

# **MEITEI WOMEN IN TRANSITION IN MANIPUR**



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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY*

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled 'Meitei Women in Transition in Manipur', submitted by Miss. Hajarimayum Jubita Devi in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University. This is her own work.

We recommend this work to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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**For**

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# ***CHAPTER - I***

## ***INTRODUCTION***

Various socio-economic and cultural factors have assigned women to a lower status than men in society. The consequence of this inferior status is reflected in female foeticide, female infanticide, a higher death rate among women, lower life expectancy, lower literacy levels, higher morbidity and an adverse sex ratio.

In India over the last few decades the proportion of females to males has been declining. According to 1991 census, sex ratio for India is 929 females per 1000 males. Although these various indices indicate the secondary status for women, they however, seem vary across states. Available studies show that status of women differs across regions, classes, caste, religion and occupations. According to 1991 census in Kerala, for instance, the sex ratio is favourable to women, 1,032, it varies from 897 in Punjab to a low of 870 in Haryana.

Discussion on health issues have shown that maternal health and child health is the indicator of status of women. Kerala and Manipur are well known for their low infant mortality rates. In case of Kerala various studies have suggested that higher female education is closely related to low infant and maternal mortality. But in the case of Manipur, much less is known about the dynamics of higher status and better health conditions of women and children. Therefore, here we are adopting an interdisciplinary approach to examine the case of Manipur

to explore the socio-economic conditions which gives it the status as an outlier in women's advancement over time.

The present dissertation contains the following chapters -

The second chapter, 'Conceptual Framework and Methodology' shows how we have developed the understanding of status of women on the basis of review of literature and derive from it our design of the study.

The third chapter, 'Women in Manipur' is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the review of available literature and historical overview of Manipur. This review includes population and geography, economic life, social organisation, caste and class and education in Manipur. The second section attempts to review the available studies on political participation, levels of freedom and age at marriage of Meitei women and analyses the larger data on female work participation, sex ratio and education. This section will show the changing status of women in Manipur.

The fourth chapter, 'Transition through women's eyes', is divided into two sections. The first section will present some selected case reports of the Meitei women across the generations. The second section shows variables that emerge from the qualitative exploration of



**Meitei women. We will also tabulate and analyse each of the variable to quantify the qualitative data.**

**The last chapter includes discussion and conclusion of this study.**

***CHAPTER - II***

***CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND***

***METHODOLOGY***

We have developed an understanding of women's status on the basis of a review of literature. The complex nature of status requires a framework of analysis that incorporates at least the major factors that must be understood for any analysis of women's status in society. We develop such a framework and derive from it our design for the study. The chapter therefore is divided into two sections; the review of literature and conceptual framework and the design of the study.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section first presents a review of literature which is the basis of our conceptual framework and the methodology of this study. We will first define 'status' before studying the overview of status of women in India.

According to International Encyclopedia of Social Science, R. Linton(1936) defined 'status' simply as a positive notion in a social system. Status refers to what a person is, whereas the closely treated

notion of role (q.v). Status deals with her or his expectations arising out of the situation. It deals out rights but not necessarily legal rights.<sup>1</sup>

In Max Weber's view, 'Status' is one of the basic aspects of stratification. Status refers to differences between social groups in the social honour or prestige they are accorded to by others. Status distinctions often vary independently of class divisions, and social honour may be either positive or negative. Positively, privilege status groups include any groupings of people who have high prestige in a social order. Status depends upon people's subjective evaluations of social differences. Status is governed by the varying styles of life groups follow.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the assumption that 'status' is correlated to the participatory rights and obligations of women in the managing of society, we will look at the status of women in Indian society. The term status refers to a position of women as an individual in the social structure defined by her designated rights and obligations. Each status is explained in terms of a role, or the pattern of behaviour expected of the occupant of a status. Thus status refers to location in a system of social relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> David, L. Sells, International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, MacMillan Publishers, London, Vol 15, 1968, p.250.

<sup>2</sup> Gidens, Anthony, Sociology, Plity Press, U.K., 1989, p.212.

In dealing with women's status in any society, the general argument has been to assess their roles in relation to men. Other dimensions to facilitate such assessment are the extent of actual control enjoyed by women over their lives; the extent to which they have access to decision making processes and are effective in positions of power and authority.

The form and extent of work and political participation, freedom of movement, levels of education, state of health, representation in decision making bodies, access to property etc. are some relevant indicators of status of the individuals in a society. However, not all members of a society have got equal access to the factors which constitute these indicators of status. Gender, caste, class are some of the crucial dimensions behind this inequality. Due to certain socio cultural factors the economic and political roles of women have remained mostly unrecongised. In society they are marginalised and economically discriminated against. According to Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj (1987), the Indian society like a number of 'classical' societies was patriarchal. Patriarchal values regulating sexuality, reproduction and social production (meaning total conditions of production) prevailed and were expressed through specific cultural

metaphors.<sup>3</sup> Overt rules prohibiting women from specific activities and denying certain rights did exist. But more subtle expression of patriarchy was through symbolism giving messages of inferiority of women through legends highlighting the self sacrificing, self effacing pure image of women and through the ritual practices, which day in and day out emphasised the dominant role of a woman as a faithful wife and devout mother.

In the laws of Manu the basic rules for women's behaviour insist that a woman must constantly worship her husband as a god, even if he is deprived of virtues or a womaniser. Women should be kept in a relationship of dependency by her husband. The ideal women are those who do not strive to break these bonds of control.

The value structure of Indian society is the dual concept of the female in Hindu philosophy; benevolent bestower of prosperity like Laxmi, Saraswati and aggressive, malevolent and destructive like Kali and Durga. Veena Das while analysing the anthropological meaning of prevalence of the worship of goddesses, draws attention to the fact that in Shakti form the goddess usually stands alone and is not encompassed by a higher male principle. She adds that 'The principle

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<sup>3</sup> Desai, Neera and Maithreyi Krishnaraj, Women and Society in India, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p. 28.

of power finds expression in goddesses who represent 'Shakti', who come to the aid of man and the gods in periods of cosmic darkness, by killing the demons who threaten the entire cosmic order. The principle of renunciation, on the other hand finds expression in the ideals of sati.<sup>4</sup> This duality is actually a confusing one and Romila Thapar in this duality sees both contempt and fear. The latter doubtless derived from fear of pollution since women were regarded as impure on many occasions.<sup>5</sup>

Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj said that the value structure by presenting the dual character of women seems to have been successful in creating a myth that Indian women possesses power, may be not in visible terms. They further adds that this whole concept is still unclear and needs more exploration. However, it is a very valuable concept in understanding the seemingly high and really inferior position of women in India.

Caste system in India has direct relevance to women. Features like caste endogamy as a mechanism of recruiting and retaining control over the labour and sovereignty of women, concept of purity and

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<sup>4</sup> Das, Veena, 'The Mythological Film and its Framework of Meaning', India International Quarterly, Vol.8, No.1, 1981, p.48.

