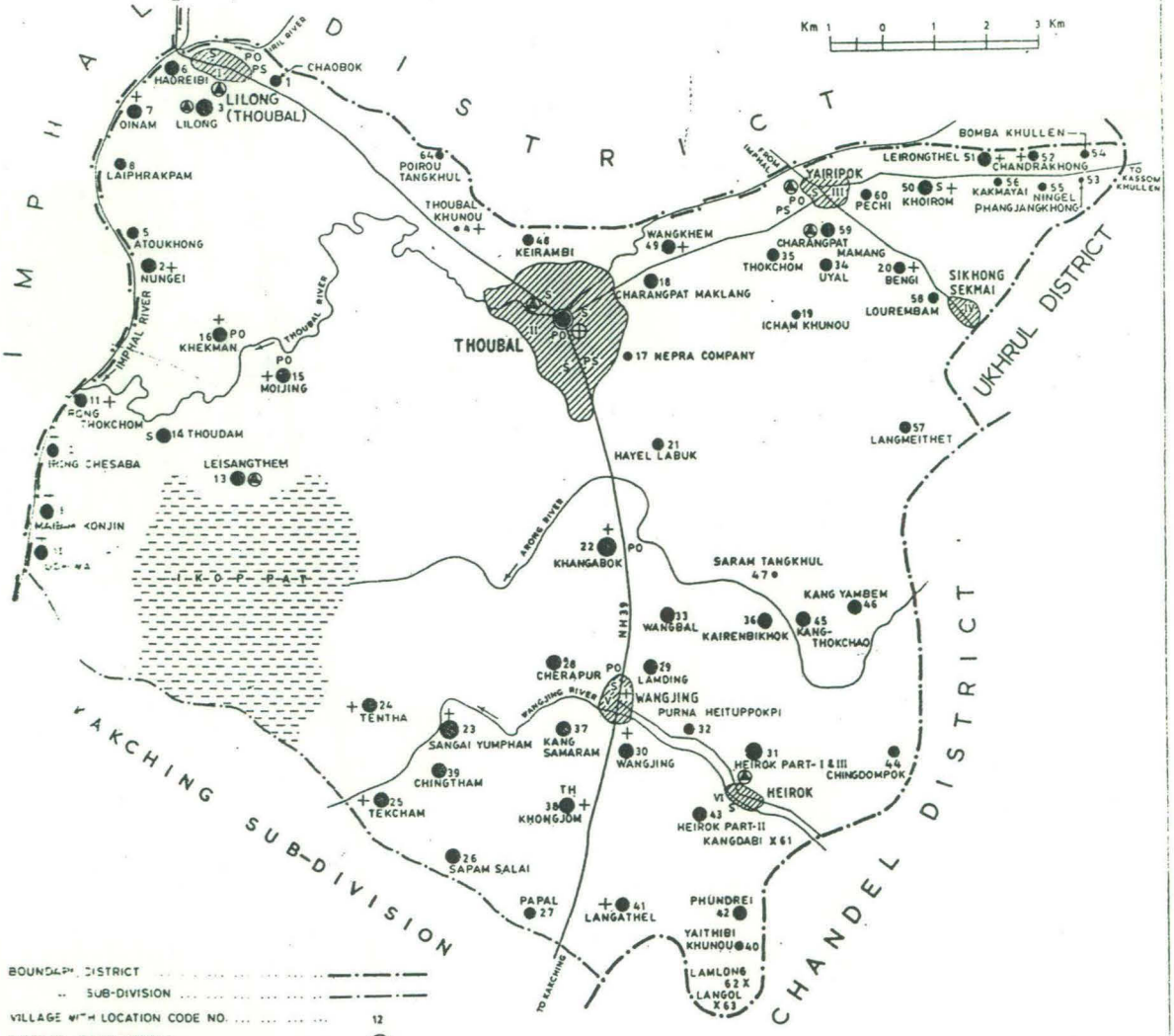
THOUBAL SUB-DIVISION

THOUBAL DISTRICT



BOUNDARY DISTRICT
" SUB-DIVISION
VILLAGE WITH LOCATION CODE NO. ... 12
DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS
VILLAGES WITH POPULATION SIZE : BELOW 200; 200-499; 500-999; 1000-4999; 5000 & ABOVE
UNINHABITED VILLAGE ... X
URBAN AREA WITH LOCATION CODE NO. ... IV
NATIONAL HIGHWAY ... N H 39
IMPORTANT METALLED ROAD
RIVER WITH STREAM
WATER FEATURE
POST OFFICE ... PO
POLICE STATION ... PS
HOSPITAL PRIMARY HEALTH CENTRE, PRIMARY HEALTH SUB-CENTRE
HIGH OR HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL ... S
TOURIST HOME ... TH

C.D. BLOCK BOUNDARY OF THOUBAL IS CO-TERMINUS WITH SUB-DIVISION BOUNDARY EXCLUDING ALL STATUTORY TOWNS.

BOUNDARIES OF THOUBAL SUB-DIVISION SHOWN ARE UPDATED UPTO 1st OCTOBER, 1989 (AS FROZEN BY RGI VIDE 9/15/89-CD(CEN) DATED 17/20.2.89).

DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS IS ALSO SUB-DIVISIONAL HEADQUARTERS.

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the researcher's home town and is about 10 kilometers away from the village. The inhabitants of Thongjao village belong to Scheduled Castes (SC-Lois) Category. The village has a total population of 1853 of which the adult population is 1457 (enrolled in the electoral list). There are 357 households in the village. The total number of women above 15 years of age is 700 and 486 women out of 700 are involved in pottery work which is the main income source in this village. One unique feature of this village different from the rest of the places in Manipur, is women are the main bread-winners and men involved in seasonal work- work-related to harvesting. In the village, caste conflicts were invisible rather class consciousness was noticeable.

The researcher is interested in exploring those areas which are in remote corners and quite backward. The researcher visited the adjacent village to Thongjao back in 2001. That visit put up lot of queries in the researcher's mind once the researcher entered in the social work arena in 2003. Though it was not cleared what could be explored at that moment but extending the researcher's understanding of social dynamics through the classes and also through the intensive field work in TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai) as well as field visits in the first year M.Phil course helped the researcher in the field work process.

Experiences by the researcher in the field during the process of data collection:

The researcher stayed in the village where the study was conducted. There was heavy power cut during the stay so it was completely dark at night but still some interviews were conducted after dinner as per the convenience of the respondents with the help of candles or lanterns. The women respondents were very frank in sharing their feelings and sorrows in life except in a few cases. There were one or two respondents who did not want to reveal their exact assets and present their economic status to the researcher. These are the families who belong to better economic condition in the village or among the respondents participated in the study.

As it was the harvesting season when the researcher reached the field area, almost everyone in the village was busy with the agricultural work in the field. In the beginning, it was quite difficult to actually plan out the scheduled time though identification of the women to be included in the first category was completed. During that time, the researcher kept moving in the village and tried to speak and interact with people around there including both the participants and also those who were not part of the study. After, about ten to fifteen days of rigorous agricultural work in the field, women were back in their original work i.e., pottery work.

Before beginning the interaction with the respondents, the researcher introduced herself as a research student and the area of the research. There were many queries in the beginning of the study - why the researcher is doing in this field and not to other area; what is the purpose behind the study, whether the researcher had come to get information regarding pottery work and get money on their behalf etc. This was based on their past experiences with some NGO groups whom they knew nothing about. It was an advantage for the researcher as the researcher was staying in the village in gaining trust because the researcher often met the women in and around and talked to them wherever possible not necessarily only about the study. Once the researcher successfully gained trust, they really cared for the study and also about the limited time the researcher had in order to cover the objective of the study. They would bless the researcher for good luck in successfully completing the study. The researcher cannot negate that there were ups and down during the whole process due to dynamics in the village.

Women kept running from morning till late in the night performing both domestic work as well as their economic activities like pottery work in the village. They have to be in queue for drinking water from the water tap which are installed in different corners of the village quite insufficient to cover the whole households. Therefore, they again have to spend time to collect from the adjacent village. Men are not part of these activities because

they think that domestic work is meant for women and they have nothing to do in the matter. There is a sense of mine and thine between husband and wife. According to the women, men in the village would sit in the waiting sheds and gossip as they have leisure time.

There were times when the researcher could not even imagine the lives women shared, thinking whether it is really happening in life. Women respondents particularly those involved with pottery work have the zeal to work with a hope that one or the other day their condition of living would be improved through their hard work and they would be able to satisfy the needs of their children which they fail to do so in the present time. It was a great experience altogether in the field. Though the village was just 10 kilometers away from the researcher's home town area but the place was once upon a time declared to be a disturbed area due to insurgency. There was couple of encounters between the army forces and the militant outfits who had forced the villagers to allow them to stay in their houses. There was high level of insecurity especially among the women. There is an army cantonment in the village since four years so the situation is much better in fact no militant outfits are in and around the village area. The researcher often saw conversation happening between the young ladies in the village without any fear and the army force personnel.

A Brief about Pot Making:

The method adopted in Thongjao pottery work is purely traditional one. It is believed that the origin of the pottery work traces back with the work of a Goddess named '*Leimaleinoutabi*' also called '*Phoujentri Ima*'. The Goddess went to a hill and found wild flower on her way back from the hill and the name of the flower is '*Cori Chaphou Manba*', meaning looks like 'copper pot'. She took the shape of the flower and started making pots since then (Information collected from a group of women who are in between the age group of 45-65 years old regarding the origin of pottery work in the village). Pottery work is

Tools Used in Pot Making

the main source of income in the village and only women are involved. Three to four men are also involved in the pottery work in the whole village.

Tools used in Pot Making:

Sl/No	Name of the Tools	Purpose of using
1	Pugging Stick	To drive out the bubbles contained in the brown clay.
2	Beating Stick	To make the different shapes
3	Oval Shape Stone with Smooth Face (Sedimentary sand stone boulder)	To bring the desire shapes, stone on the left hand and beating stick on the right hand in shaping the pot.
4	Wheel Without Handle	Helps in flatten the pots and mainly for making vase
5	Thick Wooden Stand	To shape the neck portion
6	A Piece of Cloth	To smoothen the pot with the help of water

Three different types of clay are found in Thongjao- brown clay; yellowish clay and red clay. As yellowish clay needs more processes like filtration and such like so it is not being used though it is good. Red clay is also not used in Thongjao pottery work. Brown clay is the most common clay which is being used in pot making and also is easily available. Brown clay is being collected from the village fields after digging out two layers- soil layer and then the stony layer. While making pots sand is being mixed with brown clay inorder to reduce the plasticity level and the most appropriate ratio of these two is 90% of brown clay and 10% of sand (Information collected from a woman who completed M.Tech in Geo-Physics).

Steps Involved in Pot Making:

1. Mixing Process: It has pugging process. Pugging itself has two main steps. In the first step, sand and brown clay are mixed and then with the help of pugging stick, it is mixed properly. In the second step, unwanted particles are separated out from the mixture by hand process.
2. Pot Making Process: It has three main stages.
    (a) Making the neck portion then keep for 1-2 days
    (b) Beating Process- to bring the pot into leather hard
    (c) Finally, bringing the desired shape
3. Drying Up Process: Dry up the pots. It depends on the thickness of the pots as well as the weather condition.
4. Firing-open firing in the fire place, Phushang in Meiteilon: It is of 3 days work. Firing takes place with the help of straw, husk, ash and small twigs. On the third day of firing, the products will be taken out finally. Pottery work in Thongjao is actually Terracotta work.

Ethical Issues:

The ethical issues involved in any study, particularly this kind of study where it is required to explore the intra-personnel relationship between husband and wife and also the power relation prevailing within the family need careful steps to be taken up before getting into the conversation or interviewing the respondents (actual research work in the field). Keeping this in mind, the researcher informed the respondents before starting the conversation that the researcher needs to write down the points in between the process. The researcher noted down only after their willingness to share and consent was taken from the respondents. The respondents were given their choice to be in or to be out from the whole interaction. Strict confidentiality was ensured before the interaction begins which is quite very important in doing any kind of research where individual's feelings and emotions are involved especially. During the research, some of the respondents shared

their confidential aspects in life which they have not shared with anyone else till date except to the researcher with their trust towards the researcher which are taken care off.

Timings of the interaction were absolutely according to the convenience of respondents throughout the data collection. In this study, the researcher collected the information either during their work or after their dinner. Confidentiality between the husbands or the male members in the household and the wives or female members was also maintained by the researcher.

Limitations of the Study:

It was the wrong season for the field work because almost everyone was busy with harvesting in the field. The peak season for pottery work is from January to April. It is always good to mention the drawbacks and loopholes in the study so that one can improve or learn from the mistakes. There was a sub-centre in the adjacent village but hardly anyone was around. One women respondent responded that those who are in the sub-centre would come only during polio immunization time and show their faces otherwise no one would be able to trace them anywhere. Therefore, the researcher could not gather any information from the government institution regarding the health problems of the village where the study was conducted. In order to get the village map from the government office took so much time as the person-in charge was never come to the office. The villagers had bad experience with some NGOs who had collected information in the past and never got back to them. Because of their past experience, the researcher was also associated with NGO's work therefore they had suspicion and doubts in sharing their life experiences in the initial time of interaction. Later, the researcher was able to build rapport through constant interaction with them.

Though having been taught not to have gender lens especially while doing field work still I developed gender bias against all men in the whole village after listening to life stories from

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the women in the village. Women are being treated unequally with men in the society which has been there since time immemorial in this village according to the women.

The interviews were conducted in Meiteilon (Manipuri language). The informations collected are translated then to English by the researcher herself. There are words which are difficult to be translated into English, such translation, may not have communicated the exact meaning of the word.

Chapterization of the Study:

In this study, it contains five chapters in covering the objectives of the study. ***Chapter I: Conceptualization and Methodological Framework of the Study*** – in this chapter, it gives the background of the study and methodological framework adopted for the study has been discussed in length. ***Chapter II: Women's Empowerment – Contextualizing and Understanding the Concept*** – In this section of the study, it explores the underlying meaning of the concept empowerment in exploring women's lives from the available literatures. It is the backbone of the study through which the collected data could be analyzed and linked with different approaches in bringing a desirable outcome in dealing with women's issues in the society. ***Chapter III: Exploring Women's Lives in the Context of Empowerment*** – this part contains two sections: in the first section, the profiles of the three categories involved in the study are presented and in the second one, the broad-themes and sub-themes that emerged from the collected data by which similarities and differences across the three categories are drawn out. In this chapter, women's lives have been explored in the context of empowerment and narratives of these women are also presented. Women despite being the main earners or contribute to the family income could not enhance their status within the family as well as in the society. This has direct implication on their well-being in the long run and to a great extent their lifestyle has been reinstate in their daughters lives through the socialization process based

on gender. ***Chapter IV: Relating and Revisiting Women's Lives*** – in this chapter, findings of the study are discussed by linking with the available literatures on the concept of empowerment. ***Chapter V: Conclusion*** – finally the study is concluded with some suggestions and recommendations which emerged out of the study.

Chapter II:

Women's Empowerment:

Contextualizing and Understanding the Concept

Women all over the world are overwhelmingly concerned about the issue of gender equality through women's empowerment. The concept of equality has exercised a powerful emotional appeal in the struggle of women to free themselves from exploitation and oppression[1]. *According to Akhtar, "Women's empowerment should lead to the liberation of men from false value systems and ideologies of oppression. It should lead to a situation where each one can become a whole being, regardless of gender, and use their fullest potential to construct a more humane society for all"* (Cited by Batliwala,S. 1994)[2]. Women have been subjected to a number of humiliations, forms of harassment and ill-treatment, even today; women continue to be the most helpless beings in society. While the phenomenon of women's inequality is universal, its magnitude and severity vary from country to country and within a country, from region to region and from community to community.

Women's low status stemmed from their powerlessness[3]. Powerlessness is again seen as the continuing subordination of women to men in public and private spheres, perpetuated by the cultural messages of devaluation internalized, in varying degrees. These messages form the basis for women's doubts about their power to shape their lives. The

[1] Joseph,S. 1985. *Equality: A Release from Oppression?* In Kaushik, S. (ed). Women in Society - Women's Oppression: Pattrens and Perspectives. New Delhi: Shakti Books. pp:5-10.
[2] Batliwala,S. 1994. *Chapter9: The Meaning of Women's Empowerment-New Concepts from Action* In Sen,G., Germain,A & Chen,L.C. (eds). Population Policies Reconsidered – Health, Empowerment, and Rights. Boston: Havard School of Public Health. pp. 127-38.
[3] Uplaonkar,A. 2005. 'Empowerment of Women', *Mainstream,* March (11-17): 19-21.

messages are percolated down from one generation to the next through the family as a social institution[4]. Furthermore, the beliefs that are central to the subordination of women to men cultured by the social culture about the powerlessness of women can be summarized as the belief that men have the right to control women's lives; the belief that men are essential for the well-being of women and the belief that women are responsible for the well-being of relationship[5]. To empower means either to strengthen an individual's belief of self-efficacy or to weaken one's belief in personal powerlessness[6]. The understanding of social and historical reality of women's status and position in society becomes unavoidable in attempting to empower women- socially, legally or politically.