<sup>5</sup> Thapar, Romila, Looking Back in History, In Devaki Jain (ed), Indian Women, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1975, p.10.

pollution segregating groups and also regulating mobility of women are very crucial. A boy of upper caste marries a girl of lower caste is approved while a girl from upper caste cannot marry a boy from lower caste. This system denigrates women. The caste system also plays a role in controlling women's labour. Caste not only determines social division of labour but also sexual division of labour. Certain tasks have to be performed by women while certain other tasks are meant for men. Agricultural work like transplanting and weeding are engaged by women but women are prohibited from ploughing. High caste women don't go for outside work. Neera Desai and Maithriya Krishnaraj pointed that linking of women and shudras together is one more evidence of the low position of women. They further add that caste system not only provides a legitimisation to feudal relation of production but ideologically also provided justification for subordination of women. Miller (1981) has concluded that 'The nature of production's demand for labour, the labour supply available, cultural definition of who may work at which jobs- all these are important to varying degrees in different places and time. In rural India the pattern of female labour participation responds to all these factors and more.'<sup>6</sup> Ghosh (1968)

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<sup>6</sup> Miller, Barbara, D; The Endangered Sex : Neglect of Female children in Rural North India, Cornell University Press, London, 1981, p.113.



after describing female occupation in Bengal the various types of employment of females in urban areas, like housebuilding, brick dust, cotton spinning, selling fish and vegetables etc., he wrote, the system of caste gives the female members of the various castes a monopoly of certain trades.<sup>7</sup> Among the tribals the work of both males and females among them is governed by certain customs and female participation is more among them than the caste Hindu. Among the poor lower caste households, the sex based division of labour was more homogenous.

Traditionally the status and the role of women in society have been considered lower than that of men. Women play multiple roles that far exceed those of her counter parts. In India the contribution of women to agricultural production, rural development, domestic chores as well as familial responsibilities is very crucial and vital. But this remained largely invisible and underestimated.

The contribution of women in the Net Domestic Product (NDP) was risen from 14 percent in 1970- 71 to 16% in 1980-91 and to 17 percent in 1990-91.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ghosh, Greesh Chandra, 'Female Occupation in Bengal' Transactions of the Bengal Social Science Association, Ed. by The General Secretaries Second Session, W. Newman and Company, Calcutta, Vo. II, part I, January 1968.

<sup>8</sup> Kulshreshtha, A.C. and Gulab Singh, 'Domestic Product by Gender in the Framework of 1993 SNA, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXXI, No. 51, December 21 1996, p.3333.

Agriculture remains the major economic activity for women in India. Wide differentials exist between male and female, workers in different agricultural operations. Moreover, the differentials also across caste and tribe barrier and operate among SC and ST.<sup>9</sup> Female work participation according to 1991 census is 22.27 per cent. Most females in agriculture are engaged as agricultural labourers. In 1991 census agricultural labourers are 44.24% where as cultivators are 34.57%.

Gita Sen <sup>10</sup> and others have shown that average daily earnings are more in peak time operations like ploughing harvesting and transplanting than in off-season activities such as weeding and 'others' which are mainly female tasks. This difference has an impact on women's earnings vis-a-vis those of men. Transplanting uses a very large proportion of women workers, and wage differentials are rationalised on the basis of different activities of the two genders. Most women were engaged as agricultural labourers in India. However, there is regional variations in incidence and employment.

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<sup>9</sup> Krishnamurthy, Sunanda, 'Wage differentials in Agriculture by Caste, Sex and Operations,' Workshop on Occupational diversifications of female labour force and economic development sponsored by Minister of Labour, Government of India, January 29-31, 1987.

<sup>10</sup> Sen, Gita, Women Agricultural Labourers - regional variations in incidence and employment, Paper presented in National Workshop on Women in Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, New Delhi, September 23-24 1987.

Only 4.2 percent of the women are employed in the organised sector<sup>11</sup>. Through data on Work Force Participation Rate (WFPR) is available in census and NSS data, the problem with WFPR is that femal participation rates are generally underestimated.<sup>12</sup>

Human Development report, 1995 estimates that once a woman has a child, she can expect to devote 3.3 more hours a day to unpaid household work while her paid work declines only by about 1 hour. And a woman having children under five can expect to put in 9.6. hours of total work every. Women who work full time still to do a lot of unpaid work. So the mere fact of getting a job increases a woman's total work burden, both paid and unpaid by almost an hour a day on average.<sup>13</sup>

Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj mention that patriarchal values and normative structure established some two thousands years ago still persist, though in a different garb. Motherhood and the ideal of a faithful loyal, self-sacrificing wife are projected through the media and the education system. The reality of subordinate position of woman is indicated through adverse sex ratio of girls, the growing domestic violence, increasing number of dowry deaths and rape cases.

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<sup>11</sup> See. Gopalan, Sarala, Women and Employment in India, Har-Anand Publications, Delhi, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> World Bank Report, Gender and Poverty in India, Issues and Opportunities concerning Women in the Indian economy, Vol.I, September 22 1989, P.XV.

<sup>13</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, pp.96-97.

According to Panday Rekha and Neelam Upandhyaya (1990),<sup>14</sup> the forms of social organisation that exert the greatest pressure on women's roles and status are kinship system, marriage and family organisation. The types of family organisation and nature of institutions of marriage provide the major contours of the socio-cultural settings in which women are born and brought up and live their lives. These institutions have implications for the status of women in society. They further add that women's political participation and economic participation are necessary for raising their status. They point out that political participation can be viewed from different levels- from within the family to decision making in different positions of power and authority in the society.

S.D. Maurya (1988)<sup>15</sup> mentioned that the social and economic status of Indian women has been changed to considerable extent but their condition is not yet satisfactory. Indian society has all along been a male - dominated society, where the women's place has primarily been confined to the home, her role limited to procreation, upbringing of children, and catering to the needs of men by way of job comforts. A number of social and religious customs, taboos, inhibitions, rituals etc.

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<sup>14</sup> Maurya, S.D., Women in India, Chugh Publication, Allahabad, 1988, p.6.  
<sup>15</sup> Panday Rekha, Neelam Upadhyaya, Women in India Past and Present, Chugh Publication, Allahabad, 1990, pp.46-82.

prevail in Indian society which come in the way of women's freedom, education and work participation and also other spheres of life.<sup>16</sup>

The problem which strikes demographers is the question of the declining sex ratio (females per thousand males) in India over the decades. The male population has always grown faster than the female population since 1901, except in 1941-51 decade. In 1971 there were 930 females per one thousand males. In 1901 the sex ratio was 972 per one thousand males. The level has declined from 946 in 1951 to 929 in 1991 census. Demographer Ashish Bose (1975)<sup>17</sup> explained that apart from the epidemic of influenza, there must be other factors which explain the declining sex ratio over the last several decade. Various hypothesis have been put forward to explain this phenomena, like the higher under enumeration of females in the Indian census, the higher mortality rate of females, the marked preference of sons, the neglect of girl babies, the general neglect of women at all ages, the adverse impact of frequent and excessive child bearing on the health of women - especially those in the reproductive age groups, and the higher incidence of certain diseases in women. In spite of all this lower status of Indian women, the Education Commission (1964-66) in its

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<sup>16</sup>

Ibid., p.6.

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Bose, Ashish, A Demographic Profile in Devaki Jain (ed.) Indian Women, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1975, pp.133-143.

report asserts that one of the most distinctive characteristic of life in modern India has been the phenomenal development in the education of women.

Although various studies show that women in Indian society have a lower status, and are exploited and oppressed, we should also acknowledge that there are interstate and regional variations of status of women in India. Andre Beteille(1975)<sup>18</sup> rightly said that an analysis of any important aspect of Indian social life will have to take cognisance of regional differences. The regions differ from each other both in their geographical features and in their historical development. There are differences in the extent to which women are allowed freedom of movement, across different regions of the country. He further adds that the most conspicuous variation in the position of women are found between the different strata. Indian society is highly stratified. Any analysis of the place of women in Indian society will have to take into account the fact that their role in social life in the upper strata is quite different from their role in the lower strata.

The level of infant mortality is a basic indicator of the level of women's status in a society. There is interstate variations of infant

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Beteille, Andre, The Position of Women in Indian Society, in Devaki Jain (ed.), Indian Women, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1975, p.67.

mortality. India is one country, but inhabited by many peoples. National level analyses mask genuine advancements in different regions, and also conceal wide disparities. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that conditions of Infant mortality and women's well being vary across the regions, states and country. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted in India during 1992-93 estimated Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) was 79 per 1,000 live births. IMR ranging from 15 in Mizoram to 112 in Orissa. Orissa recorded the highest IMR in the SRS every year between 1988 and 1992. Other states with NFHS infant mortality above the national average were U.P.(100), Bihar and Assam (89 each), and Madhya Pradesh (85). The IMR was low in Nagaland and Mizoram (17 and 15) respectively), The IMR for Kerala was 24 and for Manipur was 42. According to the UNICEF's the Progress of the Nation, 1995, reports Kerala reduced its IMR from 37 in 1981 to 13 in 1993: an average annual reduction of 8 percent. Tamil Nadu lowered its IMR from 91 in 1981 to 56 in 1993, recording an annual average rate of reduction of 4.6 percent, higher than the national average of three percent during this period. The report also states that there is very strong correlation between maternal mortality and infant mortality. High IMR states like Madhya Pradesh and Orissa report higher levels of Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR),

estimated over 700 for the states and this is in sharp contrast to Kerala where the estimated levels of MMR are 87 deaths per 100,000 live births, According to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (1989) estimate IMR for Manipur was 32, Kerala 37, Bihar recorded 118, Madhya Pradesh 142, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh recorded 108 and 150 respectively. The all-India estimate of IMR is 110. UNICEF's report on the Progress of Indian States, 1995 shows that 50% of the Infant deaths in India are in the four states, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan.

There has been assumption that Infant Mortality Rate is closely correlated with the women's capability and advancement. Various studies gave importance to female education, economic progress and women's advancement to reduce infant mortality rate. Caldwell(1979) gave importance to mother's education to reduce IMR because it makes mothers more westernised in their outlook, less fatalistic about illness, bold enough to question the authority of the mother in law and demand better food and health care for their children.<sup>19</sup> But P.N. Mari Bhat and S Iridaya Rajan (1990) in their study of Kerala's experience of low IMR show that education affects mortality at the micro level and

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Caldwell, J.C., 'Education as a Factor in Mortality Decline : An examination of Nigerean Data', Population Studies, Vol.33, No.3, 1979, pp.395-413.



they believe that there are equally important community level effects of Maternal education on child mortality.<sup>20</sup>

Factors assumed to explain the decline of IMR in Kerala are the expansion and spread of health facilities, egalitarian health policies and programmes pursued by the former rulers of Travancore, Cochin and continued by the democratically elected government; more equitable distribution of income achieved through rigorous implementation of land reform, public work programmes, expansion of agricultural labour unions, institution of labour welfare fund and pension scheme; efficient public food distribution system; greater autonomy, attention they pay to personal hygiene, late age at marriage and practice of family planning methods. But Mari Bhat and Irudaya Rajan believe that the net impact of the changes in the economic front on infant and child mortality was negligible. They also show that female adult literacy has a strong negative influence on under five mortality. They further hypothesised that the current high female literacy in Kerala is largely the product of high male literacy levels in the past. Their analysis pointed out three factors: (i) The promotion of mass education by the erstwhile monarchy and democratically elected government of Kerala (ii) a high proportion

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Bhat, P.N.M. and I. Rajan, 'Demographic Transition in Kerala Revisited', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XXV, No.35-36, 1990, pp.1957-1980.

of Christians in the population and (iii) a high population density that increases the accessibility to schools. They argue that female literacy is not due to higher female autonomy by showing that in comparison at the same levels of male literacy, the levels of female literacy in Kerala and India were about the same. For example, in 1961, literacy in ages five and over in India was 40 per cent among males, and 15 per cent among females. In Kerala in 1931, literacy was 37 per cent among males, and 14 per cent among females. They also showed the time trend in gender in-equality in literacy in Kerala. At the same levels of male literacy, most states do have lower female literacy than Kerala, but the difference was however marginal. Only Punjab had better equality in the literacy level by sex than Kerala did. Their analytical results showed that age at marriage, status of women and preference of sons were not important determinants of fertility changes in Kerala. While structural change was not an important factor in the decline of fertility in Kerala, if it occurs in time, it could accelerate the transition at the all India level. However they believe that structural change is a necessary condition for fertility to reach the replacement level. Therefore they argued that the Kerala government should slowly move away from subsidising heavily primary and secondary school education; and step up its effort to contain the unemployment problem.

UNICEF's document on the progress of the Indian States (1995) mentioned that of the several factors that may have contributed to the decline of IMR in Kerala and Tamil Nadu is the attention that mothers receive during delivery. In Kerala, 97 percent of the rural deliveries that took place in 1992 were conducted by trained personnel either in institutions or at home. In Tamil Nadu, the corresponding figures were 70 percent in rural areas and 97 percent in urban areas; and for India as a whole only 40 percent of rural deliveries were conducted by trained personnel either in institutions or at home. It further adds that an increase in institutional deliveries contributes to lowering not only of child mortality, but equally significantly, to preventing maternal deaths. The document mentioned that the health effects of female illiteracy are obvious in the correlation with infant mortality. In 1991, in Rajasthan only 17 women out of 100 could read and write, whereas in Kerala, as many as 75 out of 100 women could do so. The extent of discrimination against the girl child varies across states. The life expectancy at birth of a girl child born in Uttar Pradesh is (54.6 years) today some 20 years below that of girl child born in Kerala(74.4 years) Even though biologically the probability of girl children surviving is greater than that of boys, in India, the situation is the opposite. With the notable exception of Andhra Pradesh., Assam, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala,

in the remaining Indian states and for the country as a whole the age specific death rate among girls (below 4 years of age) was higher than among boys in 1991, whereas poverty is often regarded as a major driving force leading families to despair over the birth of yet another child with the implied costs of raising her, only to get her married off at an exorbitant expense in the future - anti female bias against girls and women is by no means limited to the poor. For instance, Punjab and Haryana, two of the richest states in terms of per capita incomes, have among the lowest female to male ratios: 87.4 women to 100 men in Haryana and 88 women for every 100 men in Punjab. Also a girl in a Punjabi household has a 10 percent higher likelihood of dying before the age of five year than her brother. Even within these states, studies have shown that survival ratios between girls and boys, become increasingly adverse with rising incomes. On the other hand, tribal societies almost invariably poor by all material standards show little anti female bias, with roughly equal survival rates among boys and girls.