Since women form an integral part of the life of a community, explorations in the nature of male-female relationships and a balanced appraisal of women's lives and activities become essential requirements for understanding the totality of life in a society. Explorations to grasp the nature and bases of gender relations and to acquire an understanding of women's lives, their concerns, and perceptions necessarily entail a consideration of the dimension of power. Foucault claims that all social interactions are defined and thoroughly permeated by the exercise of power, as expressed in his view that "in human relations, whatever they are - whether it be a question of communicating verbally...or a question of a love relationship, an institutional or economic - power is always present"[7]. The feminists point out that Foucault's understanding of power is inadequate while looking into the inner processes that condition women's sense of freedom or choice in addition to external manifestations of power and dominance[8]. The feminist model of power incorporates gender dimension of power relations that includes an understanding of how ' internalized

[4] Serdar,B.R & Shea,P.S. 1991. 'Empowering Women: Self, Autonomy, and Responsibility', *The Western Political Quaterly,* September 44(3): 605-24.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Conger,J.A. & Kanungo, R.N. 1988. 'The Empowerment Process: Integrating Theory and Practice', *The Academy of Management Review,* July 13(3): 471-82.
[7]Deveaux,M. 1994. 'Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault', *Feminist Studies* 20(2) pp 223-47.
[8] Ibid.

oppression' makes women difficult in exercising power, which further helps in maintaining inequality between men and women. It is important to note that the feminist theory is looking closely and critically at the issue of freedom where it concerns women's responses to structural inequality and male violence. The feminist writings emphasis more on the subject's interpretation and mediation of her experiences at the center of the enquiries into how and why of power. Such an analysis might bring forth: what do relationships of power feel like from the inside, where are the possibilities for resistance etc[9]. Foucault's model of power includes an understanding of resistance as a form of power and further suggests that where **there is power, there is resistance**[10].

The feminist stressed on women's liberation from all kinds of oppression. They demand equality between a man and a woman in accessing opportunities. To the notion of women's empowerment, the feminist focused attention on rejecting all restrictions, controls, limitations, values, etc., on the ground that these are imposed on women by the patriarchy resulting to male dominance over the women.

Judith Astellara writes:

> *"Feminism is a proposal for social transformation as well as a movement that strives to end the oppression of women.....As a movement, feminism has a long history of rebellion, more or less organized but always expressing opposition to the social institutions that made possible the inferiority of women"*[11].

According to Shrivastava[12], the chief predicament of a woman lies in her very precarious condition of not being seen as a total human being. The production and

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[9] Deveaux, opcit, p.25.

[10] Jo Rowlands. 1998. *A Word of the Times, but what does it mean? Empowerment in the Discourse and Practice of Development* In Afshar, H. (ed), Women and Empowerment: Illustrations from the Third World. London: Macmillan Press Ltd pp 11-34.

[11] Tiwari,R.S. 2001. *Feminism and Globalization versus Indian Women Empowerment* In Avasthi, A & Srivastava, A.K. (eds). Modernity, Feminism and Women Empowerment. Jaipur: Rawat Publications. pp. 33-48.

[12] Shrivastava,R.S. 2001. *Chapter10: Women Empowerment: Some Critical Issues,* In Avasthi,A & Srivastava,A.K. (ed). Modernity,Feminism and Women Empowerment. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.pp:171-81.

construction of gender identities are deeply rooted in history and structure of society, recreated and rearticulated in everyday basis. The author further elaborates that this very way of perception of a woman not only derives her of her whole identity but also renders her vulnerable to various kinds of exploitations. The contradictory statements about the status of women have been pointed out by the author in Indian context. On the one hand, women are the 'symbols' of honour of their family or community or nation whereas on the other hand, they are the most fragile, weak and needed protection of men at all stages of life. Based on these assumptions, sexual 'purity' in case of women is to be maintained at all cost, while the males enjoy relative flexibility in sexual attitudes and conduct. Women are exploited and discriminated based on their gender identities, most often seen in various sexual attitudes, practices etc. Empowerment of women is influenced and determined to a very great degree by societal attitudes towards gender issues[13].

Mary E.John further highlights that women's contribution is not being recognized as major rather it is often considered as supplementary wage earners[14]. The women's contribution gets merged with the family and becomes invisible. In terms of care and support which are quite subjective in nature, often been taken as granted but is of immense value to their families **[emphasis added]**. Women are givers of love and care. When we talk about love and care, we are talking both about emotions and about complex patterns of behaviour, mediated not only by desire, but also by habits and social norms. In all cultures, women's traditional role involves the rearing of children and care for home, husband, and family. These roles of women have been associated with some important moral virtues, such as responsiveness to the needs of others, and willingness to sacrifice one's own interests for those of others. They are seen as means for the ends of others not as ends in themselves. This has meant that too few questions have been asked about how resources and opportunities are

[13] Monthly Commentary. 2006. '*Does Employment Empower Women'*. February: 28-30.
[14] John, M.E. 2004. *Gender and Development in India, 1970-90s: Some Reflections on the Constitutive Role of Contexts* In Chaudhuri,M. (ed). Feminism in India. New Delhi: Kali for Women. pp: 246-58.

distributed within the family[15]. Unlike the males, who could spend a portion of their earnings on themselves, the poor female daily wage-earners hardly spend anything on themselves. Their entire earnings are spent on the upbringing and betterment of their family members. As long as men and women play gender-based roles, the culturally constructed notions of entitlement which are embedded within them deny women even their claims to humanity, and consequently they are seen as carriers of lesser rights.

Impact of Patriarchal Ideology on Women's Status:

The dictionary meaning of patriarchy is "rule of the father" and it is the term originally used to describe social systems based on the authority of male heads of household. But now the feminists define the term patriarchy as male dominance over women in all its forms-physical, political, psychological and ideological. The feminists further strengthened their point of argument by referring to the social and political structures, cultural traits and social forces which keep women oppressed and powerless in male-dominated societies. It is the power of an ideology which proclaims that male dominance and female subordination are both natural and normal; that for women to be aggressive is deviant and unfeminine. Such sex stereotyping is promoted through the socialization process[16].

Discrimination on the basis of sex often starts from the earliest stages in life. Woman has to depend on man from cradle to grave; in childhood on her father, in youth on her husband and in old age on her sons. Addressing women's status in Indian context, Shrivastava has pointed out earlier the contradictory statement of women being 'symbols' of honour and on the other side, they are considered to be the most fragile and weak and needed protection of men. Dependency has become a survival mechanism for the female child and for women caring for men becomes a means to strengthen one's faltering self-esteem. Furthermore, women have been typically viewed as subordinate inhabitants of the

[15] Nussbaum, M.C. 2001. *Chapter4:Love, Care, and Dignity* In Martha C.Nussbaum. Women and Human Development – The Capabilities Approach. UK: Cambridge University Press. pp.241-97.
[16] Feminism.2003. *Patriarchy* in Slattery, M. Key Ideas in Sociology. United Kingdom: Nelson Thornes Ltd. pp:156-64.

family sphere. Therefore, women were politically irrelevant as well (J.S.Mill cited by Serdar and Shea, 1991)[17].

The autonomy of women and improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself, particularly in the developing countries like India. In India, women in general and poor rural women in particular are relatively powerless with no control over resources and little decision making power[18]. As women do not have decision-making power, their lives have been affected in an every day basis by the decisions made by others. To this aspect of power, Kabeer refers to Sen's understanding and suggestion which highlights that women are less likely to secure favourable outcomes for themselves in household decision-making processes because their longer-term security lies in subordinating their personal well-being to that of male authority figures[19]. Women's role in decision-making; mobility; incidence of domestic violence; access to, and control over, economic resources can be looked into while dealing with women's autonomy. Couple of area specific studies have shown that often decisions are taken mostly by the male heads in the family. There are situations where women's opinions do not necessarily influence the whole decision. This is described as **male dominated joint decision making.** The prevailing patriarchal ideology demands values of submission, sacrifice and silent offering which often undermines their capacity and deprives them of their share of resources.

Patriarchal structure of society is characterized by male dominance and female subordination. Women's position remains inferior to men in different spheres of decision-making by social conditioning and through gender socialization process. Men and women seem to be keeping decision-making gender based in the household domain. In domestic sphere a woman's life is neatly compartmentalized as first a daughter, then being a wife, and

[17] Serdar & Shea, opcit, p.25.
[18] Monthly Commentary, opcit, p.27.
[19] Kabeer,N. 1995. *Chapter9: Empowerment from Below- Learning from the Grassroots* In N.Kabeer. Reversed Realities. New Delhi: Kali for Women. pp. 223-63.

finally becoming a mother[20]. A woman's status is elevated if she gives birth to a son. Preference for male children is another manifestation of patriarchal subordination of girls. This clearly shows that discrimination against girls starts at the time of birth itself.

Women in the Third World face multiple challenges, among them poverty, unemployment, limited access to land, legal and social discrimination in many forms, sexual abuse and other forms of violence. On the ground of specificities of history, economic and political position of their nation in the international structure of power and culture, women of the First World face oppression and exploitation in different manner[21]. The ways in which women approach struggle against oppression largely depends on production relations that define not only the differing degrees but also differing forms of power and authority held by women of different classes, cultures, and nations. Whatever it may be, women's formal power is always less than that of men in the same position[22].

Recalling Women's Authority in Pre-Market System:

Engels long ago suggested that women held public authority to the degree that a society's production was for use rather than for exchange. Common consumption as a system was existed during the time where both males and females had controlled over the produced goods and its distribution. When the specialization of labour and production of commodities for exchange replaced the old system of common consumption pattern by which the direct producers lost decision-making powers over their lives. Women in particular lost out because the new economic relations based on exchange were in the hands of men. This was the time where women's domestic work had transformed into private service followed with controlling of women's sexuality. Engels argued that the position of

[20] Shrivastava, opcit, p.26.
[21] Bhavnani,K.K., Foran,J. & Kurian,P.A. 2006. *Chapter1: An Introduction to Women, Culture and Development* In Kum kum Bhavnani, John Foran & Priya Kurian (ed). Feminist Futures: Re-imagining Women, Culture and Development. New Delhi:Kali for Women. pp:1-21.
[22] Leacock,E. 1986. *Women, Power and Authority* In Leela Dube, Eleanor Leacock & Shirley Ardener (ed). Visibility and Power – Essays on Women in Society and Development. New Delhi:Oxford University Press. pp:107-35.

women could not be fundamentally changed because women's 'domestic slavery' persisted even when, with the development of industry and women entering into the public production until the family as the economic unit of society was abolished (Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* cited by Eleanor Leacock[23]).

The compartmentalization between public and private domain in man and woman's life started with the decline of hunting, and the growth of agricultural societies and with the use of the plough, men replaced women in the fields. From F.Engels's work-

> **As wealth increased it made the man's position in the family more important than woman's and created an impulse to exploit this strengthened position in order to overthrow, in favour of his children, the traditional order of inheritance. This, however, was impossible so long as descent was reckoned according to mother right. Mother right had to be overthrown, and overthrown it was. The overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex** (Cited in Manoshi Mitra: 24)[24].

It is important to note that at one point of time, women did hold authority and power in the public domain which now seems to be covered completely with the powerful ideology i.e., **patriarchy** as noted, quoted by imminent writers, academicians and others. With the overthrow of the mother-right, the man seized the reins in the house which gave him a more important status in the family. Along side, the transition of family system from **pairing family** where the man had a principal wife among his numerous wives (one can call her his favorite wife) and he as her principal husband among others to **monogamy** took place. This had happened in the transition period between the middle and upper stages of barbarism. The very commencement of **monogamy** was a landmark in bringing forth man's

[23] Leacock,E, opcit,p.30.
[24] Mitra, M. 1985. *Patriarchy and Women's Oppression: An Examination of Marx and Engels* In Kaushik, S, (ed). *Women in Society-Women's Oppression: Patterns and Perspectives.* New Delhi: Shakti Books. pp:23-28.

rights over woman in both private and public spheres. It is worth noting that the specific character of monogamy was- monogamy for the woman, but not for the man. The system retains its character till date which is associated strictly with patriarchy. In order to guarantee the fidelity of the wife, that was, the paternity of the children, the woman was placed in man's absolute power, if he kills her, he was but exercising his right. It was based on the supremacy of the man[25]. Woman was enslaved and become a mere instrument for breeding children.

Engels[26] further added that **monogamy** was a great historical advance, but at the same time it brought along with slavery and private wealth, that epoch, lasting until today, in which the well-being and development of the one group are attained by the misery and repression of the other. Marx's argument on the consequences of exchange on social relations considers social relations between persons taking the form of economic transactions in which all relationships are reduced to exchange and become subject to buying and selling. He had extended his argument by explaining that this is only possible in a society where all value is determined by the ability of things to enter into the medium of exchange-**Market**. To him, this was a major reversal of earlier systems of social relations in which human-beings were valuable in themselves, independent of the medium of exchange[27].

In recent years, one of the most influencing theoretical positions for analyzing gender power relations is that of Amartya Sen. Sen[28] has claimed that "the question of gender inequality.... Can be understood much better by comparing those things that intrinsically matter (such as functioning's and capabilities), rather than just the means (to achieve them) like...resources. The issue of gender inequality is ultimately one of disparate freedoms". Sen's

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[25] Engels,F. 1948. *Chapter 2: The Family* in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.* Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House. pp: 42-119.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Karl Marx. 1995. *Chapter 2* In Ken Morrison. Marx, Durkheim, Webber : Formations of Modern Social Thought. London: Sage Publications Ltd. pp: 27-119.
[28] Robeyns,I. 2006. *Chapter4: Sen's Capability Approach and Gender Inequality: Selecting Relevant Capabilities* In Bina Agarwal, Jane Humphries, & Ingrid Robeyns (ed). Capabilities, Freedom, & Equality-Amartya Sen's Work from a Gender Perspective. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp: 70-105.

work on **capability approach** focuses and emphasizes on the real freedoms that people have for leading a valuable life, that is, on their capabilities to undertake activities. Further he elaborates that capabilities are people's potential functioning's. In other words, all capabilities together correspond to the overall freedom to lead the life that a person has reason to value.

Though Sen's contribution on capability approach is quite significant in studying and analyzing gender gap and gender inequality as the approach accounts individuals as a single unit in the process of analysis and not being subsumed under wider entities such as the household or the community particularly, in the context of women's well-being. Robeyns has pointed out that Sen's capability approach cannot be used as a full fleshed out theory rather it can be used as a general framework because it has not framed out a well defined list of capabilities to be included[29].

Freedom of an individual is an important aspect as it not only shapes individual a fuller social-being but also enables in exercising one's own volition. Sen emphasizes his concern over the freedom and liberation for self-growth and decision-making is because greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world, which are central to the process of development. The concern here is the usage of the term 'agency aspect' of the individual. The term **agent** is being used to denote an individual who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not the assessment is in terms of some external criteria as well. This indicates the role of the individual as a member of the public and as a participant in economic, social and political actions[30].

[29] Robeyns,I., opcit, p.32.
[30] Sen,A. 2006. *Chapter 1: The Perspective of Freedom* In Development as Freedom. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp: 13-34.

In viewing and judging an individual's advantage in terms of the capabilities that a person has, that is, the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value. Poverty can be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes. Deprivation of capabilities reflects in premature mortality, significant undernourishment (especially among children), persistent morbidity, widespread illiteracy and other failures[31]. According to the capability approach, an individual achieved well-being is evaluated by considering the level of her valued functionings, or the 'beings' and 'doings' that she can attain. Potential functionings are described as her capabilities. To Sen, valued functionings are attainable as substantive freedoms. He emphasizes the intrinsic value of the freedom to choose among alternative sets of functionings.

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If development has to become meaningful, one has to improve the quality of life of all citizens giving more concern over the weak, the under-privileged and the disadvantaged people in the society. Development requires and calls for removing poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, inequality, irrationality and oppression prevalent in the society. The understanding of it itself has shifted since the mid-eighties from the notion of poor people as *'beneficiaries'* to *'equal partners of development'*. This shift had occurred due to the imbalanced economic development, increased class inequality, sharp gender segregation and stiff downward mobility of a vast section of the population along with increased levels of poverty, illiteracy and ill health differently among men and women[32]. In the true sense of development, all people irrespective of class, caste or ethnicity should have the privileged of participation in all areas-social, political and economic aspects in the society and also get the benefits of their participation in turn so as they can lead the life that they have reasons to value.

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[31] Sen,A. 2006. *Chapter 4: Poverty as Capability Deprivation* In Development as Freedom. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp: 87-110.

[32] Singha Roy,D. (ed). 2001. *Introduction* In SinghaRoy, Debal K. Social Development and the Empowerment of Marginalised Groups- Perspectives and Strategies. New Delhi: Sage Publications. pp:11-21.

Andre Beteille has put across the importance of the concept of empowerment where it says that empowerment has been viewed as an effective answer to oppression, exploitation, injustice and other maladies with which our society is beset, by politicians, social activists and others. He further extends his point by saying that the idea of empowerment contains exciting possibilities. Fifty years ago, people expected a great deal from the Constitution but in the present time increasing numbers of person seem to expect hardly anything at all from it. With the passage of time, the realization has grown that a whole social order cannot be transformed or transformed quickly enough, merely by having regular elections, good laws and good plans. This is where public attention draws on ***"empowerment"***.[33] The process of empowerment is looking at the rebuilding of the structures so as to form a structure or structures of **women inclusive [emphasis added]**.

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With the women's movements centered on the pursuit of freedom and justice in terms of gender biased social systems and policies eschewing towards male biased nature. The term 'empowerment' has emerged along with the shift in the developmental discourse, power to certain unprivileged sections of society. In this context, empowerment could be defined as a process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power. Empowerment, therefore, is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context (Sharma, cited by Batliwala,S. 1994)[34].

In the nineties, with liberalization and privatization of the economy, the old concept of *'growth with social justice'* was replaced with the new goal of *'development with empowerment'*. In other words, it is a change from **trickle down** to the **bottom up** approach where participation of the people is being sought and henceforth, everyone enjoys the benefits out of it **[emphasis added]**. In order to empower people which in other word means *'full participation of people'* requires creating an enabling environment - economic, political, social,

[33] Beteille, A. 1999. 'Empowerment', *Economic and Political Weekly,* March (6-13): 589-597.
[34] Batliwala, S., opcit, p.24.

cultural and legal. In the words of Nancy Fraser, empowerment requires individuals to be able to increasingly participate in social decision-making through their self-organization and through increasing their self-determination in all areas of activity[35].

Gaining Importance of the Concept of Empowerment in 1990s:

Women's empowerment had replaced earlier terms in development jargon like welfare, upliftment, community participation, and poverty alleviation in the beginning of 1990s. The word empowerment has become a buzzword in 90s henceforth; the sharpness of the perspective that gave rise to it has been diluted. Despite of this, the study and understanding of empowerment as a concept hold quite relevant for development per se. The World Summit for Social Development held at Copenhagen in March, 1995, figured empowerment as an objective in which creating an enabling environment - economic, political, social, cultural and legal had talked about. In its first commitment announced under point 25 of the Declaration, it says -

> **Provide a stable legal framework.....that includes and promotes equality and equity between women and men, full respects for all human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, access to justice, elimination of all forms of discrimination, transparent and accountable governance and administration and the encouragement of partnership with free and representative organizations of civil society [36].**

The success of development effort depends on the fruits of development reaching to men and women, boys and girls in an unbiased manner. The extent to which this happens, however depends critically on gender relations within the society that set the worth of one

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[5] Hill,M.T. (ed). 2006. *Chapter6: Development as Empowerment* In Bina Agarwal, Jane Humphries, & ngrid Robeyns (ed). Capabilities, Freedom, & Equality- Amartya Sen's Work from a Gender Perspective. Vew Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp:132-52.

[6] Mohanty,M. (ed). 2001. *Chapter 1: On the concept of Empowerment* In Debal K. SinghaRoy. Social Development and the Empowerment of Marginalised Groups – Perspectives and Strategies. New Delhi: Sage Publications. pp: 22-30.

sex relative to the other[37]. The 1992 World Bank Report had come out with the statement stating that 'women must not be regarded as mere recipients of public support. They are, first and foremost, economic agents' (Cited by Bhavnani et.al[38]). The importance of treating women as an active agent in the process of development can be derived extensively from Sen's work on freedom and "agency aspect" which are central to the process of development which has already been explained above. Referring to the World Bank Report, Bhavnani et.al[39] highlights a very valid and important point that is: the roles which form the backbone of all societies - the actual realities of people's lives, including gendered realities.

The Declaration and the Programme of Action on World Summit for Social Development held at Copenhagen in March, 1995 gave impetus on empowerment in its Point 23.0 of the declaration (Quoted by Manoranjan Mohanty[40]). The statement of the declaration made in Point 23.0 says.....

> ***Recognize that empowering people, particularly women, to strengthen their capacities is a main objective of development and its principle resource. Empowerment requires the full participation of people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions determining the functioning and the well-being of our societies.***

Empowerment is essentially a process of acquiring greater control over one's life and life-choices. Therefore, it is important to understand that the process of empowerment is inevitably rooted in and stems from a state of disempowerment, characterized by a number and variety of denials in life and life-choices. Also empowerment in any form would need to look into the power relation in the very context particularly so with the male and female relationship. Agarwal has argued that "the gender gap in the ownership and control of

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[37] Kishor,S. & Gupta,K. 2004. 'Women's Empowerment in India and Its States- Evidence from the NFHS'. *Economic and Poitical Weekly.* February 39(7): 694-712.
[38] Bhavnani, Foran & Kurian, opcit, p.30.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Mohanty, opcit, p.36.

property is the single most critical contributor to the gender gap in economic well-being, social status, and empowerment".

Empowerment is about change and it refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where their ability was previously denied to them. According to Naila Kabeer, women's empowerment is the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability[41]. As gender inequalities touch all aspects of women's lives. It is important to note that an attempt to empower women - socially, legally or politically - cannot divert from the social and historical reality of their status and position in society. Women in society are generally marginalized, underrepresented, and depicted in a hierarchical and stereotyped imagery of the sexes. The feminists talk about equal rights among men and women which needs clarification. Therefore, it becomes important to highlight that demand on equal rights among men and women does not mean of setting women against men by empowering them. In the patriarchal society, it seems quite natural of men having more power than women in the name of social norms and values directly or indirectly. This creates confusion in the mindset among men in the society whether to promote or oppose the process of women empowerment. As highlighted by Batliwala, resistance would occur when women compete men for power in the public sphere or challenge the rights, and privileges of men within the family, which simply means challenging the prevailing patriarchal family relations. To target patriarchy is not so easy and the process of empowerment cannot be expected to have an impact very quickly in the private sphere. It is because as brought out by Vasantha Kannabiran, 'The family is the last frontier of patriarchy and it is the most difficult one to penetrate' (cited in Srilatha Batliwala[42])'. According to Batliwala, women's empowerment in its simplest meaning is first and foremost, to challenge and transform the ideology of

[41] Kabeer,N. 1999. 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', *Development and Change,* May, 30(3): 435-64.
[42] Batliwala, S. 1995. 'The Meaning of Women's Empowerment', *Women's World* (29):23-28.

patriarchy, which women and men have internalized, which the whole society operates on, one of its dominant ideological strain[43] .

The nature of gender relations-differential power relations between women and men are revealed not only in the division of labour and resources between women and men, but also in ideas and representations - the ascribing to women and men of different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, behavior patterns and so on[44]. Furthermore, for understanding the gender dimensions of empowerment, however, the position of the individual within the domestic arena is of particular importance. The multiple hierarchies of power between men and women intersect within the supposedly "private" domain of the domestic unit, affecting their opportunities and capacity for empowerment[45]. The inequality in gender relations is produced and reproduced from the household itself. Shrivastava's argument also highlights that the basic problems of women will remain largely unsolved until and unless fundamental changes are brought about in the social and political system which facilitates continuation of gender inequality[46]. Kabeer's point can add on this line of argument which notes that improving women's access to income to facilitate their empowerment is not sufficient because social norms are likely to be related to women's social dependence on women's ability to convert resources into power[47].

Women's access to work participation does not necessarily lead to their upliftment of their status and position rather it often leads to intensify pressures as they need to balance both their economic activities as well as household works requires multiple roles[**emphasis added**]. The important point to be taken into account is that the most conspicuous feature

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[43] Batliwala, S. 1995. 'Concept of Women's Empowerment – A Framework', *National Seminar on Women in Panchayat Raj held on 27-29th April at Bangalore on-* Women in Panchayat Raj: Perspectives from Different States, pp: 14-30.

[44] Agarwal, B. 1997. 'Bargaining and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household', *Feminist Economics,* 3(1): 1-51.

[45] Ranadive,J.D. 2005. *Chapter5: Gender,Power, and Empowerment: An Analysis of Household and Family Dynamics* In Narayan,D. (ed). Measuring Empowerment :Cross-Disciplinary Perspective. Washington: The World Bank. pp.103-21.

[16] Shrivastava, opcit, p.26.

[17] Kabeer, opcit, p.38.

of the term empowerment is that it contains the word power[48]; therefore, an integrated approach would be appropriate to deal with women's empowerment. As women's empowerment calls for redistribution of power fairly among men and women thus, the process itself must challenge patriarchal relations, and it does mean the loss of the privileged position that patriarchy allotted to men. This is where the problem ought to begin in the process of women's empowerment because the existing patriarchal values on which the present gender inequality is built, are firmly established in society and are accepted and legitimized by both men and women.

Gender discrimination within the household and in society at large results in women getting smaller shares of resources and larger shares of work. The systematic undervaluation of women's contributions or needs, in a system where these are important distributive principles, would reinforce gender-related deprivation. Very often, women's needs are described as synonymous with the "family's" needs, while for men the distinction between family and personal needs are widely accepted and sanctioned. Moreover, the accepted rights and duties for men and women are in themselves gender-biased and unjust. Considering the socio-cultural norms of men being the main providers, often it appears that for men rights are actual but duties nominal, while for women rights are nominal but duties actual. On the ground of gender or race, a person's contributions may be undervalued or unrecognized. Indeed, a woman's contributions to the household are typically undervalued and usually treated as supplementary to the whole household income.

Within the bargaining approach, the household members bargain over the use of the pooled income, the outcome depending on their bargaining power, determined by their respective fall-back positions[49]. Though an individual's bargaining power consists of quantifiable feature like individual's economic assets but more would be towards the social

[48] Batliwala, opcit, p.24.
[49] Agarwal, B., opcit, p.39.

perceptions about contributions and needs; external support system, or social norms and institutions.

Woman's bargaining power within the household is affected by the social norms. For instance, a woman is not supposedly raised their voice against the male heads in the family depending on her gender norms which narrows down her opportunity to defend the acts forcing against her will. This simply means that a woman is not permitted to exercise her own rights enshrined in the constitution. A quotation from Sen points out that *'a person who doesn't think herself entitled to anything much , and who believes that others have more worthwhile goals than her own , will bargain weakly*[50]*.'* Women to some extent successfully bargain over certain aspects of household expenditure like expenditures on food, clothing etc, what remains largely non-negotiable is men's overall control over household land, capital and other valued resources.

Coming to the multidimensional nature of power suggests that empowerment strategies for women must build on 'the power within' as a necessary adjunct to improve their ability to control resources, to determine agendas and make decisions[51]. Women would need to review their lives in order to realize their power from within by doing so, new forms of consciousness would arise. This is certainly their autonomy and building of self-esteem which operates on the principle that every woman has the right to self-determination. Women to take part in decision-making process hold great significance in overall improvement of their lives which presumably would have an impact on the lives of others in the family as well as in the society in the broader context. The importance of women participating in decision-making process has also been recognized at the national level which was seen lucidly in the 'National Policy for the Empowerment of Women-1996'[52] in its point 7 which envisaged that

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[50] Nussbaum,M.C., opcit, p.28.
[51] Kabeer,N., opcit, p.38.
[52] Government of India. 1996. *National Policy For The Empowerment Of Women-1996 (Final Draft).* Ministry of Human Resource Development Department of Women and Child Development.

"Women's active participation in decision making will be ensured for the achievement of the goals of equality, development and empowerment".

The above statement tries to draw a linkage between women and development viewing women as an active agent in the process of development through a pathway that is equality among men and women by throwing the opportunities to expand their capabilities **[emphasis added]**.

Most poor women have never been allowed to take their own decisions or to make their own choices except in unusual circumstances like a male decision maker has been absent or abdicated his role. This has happened mainly because women have presumably remained silent and majority of them grew up believing that this is the just and 'natural' order. Thus, empowerment cannot be a top-down or one-way process rather it should be of holistic understanding of the situation, emphasizing more on the existing power relation both within and beyond the household. Keeping in mind the objectives of the study, we propose to understand the web of intra-household relations within which women are caught so as to get more insights on empowerment as a process towards improving women's lives.

Women Empowerment As An Active Agent in the Development Discourse:

Focusing on women as an integral part of the development process at both national and international level, the constraints and barriers that impede the pursuit of women's interests started gaining impetus. Amartya Sen's writing on 'development as freedom' could well be recognized as a starting point in defining the recent definitions on empowerment, giving emphasis on an individual's freedom to choose[53]. He stressed on freedom to increase choices in one's life that would in turn bring development in the society. A remarkable point in his writing on freedom is that he uses an individual as an *'agent'* by whom the analysis of the outcome of the freedom would be evaluated at the individual level. By doing so, an

[53] Sen, A., opcit, p.33.

individual would be fully taken into account as a whole being rather than treating the individual as a mere part of the whole society. His point on freedom to enhance self-growth of an individual has been elaborated further by Kabeer's definition on empowerment as the movement from an inability to an ability to make choices[54]. While making choices, it is required to examine the conditions of constrain in pursuing the choices; consequences of choice must be positive and the choices should make some significant change in sustainable ways because empowerment is all about bringing change. Therefore, empowerment would be better understood as an ongoing process though it is also the result of the process itself.

Defining empowerment based on an understanding of power as inherent in the social structure, quite often limit the fields of possible action, and constrain the choices of both the marginalized and the dominant. Quite often, the internalization of social norms and values reach to the climax that *"A woman may not report discrimination even when asked directly, since the victim herself may be unaware of any injustice being done. Because of social norms, many injustice are understood and accepted as part of 'being a woman'. Female self-sacrifice and self-denial are expected for the 'good of the family' (cited by Ranadive,J.D. 2005)[55]"*. It could be seen as internal constraints that prevent the pursuit of interests and limit a sense of self-entitlement to them. This is possible through the socialization processes which encourage adherence to social norms. In addition, women's adherence to social norms and practices associated with son preference, discrimination against daughters, the oppressive exercise of authority by mothers-in-law over their daughters-in-law are examples of behaviour in which women's internalization of their own lesser status in society leads them to discriminate against other females in that society.

Women's empowerment requires systemic transformation not just of any institutions, but specifically of those supporting patriarchal structures. In the process of empowerment, women themselves must be significant actors in the process of change that would be

[54] Kabeer, N., opcit, p.38.
[55] Ranadive,J.D., opcit, p.39.

conducive to make strategic life choices. At the intra-familial relations where there is differential power between men and women, the importance of agency aspect is embodied in the idea of self-efficacy and the significance given to the individual woman's realization that she can be an agent of change in her own life. As reflected by Batliwala rightly in defining the meaning of women's empowerment, it is quite important for a woman to first recognize the ideology that legitimizes male dominance and understand how it perpetuates their oppression. This recognition calls for reversal of the values and attitudes and, indeed, the predominant perception that most women have internalised since earliest childhood.

The concept of empowerment contains the word power in it. Power is both the source of oppression in its abuse and the source of emancipation in its use. We would rather discuss the positive aspect of power that is "power from within". The basis of such kind of power is self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals. The power of the kind outlined here could be described as generative power rather than controlling power. It is the internal consciousness from within. Women must be convinced of their innate right to equality, dignity, and justice. Thus, women's empowerment is likely to involve not only their gaining new individual capabilities, but also the emergence of new beliefs about their rights to exercise these capabilities and take advantage of opportunities in their communities[56].

Economic independence or access to income could be considered as a mean to empowerment but not as a sole feature of empowerment per se. It could rather be treated as catalysts for empowerment, as "enabling factors" that can foster an empowerment process. It is undeniable that income confers power, power relations within families are so complex that income earning women enjoy less control of their earnings than men in the same position[57].

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[56] Mason,K.O. (ed). 2005. *Chapter4:Measuring Women's Empowerment: Learning from Cross-National Research* In Narayan,D. Measuring Empowerment : Cross-Disciplinary Perspective. Washington: The World Bank. pp.89-102.

[57] Viswanathan,R. 2001. "Development, Empowerment and Domestic Violence- Karnataka Experience", *Economic and Political Weekly,* June 16: 2173-77.

The prevailing value system has put so many hurdles on the path to women's equality through economic participation mainly due to social norms likely to be related to women's social dependence on men in the Indian context, intervene in women's ability to convert resources into power. Women's role remains unaltered, despite the fact women add new dimension to their role as economic providers.

With all these understanding on the concept and process of empowerment, the exploration on women's live experiences in the context of empowerment are presented in the next chapter. Till now, we are only looking into the theoretical understanding on the concepts of power, authority, patriarchy, gender and how all these concepts have an implication on women's lives. In the process of empowerment, the ability of an individual to make strategic life choices holds immense value. Therefore, it becomes quite important to identify conditions that foster a sense of powerlessness in order to empower. While dealing with women's lives, the social and cultural aspects are prime factors which often constrain women from expanding their choices in life. Based on the theoretical understanding, we examine and explore the concept of empowerment as an ongoing process at the individual and familial levels in a group of women involved in pottery work at Thongjao village, Manipur.

Chapter III: Exploring Women's Lives in the Context of Empowerment

Patriarchy as an ideology demands women's sacrifice, submissive behaviour, tolerance and so forth. The social norms, values and customs which make woman, a dependent being, are passed on from one generation to the next through the gender socialization process in the society. It has been so *'internalized'* that it becomes non-negotiable or seems impossible to change. It is important to note that patriarchy has different patterns and is not the same everywhere. With this knowledge, we are going to look into the region which is known to be a stronghold of women's solidarity and freedom. Here, we also need to be a little cautious because the study is going to explore women at the individual level which would be quite different from the women in group that is being highlighted and known to the public. All these facts highlight that inspite of over three decades of attention by the Indian state and international agencies to 'integrate' women into mainstream development, women from poor communities have either been left out of these processes or have derived little benefit.

Meitei society is patriarchal and it also exists in the village where the study was conducted. The study covered three categories depending on their involvement with group formation and involvement in pottery work. The exploration of the women's lives will begin with the profiles of different categories included in the study. In this chapter, there will be two sections: in the first one the profile of the respondents are placed whereas in the second section, the broad-themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data are analyzed by which similarities and differences across the three categories are eventually drawn out. Keeping the confidentiality and anonymity, the name of the respondents are changed.

SECTION – I

Profile of the three categories:

It has already been explained in the first chapter that **the first category** consists of three groups. The groups in this first category were the only existing groups involved with group formation and also involved in pottery work in the village. The pattern of functioning across the groups within this first category differed. The respondents in **the second category** were those who were involved in pottery work but not with the group formation. In **the third category**, individuals were neither with group formation nor with pottery work. The names of the respondents are arranged in descending order of their age, as it is more convenient in going through the cases in all the categories.