Shivakumar (1995) shows that in high IMR State - Bihar, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh - over a third of the area is in the large land holding category, and is owned by 6.5 percent of the households. Over 50 percent of the households own less than 11

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percent of the area in the 'marginal' and 'small' categories. In sharp contrast to low IMR states of Manipur and Kerala where these states have negligible large (more than 10.12 hectore) holdings.<sup>21</sup>

Kerala and Manipur, two low per capita income states in India are also well known for their low infant mortality rate. However, the levels of female literacy are significantly lower in Manipur (48 percent in 1981 census) than Kerala (86 percent). Clues to better child survival conditions in Manipur can be found in the freedom that women enjoy, particularly in respect of marital and occupational choices, high female work participation, tradition of women's collective action. But much less is known about Manipur whereas various studies have been done in the case of Kerala. Therefore here we are examining the case of Manipur: A state that is an outlier in Women's advancement but has not been adequately analysed within a socio-historical perspective.

The factors for higher women's status in Manipur that Shivakumar (1995) mentions are higher female work participation, high proportion of women engaged as cultivators and relatively low agricultural labourers, most of the women engaged as handloom weaving and petty trade, freedom to choose marital partner and high

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<sup>21</sup> Shivakumar, A.K., Women's Capability and Infant Mortality : Lessons from Manipur, in M.D. Gupta, L. Chen, T.N. Krishnan (ed.), Women's Health in India Risk and Vulnerability, Oxford University press, 1995, p.79.

age at marriage, increased political participation, tradition of collective action organised around the market place and at home.

Our conceptual understanding is that women's status is much more complex than just her educational achievements. It is critical for her health and is determined by her economic, social and political role in a society. Our overall objective, therefore, is to assess the historical trends of women's status and to explore qualitative shifts of status in the highest caste group of Meiteis.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

To study the historical shifts in economic and demographic status of women of Manipur and to understand the shifts in status of Meitei women in contemporary society in the light of the above. This objective can be broken into the following sub-objectives:

1. To examine the historical shifts in the status of women in Manipur.
2. To bring out the unique socio-historical features of Meitei women in Manipur that favoured greater freedom for them.
3. To bring out the shifts apparent in the present generation of Meitei women in Manipur.

To study the above objectives we have decided to adopt the following design.

#### DESIGN OF THE STUDY:

Our study composed of two parts. First, we did a socio-historical study of Manipur and attempted to construct the economic, educational and demographic time trends for women in general in Manipur over the twentieth century to the extent possible. For this, census data was used. Secondly, we did a small qualitative study in one village, Bishenpur district in Manipur - where Meitei women's lives were explored on the basis of the study of selected women.

#### SOCIO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS:

In order to get a socio-historical perspective of Manipur's development and its women, both primary and secondary data were used.

##### Primary data included :

Census reports of various years. To see female work participation rate we have used census reports from 1901 to 1991 except 1941 and 51 which is not available.

To see sex ratio we used census report from 1901 to 1991.

To see educational achievements we used census report from 1901 to 1991.

Data from 1901 to 1951 Census of Assam were used. Data from 1961 to 1991 Census of Manipur were used.

ii) Secondary data included :

- Review of available studies and reports.
- Gazetteers
- Thesis and Dessertations.
- Statistical Handbook of Manipur

LIVES OF MEITEI WOMEN - A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION:

Qualitative explorations were done among a certain section of Manipuris - the Meitei women belonging to upper caste - to see shifts in women's lives.

(i) Area of Study :

Keeping the objectives in mind we have chosen one particular village in Manipur for case study. A village called Leimapokpam, situated in Bishenpur District of Manipur was selected. Leimapokpam village is 16 kms distance from Imphal. According to 1991 census, population for this village was 5803. Total Schedule tribe population in



this village was 181 and 1 male schedule caste. There were 446 households. Of these, 432 belonged to the Meiteis.

Number of literate males was 1472 and females was 752. Nambol is the nearest town from this village which is at about 5 kms distance. For basic amenities like medical facility, main market, bus stop, college etc. people depend upon Nambol. But recently just before the researcher's field work bus facility was made available in this village. The village has only one high school. After passing X class, for further study, people from this village have to go to Nambol or other town. Inside this village, there was one small market where elder women sold vegetables, fruits, fish etc. Women traders collect things from Imphal or Nambol bazaar and sell at that small market in the evening. Most of the women traders started selling from around 3.30 to 4 p.m. upto 6.30 to 7 p.m. During the researcher's field work, 4 or 5 women sold regularly at the small hut from 10.30 a.m. till the evening. They went early in the morning to Imphal or Nambol Bazaar to collect vegetables and other goods and came back at around 10 a.m. . Most of the time when the researcher went for the field work, she met with those market women and went with them in the same bus.

The inhabitants of this village had very close relationships. Tribals also participated in the Meitei festivals of this village and Meiteis

participated in the tribal's traditional festivals. However, the older generation of Meiteis maintained that ritual distance from accepting cooked food by the tribals. But among the younger generation they have no restrictions. These Kabui tribals lived together and their surrounding area was inhabited by Meitei population.

Most of the people of this village were engaged in agriculture, weaving and trade. Most of the women of this village were known for their active participation in community action, trade and weaving. Besides women's activities, the researcher has chosen this village also due to the convenience of availability of transportation and easy access to women of this village within the time and resource limitation.

(ii) Selection of women for Qualitative study:

The village had 432 Meitei households. These belonged to cultivators, traders, weavers etc. We took purposively 30 households in a cluster that was manageable in terms of rapport and distance. Thirty women have been selected to explore shifts in their lives. One woman was selected from each household and was interviewed individually. For our purpose to see the pattern of shifts in women's advancement, we decided to select women across the generations. Twelve women have been selected from the older generations aged 60 years and

above, eighteen women below 60 years of age. Comparisons of the two helped to highlight the shifts.

(iii) Tools of data collection:

Qualitative exploration was done through indepth open ended interviews with Meitei women in order to capture the changing scenario and its impact on their lives. In depth interviews were done with the help of interview guide. In addition, the women were accompanied to the market and their dealings were directly observed. Group discussion and use of key informants for understanding customs and norms were also used.

(iv) Time frame and process of field work:

Pilot study was done in the month of July 1996. During this month identified the village and collected all the basic data from the Census of Manipur. Through the project Officer of Adult Education and Continuing Programme, Manipur University, the researcher met the General Secretary and other active members of Youth Club of the Study area, Leimapokpam. With the help of those youths, collected the basic information on Leimapokpam village during the month of July, 1996.

Qualitative exploration were conducted during the period from November'96 to January'97. Before starting qualitative exploration the researcher explained the objectives of the present study to some of the

active youth club members and identified all the older women of this village. When the researcher explained the objectives of the present study, they were very eager to help the researcher. They said that most of the older generation women of this village were very active during their time in collective action and economic participation. They heard lots of story about their courageous act from their grandparents and other older kins. After identifying older women, selected only 12 older women who could share their experience and ideas. While identifying the women, youth club members helped a lot as they knew all the elder members of their village. They even introduced the researcher to all those women who were selected and then 18 younger generation were also identified. With the limited time and resources, the contact of youth club members were very helpful in establishing rapport very soon with those women whom the identified for qualitative exploration.