Profile of the First Category: Three Groups involved in group formation and also involved in pottery work

Table 3.1: Profile of the First Group in First Category

Sl/No.	Name	Age	Educational Qualification	Marital Status	Age at Marriage
1.	Memcha	63	Illiterate	Widowed	13
2.	Tombi	48	Illiterate	Married	16
3.	Chaobi	35	Class V passed	Married	18
4.	Thoibi	34	M.Tech	Single	-
5.	Thadoi	34	B.A.1st year drop out	Divorcee	23
6.	Rajani	33	Class VI passed	Single	-
7.	Gulap	33	Illiterate	Married	22
8.	Sarmila	28	Class IX passed	Widowed	18
9.	Tomchoubi	26	Class IV drop out	Widowed	16
10.	Lily	24	Class X failed	Single	-
11.	Rebeka	21	Class X drop out	Single	-
12.	Chanu	18	Illiterate	Single	-

The data reveals that only one woman completed her M.Tech and the rest are either illiterate or dropped out or failed in the examination. Lack of encouragement from the parents was found to be the common reason in failing to complete or reach school which was often accompanied with family's financial problem. The woman who had completed her M.Tech had to face lots of obstacles in life as no one was ready to support her education in her family. Even to the extent that her own parents and other family members asked couple of times to drop her studies. With all the pressures, she still went ahead and completed what she wanted to achieve as she valued education. Today, the very same woman decided to stand for her family and also decided not to get married because she was the only earning member in her family after her father's death.

The level of education was not directly related to the age at marriage except the woman who was illiterate and married at the age of 13. There was no school facility in the village during her time, so we cannot draw any linkage between the level of education and its relation to age at marriage. The common factors which had an impact on marriage directly or indirectly were found to be peer group influence of early or late marriage; marriage by choice; family condition or differential family condition between the bride and groom to some extent etc. Taking a few examples from the sample for instance Ms.Tombi got married because her husband's family was economically better and she was once proud of her husband's family prestige in the public though the present scene was quite depressing. We will come back with her life story a little later. In the cases of Ms.Sarmila and Ms.Tomchoubi, both their husbands were close friends; this was an example of peer group influence on marriage.

Table 3.2: Impact of support system in income earning

Sl/No.	Name	No. children*	Type of Family	No. of Dependent(s) **	Age of Joining Pottery work	Average Income p/m	Support for Household chores
1.	Memcha	1	Nuclear	-	13-after marriage	1000	Nil
2.	Tombi	3	Nuclear	1	11-before marriage	1500	Nil
3.	Chaobi	2	Nuclear	Sharing	20-after marriage	1500	Daughter
4.	Thoibi	-	Nuclear	3	12-professionally since 3 years	11,000	Mother
5.	Thadoi	1	Nuclear	1	12-before marriage	2000	Nil
6.	Rajani	-	Nuclear	2	12	2000	Nil
7.	Gulap	3	Nuclear	Sharing	13-before marriage	1500	Daughters +husband
8.	Sarmila	3	Nuclear	4	19 one year after marriage	1000	Nil
9.	Tomchoubi	2	Joint	2	16 one month after marriage	1000	Mother + daughter
10.	Lily	-	Nuclear	Sharing	17	1200	Mother+ sister
11.	Rebeka	-	Nuclear	Sharing	17	1200	Sister
12.	Chanu	-	Nuclear	Sharing	11	1000	Mother+ sister

Note:
* This column applies to only those who are married.
** In this, numerical indicates direct dependent(s) and 'sharing' indicates those who shared the family expenses.

More than half of women respondents had joined pottery work in between the age of 10 to 15 and some had joined in between the age of 15 to 20 **(five out of twelve)**. Those who had direct dependents were the main bread-winners in their families. The burden of responsibility was found more on those who had direct dependents and also level of burden increased with more number of dependents than those who had sharing with other family members. The workload was more among those who did not have support system in managing household chores as they had to manage both their economic activities and domestic work whereas the respondents who had some one or the other to help in domestic work were relatively lesser in terms of workload. The married women were facing more problems among the respondents.

Table 3.3: Profile of the Second Group in First Category

Sl/No.	Name	Age	Educational Qualification	Marital Status	Age at Marriage
1.	Thabal	60	Illiterate	Divorcee	19
2.	Rubina	55	Illiterate	Married	17
3.	Lakshmi	54	Class X failed	Married	20
4.	Nungshi	42	Illiterate	Married	17
5.	Tampha#	35	Class XII failed	Married	25
6.	Sana	34	Class X failed	Married	24
7.	Leima #	30	Class XII drop out	Married	26
8.	Lucy	23	Class X failed	Single	-
9	Keina	20	Class X failed	Married	20(Feb'06)
10.	Korou	16	Class VIII drop out	Single	-

Note: # Those who are not the inhabitants by birth but by marriage.

Lack of encouragement from the parents together with financial problem in the family were the main reasons for the respondents being illiterate or failed or dropped out from the school. In this group, the reasons for marriage were more of marriage by choice that was seven out of eight married women. Marriage by much better family condition (husband's family) was found to be in only one case. Again here in this group too, there was no direct linkage between the level of education and the age at marriage of the women respondents. It was more to do with their choice.

Women respondents in this group started helping their mothers by involving themselves in household chores at their young ages if not directly involved in pottery work. As pot making is rather a custom of this village therefore each and every girl was expected to have the knowledge of pot making irrespective of the class she belonged to.

Table 3.4: Impact of support system in income earning

Sl/No.	Name	No. of children*	Type of Family	No. Dependent(s) **	Age of Joining Pottery work	Average Income p/m	Support for Household Chores
1.	Thabal	3	Nuclear	Sharing	12	1500	Her daughter-in-law
2.	Rubina	2	Nuclear	Sharing	10	1000	Her daughter-in-law
3.	Lakshmi	3	Nuclear	Sharing	25	1000	Daughters
4.	Nungshi	4	Nuclear	Sharing	23	1000	Daughters
5.	Tampha#	3	Nuclear	3	33	1000	Nil
6.	Sana	1	Nuclear	Sharing	10	1000	Mother-in-law
7.	Leima #	1	Nuclear	Sharing	26	1500	Sister-in-law
8.	Lucy	-	Nuclear	-	21	1000	Sister-in-law
9	Keina	-	Nuclear	Sharing	20- 3months after marriage	1000	Mother-in-law
10.	Korou	-	Nuclear	Sharing	14	1000	Mother + Elder sister

Note:
* This column applies to only those who are married.
** In this, numerical indicates direct dependent(s) and 'sharing' indicates those who shared the family expenses.
# Those who are not inhabitants of the place by birth but by marriage.

In this group, there were more number of respondents who had shared the family expenses with other family members in taking family responsibility (eight out of ten respondents). The one who had three direct dependents was facing lot of problem because she was quite very new in the field of pottery work. She said that her problem was more aggravated because she did not have any support system in household chores. In this context, inhabitant by birth and preference of bride from the same place acquired significance. The burden of responsibility was lighter among the respondents who had shared family expenses with other family members than the one who had direct dependents. Half of women respondents had joined in between the age of 10 to 15; some were in between 20 to 25; one in between 25 to 30 and another one in between 30 to 35.

Table 3.5: Profile of the Third Group in First Category

Sl/No.	Name	Age	Educational Qualification	Marital Status	Age at Marriage
1.	Achoubi	60	Illiterate	Divorcee	17
2.	Memory #	53	Illiterate	Married	18
3.	Santa#	49	Class VI passed	Married	16
4.	Romi	38	Illiterate	Married	23
5.	Bimo	31	B.A. passed	Divorcee	23
6.	Lata	30	Class V drop out	Married	19
7.	Beena	20	Class V drop out	Single	-

Note # Those who are not inhabitants of the place by birth but by marriage.

The level of education in this group was linked to the financial condition of the family. Like for instance, Ms.Bimo could reach till graduate because her family condition was such that her parents were able to support and moreover she was the only daughter to her parents. On the contrary to the above mentioned case, Ms.Santa had dropped out from the school because her widowed mother could not afford her education inspite of being the only child. These women were drawn into domestic work like taking care of other siblings; helping their mothers at their young ages in household chores etc. Divorcees, marriage in this group happened purely through their choice although there were different reasons for breaking their marital relationship by the two women divorcees. And there was no direct linkage between the level of education and age at marriage. There is no difference between a graduate and an illiterate woman **[both married at the age of 23]** so we can conclude that age at marriage was absolutely by choice of the women.

Table 3.6: Impact of support system in income earning

Sl/No.	Name	No. of Children *	Type of Family	No. of Dependent(s) **	Age of Joining Pottery work	Average Income p/m	Support for Household chores
1.	Achoubi	1	Nuclear	3	10	1500	Nil
2.	Memory #	2	Nuclear	-	5 Months after marriage-18	1000	Nil
3.	Santa#	2	Nuclear	1	16-2 months after marriage	4000	Daughter
4.	Romi	3	Nuclear	3	17	2000	Nil
5.	Bimo	1	Nuclear	1	18	2000	Mother+ sister
6.	Lata	3	Nuclear	4	20	1500	Nil
7.	Beena	-	Nuclear	-	16	1500	Aunty + elder sister

Note:

* This column applies to only those who are married.

** In this, numerical indicates direct dependent(s) and 'sharing' indicates those who shared the family expenses.

Those who are not inhabitants of the place by birth but by marriage.

In this group, majority of them had joined pottery work in between age of 15 to 20 and only one woman had joined in between 10 to 15. Women who did not have support system in domestic work had to put their labour more strenuously. The more number of dependents, the more was their burden in shouldering the responsibility unlike those who had shared the family expenses or no dependents. The significance of the place by birth had an impact on women involved in pottery work which was not reported in this group. This might be partly because they had already settled in the field of pottery work to the extent that some of these women were much better than the inhabitants of the place by birth. In fact, Ms.Santa won many awards till date and recently she was invited for an exhibition which was supposed to be held in Germany. Unfortunately, she could not go because of the postal delay in receiving the invitation.

The Second Category: **Individuals who are involved with pottery work but not with group formation.**

Table 3.7: Profile of the Second Category

Sl/No.	Name	Age	Educational Qualification	Marital Status	Age at Marriage
1.	Romina	40	Illiterate	Married	17
2.	Ibemcha	38	B.A. passed	Single	-
3.	Sony	34	Class X failed	Married	23
4.	Leela	33	B.Sc. passed	Married	26
5.	Thoinu	32	Illiterate	Married	22
6.	Senu	29	Class XII failed	Married	20
7.	Binata	27	Class VII passed	Married	15
8.	Bhabi	23	Class VIII drop out	Single	-
9.	Lalita	22	Class VIII drop out	Single	-
10.	Nalini	22	Class X drop out	Single	-
11.	Ruhini	20	Class VIII drop out	Single	-

The family condition appeared to be significant in relation to the level of education like except two cases, the rest could not finish higher secondary education or tenth or of complete illiterate in the first case. The data did not reveal of direct linkage between the level of education and the age at marriage of the women rather it was inclined more towards marriage by choice. Among those who were single had dropped out from their schools in their early adolescent periods and they have still remained single. When we reviewed those married women's cases, their marriage was found to be completely through their choice.

Table 3.8: Impact of support system in income earning

Sl/No.	Name	No. of Children *	Type of Family	No. of Dependent(s) **	Age of Joining Pottery work	Average Income p/m	Support for Household Chores
1.	Romina	3	Nuclear	Sharing	14	700	Daughter
2.	Ibemcha	-	Nuclear	Sharing	17	2000	Mother + sisters
3.	Sony	3	Nuclear	6	12	2000	Nil
4.	Leela	2	Nuclear	2	12	1000	Nil
5.	Thoinu	2	Nuclear	2	30-after marriage	1500 -1700	Nil
6.	Senu	2	Nuclear	Sharing	20-2months after marriage	1000	Mother-in-law + sister-in-law
7.	Binata	2	Nuclear	3	22-after marriage	1500	Nil
8.	Bhabi	-	Nuclear	Sharing	16	1500	Mother
9.	Lalita	-	Nuclear	Sharing	14	2000	Mother + sisters
10.	Nalini	-	Nuclear	Sharing	12	2000	Mother + sister
11.	Ruhini	-	Nuclear	3	13	2000	Mother

Note :* This column applies to only those who are married.

** In this, numerical indicates direct dependent(s) and 'sharing' indicates those who shared the family expenses.

In the above given data, women reported strenuous physical work of managing both household chores and their economic activities in the cases where there were no single support system (four out of eleven respondents). The problem was more aggravated when their husbands were non-cooperative in their intra-personnel relationship in cases of married women. In Ms.Binata's case, she did not report any kind of problem as her relationship with her husband was quite smooth and understanding. Therefore, even though she was the main bread-winner and having no one to support her in household chores, she was able to handle situations well in cooperation with her husband. The burden was found more in cases where there were more number of dependents; less support system or no single support system and above all non-cooperation from the other members in the family, especially from the male heads or husbands. The respondents who had other family members to share the expenses reported of more independence in income earning with less tension.

Profile of the Third Category: Individuals neither with group formation nor involved with pottery work

Table 3.9: Profile of the Third Category

Sl/No.	Name	Age	Educational Qualification	Marital Status	Age of Marriage
1.	Babina	52	Illiterate	Married	17
2.	Tomchou	51	Illiterate	Widowed	17
3.	Sanahal	47	Illiterate	Married	18
4.	Aruna	43	Illiterate	Married	21
5.	Babita	40	B.A. 1st year drop out	Married	26
6.	Premila	27	B.Sc passed	Single	-
7.	Sunita	27	B.A 2nd year drop out	Single	-
8.	Yaima	25	Class III drop out	Married	18
9.	Saya	24	Class XII passed	Single	-
10.	Sonali	19	Class X failed	Single	-

In this category, four out of ten respondents were completely illiterate; two of them were undergraduates; only one could reach graduate level; another one studied till higher secondary level and two of them were below secondary school level. The common reason for their inability to reach school or finish graduation was due to family's financial problem except in two cases where they dropped out as per their wish. Even in this category, it was found that marriage was completely through their choice. Marriage due to better family condition between the bride and groom's family also appeared in two cases. The level of education was found less likely to have an impact on the age at marriage in this category too.

In the next section, the analysis of the commonalities and differences within and across the categories are presented by looking into the broad-themes and sub-themes which emerged from the data.

SECTION – II

As mentioned above, this section looks into the broad-themes running across the categories while exploring and analyzing women's lives in the context of empowerment as an ongoing process rather than an end in the process itself. We tried to understand the inter-relatedness of the concepts like power, authority, patriarchy, gender and its impact on women's lives.

Group Cohesiveness and Its Dynamics within the Group:

Among the three groups in the first category, the third group was the oldest in group formation. It had been working as a group since 21 years; 20 years for the second group and 3 and half years for the first group. The members had joined the group at different periods of time which was found common across the groups. The group formation here in this study did not have strict norms and rules but certainly there were external pressures from those who provided material requirements **[Providers, hereafter]** for pot making exclusively about the first and the third groups. The members in the second group had pressures from the middle women as they took money well in advance otherwise the materials for pot making were bought by themselves, which were not the case in the first and third groups.

In these three groups, group cohesiveness was found more in the second group. They gave very positive feedback about the group work. To them, **"It is the platform where they get to learn new things from one another; a place where they share their feelings and emotions with the members and ease out their sorrows and throws challenging mood in a positive way".** In this regard, an old lady among this group, Ms.Thabal commented: ***"I am so restless if I do not meet my group members and the place we all work together. There is something which binds us together since the time we started working in this place as a group. Therefore, I go there everyday except in a few unavoidable ceremonies to attend, even if I do not make pots and simply sit there".*** This kind of feeling was not found in the

first and third groups. In these two groups, existence of class hierarchy was observed. The providers in some way had the dominating power over the group members. Lack of group cohesiveness appeared to be due to the prevailing class consciousness among the members in these two groups. Though cohesiveness as a group was not found but women in these groups did share their problems among their own circle of friends to certain extent because of which they could divert their tensions and worries, exclusively of these two groups.

The Process of Price-fixing:

Women who were directly involved with pot making did not have any power in increasing the prices of their products rather it was found that the price of the commodity was decided between the middle women and the shopkeepers or sellers, sitting in the main market. According to the women in the village, 90% of the pottery products were supplied by this village for different purposes like in performing rituals, as decorative items **[noted from the middle women; a researcher conducted survey on pottery work in the village]** . There are seven other places in all of Manipur where pottery work is being conducted. The main markets identified in the study were Imphal (80% of the products reached the place); less than 20% or exact 20% reached to Churachandpur town as decorative items and a small fraction of the products scattered to the other corners of the State. Again, there happened to be one more layer in between the middle women and independent members of second group that was the providers exclusively of the first and the third groups. Therefore, the most marginalized in these three groups were those who were working directly under the providers and getting their wages according to the number and size of the pots. Their condition was even lower than those who were working independently referring to the second group members. The whole structure could be presented like a pyramid depending on their capability in dealing with prices of the products (see the following figure below).

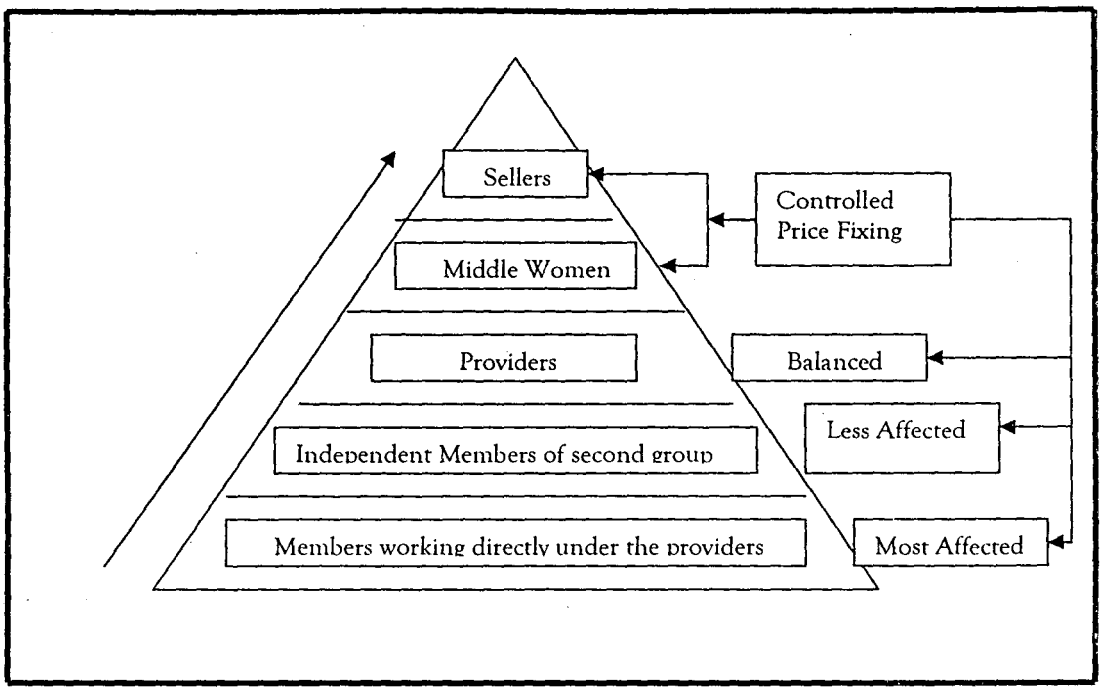

Figure: Represents the structure of price controlled.

Those who were at the top were in direct contact with the larger market system and had power over controlling and fixing the prices of the finished goods like pots. The second in the ladder i.e., the middle women would negotiate the prices with the sellers and would convey the message to the village women who were involved with pottery work. The providers have some power to negotiate again with the middle women as per the increase in prices of other commodities in the market. Moving further down from this level, it would start affecting but would find a little lesser among those who were in the second row from the lowest bottom row indicated in the pyramid as independent individuals as they worked independently. The effect would start showing once they start taking money in advance from the middle women thus, left with less negotiating power in terms of prices.

Those who took money in advance failed to negotiate with the middle women in terms of low prices paid for their finished products. The most affected group was those who were directly working under the providers. They did not have negotiating power neither with the providers nor with the middle women or with the sellers who were at the top even though,

they put equal or more physical labour as pottery work demands complete physical labour. We would need to remember that the method used for pottery work in the village was completely traditional. They were getting the least profit out of their strenuous labour they put in to pot making. According to them, **"In Thongjao pottery work, the middle women were the most benefited as they do not need to break their bones and get money out of our sweat. They could do this because they have money in their hands to give to the people who need money like us. We cannot uplift our condition until and unless we do not leave this job and take up other jobs. Money is everything which sometimes change one's life. We are trapped in a well from where it will be hard to come out."** This showed their helplessness and a feeling that there were no alternatives to be taken up.

Table 3.10

Affected group in the politics of profit making

Affected Group	Number
Providers	2
Independent Individuals	10
Members Working Directly Under the Providers	17
Total	29

Impact of Support System in Income Earning:

It appeared that majority of the respondents reported their average monthly income to be in between Rs.1000 to 1500; some were in between Rs.1500 to 2000 and a few of them were above Rs.2000. The financial problem in the family appeared to be the main reason for women to involve themselves in pottery work. According to them, they could earn and get money for their emergency need through pot making like they could seek help from others (either the money lenders or the middle women) by assuring them to pay back after selling their products. Women usually lose their entitlement i.e., their labour in order to pay back their debts.

Work-related health problems: It was found that twelve respondents joined between 10 and15 years of age; another twelve in between 15 and 20; three in between 20 and 25; only one in between 25 and 30 and another one in between 30 and 35. A large number of women had joined at their early adolescent period which would have direct impact on their health. Work related health problems like chest pain; severe pain on right limb; numb on the right hand; respiratory problem etc were brought out. In general, the onset of their problem would start after 10 years of their involvement in pottery work but it also depended on the labour they put in it. According to a government doctor, most women in the village were suffering from iron deficiency anemia. Women who had been working for the last 20 years or more were having severe pain in the limb or numbness on the right hand or breathlessness in general, whereas those who were little less than 15 years in the field of pottery work started having mild pain. None of them had taken them so seriously that they usually took pain killers just to get back to their work. Leaving work for one day meant a lot to many of them as they happened to be the main bread-winners in their families. They somehow ignored or sidelined their problem and more by those having no support system. But in the case of other family members' problem, they would not wait to consult the doctor. In general and also in this study too, it was realized that women are mere instruments to achieve the ends of others.

Managing both household chores and their economic activities: When it comes to work load, those women who did not have support system in household chores claimed that they were compelled to put extra labour and cut down their leisure time unlike those who had some other person in the family to help them. The condition of the women was much worse when the situation of no support system was added with more number of dependents. To some extent, having support system in managing domestic work had an impact on income earning where men remained out of the matter assuming household management as women's domain by birth. *Ms.Rajani was looking after her father who was suffering from mental illness and her younger brother. She could not get married because there was no one to look after them. She had no one to help her in household chores too so lot of extra effort she had to put in. Sometimes, she thought of committing suicide. Another woman Ms.Achoubi who was 60 years old was taking care of her son and*

two younger brothers. This woman too did not have anyone to help her and still working very hard to shoulder the family expenditure. She took divorce from her husband because her family needed her help. That was how she started helping by looking after all her seven brothers as parents passed away in their early ages. To her, ***"I even suggest people not to name as Achoubi because she will be very unlucky in life like mine. I really don't know what I had done in my past life for which I am suffering now. My only prayer to God Almighty is to keep me away from any kind of disease or illness because once my health breaks down then my family condition will be in such a state that it would be better for me to end up my life then and there itself. I work from morning till night so there is no question of rest time."***

When we examined the support system, we found that all of them were either daughters or mothers or any other female members in the family which clearly showed us that they are seeking help from the other female members in the household or in other way other female members were extending their support. But they would not ask help from the male members in the family especially in domestic work because of two reasons: one was they usually got negative response if at all they asked and the other was male members think that domestic work is meant for women and they have nothing to do in the matter.

The Patriarchal Ideology:

Thongjao is a patriarchal society. The mainstay of the family remained in the sphere of male members. Women felt safe with their male members therefore they themselves chose to live behind the male figures even though they stressed on the unequal power relation between men and women in the household as well as in the society at large. Male heads in the families exercised their power in different forms like dominance over decision-making process in the household as well as in public domain; curtailing their rights to make strategic life choices; giving less freedom in terms of movement and expanding their ability to handle external barriers and so forth.

Ms.Bimo revealed one incident. ***"My mother is a middle woman and simultaneously she involves herself in pottery work too. She works really hard to support my younger brother's education as well as the family expenditures. One day, she reached home late from her work then my father started shouting by saying that women are not supposed to come late in the night. He never tried to realize how hard it would be to my mother after her tiring long day work , I felt really hurt as I was expecting him to tell my mother that 'oh! You must be tired so please take rest.' But rather he acted in a different way which I completely disagree with. So sadly, my poor mother did not reply anything back to him. She just smile and said its ok."***

There were two young women who became widowed in their 20s. Among these two, Ms.Sarmila narrated her condition. ***"It has been almost two years, my husband is no more. Since then I stopped talking to other men at public places. I even requested my husband's close friends to stop saying even hello to me because I don't want to hear any social talks later. I have three children to look after all alone so it will be hard for me to bear social gossiping and simply suspecting my morale character. Before I was behind my husband and now as he is no more I need to be very cautious in any of my steps. I cannot do whatever I want unlike other women in the society who have husbands to protect them so I feel - 'as misfortune as a widow'. My life is with lot of restrictions and barriers."***

Domestic Violence as a form of dominance over women: *Ms.Tombi is the main bread-winner in her family and living with her trouble maker husband, known to everybody in the village for his violent nature. As she was asked to talk on domestic violence in her family or in her relationship with her husband, she started with a smile and said that* ***"wait and watch my husband's scene once he gets drunk especially in the night. I thought of leaving him and go back to my parents home and even tried thrice already by now. But you know, I cannot live happily there too as my brothers are also having their own families now. My husband beats me and shouts at me using filthy language. Now, I have decided to run out of the house and hide in the nearby drainage till the time he stops shouting. It is quite embarrassing to my neighbours***

as well as to the society at large. One night during winter, he threw all the blankets into our pond in front of our hut. No place to go and having no assets with me from where I could arrange for myself, I am suffering with this man with animal instinct. It is my faith which makes me suffer from the beginning of my life. In my childhood, stayed with stepmother as my own mother passed away and after my marriage with this man so my life is rapped with suffering and no space left for a small amount of happiness. Still I continue to work for the sake of living with no taste of good life."

In another incident, Ms.Thadoi revealed her story in short. *"I had a love marriage and my husband turned out to be an insensible and irresponsible person later after the marriage. For almost ten long years, he left me with my son without any information. Then one day he turned up and started harassing me all of the sudden. He used to beat me and the scar on my right eyebrow is his gift. He hit me with the knife actually he tried to kill me but I was lucky enough to save my life as I defended myself. Finally, I decided to take divorce. Now, I am very happy with my son without that monster in my life any more."*

Adding to her point, Ms.Thabal, an old divorcee said, *"My story will not be so different. My husband was an irresponsible person and a real sucker in the family when my four children were quite small. He used to come drunk every night and picked up fights with me after my tiring work. I never used to get peace of mind and he never wanted to discuss anything for the family rather he tortured me to the extreme end. At last, I could not bear his behaviour anymore then decided to remain as a divorcee. Now, I am happy with my son, daughter-in-law and my little grand-son. I have no regrets in life till date for my step I took to leave him and live happily."*

Women's position in the household and their involvement in work: Apart from the widows and divorcees, women who were living with the male members or their husbands did not have full authority over their income. To some extent, women who were not yet married (those who have not been decided whether to marry or not; from hereafter this group

would be presented as 'yet not married') could do something for themselves out of their income although they may not have the full authority over their income. According to the women respondents, "*We work and contribute to our family income but we really could not do anything good for ourselves because family needs come to the fore and thus our needs and wants get diverted or sidelined automatically. At the most, we take out money for buying pan or taking tea as we do not make tea at home. Therefore, our share or being the mainstay in the family in terms of earning we cannot turn it for improvement of our position in the household. Because the main decision will be in the hands of the male members in the family, we simply cannot arrive at the conclusion for any matter leaving apart from buying vegetables or small expenditures like buying toffees for the small children. When it comes to expenditures above Rs.500, we need to discuss with the male members and there our opinions become secondary.*"

Decision-making process in the household: When the women were posed with the question-*do you take part in decision-making process in your family?, they would reply quite positively.* When we further extended the same question with a little modification like *who takes the main decision in the whole process of decision-making?, they claimed except one woman that their husbands or other male members in their families took the main decision and their opinions were also considered while making the decision. They did not have any power to dominate and take their own decision in life because they were women and considered to be the followers of their male heads willing or unwilling. They were so powerless to the extent that like for example women – the mothers could not easily allow their daughters to go beyond their village without their husbands' prior permission to allow the same. They felt that they were being dominated by the male members in the family and also in the society too. Moreover, their bargaining power was quite low or relatively lower than the male members in the family.*

Ms.Leima who has a son knew that her husband's mere income would not be able to run their family for which she decided to take up petty business like selling the finished goods in the main market which was termed as middle woman. Though she wanted and decided herself for the good of the family but she could not turn it into reality as she got to

take permission from her husband to do the same. After a long discussion about their future life and also the possible consequences out of their meager income, her husband allowed her but he was not convinced enough to accept her point whole heartedly. She had an understanding relationship with her husband and was known to the people at the village. Even this kind of relationship too sought for seeking permission from the male heads or husbands in the family which left us to think those relationships having been fully dominated by the male members or the husbands in the family. We also had come across a few examples earlier where women having no 'exit door' (from their marital life) as they did not possess any assets with them to start a new life altogether.

Gender Dimensions in the family:

The gender role or status was defined by the social manifestation of maleness and femaleness in an 'uncharted configuration of social expectations'. In work front too, gender set out its implications like pottery work was confined to women's domain. Women's involvement in pottery work was accountable as gendered activity. According to these women respondents, there was no such strict rule for which men were out from the pottery work, in fact, it would have been easier and lighter if they (men and women) worked together as pottery work demands complete physical labour. They felt that they were marginalized on the ground of gender which further left women with no or relatively less power with their male counterparts in the family and in the society as a whole. They did not have any power to speak up for themselves which simply meant their rights were denied. Though they wanted to bring some change in the system but it seemed impossible so what they arrived at the end was the prevailing norms, values and practices in the society forcing them to strictly adhere to it, which had been there since time immemorial.

Two young respondents expressed their views on differential power and rights socially or legally sanctioned to men in the society (Ms.Korou and Ms.Lucy). They pointed out that *"We cannot go out late in the evening like other men in the village. We do not feel comfortable when other men eyeing on our lives. Freedom is out of us and we feel that we*

are being grounded just because we are girls or being a woman. We totally disagree with our low status in the society."

In this category, women who were mothers did not show any gender bias in their own families. None of them reported of having son preference rather they were more attached to their daughters. It could be possible that either all of them (mothers) were already having a son or more than one or very genuinely they could understand their daughters' help both in terms of financial as well as in household matters. Nevertheless, we could find a different picture altogether. Their role as a woman had been neatly reinforced into their daughter's life. They somehow expected their daughters' help but they never mentioned about their sons' help in the matter. This could be better understood or looked from the angle of gender socialization that made its inroad from one generation to the next. With this interpretation, we could arrive at their way of understanding as being gender biased. Reason being these mothers had started helping their families at their young ages and took part in shouldering the family expenditures and the same was being repeated in their daughters' time too out of no choice. We could also gather some more information in gender-related deprivation in the family as well as in society.

- Gender-related Deprivation: Looking into the current generation including both married as well as yet not married or unmarried (**those already decided to remain single; from hereafter 'unmarried' would be used to represent this group**) and leaving aside one generation back, we could find that poor financial condition of the families was appeared to be closely linked with high level of dropping out or failed or failed to reach school at all. *Ms.Rebeka was a good student but unluckily she could not give her tenth board examination. She was among the toppers in her class, till to-day, she could not forget those moments in her life where she was forced to withdraw herself from the school and completely confined in pottery work as a means for her survival. She did not have any means to fill up her examination fee of Rs.650 back in 2003. Her family condition during those days was out of*

imagination. She revealed "One day while I was in the school came back home with a small trophy in hand received from the school because of my good performance in academic, suddenly tears rolled down after I had my lunch. I realized that my parents could not afford to buy 'ngari' [fermented fish used in making eronba, a common Manipur dish- 'Chatni'] for one rupee also. Since then I started bothering and was unable to concentrate on my studies. To-day, I am living with my younger sister as my parents left us behind. They are staying in a rented house in Imphal to earn money by doing petty jobs like my father is a rickshaw puller and mother works in a tea stall where she cleans up the glasses and plates and my younger brother is with them."

In the above mentioned case, apart from financial crunch in the family gender sets its implication in the life of the woman. She was taught to sacrifice her life for the good of others.

- Inheritance of family property: As a social custom, family property has to be divided among the brothers and a larger share of it would go to the last son as he is expected to look after the parents in their old age. It did not mean that women do not have any right to claim their share of it but usually it did not happen. It had become a norm in the society that inheritance became male oriented. With this understanding of the social custom, women were left with no assets in their hand which often made them difficult or rather left with fewer alternatives or no opportunities in expanding their choice later in life. Most women in this category could not make their choices as they did not possess any assets from where she could uplift their status and position by exploring other work or job comparatively better than pottery work. Opening a grocery shop was most common among the women in exploring other alternatives.

Can Economic Participation Lead to Upliftment of Women's Status?

In the context of their economic contribution to the family income by being the main earners or being a major contributor, women were posed with the question - *what did you do for yourself from the income you earn?*, most of them responded that they could not buy or do

anything good for themselves as the family's needs had become more important than their own needs. In order to get more insights, the question was little modified and put across to the women – *Did you feel that your economic participation bring you better position or status in your family and in society?*, they felt that instead of becoming better half rather their health continued deteriorating due to their involvement in pottery work for long years.

They felt that there was more harm than benefit from their economic activity because work as such demanded extended hours of physical work. Their earnings were always used up in family maintenance like buying vegetables, giving monthly school fees for their children, fulfilling the demands of their husbands, etc., exclusively for the married women whereas those yet not married or unmarried would give more than half of their earnings to their families and they could take a small fraction of their earning for themselves usually spent in watching movies in the cinema hall, buying cosmetics, etc.

After reviewing different responses from all of them, it appeared that their earnings or their economic participation could not make even a slight difference to their position or status in the family and in society. In terms of decision-making process in the family, they do not have equal share in the whole process as it was their male counterparts who had the power to arrive at the final decision. In some cases, they were unable to gain respect and dignity of their multiple roles in the family. Their condition was more aggravated with their financial crunch in the family which often left them with less bargaining power.

According to the women, *"We feel good when we could do something for the family therefore we consciously or unconsciously leave aside our interest and needs in life. We always pray to God for good health and peaceful life. All of us know that health is wealth but could not really care for health because there are other competing demands in the family. Henceforth, prioritization holds true in which health comes at the last that too our own health. A very small fraction of men in this whole village will find with some responsibility towards the family and respect their wives or other female members due to*

which it is quite easy to figure out those men having unique characters, defining those having good responsibility as unique is only of this village because usually in any given society, men would look after the family and women take care of the children and domestic work but in our village, it is the other way round and this kind of system will not find in other places in Manipur. Citing an example by the women respondents, men right in our adjacent village look after the family and the wives which will be very hard to find in Thongjao village. Here, we women look after them and continue to remain as subordinates to them-having no power and authority; no control in decision-making process rather dominated by men; less freedom to make strategic life choices etc. We live for our children though life is filled with all sorts of bitterness ranging from our husbands' irresponsible behaviour; violent nature after they get drunk; life without good taste, fill with sufferings and sorrows. We are living with a hope of tomorrow with a little better condition for which we won't mind working hard through day and night."

The Second Category: Individuals who are involved with pottery work but not with group formation.