(v) Analysis of data :

30 women's qualitative exploration has been quantified and tabulated for each variable. Although the number was small we have calculated the percentages so as to get an idea of the proportions and distribution of trends. This will need further confirmation and at present can be taken only as an indicative and an absolute trend. Similarly, the

Census data was tabulated for 1901-1991 and time trend tables were constituted for economic, demographic and educational achievements.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY :**

- Lack of enough literature of Social and economic history of Manipur.
- Non availability of 1941 and 1951 census report for work participation

However, we tried to explore and analyse with the available source. A further indepth study can be done in the future with more information on Manipur.

***CHAPTER - III***

***WOMEN IN MANIPUR***

### III .1 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF MANIPUR

#### GEOGRAPHY AND POPULATION OF MANIPUR:

Manipur is situated in the extreme border of North-Eastern Indian territory bounded by Burma on the East, Nagaland on the north and Tripura on the west. Manipur covers an area of 8,628 sq. miles of which 700 sq. miles constitute the valley where the Meiteis<sup>#</sup> live. The rest is the homeland of various hill tribes. This geographical dichotomy had led to two distinct cultures and ethnic groups. The Meiteis, the local population of the valley, was an amalgamation of six ethnic groups who were converted to the Vaishnavite school of Hinduism in the sixteenth century of Chaitanya of Nadia district (Bengal). As per Constitution (Schedule Tribes) Order, 1950, Manipur has 29 tribes communities. The Kukis, Nagas and the Hmars are the major tribal groups in Manipur. The Kukis and the Nagas have several sub-groups. The majority of tribals of Manipur are Christians. According to 1981 census 95 per cent of tribes are christians.

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<sup>#</sup> Meiteis - Hindu population of the Valley. see T.C. Hudson, (1984).

**Table 1: Number, percentage Distribution of Hindus, Tribes and Muslims in Manipur.**

YEAR	Total Population	Total Number of Hindus	% of Hindus	Total Number of Tribes	% of Tribes	Total Number of Muslims	% of Muslims
1901	284,465	170,565	59.96	103,289	36.31	10,382	3.65
1911	346,222	201,362	58.16	130,118	37.58	14,506	4.19
1921	384,016	230,179	59.94	131,832	34.33	17,472	4.55
1931	445,606	257,248	57.73	154,803	34.74	22,859	5.13
1941	512,069	303,656	59.30	152,801	29.84	29,546	5.77
1951	577,635	347,325	60.13	194,239	33.63	37,197	6.44
1961	780,037	481,112	61.68	249,049	31.93	48,588	6.23
1971	1,072,753	632,592	58.97	334,466	39.18	70,969	6.62
1981	1,420,953	853,180	60.04	387,977	27.30	99,327	6.99
1991	1,837,149	1,167,871	63.56	632,173	34.41		

Source:-

- I. Census of Assam, 1941, Vol. IX.
- II. Statistical Handbook of Manipur, 1992, Government of Manipur.
- III. Census of Manipur from 1961 to 1991.

# According to 1991 Census of Manipur, the total population of Hindus and Muslims were taken together. So the total number and percentage of Hindus in the column of Hindus on the table is the total population of Hindus and Muslims.



Table 1 shows the variation of population in Manipur over a period of time. Since 1901 the majority of population has been constituted by Hindus where tribes were the second largest and followed by Muslim community. Since 1901 till 1991 Census the number of total population has been increasing. Total population in 1991 was 18,37,149. The proportion of Hindu population was 59.95 per cent in 1901. In 1911 it has declined to 58.16 per cent and then increased to 59.94 per cent in 1921. Again it declined to 57.73 per cent in 1931 where in the proceeding three decades it increased. In 1941 the Hindu proportion was 59.3 per cent, in 1951, it was 60.13 per cent and in 1961 it was 61.68 per cent. In 1971 it declined to 58.97 per cent. Again, the Hindu proportion increased to 60.04 per cent in 1981. According to 1991 census the population of Hindus and Muslims are not divided. So we cannot compare the proportions whether Hindus population has decreased or increased. We can assume that one of the two religion groups must have decreased the proportions enormously.

The proportion of Tribal population in Manipur were also again increasing and decreasing over a period of time. In 1911 tribal proportion increased to 37.58 per cent from 36.31 in 1901. In the next decade it declined to 34.33 per cent and again in 1931 it increased to 34.74 per cent. In 1941 the tribal proportion declined to 29.34 per cent

which was below the proportion in 1901. In 1951 it increased to 33.63 per cent and then decreased to 31.93 per cent in 1961. 1971 has the highest proportion of tribals in Manipur in the twentieth century. It increased to 39.18 per cent. And then in the next decade it was declined to 27.30 per cent which was the lowest proportion of tribals in the twentieth century. Again in 1991 Census it increased to 34.41 per cent.

The table also shows the proportion of Muslim in Manipur over a period of time. The proportion of Muslims has been increasing gradually since 1901 upto 1981 except for the decline to 6.23 per cent in 1961 from 6.44 per cent in 1951 Census. The proportion of Muslims in the beginning of this century was 3.65 per cent and in the 1981 Census it increased to 6.99 per cent in Manipur.

Most of the recorded history of Manipur relates to the Meiteis and to those who settled in the valley. Historical reference to the hill settlers is scanty and sporadic.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sanamani, Yambem, 'Night patrollers of Manipur,' in Devaki jain (ed.), Women's Quest for Power : Five Case Studies, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980, p.221.

**Table 2 : Schedule Caste Population in Manipur, 1951 to 1991**

Year	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991
Total Scheduled Caste Population	7,841	13,136	16,376	17,753	37,105
Percentage	1.36	1.71	1.53	1.25	2.02

Source: Statistical Handbook of Manipur, 1992, Government of Manipur.

Table 2 shows the total number and proportion of Schedule Caste population in Manipur. In 1961 the proportion increased to 1.71 per cent from 1.36 per cent in 1951. In the two proceeding decades it was declined. In 1971 the proportion was 1.53 per cent and in 1981 was 1.25 per cent. Again in 1991 Census it increased to 2.02 per cent. Scheduled Caste proportion is very less.

**POLITICAL BACKGROUND:**

Manipur was once a princely state and later became the first Territorial State in the North East to enjoy greater autonomy. Manipur

merged into India on 21 September, 1949 and got statehood on 21 January, 1972. For twenty-two years the administration was run from New Delhi with administrators who did not understand the aspirations, problems and needs of the people.

British established their Political Agent in Manipur in the year 1835.<sup>2</sup> Politically there has been distinction between the clans(Sageis). There has been no upper class possessing preponderating influence, as a matter of fact, all the Manipuris were at par. So everyone thought himself to be fit for any post, however high it might be, until 1940, when appointment board was established and competitive examination for selecting clerks and teachers was introduced. Manipur did not recognise, politically anyone as superior except the ruling prince and his issues. This recognition was formal. If the royal family became autocratic people revolted. Competitive examination became a way of assessing and measuring strengths, if one was defeated he would be glad to serve under his superior but if by nepotism and favoritism one was made into a big officer, without any sort of competition, people entertained great grudge and waited for an opportunity for retaliation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Singh, Joykumar, 'Political Agency - 1835-1890', in Lal Dena (ed.), History of Modern Manipur (1826-1949), Orbit Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991, p.31.