Authority of men vs. less Autonomy of women:

Our study shows that generally, men have authority, socially sanctioned to them, due to which they always have an upper hand at both the levels i.e., at the individual as well as at the societal level. Whatever they do and act can be defended with minimal level of social or public interference but with women, they need to be very cautious about their steps in life because any act of a woman has high chance of being criticized by any group in the society including women as a group. Why are we talking about women's autonomy and dignity here? The reason is women have been denied their rights which have directly affected women in the long run and also to the overall growth of the family, more particularly other female members in the family. As women lack autonomy or having less autonomy, they tried to lean on other female members in the family to shoulder together the family responsibilities and

therefore, in some way or the other, they replicated the same in the future generation as well. This is often observed in male-dominated societies. For instance, women respondents needed to seek permission from their male heads in the family like fathers, husbands or male siblings when they thought of making their choices which would help them in better earning. They had minimal choices as they were not free to do what they want in life.

Every time, they needed to consult the male heads. Their freedom to grow as a free individual was being curtailed though they were either the main bread-winners or contributed major share in the family income. In this category, five out of eleven were the main bread-winners in their respective families and the rest six shared the burden of family expenses with other family members.

Decision-making Process in the Family:

Power to influence in family decisions did have greater say in the overall relationship. Men had the authority and power over the women. It was also found in the study where all the respondents reported that decisions in their families like buying or selling family property or construction of a new building were taken either by their husbands- in cases of married women or by their fathers- in cases of women (yet not married/unmarried). In the next step, they informed that they (married women) and mothers of those who were yet not married/unmarried took part in the decision-making but it was more of **male dominated joint decision-making.** They did not have any power to decide what was good for them because power lay in the hands of the male members in the family. Their ability to make strategic life choices for which they had reasons to value had been curtailed by male dominance over decision-making. Women having less autonomy attach less value to their own well-being and rarely thought of their self-worth, which therefore made them difficult in bargaining their rights and dignity among other family members. Those who had a low sense of self-worth had weaker bargaining power.

The study had come across evidence of male dominance where it was manifested in the form of domestic violence; taking least family responsibility by pushing everything to their wives and using abusive languages. This showed that the male members did not respect the female members. They did not recognize women's contribution inspite of women playing multiple roles in the family maintenance. When women were asked about domestic violence in their families, they came up with reply saying that *beatings are normal until and unless they are severe.* It was very subjective as they did not mention their level of severity. It is the power of an ideology which proclaims that male dominance is normal and natural whereas a woman to be aggressive is deviant and unfeminine. It is all ingrained through the socialization process.

We can imagine a woman's life with family responsibility without any cooperation from her husband. There was a scar on the right eyebrow of Ms.Thoinu. Once her husband had hit her with the lantern and that was how she got it. This woman was frustrated with her husband's misbehaviour and moreover he was not taking any responsibility in the family. Husband used up all his earnings for himself. She was taking care of their children's education and the family expenses alone. Instead of appreciating and respecting her, her husband rather would beat her if she did not provide him good food. She was blaming her faith and regretted of being married. She claimed that ***"Life was so free before marriage though my natal family condition was not good. I was very healthy, in fact, fat before marriage but now, see, my condition, just bones are left and covering just by my skin. I would not mind to work day and night through, if my husband gives me a small amount of cooperation and understanding. More than physical weakness, I am mentally tired with my married life. Life is simply miserable."***

Another evidence of domestic violence was reported by Ms.Romina. She was very depressed in her life since the day she lost her only son in a road side accident. She was still holding grief and pain of losing her son. On top of that, her husband's behaviour had changed dramatically within these two years. She revealed her story, **"one night while I was still cooking, my husband rushed with a knife and tried to kill me. I stood there and did**

not run away from the place because I believe that if there is problem, we better solve it instead of running away".

These two incidents were the extreme cases in this category; otherwise, other respondents faced different kinds of dominance like using abusive languages by their husbands or their fathers after they got drunk especially in the night. Like Ms.Lalita's father who often abused her mother using abusive and filthy language when her mother come back home from her long day work. Her mother did petty business like selling fire woods in a small market which was 5 kilometers away from their main village. Women were not often treated as persons who deserve dignity and respect for what they were doing for the whole family. They only wished to have some peace and cooperation from their husbands or other family members. They were quite confident in saying that their lives would be more meaningful if their husbands or the other family members would try to understand and cooperate with them.

It was very interesting to further know that these women would still want their husbands or other male members to head their own respective families and they wanted to live their lives behind their male members. This brings out the point that they have doubts over their capabilities to tackle difficult situation. They rather felt that men are more capable in handling difficult life situations than themselves. This itself showed their undervaluation of their own capability to perform their hidden skills which were so internalized through the socialization process in the society i.e., women to be dependent and needed protection by men.

Son Preference and Discrimination among the siblings:

Women who were mothers expected their daughters to help them either in their pot making business in order to add up in their family income or in managing household chores so that they (mothers) could earn more. If not then, they had to manage both economic activities as well as the household chores, which often put them with strenuous labour which had direct bearing on their health in the long run.

Table 3.11: Discrimination against the female child

Sl/No.	Name	No. of kids		Age of kids		Son Preference	Support from daughter
		Sons	Daughters	Sons	Daughters		
1.	Romina	1-died	3	N.A	22,20 &6	Yes	From the first two.
2.	Sony	Nil	3	N.A.	10,8 &2	Yes	Expecting from 1st one
3.	Leela	1	1	6	10 months	No comment	No comment
4.	Thoinu	1	1	10	7	No comment	Did not expect
5.	Senu	Nil	2	N.A	6 &4	Yes	From 1st daughter
6.	Binata	1	1	5	7	-	From the daughter

These mothers looked forward to their daughters help but they preferred to have male child to inherit their family lineage or family property and most importantly their future security in their old age. They all felt that daughters would leave them once they get married. Preference of a son was found more among those mothers who did not have sons. On the other hand, mothers who had a son did not report of son preference.

Ms.Sony was the only earning member in the family and six of them were dependent on her income out of pottery work. She did not have anyone to help her in household chores so managing both economic activities and household work had become overloaded at the end of the day with her husband being least concerned over any problem in the family. She could not sleep many nights together thinking about the family's future and the expenditures when their children grow up. She was the mother of three daughters and she would still want to try for another baby because she had not got a male child.

According to her, "It is not to say that I do not love my daughters but the thing is they will not look after us when we become old so we need a male child for our future security. I also know that daughters are more caring than sons but still I want a male child and at the same time I am scared to get another female child instead of a male. I am looking forward to my first daughter who is 10 years old now to help me in doing household work. I also want her to study and will make her study till her tenth then I will think over it because I do not have enough money to support her. Anyway, what will she

get even if she studies beyond that? After all, every woman picks up pottery work at the end so, there is no point of investing money, as it does not serve any good purpose till date."

Biasness towards the male child or sibling had an impact on the female child. They felt rejected and a sense of worthlessness being developed in their minds inspite of their contribution towards their family income out of their monthly earnings. They felt that they were not being appreciated rather they were being controlled by the family members especially the father and the male siblings in the family. Young women who were in their early 20s started helping their families economically and their mothers in the household work. These women could not pay much attention towards their studies due to their financial crunch in their families which resulted either in failing or dropping out of the school. They really regretted now but they could not do anything about it. They hoped that their younger siblings should not face the same problem they had in their time. Therefore, some of them would encourage their younger sisters to focus on studies and they were even ready to support them.

Ms.Ruhini who was just 20 years old was the main bread-winner in the family and looking after her parents and her younger sister. She was very depressed about her life and reported that she wanted to commit suicide, especially when she started thinking about her family condition. She worked from morning 8 a.m till 4p.m in the evening. Many nights, she could not catch sleep. There were times where she got up in the night and worked so that she could get some more money. She was very confused with her life. ***"I do not want to blame anyone and am not scared to work hard but I feel very sad when my parents crib so much about a male child. I am doing what I can to the best of my ability so why don't they appreciate my work and concern over the family. I really get hurt when they say that they will give a bed and a cupboard for my marriage and send it off and finish it. It is madness when I hear all these. And I do not just want to leave them in this deserted condition and get married because life is again uncertain and unpredictable too (life after marriage), more than that if I leave them now here, then who is going to look***

after them. My sister is just a kid (6 years old); my mother is sick and father is jobless and drinks everyday. It is completely blank what to do in life."

Another young woman, Ms.Nalini claimed that she wanted to enjoy life with some freedom atleast before marriage where there is less responsibility but her mother and her other family members, male members would not allow her to do so. If she laughed a little louder then they (her family members including her mother) would scold her for being loud. Her mother would tell her, ***"See you are a woman so, you should be very soft and gentle".*** She said, ***"I do not understand any of them because I do not agree with them. My laugh is nothing to do with me being a woman or not. It's simply a sign of enjoyment, even this they want to control. When I tried to answer them back, they would beat me so now I just shut my mouth and do what they want me to do. On the other side, my brothers are enjoying their life. They get all kinds of freedom like they can go out any time of the day unlike girls in the family where there are so many restrictions. I feel very sad when I think of this".***

The same woman was contributing like other male members towards the family income. She earned Rs.2000 per month and out of that she could only save Rs.200 to 250 for herself but still she did not get the same treatment like her male siblings in the family. Adding to this line of argument, Ms.Bhabi had put across her experience. "I want to say that all these kinds of discrimination against female child and biasness towards male child in the family and in the society at large start from our mothers. She is the one who is teaching us. As I cannot do anything now but after my marriage, I will surely bring some change atleast in my small world. I will give everything to my daughter, which I cannot get in my life, a special kind of treatment because I know that we, girls are more concerned about our family and understand the situation far more better than our brothers do. I get frustrated when my parents count my brothers' small and one time contribution so much that they keep speaking and on the other hand, they do not want to realize what we, girls in the family are doing for them. They think we, girls are temporary to them because we will get married one day and leave them forever."

Women did not get leisure time because they had to manage both domestic work along with pottery work. The support system in the household chores played a crucial role in the domain of their earning.

Can Economic Participation Lead to Upliftment of Women's Status?

Married women could not do anything for their own well-being rather their own needs had been sidelined. Those who were not yet married could take out some amount from their earnings before handing it over to their family. They could not think anything beyond fulfilling their family's needs. To a great extent, they sacrificed their needs and many others. Of all these, women did not get respect and rights of their own in their families as well as in the society. This was felt and emphasised by all the respondents in this category.

Empowerment is about internal realization of self-worth and consciousness of selfhood and not merely with external access to resources, materials etc. So, even to think internally with some space of their own, women did not get time to really sit down and think over anything seriously for themselves; this was observed in all the cases in this second category. They were obsessed with work because they wanted some extra amount so as to fill some gaps in their competing demands. They informed that they dreamt of life with sufficient income and not a lavish life because they could not achieve in their whole life. Furthermore, they stressed that sufficient living could be achieved only through their hard work.

Women could not make their life choices because of the financial crunch in the family and moreover the existing social values attached to a woman often constrain them in exploring their choices. Here gender status appeared significance as women were not expected to exercise their own will without discussing with the male heads in the family even if it would mean for family's good. But the male members in their household could do for themselves from their earnings, if at all they had some work by doing odd jobs in and around the village. A close association between their financial crunch in their families and disempowerment was noticed because their insufficiency in meeting the basic needs often

ruled out the ability to explore other choices in life. This is one major hindrance for these women because they were unable to explore other choices in life apart from pottery work, which demands complete physical work. They were facing lot of health problem in their early age due to their kind of occupation.

Except one woman (Ms.Ibemcha), the rest did not take care of their health because they did not have enough extra money to look after their health and their daily diet, though they very well knew that the work they were doing would affect their health later. All of them reported that **"Health is Wealth"**, but they said, ***"what can we do? There are lots of other competing demands so our health comes at the last, until and unless we are completely broken down i.e., bed ridden condition. We cannot imagine our family condition if we are sick and unable to work for couple of days".*** In addition to this, Ms.Sony narrated her condition: **"I was operated for appendicitis 4 years back. I could not take bed rest for long because I am the main bread-winner in my family. Six of my family members are dependent on my income from pottery work. I know it is going to affect my health but no other option left for me at that point in time and also of now. I am simply helpless."**

The Third Category: Individuals neither with group formation nor involved with pottery work.

Authority of Men vs. Less Autonomy of Women:

When we talk about authority of men, it is closely associated with having power over women. Power over is nothing but making others to do against their wishes. Women were so powerless that they were unable to use their own earning without informing to their male members or to their husbands except one lady whose case will be presented a little later. They had little bargaining power with their male members as they possessed less autonomy. The notion of autonomy is rooted in closely related concepts and dimensions of power and authority. Men's command and authority over women had tilted the balance of power

towards the former. The analysis of gender and differential power relation between men and women in the intra-household allocation pattern came to the fore front. The decision-making process at the household level acquired significance in understanding the nature of dominance and exercise of power by different actors in the family.

Decision-Making in the Family:

Women in this category too had minimal role in decision-making process in their families except one case. Despite being dominated by the male members, none of them saw it as a problem as most of them got some satisfaction from their husbands or male members. This was partly because of their relative freedom in pursuing their interest. One common point carrying dual understanding of freedom according to these women was that on one hand they stressed that they got freedom to pursue their interest but on the other hand they needed to consult their male counterparts before taking up any choices. They further explained their point by saying that their male counterparts expected them to inform therefore they were compelled to obey them. This would probably help in reducing possible conflict situations in their intra-familial relationship. There were no reports of wife beating by their husbands or other male members in the family which was often seen in male-dominated society as a sign of male dominance over the women.

In relation to their dual understanding of freedom, we get a clearer picture of male-dominance and women's inability to oppose the decisions made by their husbands or male-heads in the family. Quite strongly, women respondents realized the unequal power relationship between men and women in the society and would want to bring equal status among them. According to these women, a successful and peaceful life would only come from *equal sharing, participation, understanding and cooperation* among the members in the family, more specifically between husband and wife. As noted by the women, **"We are living just for the sake of living as we do not possess any power to transform the prevailing social structure which sanctions all the power and prestige to the men. We are all dominated by men and it has direct impact on our well-being because we are powerless to decide our**

own interest and pursue the same." Their inability to challenge the social norms and values had reduced them from enjoying equal status with men in the society. This often replicated in the socialization processes within their families in the intra-personal relationship level, encouraging the **'disempowered'** to internalize and adhere to a new set of norms that would result as disempowering.

The male heads in the family dominated the decision-making process except in one case where the respondent herself took major decisions in her family and her husband's role was quite minimal. In case of Ms.Aruna, she was very confident in her life. Unlike other female respondents, she was very much ready to interact with the researcher in the presence of her husband. When she was asked during the interaction, *who takes the main decision or do you also take part in decision-making process in your family?*, confidently she said: ***"In my family, I take the decision though I do consider my husband's suggestion. In fact, I dominate and rule my family; there is no doubt in it. I do not mean to say that I sideline my husband's voice but rather we both share together. My husband's nature is very calm, cool so it becomes difficult in to-days world to face the society and the people for which one needs to be a little aggressive and dominating. Without his cooperation and understanding, we could not have reached this stage. We really worked very hard together to reach what we are now, like for instance, we do not ask money from others. We support our children's education from our own earnings. No gossiping with others; no time wasting; get up very early around 3a.m and work till 8p.m but we are quite happy in our life with our children. This is what life is all about."***

It was interesting to come across Ms.Aruna's experience. She was the only woman who could face and take the challenges well in such a patriarchal society; also at the individual level. Her case was not found within the cases and also across the cases. According to her, a woman's position in the family as well as in the society depends on the woman and not to any other person which was to a great extent true. The concept of empowerment in this study is also looking at the consciousness and ability of the individual in making her own choices

in life. This is what she had pointed out rightly.

Considering the constraints imposed by the social norms, values towards male and female in the society, women still would prefer to live behind their male members as it was perceived that an honour of respect would come from being under the male dominance. *In any given family where the wife dominates her husband, society at large would not respect the husband and often he would be known to the public as 'homo'* **[quoted directly from the women's own words]**. Referring to the statement, they therefore would like to stick to the social norms as they could not go beyond the social boundary.

Son Preference is a Form of Gender Discrimination:

Gender discrimination was found in this category too. Unlike the other two categories, the respondents in this category were more focused on their children's education which was closely associated with their relatively better living condition. In cases where their children were small they would hire private tutor at their homes by giving extra money. A few others would send their kids to boarding schools. Among the women yet not married, they were given choices to take up other courses of their interest. Unfortunately, biasness towards the male child was observed. In Ms.Babita's case, ***"I have three children -only one son and two daughters. We (me and my husband) give all our effort to make our son the best but our first daughter is doing really well inspite of minimal effort from us. Therefore, now we are living with a dilemma whether to shift our focus towards the daughter or put the same to our son. I even tried to contact people who are selling products to make our son more brainy. He is right now in the privately run boarding school. If we put a small fraction of our investment towards our first daughter, we are sure she will perform excellently."***

In another case, *Ms.Yaima and her husband started planning for their only son who was just 3 years old from now on. They wanted their son to hold government post and for their twin daughters were only planning to make them study till tenth. But to Ms.Yaima, she wanted her daughters to study till B.A. or M.A. because she regretted of not being educated. She at her young age supported her only*

brother's education by making pots and withdrawing herself from the school. As informed by Yaima, **"My father never took his responsibility of looking after me and my brother rather he was enjoying his life with many other women due to which my mother was broken down and completely shattered. It was a terrible moment in my life to face with."** *Therefore, she really had a dream to fulfill all her unfulfilled dreams in her life before marriage in her natal home. Her husband was in Assam Rifles, so her husband came once in a while. Her husband told her to buy ointment to erase the mark which was there on their son's right leg.* Discrimination against the female child comes from many directions, not necessarily from the mother alone.