<sup>3</sup> Singh Ibungohal, Lairenmayum, 'Introduction to Manipur', Students Store, Imphal, 1987, pp.23-24.

### CASTE AND CLASS:

There was no caste system in Manipur before the advent of Hinduism as we generally find in other Indian villages. In the pre-Vaishnavite period, the Meiteis lived in a more or less egalitarian society except for the presence of the outcaste, the Lois.

Manipur adopted Hinduism formally from 1714 A.D. during the time of King Pamheiba. He also adopted Hindu religion and changed his name to Garib Nawaz. Since that time, they have been observing the rules of caste and ceremonial purity.<sup>4</sup> But in Manipur, there was not a rigid caste system like the way it was prevailing in Bengal.<sup>5</sup> The Brahmin immigrants from the neighbouring states like Bengal, Assam, etc. became the Brahmin caste while the native Hindu proselytes became the Kshatriya caste. The non-converts who professed the traditional religions were classified either as Schedule Caste or Schedule Tribe under the Constitution. The Brahmin, a minority group, enjoyed the highest ritual status and the remaining Meitei Kshatriya has an egalitarian relationship. Other than the Brahmin's higher status on

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<sup>4</sup> Hunter, W.W., The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol.IX, Madras Presidency to Multan, Trubner and Co., London, 1886, p.326.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.329.

rites and rituals, reading sacred book, etc., a variety of occupations or professions could be followed by a person or group of persons without being considered it as socially high or low. A Brahmin boy could enter into a marriage with a Meitei Kshatriya girl. However a Meitei Brahmin girl could not marry a Meitei Kshatriya boy. A Brahmin boy who got married a Meitei girl maintained his ritual distance from his wife by not accepting cooked food and water. There was no stratified caste system in a Meitei village. The Loi and the Naga lived apart in their own villages without any ritual or social ties and often no economic obligation to the Meitei Kshatriya or Meitei Brahmin. The Meitei Kshatriya and Meitei Brahmin did not accept cooked food or water from the Loi or the Naga and maintained a social distance from them. Although, sometimes a Meitei looked upon other caste groups as of low status, inter-marriage was tolerated. The absence of occupational caste (except for Brahmin) helped the Meitei to develop a community based on cooperative labour. There was no system of caste exploitation as found in the high-caste-dominated communities in India. The Loi and the Naga were considered outsiders to the Meitei Kshatriya community and in fact, live independent of any caste obligation to the Meitei.<sup>6</sup>

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Chaki Sircar, Manjushi, 'Feminism in a Traditional Society - Women of the Manipur Valley', Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984, p.24.

Slavery was a social evil of pre-British Manipur. K.B. Singh observes, "Due to lack of relevant literature and evidences, much light on the position of slaves in Manipur could not be thrown; but their lot could not be worse than that of slaves found in other parts of the world. When the institution of slavery was abolished in British India in 1860 ..... Manipur had her own slave trade." But E.W. Dun was reluctant to call this as slavery as he observes, "The name of slavery however, as it appears to European ideas, is perhaps too harsh a name of the mild form which is most, if not in all instance, obtained in Manipur". James Johnstone also emphasised the mild form of slavery. Brown writes, "Ill usage of slave did not seem common; they were generally treated as part of the family with whom they reside and did not hesitate to run away when they were ill-treated."<sup>7</sup>

#### SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF MEITEIS:

(i) Meitei family and kinship:

The Meiteis were patrilineal and both patrilocal and virilocal. The eldest son of a family holds a very important in family rituals. If the village temples belong to a lineage, then the eldest son of that lineage

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<sup>7</sup> Kabui, Gangumei, 'Socio-Religious Reform Movement' in Lal Dena (ed.), Op. cit., (1991), p.98.

and his wife play a prominent role in the annual Lai Haraoba.\* Even though Meitei women hold higher position, the importance of a male child was constantly expressed in everyday conversation.<sup>8</sup> In Sircar's case study, women said that they got a lot of harsh words for not having a son, or husband takes another wife, if the first wife could not bear a son. The mid-wife could expect a much larger remuneration if she delivered a male child. A son's importance could be observed in family rituals, eg. funeral rites of the parents, Shradda, annual ancestor worship, and the feast of pitritarpan (dedication to the forefathers). In all of these rites a daughter did not feature unless she is the only child. In spite of the facts mentioned above daughter was never considered a burden to the parents. She was always brought up and guided like a son without any bias of sexual difference. Any form of ill-treatment of daughter was not encouraged by culture. In short, a daughter was treated at par with a son though the latter was preferred to the former at the first birth.<sup>9</sup>

Every village was organised on the basis of mutual help and co-operation. In the village situated in the Manipur valley were clubs called 'Singlup' or wood club, resembling the panchayats of Bengal. These

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Lai Haraoba - In pleasure of god : the prime traditional Meitei ritual performed annually. Op. cit., Sircar (1985), p.63.  
See. Vimala Devi, Khuraijam, 'Women in Meitei Society and Culture : Anthropological Case Study', (unpublished thesis), Manipur University, 1993.



clubs under the Sirdar, or head of the village, have the general control of it, and adjudicate in trifling cases arising in the village. In the event of a village facing the hardship due to the state of poverty, these clubs supply him with basic necessities and food. In sickness they looked after him, and when dead, provided the wood for his last rites. In this way, although many of the inhabitants were very poor, actual starvation or fatal neglect was rendered impossible.<sup>10</sup>

Meitei family was organised with a small social radius, people maintained a close link with their affinal and consanguinal kin groups. Even in cases of broken marriages, Sircar (1985) found that the affinal kins did not separate the contact, especially where there were children left behind by the mother either with her in-laws or with their own mother. In a village, people broadly identified as relatives others belonged to a common lineage and clan.

Children learned to address elders by lumping them in the context of a generation. Sex was specified in each term. Sometimes the sex of the ego was important, eg. a man addresses his brother's wife as itemma, a woman called her inamma. Outside the kin group the most respectable way to address a woman was iche or sister, but for

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<sup>10</sup> Dun, E.W., Gazetteer of Manipur, Vivek Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, (Reprint of 1886), p.67.

an elder man it should be tada (brother); for an older man, ipa (father) or khura (uncle). Younger women were addressed affectionately as ibeyamma by the elders. If the woman was very young, she was addressed as meimma by her kin and by outsiders.

Kin groups were bounded by social obligation of poyeng and potpang (gift), during the life cycle ceremonies of each others' families. When a baby was born, the woman's natal family sent special gifts through a procession of women carrying bamboo baskets of clothing, food, jewellery and other items, called poyengba. The woman's brother did a special role during the Shastipuja ceremony, the ritual on the sixth day after a child's birth, throwing arrows in different directions from the ritual arena to protect the baby from evil eyes. A woman's maternal uncle was responsible for making wedding bed for the bridal room.

A son-in-law and sister's husband had special obligation during any rite or feast in his in-law's family. They were expected to help the Brahmin cook, in washing the lentils, cutting the vegetables, and cleaning the utensils. They were also responsible for cleaning up the waste left after a feast.

Once married, the woman were not supposed to spend nights in her parents' home unless there was an emergency. Her children were born in her husband's compound, her mother helped in delivery.

Although a family maintained close contact with married daughter through calendrical rituals and feast, it was considered rather improper for them to visit her too frequently or to interfere in her family affairs. However, in case of conflict, the two families often confronted with each other, especially after a divorce, when the woman's family demands repayment of dowry.

(ii) Rights over property:

In spite of the males importance, Meitei custom has special provision for widowed, divorced and unmarried daughters by giving them a right of residence in their parents' home. Women inherited their mother's property and had rights on their own dowry, which was to be returned after a divorce. Women's wealth was included a woman's inherited wealth, her dowry, and her own savings. The mothers Stridhan (women's wealth) was inherited by the daughter, and the inheritance of market plots by women could be traced matrilineally.<sup>11</sup>

Inheritance was done through the male line. The headship of the family belongs to the father. Such family consists of the father, his wife or wives, his decendants, and adopted son and the aged dependent parents. The expansion was done along the lines of agnatic kinship.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Op. cit., Sircar (1984), p.195.

<sup>12</sup> Dr.Mangang, S.R., Meitei personal law, The Lanmei Thanbee Publication, Paona Road, Imphal, 1986, p.40.

Divorced daughters could not claim residence as of right in the land belonging to their divorced mother to reside in her divorced daughters in their turn. A daughter after her divorce has a right to return to her Mapam (father's house) and to live there for her life time during the divorced period. Divorced daughter through their mother could not claim landed property for residential purposes to their maternal uncles.<sup>13</sup>

Inheritance of property of any married woman was governed by the order of preference as shown below:-

1. Unmarried daughter, 2. Married daughter who was unprovided for, 3. Married daughter who was provided for, 4. Daughter's daughter, 5. Daughter's son, 6. Son, 7. Son's son, and 8. Husband..

(iii) Meitei's religious life and festivals:

Meitei's religious life was marked by the co-existence of the traditional belief system and Vaishnavite Hindu faith. Inside a Meitei home, there was no altar for Vaishnavite deities, but the most auspicious corners, the south-west and north-east, were dedicated to the ancient deities, Sahamahi and his mother Ima Leimaren. The hearth was associated with the ancestral deity of lineage, Sagei Apokpa. Vaishnava rituals were usually performed in the courtyard or

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<sup>13</sup>

Ibid., pp.42-43.

Sangoi. Very often these rituals were not completed without the propitiation of Meitei's house deities.<sup>14</sup> Besides Meitei's festivals like Cheiraoba (Meitei New Year), Heikru Hitongba (boat race) and Lai Haraoba (in pleasure of god), Hindu festivals like Krishna Janmashtami (birth day of Krishna), Radha Janmashtami (birth day of Radha), Rath Yatra, Holi, Diwali, etc. were celebrated. Cheiraoba and Heikru Hitongba have been influenced by vaishnavism. The pre-vaishnavite festivals and practices have been thoroughly Vaishnavised during the centuries. Ancient cult was modified in the Vaishnavite environment. They were associated with some local peculiarities which were not found in other parts.<sup>15</sup>

In the midst of an exuberant Vaishnava environment, the traditional system and belief maintained its strength and character in the people's lives. The ancient religious complex was outside the Vaishnava framework. Instead of the Brahmin priests, the Meitei maiba (priest and diviner) and especially maibi (priestess and diviner) play highly important roles in officiating for Meitei God worship. These traditional ritual specialists were kept busy throughout the year conducting various ritual ceremonies. The Pundit (in charge of Maiba

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<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., Sircar (1984), p.103.

<sup>15</sup> Singh, Kirti, 'Religious Development in Manipur in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries', Manipur State Kala Academy, Imphal, 1982, pp.261-262.

Loishang, Maibi loishang and Pena Leishang) remained active and responsible for the indigenous religion, side by side with the Sri Govindji temple. While Vaishnava culture received major attention from the royal administration, the ancient faith retained its place in the core religious conscience of the society.

In pre-Hindu days, Lai Haroaba, was the most important state supervised ritual. With the advent of Hinduism, the attention of royalty turned to the grandeur of the Hinduized ceremonies; nonetheless, Lai Haroaba, as the prime community festival remained important in people's lives.

In every religious festival and ceremony of both Meiteism and Hinduism, women were given an equal status with men. The only restriction imposed upon women was the worship of God and Goddesses with religious rites at the temple. They were considered to be the men's duty.

But in the traditional Meitei religion, women occupied a more prominent place than men. Even though the organisational framework of Lai Haroaba was under male authority, women have very important role to play in ritual participation<sup>16</sup>, eg. the Maibi (priestesses) were considered to be more important than the Maiba (priest). It was also

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<sup>16</sup> Op. cit., Sircar (1984), p.127.

considered that the origin of the Maibi was earlier than her male counterpart.<sup>17</sup> In Manipur, women's dancing in religious ceremonies, regarded as 'thougal' (dedication), cuts across all social classes and age groups.

### ECONOMIC LIFE :

The population of Manipur is almost agrarian with 71 per cent of the population directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture which contributed 57 per cent of the State Domestic Product in 1980-81 (as against 53 per cent in the preceding years). Industry contributed only 4.13 per cent to SDP in 1980-81 (as against 4.40 per cent in the preceding year). The main crop and source of livelihood in Manipur is rice.<sup>18</sup> Next to agriculture, weaving was the most important economic activity. Whereas agricultural activities were open to both sexes, weaving was entirely in the hands of women. Women were also in full charge of the marketing of both agricultural and industrial products.

Earlier in Manipur many forms of industries were practiced by the people who were mainly agriculturists.<sup>19</sup> Hudson (1984) mentioned

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<sup>17</sup> Dr. Bimola, Ksh, 'Manipuri Women - A Study' in Dr. Sanajaoba Singh (ed.), Manipur Past and Present (The Heritage and ordeals of a civilization), Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1988, p.166.

<sup>18</sup> Op. Cit., Sanamani (1980), p.221.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.221.

one can believe that Manipur was in enjoyment of wealth and prosperity before the great devastation of the State by the Burmese (the period from 1819 to 1826) because in those days in every house women used to weave clothes for the family and there were goldsmiths whose art produces much that was of great beauty with simple design. The period from 1819 to 1826 has often been referred to locally as Chahi Taret-Khuntakpa (Seven years' Devastation). Manipur lost sovereign power due to internal dispute and factionalism among the ruling princes of Manipur. The period was signified for the Burmese devastation over Manipur. The male population was reduced to a very low level, majority of them were forcibly taken to Burma.<sup>20</sup>

Manipur had a self-sufficient agricultural economy with simple minimum needs which were produced locally. The secondary sector was marked by cottage industries. B.C. Allen wrote of those days of the Manipur in the early twentieth century when the prices of rice and other products were extraordinarily low. That common rice was selling at fifteen annas a maund and unhusked rice was only four annas and four pie a maund in the first calendar month of 1905.