A sense of discrimination against the female child among the siblings was revealed by Ms.Premila, ***"I want to blame my mother for everything because she is the one who is quite obvious among the other family members in terms of biasness towards the male child. I do not get free time during the day time as I am also helping my family in household chores along with my embroidery work. I get to watch T.V. only after dinner before sleep. I cannot specify what she has done but I am sure, she is very biased".***

An incident noted during the process of interaction again shows the frustration of young woman. Ms.Tomchou's first daughter was taking care of the family responsibility as her husband passed away three years back. She was managing the household chores and her daughter was involved in pottery work. She had other two sons with her. One day, her daughter started shouting with lot of anger, ***'I am doing everything for the family and why don't you care for me? You always talk about your two sons who are doing nothing great for the family just because they are males, you praise them for no reasons. What did I do wrong for which you hate me from the bottom of your heart? Why is it so?"*** Referring to the same statement, Ms.Tomchou replied... ***"See, she is very loud and has got dominating character within her unlike a female. I know she is taking all our responsibility to the extent that she is also not planning to marry but there is something wrong with her which spoils everything that is none but her behaviour."*** In the society, a woman to be aggressive is considered to be deviant and unfeminine by the women themselves.

Yet one more case which was very touchy...Ms.Sonali was living with her 80 years old grand-mother. **"I was never known to my father till my 3rd standard as my father never used to come home in his vacation. My father was in CRPF. He used to enjoy his life with other women in his work place and later he divorced my mother and married his second wife. I was separated from my mother by my grand-parents. And even my mother too married again after a long gap. I lost my father when he started changing his behaviour and concerning about my future".** Now, her uncle takes care of her expenses but she kept worrying about her uncertain life as she was not so sure how long her uncle would provide and take care of her. She claimed that ***"I want to be with my parents because I had never stayed with them so want to experience such moment in life. I envy my friends who have parents with them, no matter how hard the life would be. Life without parents is much harder than life with financial problem which is quite temporary. Emptiness within me could not be resolved with money; it is much beyond than that. Most of the time, I cry and always haunt with different kinds of thought. I could forget when I mix up with my friends but once I come back to this small hut, I start thinking. Couple of nights, could not catch sleep, rolling on the bed, imagining about life with no support from the other family members left with, all these make me unable to take breath during my sleep. Nobody in this world would be as misfortune as me."***

The same young woman did not agree with the differential access of men and women to *'power'*. Even to her, mother's role was important in shaping all the differences between a girl and a boy. As a human-being, man and woman should be treated equally according to her. Another woman Ms.Sunita who was yet not married and had exposure to the social problem involving herself in one NGO, working in the area of maternal health brought out a different picture altogether. She said ***"education is essential for the person to take challenges in life because education gives the exposure and also enhances the ability of the person. Knowledge and skills come through the education. Henceforth, it is required to make everyone accessible to the system of education irrespective of class or gender of the person."*** *Speaking from her experiences in the field, she further added that the prevailing social norms*

and values were so strict that it was quite difficult for them to change the mind set of the people even if they (her team in her NGO) did awareness campaign on maternal health and child care. It was found more difficult among the illiterate people she added. She pointed more towards the women's right which according to her would achieve through education. Commenting on the mother's role, to blame everything on the mother was not right. She explained further by saying that woman should stand for herself and fight for her rights instead of playing the blame game.

Gender discrimination in any form would avoid treating woman as a complete human-being. It is fairly related to the existing differential power relation between men and women in the society where men have the full authority and command in their own right where women are made to be subordinate beings; this is the result of gender socialization as evident from the narratives of the women. Mothers who themselves having biasness towards their male child failed to realize their own action of gender discrimination and this was mainly because the idea of male supremacy was deeply ingrained in them. Again, they themselves would say, **"we women remain inferior to men in different spheres of decision-making by social conditioning and through gender socialization process. We are taught to listen and obey our husbands. We are also learnt to tolerate everything under the sun by doing so we will be figured as a strong woman who holds no value practically. We ought to do just because we are women in the society".**

Can Economic Participation Lead to Upliftment of Women's Status?

Women in this category belonged to better financial condition. They have better support system such as having assets; working husbands, fathers, uncle (in government offices); capable family members to take the responsibility of the expenses etc. Six out of ten women were contributing to the family income having different ways of earning whereas four of them were direct dependents on other family members. Those who were direct dependents reported of having no power or minimal power over any issue in the family. Their feelings and emotions will be discussed a little later. As it has been mentioned by some of the respondents, they get other options to explore in life. The table given below would help us in

understanding what kind of options they get.

Table 3.12: Availability of options other than pottery work among the third category respondents

Sl/No I	Name II	Type of Family III	No.of children*/ Siblings# IV	Knowledge of pottery work V	If yes to (V), Age of Joining V I	If yes to (V), Age of Leaving	Source of income ** VII
1.	Babina	Nuclear	4	Yes	10	Since 2 years	Dependent
2.	Tomchou	Nuclear	4	Yes	After 17	Since 3 years	Dependent
3.	Sanahal	Nuclear	4	Yes	10	After 18	Runs tea stall
4.	Aruna	Nuclear	3	Yes	10	After 23	Runs grocery shop
5.	Babita	Nuclear	3	Yes	14	Since 3 years	Runs grocery shop
6.	Premila	Nuclear	7	No	-	-	Embroidery work
7.	Sunita	Nuclear	5	Yes	10	After 17	Runs pharmacy+ serves as a nurse
8.	Yaima	Nuclear	3	Yes	10	Since 1year	Dependent
9.	Saya	Nuclear	4	No	-	-	Teaching in community school
10.	Sonali	Nuclear	1	No	-	-	Dependent

Note: (a)* It applies to all those who are married and # to those who have not yet married-numerical against this includes the respondents themselves.

(b) ** In this column, dependent applies to those who are dependent on other family members' income source.

Among the four cases who were dependents, three cases were home-makers and the last one was dependent to her uncle as her father was no more and the mother married again. The inhabitants of the village by birth did have some advantage in pottery work like in the above table, we can see two typical cases that of Ms.Tomchou and Ms.Sanahal. In the case of Ms.Tomchou, she had joined pottery work after her marriage because she belonged to other village by birth whereas Ms.Sanahal left pottery work after marriage because she was married to another village so she had to leave pottery work. It appeared that most of the respondents (five out of six) had joined at the age of 10 years among those who had the knowledge of pot making. The one who had joined at the age of 14 was a single child and therefore she had learnt pottery work a little later than others. Pot making was a kind of

culture in Thongjao village, therefore, even newly married women were in a way made to learn pottery work after their marriage. People often say, **"Women especially mothers of the sons prefer their daughters-in-law from the village itself because the newly married bride will contribute to family income directly by involving in pottery work. But brides who come from other place need to learn from the scratch so it takes time in getting their share of income. And this village's main source of income is from pottery work."**

When the respondents were asked whether economic participation is a panacea for the problems faced by them?, their response was dual in nature. On the one hand , they would say their economic participation to some extent enable them to participate in decision-making process in the family which on the other hand, they claimed that their problem could not be solved by their economic participation because more than money, a lot more needed to be considered like their low status in the family as well as in the society; inability to fight for their rights having low bargaining power; less autonomy due to which they were being dominated by their male members and above all the prevailing social values and norms attached to them. They extensively talked about the social system in which they themselves were defined as a social unit rapped with expected roles in the family cultured from time immemorial. Henceforth, to break away from the pathway of human social system seemed impossible for them like to over-rule the male heads in the family appeared to them as a violation of the prevailing social custom. They therefore, suppressed their emotions and desires in life for the smooth functioning of the system as a whole and family as a unit. Here, these women do not realize that they are somehow undermining their own values as a human-being which deserved equal footing with men in the society and in their families too.

Those who were direct dependents perceived that they were powerless because they did not have any income source. As they did not contribute, they had no say in the family decision-making. On the contrary, it was brought out that those who had income source and contributing either it is being shared one or taking the responsibility of major expenses in the family claimed that they could not spend their earning without discussing with their male

heads. Moreover, their income was just to fill some loopholes therefore they remained always as the supplementary earners. Some of the respondents felt that they had full authority over their earning and they had relative freedom in spending their earning in their own way. *When these women were further asked in what way they spent their money?*, it showed that they were not actually doing any good for themselves rather it was all meant for the family's good like buying clothes for their children, vegetables particularly among the married women. Those who were yet not married were also using their earnings for the family's needs but to some extent they were able to save some for themselves.

In the context of empowerment if we analyze these cases, self-consciousness and selfhood are very essential in the process of empowerment which was lacking in this category because the respondents have hardly recognized their needs or rather combined it with the well-being of the family due to which they could not reach the level of self-hood. Their internal self-consciousness was being suppressed. This could have adverse implications for their own well-being as well as for the well-being of other female family members. It appeared that a woman's life experience held some significant impact on her daughter like in the case of Ms.Yaima. *She had broken family due to which she was unable to study for which she regretted a lot now. Therefore, she would want her twin daughters to study till B.A. or M.A.* In another case, *the lady was the only child (Ms.Babita) so she got relative freedom and got alternatives to explore which had some impact on her two daughters. Even she would like to give the same kind of freedom to them in life.*

As noted, the gender stratification within the household - the differential power of men and women could also be observed. Their husbands or other male members in the household had the freedom to spend their earnings according to their wishes. The women did not have the power to resist this because men had culturally sanctioned power over women and had greater control over their earnings unlike women. It was all centered on men's authority and power over women. The operation of power could be shown as an active discrimination by men as the dominant group usually found in a patriarchal society.

In terms of their health, they were well taken care by their husbands or other family members. According to them, **"we should not neglect our health because if we remain healthy and fit, we can get wealth but without good health everything is like a waste. We consult both private and government doctors but more to the private doctors simply because less rush, proper treatment etc."** The respondents in this category had surplus therefore they did not wait for long to seek treatment.

Some Commonalities and Differences Among the Three Categories:

Women in all the three categories did not possess any authority and power in decision-making process in their own respective families except two women (Ms.Aruna & Ms.Lakshmi in Category III & Category I-Group 2) inspite of their multiple roles in family maintenance. This showed us that power remains in the hands of men. Lack of autonomy was a major hindrance in the process of empowerment. Women were unable to make any difference to their intra-familial relationship by their income earned as it appeared similar to unpaid work. It was also observed that the process of gender socialization helps in reinforcing the social norms and values attached to a woman from one generation to the other. This furthermore increases the gender gap between a man and a woman both within the family as well as in the society at large. When we analyzed the available options, the condition of the family appeared quite significant. This is where we can find a slight difference among the three categories. Although the dual understanding on freedom by those women who belonged to the third category was analyzed and mentioned above, but still they were having better freedom compared to the other two categories i.e., I and II. Their freedom was more in terms of exploring other choices in life and also in the availability of options. Another point is related to their health, women in the third category took care of their health which was not found in the first two categories. This is mainly because of their differential family condition. In the third category, there was surplus which was not so in the other two categories which in a way had an implication in their health condition too.

After analyzing the collected data from the field extensively, we can to a great extent connect the inter-relatedness of the concepts like power, authority, patriarchy and gender and its impact on women's lives. In dealing and exploring the women's lives, particularly in the context of empowerment, it appears that the process of socialization is extremely significant. In addition, the understanding of social and historical reality of women's status and position in society becomes unavoidable in attempting to empower women-socially, legally or politically. In the second chapter, we already have dealt with the theoretical understanding of the concept of empowerment. In order to understand the concept of empowerment in relation to the field experience by the researcher, it becomes important to link the theory with the analysis of the data presented in the current chapter. In the next chapter we would attempt a discussion on the data presented here and draw theoretical and practical implications.

Chapter IV:

Relating and Revisiting Women's Lives

Shklar.....

> **[M]any victims learn to be helpless, as women often do, which allows them to evade the conscious status of victimhood but at an awful cost to themselves (Quoted by Kabeer,N.)[1]**

This section starts with a quotation revealing the status of women being described as victimhood which depicts meaningful in-sights into male-female relationship and the power dynamics involved in it. Such connotation on power could be better viewed from the gender perspective existing in the society and functioning smoothly in the familial level. For instance, male power is successfully exercised in the household as an institutional arena through the mobilization of biased norms, rules and procedures. It becomes unavoidable to discuss about power and its implication on human relations because the concept of empowerment is clearly rooted in the notion of power and powerlessness in its reverse. The position of the individual within the domestic arena is of particular importance while understanding the gender dimensions of empowerment. Though men and women are declared to be equal before the law, in principle but not in practice, women are still at a disadvantage in India in many areas of life. Since the enactment of the Constitution, the position of women in India has not improved much when it comes to the issue of gender justice. Hence a study of women's empowerment which stress on

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Kabeer,N. 1995. *Chapter9:Empowerment From Below-Learning from the Grassroots* In Kabeer,N. Reversed Realities-Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought. New Delhi: Kali for Women. pp.223-63.

building self-confidence, a sense of independence and capability to resist discrimination imposed by the male dominated society would be of great significance.

The current study was conducted at Thongjao village, an area where women played major role in the economic front along with their non-negotiable domesticity. Majority of the women worked very hard to meet daily minimum requirements involving themselves in pottery work in their young ages mainly due to their financial crunch in their families. The village had a total population of 1853 in which women above 15 years of age were 700. Out of these 700 women, 486 women were involved in pottery work as the main source of income. Pottery work was the main income source in the village. Thongjao village was barren in terms of public facilities like proper schools, to access to health facilities nearby, adequate water supply and many others. The study focused attention in exploring the availability of choices, intra-familial relationship and above all to examine whether economic participation is a panacea for solving the problems faced by the women. The findings of the study reported in the previous chapter are discussed below.

Differential Power Relations and Existing Gender Dimension:

In this study, empowerment is viewed as an ongoing process rather than an end of the process itself. Empowerment is an active and multidimensional process, rightly put by Batliwala as a spiral[2]. The first and foremost step while examining empowerment is to figure out the existing power relation among individuals in the household at the micro-level. From the analysis, it was revealed that women had no power over the decision-making process except two cases in all the three categories, which could be well explained from the gender dimensions and its implication for male-female relationships. Equal participation in decision-making process is an essential part of the empowerment process but this study found women having no power inspite of being the main bread-winners or

[2] Batliwala,S. 1994. *Chapter9: The Meaning of Women's Empowerment-New Concepts from Action* In Sen,G., Germain,A & Chen,L.C. (eds). Population Policies Reconsidered – Health, Empowerment, and Rights. Boston: Havard School of Public Health. pp: 127-38.

major contributors to the family income. Women were emphatic that they are not treated with dignity and respect. Their contribution did not help them to gain recognition from the male members but still they would prefer to live behind their male figures because they felt that by doing so, society would respect them.

In general and also revealed from the study, women in the society are supposed to remain in the four walls of the house. Women were often used the word ***'samaj'*** during interaction with them in the field. The word *'samaj'* denotes social norms and values attached to a woman in the society according to women respondents. What they meant to point out is that they could not do what they wish to do in life as they are assigned with certain specific duties and responsibilities in which their sacrifice for the well-being of others and the members of the family are also included distinctly. They somehow were unable to grow as a free individual, rapping up themselves with the prevailing social norms that made them weak in bargaining about their rights in the intra-household power relationships directly or indirectly. Women's issues are not contested and established practices and expectations make success in bargaining extremely difficult as put forward by Agarwal in her study[3]. In the indirect sense, norms may influence the access women have to means of improving their bargaining power like right to grow freely, gaining skill through attending training programmes etc.

Until and unless fundamental changes are brought about in the social system their basic problems remain largely unsolved because prevailing social norms are so deeply ingrained within the individual and the society at large and are resistant to change even if they have access to income source (as explained by Shrivastava, Agarwal and Kabeer)[4].

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[3] Agarwal, B. 1997. 'Bargaining and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household', *Feminist Economics,* 3(1): 1-51.

[4]Shrivastava,R.S. 2001. *Chapter10: Women Empowerment: Some Critical Issues,* In Avasthi,A & Srivastava,A.K. (ed). Modernity,Feminism and Women Empowerment. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.pp:171-81.

Agarwal, B., opcit.

Kabeer,N,opcit, p.90.

Majority of the women had to manage both economic activities and the household chores without getting any assistance from their husbands or other male members because men think that domestic work is meant for women and they have nothing to do in the matter. Except during the harvesting season, men in this village remained unemployed and still they would not help the female members in any of their activity instead they would suppress women under them. This is nothing but the power which has been socially sanctioned to men in the society. Unequal gender relations imply that men not only have and can exercise greater power than women in almost all spheres of functioning and also have greater control of and access to resources and information. This inequality in gender relations is embodied in various societal institutions, but is reproduced daily in the household.

It is seen that majority of the respondents reported of getting support from either their daughters or mothers or any of other female members in the household and none of them reported of getting assistance from their male members in the household which clearly showed that domesticity remains women's primary responsibility. When they were posed with the question like "*don't you try to ask help from male members in the family*", majority of them replied that they usually do not ask because men think that domestic work is women's work to the extent that men even think that pottery work is meant only for women which is not true. Women's involvement in pottery work was seen as gendered activity. From this, it is evident that gender set out its implication in work front too.

Gender discrimination and other social disparities relating to women in Indian society are reflected in the falling sex ratio as examined by Dhall. The sex ratio in Manipur had started falling from 1971 onwards. Till the year 1961, the female population in Manipur outnumbered its male population. In 1961, the sex ratio of Manipur was 1,015 whereas in 1971, it was 980 then 971 and 958 in 1981 and 1991 respectively (census of India, 1991, Series-15). Gender biasness is well manifested in the form of son preference. In the study too, biasness towards the male child or son preference was found prominently

more among those who did not have a son or had only one son in the family. Its adverse implications on the female child was also revealed by the female respondents who were not yet married **(those who have not yet decided to get married or not, most of them were at the age of 20s –from hereafter as 'not yet married')** or unmarried **(those who were already decided to remain single, they were of above 35 years – from hereafter as 'unmarried')**.

Differential treatment among male and female child was evident. Male child was given more attention and even investment on education was found more among the male child as compared to the female child. Women respondents who were mothers expected their daughters' help in managing household chores in the family but they did not report of seeking any domestic help from their sons. Such kind of biasness towards male child helps in maintaining the inequality between men and women in the society. Gender is an important factor in the allocation of roles, status and power in all societies. Moreover, the accepted rights and duties for men and women are in themselves gender-biased and unjust. In general men are perceived as the major providers and protectors of a family, while women are perceived as playing only a supportive role. Gender discrimination often results in women getting smaller shares of resources and larger shares of work.

Impact of Patriarchy on Women's Status:

The present understanding of patriarchy denotes dominance of men over women which in a feminist framework gives attention towards women's oppression and subjugation in different spheres. Male dominance could be simply considered as exercising power over women which could be seen in the forms of women having relatively less power than men in decision-making process; experience of violence by women; social constraints in expanding their interests and making their choices in life on the ground of gender imposed by the prevailing social norms and all of these giving more power and authority to men, sanctioned culturally and socially in the society. Such disparities which the women experience are discussed below.

Decision- making process: Majority of the respondents reported that male members in their own respective families take the main decisions. Only a few of them had direct control over the decision-making process, those were either divorcees or widows or absence of male decision-makers or abdicated his role as a decision-maker. In all of the three categories-I, II and III, only two women appeared to have full control in the decision-making process. A very few women revealed of having **male dominated joint decision-making.** While understanding the process of empowerment in the lives of the women, it is quite important for a woman to have right over decision-making in the family which will have an effect in the overall relationship as well as in the family, particularly towards the other female members in the family and in the society at large.

Women's role in decision-making is a form of women's autonomy. A study done by Pant[5] on intra-household allocation patterns among women workers engaged in 'dyeing' part of the tie and dye handicraft industry of Jaipur city found that women workers showed active involvement in decision-making relating to general domestic issues like small expenses on children, domestic expenditure, medical care, buying gifts etc., but household asset management remained in the domain of male members in the household. Her findings also showed that the husbands and other male members, not women, were crucial decision-makers. If at all, women only took decisions jointly with others. Women thus internalized their own self as persons of lesser value, further manifested in having doubts on their capabilities and their abilities in taking crucial decisions.

Experience of violence by women: Violence is also a form of male dominance over women. The reported violence by the respondents was unclear to the point that they did not specify their level of severity of the violence. Most of them did not want to reveal incidence of violence, rather their husbands or other male members in the family were justified in beating them as men's rights. Married women reported of having experienced beatings from their husbands but they did not project it as a problem rather viewed as

[5] Pant, M. 2000. 'Intra-household Allocation Patterns: A Study in Female Autonomy', *Indian Journal of Gender studies,* January- June, 7(1): 93-100.

men's rights to control women. Women are taught to tolerate and sacrifice their lives instead of creating a more potential conflict situations in the family because they feel that their long-term security lies in subordinating their well-being to that of male authority figures as viewed by Sen (cited by Kabeer[6]). The experience of violence affects every aspect of women's lives from the physical to the mental. There were cases where experience and the threat of future violence developed low self-esteem, an inability to effectively fulfill her set targets for the day and in extreme thoughts of suicide like in the case of Ms.Tombi. All of this implies that an environment in which women have experienced violence or live with the threat of violence is likely to act to undermine empowerment. [7]Kishor and Gupta's study on women's empowerment in twenty-six states were chosen for their study covered a wide range of issues. On their survey on experience on violence, it was revealed that overall one in five women in India reports having experienced some form of violence since age 15, and the majority of women report the husband as the source of the violence.

Availability of other options and ability to make choices: Leaving aside the category-III women respondents-those individuals who were neither with group formation nor involved with pottery work, the rest of the women in category I and II did not have any other options other than the pottery work as their source of income for survival. In category III, the living condition was relatively better than the rest of the two categories which could be linked to having some small amount of surplus with them unlike in the other two categories. Choice necessarily implies the possibility of alternatives to be chosen which draws an association between poverty and disempowerment because an insufficiency of the means for meeting one's basic needs often rules out the ability to exercise meaningful choice discussed by Kabeer as well[8]. It would be misleading if we only try to link poverty with women's disempowerment because it misses out other disparities which restrict women from exercising their rights in making their choices.

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[6] Kabeer,N., opcit, p.90.

[7] Kishor,S. & Gupta,K. 2004. 'Women's Empowerment in India and Its States- Evidence from the NFHS'. *Economic and Poitical Weekly.* February 39(7): 694-712

[8] Kabeer,N. 1999. 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', *Development and Change,* May, 30(3): 435-64.

Existing inequalities between men and women and gender discrimination in basic well-being could be well included in such disparities. Women in the last category could not make choices by their own though they were having options, except one lady who had full control over every matter within her intra-familial relationship and also to the public domain to some extent. These women always waited for the permission of their husbands or other male members' while making their choices in life. The reason they gave was to avoid unfaithfulness and also to maintain transparency in their relationship with what they were doing. When they were posed with the question- *'Do their husband feel the same? '*, they replied that they only tried to keep transparency which simply means that they were trying to avoid any potential conflict situations in the family. Dependency has become a survival mechanism for the female child and for women caring for men becomes a means to strengthen one's faltering self-esteem. Furthermore, women have been typically viewed as subordinate inhabitants of the family sphere.

A woman who was not yet married withdrew herself from her job as a social worker (not a professional social worker) because her father and other male members in the family would not want her to travel long distances and stay overnight in other villages for her field work. She was made to shift her own life choice to a new beginning. Her condition strikes the equation between power and choice which further draws attention on the existing gender inequalities in the family and in the society thus signaling the operation of power. In general and also in her case too, the operation of power is often visible either as an absence of choice on the part of women as the subordinate group or as active discrimination by men as the dominant group.

People's perception of their needs and interests, partly reflects their own individual histories and everyday realities, but are also significantly and systematically influenced by the norms and values of the societies to which they belong. We can further extend this

understanding from Kabeer's work on "Power to Choose"[9], where she points out that there is a constant social effort to reproduce the social norms, values and beliefs over time about gender and gendered relationships in most societies. Such efforts mobilize in operationalizing at the level of individuals through shared understandings of what constitute appropriate ways of 'being and doing' for women and men. The internalization of social values and beliefs are manifested in women's perception about being the subordinate group who need protection by men. Women would further reinforce the same practices on their daughters. This is how the process of socialization proceeds successfully in the society from time to time.

Work Place and Its Significance in Relation to Empowerment:

The analysis in the previous chapter shows that access to income source did not directly bring improvements in women's lives, such an outcome raises the need to explore other areas in respect to empowerment of the women. Pottery work in Thongjao village was performed mostly at homes and only eight women out of 486 women (**those above the age of 15 years**) involved in pottery work were engaged themselves as middle women who reached the finished products in the main markets like Imphal, Churachandpur and a few other places in the State. The rest were confined at home which often left them with minimal bargaining power and the prices of the products were very low as compared to the time and labour they put in it.

It is important to note how far women themselves value their work and contribution towards the family income because often and also study did by Kantor[10] shows us that home-based work is less visible as compared to the work outside home. In respect to this, the visibility of the work place gains greater significance in the process of

[9] Kabeer, N. 2000. Power to Choose- Bangladeshi Women Workers and Labour Market Decisions. New Delhi:Vistaar Publications,

[10] Kantor, Paula. 2003. 'Women's Empowerment Through Home-based Work- Evidence from India', *Development and Change*, June, 34(3): 425- 45.

empowerment in the lives of women engaged in economic activities at home like Thongjao pottery work. One more point Kantor highlights is that income earned through home-based work found too low to make a difference in household relations as work done is so close to unpaid household work. Kantor's point seems quite impressive but the study seeks more detailed examination on the condition of the family and the role of the actor in meeting the survival needs. For instance, in Thongjao women in general take primary role in meeting the family expenses which falls in men's domain in general understanding along with their non-negotiable role of domestic work whereas men involved in seasonal work. Out of the total respondents, only four were dependent on other family members in their own respective families and the rest were engaged with some or other work as an income source, mainly pottery work.

Coming to the point of the income earned by women involved in pottery work, though their income might be low it had some value to the family as it was the only source of survival. Women themselves reported that their contribution cannot make any difference in their intra-household familial relationship as they viewed their income as a meager income in totality. It was found more among those who were sharing the economic burden with other family members. This means that they to some extent undervalue their contribution which in a way attaches less value to her own well-being as compared to the position of other members in the family.

Women's role perceptions influence their bargaining power in the household. Women who generally have a low sense of self-worth have weaker bargaining power and fall back position as explained by Young (cited by Pant)[11] . Those who were the primary earners in their own families to a great extent were able to receive a valuable recognition from other household members but quite sadly they could not do anything good for themselves. They neither had power nor rights to enhance their well-being. Consequently, their role in decision-making and their claims on household resources weakened. We

[11] Pant, M., opcit, p.95.

argue that their inability to make a difference in household relations can be linked to inequality based on gender which shows us that their problem is much beyond the economic problem in life.

Economic Participation as a Means not an End to Empowerment:

Economic independence or access to income source is considered the major means of empowerment of women. To a great extent this is true as economic dependence is the worst form of dependence. From the analysis of the data, one can conclude that to a point women were able to feel that they are not dependent on others which came through their economic participation but they were unable to transform it for their own well-being. Rather their work increased the total workload as their domesticity remained non-negotiable. Therefore, it is important to understand that one aspect of empowerment does not necessarily lead to complete empowerment per se as women empowerment is a complex process. Women rarely negotiate the division of labour so that the male members of the household would undertake a greater share of domestic chores. They either cut down their own leisure time or take the help of other women or older children, especially the girl child. They remained very busy throughout the day from morning till night because of which they could only get half an hour or so as leisure time before going to bed. Furthermore, Batliwala[12] added that strengthening women's economic status, though positive in many ways, does not always reduce their other burdens or eradicate other forms of oppression; in fact, it has often led to intensifying the workload in family maintenance.

Domestic activities, in conjunction with economic activities and child care, force women and girls to reduce time in rest, leisure, and education. The study shows that domestic duties interfere with girls' school enrollment. High activity levels combined with low nutritional intake place women at considerable health risk (Refer to Rebeka's case in

[12] Batliwala, S., opcit, p.91.

Chapter III, p.67, also explained by Desai[13]). All of them knew that their health will get affected if they work beyond their capacity at their young ages but they usually put extra labour and time in order to get some extra amount out of no choice. Among the respondents who were below the age of 40 years, very few have reached graduate level of education.

It reveals from the available literature as well as from the field experience that cultural traditions are built into the social structure and institutionalized within society whereby women are denied power and autonomy. The prevailing value system has put so many hurdles on the path to women's equality through their economic participation. Inspite of women being the primary earners in the family or contributor to the family income, it fails to change role structure and role relations within family. Thus, women's role remains unaltered, despite the fact women add new dimension to their role as economic providers. Women revealed of having serious health problems due to the kind of labour they put in an everyday basis. Many of them could not seek treatment as they were the primary earners in the family. They usually took pain killer from the pharmacy and remained busy with their daily schedule of managing both economic activities and domestic tasks. Their inability to take care of their health and well-being could be well linked to Kabeer's explanation of the linkage between poverty and disempowerment[14]. Not having sufficient means for meeting their basic needs often rules out the ability to think for themselves though their good health is an immense value to the welfare of the whole family as majority of them were the primary providers in their own respective families.

Empowerment talks about bringing change in an individual life. However, it becomes difficult to evaluate the degree of empowerment these women achieved through their economic participation as no such change and transformation were evident from the

[13] Desai, Sonalde. 1994. *Women's Burdens-Easing the Structural Constraints,* in Sen, Gita; Germain, Adrienne & Chen, Lincoln C (eds): Population Policies Reconsidered – Health, Empowerment, and Rights. Boston: Harvard School of Public Health. pp:139-50.

[14] Kabeer, N., opcit, p.96.

analysis. Our preliminary explorations suggest that women's access to income source is not sufficient in improving their status so as to facilitate their overall empowerment because social norms still act as constraining conditions to bring any change in intra-household power relations. In the final analysis, we find that the women are unable to convert the income earned into power. This itself has serious implication for the existing approaches to women empowerment.

Chapter V:

Conclusion

With the existing knowledge on the concept of empowerment, we by now know that there is no fixed definition of empowerment as a concept. Therefore, it cannot be used consistently across a range of contexts, which means that it has to be used depending on the context of the study. Empowerment as a concept has been looked at and understood as an ongoing process in exploring women's lives in Thongjao village although the concept of empowerment is also the result of the process itself. Empowerment as a concept is quite important and meaningful, more specifically in the developing countries like India while dealing with the large section of disadvantaged groups in the society.

An individual does not grow as a free individual as every individual is an unit of a society in the boarder context. This means that prevailing social norms and values in the society mould each and every person with certain kinds of perceived expectations to be accompanied with duties and responsibilities. Based on gender, the roles are assigned differently between a man and a woman inspite of the fact that they both are social entities. Further down the stream, both man and woman grow within the family as a social institution. There is a clear demarcation on the roles to be fulfilled by a man and woman and it often leaves a woman with lesser "value" in all the ways and fields in comparison to a man in the family or in the society at large. This is where the concept of empowerment becomes meaningful in dealing with the power dynamics prevailing within the family and in the society as well. As pointed out by many scholars empowerment as a concept contains lots of possibilities to bring change in the society through a rearrangement of power.

Our study reinforces the fact that the roles played by women are often unrecognized. It has been taken for granted. They play multiple roles with no rights and

dignity as a person which cut across all sections in the society. The level of deprivation or gaps in accessing resources and information might be different depending on the socio-economic conditions of the households that they belong to. All these have serious implications for the women in the long run in terms of their health and well-being. This would have an impact on the overall growth of the family and the society too.

There is a constant interaction among different fronts or actors in the context of the family or household and the society at large. Therefore, it is quite necessary to understand and study the relationship between these actors and the contributions made by the actors to the maintenance of the family and the society. Unfortunately, the importance of women's contribution has remained largely invisible or untouched. This is why women becoming economically independent by and large fail to enhance their status and position at the familial-level.

It is seemingly difficult to transform the way the society treats a man and a woman so differently. But an unimaginable inequality between man and woman might as well develop sooner or later if we do not put our efforts to change the social thinking towards a man and a woman. This could be the reason why women's issues attract much attention and focus from different corners in the globe. One significant point to note in understanding the concept of empowerment is that the holistic understanding of the situation and context is an important aspect. Because women are trapped in a web of power in the human chain. Empowerment is considered to be the process and goal of changing the structures that enforce oppression of women, mainly understood in the literature as patriarchal ideology.

Some Suggestions and Recommendations:

- Empowerment cannot be examined in isolation from the situation and context in which the women live and work.

- An integrated approach should be adopted in dealing with women's empowerment because empowerment is closely linked to power. Power itself is quite a complex word as it touches every aspect of life, particularly demarcating between a man and a woman as oppressor and oppressed beings in the society. In such a context, instrumentalised approaches such as micro-credit, income generation or self-help groups may not enhance the "capability" of the women.
- Collaboration between Government and Non-governmental Organization (NGO) would be a meaningful step in addressing empowerment, more so regarding women inclusive development per se.
- Sensitization about the equality between men and women in the developmental process could be tried as a first step in the empowerment process.

ANNEXURE

Interview Guide Used for the Data Collection from the Field

#Name of the respondent

#Age of the respondent

#Marital Status

#Age of Marriage

*Name of the husband

*Age of the husband

*Occupation of the husband

*Monthly/Annual Income of the husband

(For married women only)

#Educational Qualification

#Reason for dropping out

#Number of Children/ Siblings

#Type of the family

#Age of joining pottery work

#Reason for joining pottery work

Do they have any other options available other than pottery work? If yes, what are those? If no, then what do they feel about it? What are the possible factors for not having other options? Is it financial problem or any other?

#Do you get freedom in expanding your own interest? Do you ever experience differential treatment among your siblings? If yes, then what do you feel about it?

#What is your average monthly income and how much do you contribute to the family? How much can you save for yourself from your income?

#How many hours you work in a day? How many minutes or hours do you take rest in between your work or after the work?

#Why don't you prefer modern technology for pottery work?

#Do you plan out your work atleast one day prior?

#Do you think your earning help in improving your position in the family? In what ways you spend your own earnings? What do you feel about your earning?

#Who takes the main decisions in your family? Do you also participate in the decision-making process?

*When do you share with your husband regarding any matter? How often do you share? What kind of support you get from your husband? (Only for the married women)

*What do you expect from your husband? What do you wish in your life?

#Have you experienced any kind of violence from the other male members in the family? If yes, in what ways? What is your opinion on it?

#Narrate your feelings; thoughts and emotions-about life.

#How do you see yourself as a woman in the society? Do you want to bring any change in the existing social norms and values?

#What are the difficulties you faced as a woman in the society as well as in the family?

#What is your opinion on Meitei's predominant saying –'Nupigidi Yumgnak Leite' and 'Nupadi Taragi Mapuni'.

For Category I group members: Those involved with pottery work and also involved in group formation:

- When did you join the group? What is your opinion about your own group?
- Do you get any pressure from the providers or middle women if you take money in advance? How do you manage it?
- Do you share your problem with other members in the group? Are you able to divert your family problem by being with the group members?

Health Problems:

- What are the common health problems faced by the women involved in pottery work?

- Where do they seek treatment-Government hospitals or private clinic? What is their opinion about the services provided by the government and the private clinic?
- How often do they visit the doctor? Who initiates for seeking treatment when they fall ill?
- If they could not seek treatment, what is the reason behind it?
- What is their opinion about the traditional healers in the village? Do they also access to it or not?
- Do they take their health problems seriously or not? If no, then why?
- Do they think that health is wealth?

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