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<sup>20</sup> Dena, Lal, 'Assertion of Resurgent Manipur, 1826-1834', in Lal Dena (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, (1991), p.8.



Upto the close of the Third Plan, Manipur was a surplus state in the production of foodgrains. However, during most part of the Fourth Plan (1969-74), the state became deficit in the production of foodgrains. Since 1975-76, the state became marginally surplus in the production of foodgrains. Nevertheless, two successive years of drought, namely, 1978 and 1979, reduced the state once again to a marginally deficit state in respect of food. According to Dr. H. Nabakishore (1988) Manipur was the most backward state of the backward North East Region of India according to 1981 Census. As many as 60 per cent of the people of the state were below the official poverty line as against the all-India average of 48.4 per cent by the end of the Fifth Plan period and the Sixth Plan target of reducing the same to 30 per cent by 1985.

According to the indices of economic development prepared by the Centre for monitoring the Indian economy in May, 1982, with weightages of 50 per cent for agriculture, 20 per cent for the service sector, Manipur stood last with only 20 points in the index (all India = 100) among all the states of the country. The per capita income of Manipur of Rs.1085/- at current prices in 1980-81 (as against the all India coverage of Rs.1537/-) was also the lowest in North East India. However, Shivakumar (1995) shows that per capita daily calorie intake in 1983 in rural areas in Manipur was higher than Bihar, Madhya

Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the four high Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) states. And Manipur has a far more equitable distribution of land holdings. Ninety-four per cent of households own 68 per cent of land in the marginal and small categories. The state has negligible large (more than 10.12 hectares) holdings.

Table 3 : LAND USE PATTERN IN MANIPUR

LAND USE	Area (in sq.kms.)
a. Forest	15,154,94
b. Agri-tree land	337,10
c. Crop land	3,170,12
d. Jhum land	1,832,08
e. Urban sites	223,13
d. Pasture and barren land	1,568,03
Total	22,356,00

Source: Dr.N.Nabakishore H., The economy of Manipur (an Evaluation of Resources) in Dr, Sanajaoba Singh (ed.), Manipur Past and Present (The heritage and ordeals of a civilization), Vol.I, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1988.

Manipur has a total area of 22,356 sq.kms., of this 1/10<sup>th</sup> is the valley while the remaining 9/10<sup>th</sup> are the hills. The land use pattern is briefly shown in table 3 that forest covered an area of 15,154,94 sq. kms; Agri tree land covered an area of 337,10 sq. kms.; Crop land covered 3,170,12 sq. kms.; Jhum land covered 1,832,08 sq. kms.;

urban sites covered 223,13 sq. kms. and Pasture and Barren land covered an area of 1,568,03 sq. kms. Forest covered an area of nearly 15,155 kms. or 66.7 per cent of the total geographical area of the state. The forest area of the state has come down to 59 per cent. Nearly 50 per cent of the total forest area was under tree forests; 22 per cent was under bamboo forests; and the remaining 28 per cent is under open forests. The tree forests are again of five different types, viz., (a) wet temperate forest, (b) pine forests, (c) wet hill forests, (d) semi evergreen forests, and (e) teak garjan forests.<sup>21</sup>

Nearly 70 commercially valuable species including teak, garjan , uningthou, etc. were found in the Manipur forest. The Loktak lake, biggest fresh water lake in the whole of North-East India situated in Southern part of the valley of Manipur. This natural lake provides fish resources to Manipur.

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Dr. Nabakishore, H., 'The Economy of Manipur (An Evaluation of Resource)' in Dr. Sanajaoba Singh (ed), Manipur Past and Present (The heritage and ordeals of civilization), Vol.I, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1988, pp.198-199.

## EDUCATION IN MANIPUR :

Manipuris started attending school in the beginning of 1857. The year 1907 marked a great advance in the spread of education and the Manipuris were evidently becoming sensible to its advantages.<sup>22</sup> The education of women cannot be said to have made equal progress in the beginning, although it was hoped that in a state like Manipur where women hold an important and high position in the economic activity of the state, the effort to establish a good school for the daughters of the high classes would have been attended with more success than has actually been the case.<sup>23</sup>

For the Christian missionaries, education and hospitals were their primary concerns. William Pettigrew learned Meiteilon (Manipuri language) at Cachar (Assam) even before his entry into Manipur. When he was allowed to enter Manipur after the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891, Pettigrew opened a school at Imphal on 6 February 1894. In consultation with the state officials Pettigrew began to formulate the educational policy for the state. Maxwell, the Political Agent, later on

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<sup>22</sup> Singh, K.M., 'History of Christian Mission in Manipur and their neighbouring States', Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1991, p.447.

<sup>23</sup> Op. Cit., Hudson (1984), pp.24-25.

appointed Pettigrew as honorary inspector of schools by entrusting him with the power to draw up the whole educational budget for the entire state. The schools were practically state sponsored schools, every price of expenditure being paid by the state. In-so-far as the hill people were concerned, the government did not raise any objection to Christian truth being taught in the schools. Wherever mission stations were established, hospitals also inevitably came up. Some selected young men and women of the hill tribes were given medical training for public health care and nursing. In this way, many people were converted to Christianity through the healing touch of the ministry.<sup>24</sup>

As soon as modern education was provided, new educated elite groups emerged.<sup>25</sup> They began to look upon Europeans as models and tended to become pro-western in taste and attitude. They began to regard themselves as belonging to more or less different categories and assumed new leadership in political and religious arena. the emergence of new elite groups disturbed the structure of traditional social organisation.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Dena, Lal, 'Christian Proselytism', in Lal Dena (ed.), Op. Cit., (1991), pp.112-115.  
<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.116.  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.117.

### III . 2 - MEITEI WOMEN - SOME SELECTIVE SOCIO-ECONOMIC

#### TIME TRENDS

Meitei society was remarkable not only in the pervasive role of women in the socio-economic and political areas, but also in women's role in religion in a patrilineal society. From the Nineteenth century literature written by colonial administrators between 1835 and 1913, we get valuable accounts of the social, political and religious customs of Meitei society during that century. On the women's important role in the economy, Dun(1979) states, 'Most of the work of the country, except the heaviest, was performed by women, and they were consequently the mainstay of the family circle. All marketing was done by women, all work of buying and selling in public, and the carrying to and fro of the articles to be sold; whilst at home they were busily employed in weaving and spinning.' Johnstone\* (1971) says that 'Women were the greatest traders, and many walk miles in the morning, and buy things in the more distant bazaars to sell again in the capital in the evening. It was not considered proper etiquette for men too often to frequent to bazaars. Hudson (1984) states that, 'The women hold a high and free position in Manipur, all the internal trade and exchange of the produce of the

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\* James Johnstone was the Political Agent of Manipur from 1877 to 1886.

country being managed by them'. Concerning religion, he further states. 'side by side with the Brahmin, there exists the priests and priestesses of the animistic faith who are called maibas and maibis'.  
Mc. <sup>Cullock</sup> Cullock's\* (1980) description on women's prominence in religious ceremonies of Lai Haraoba said, 'The worship consists in a number of married women and unmarried girls led by a priestess, accompanied by a party of men and boys in dresses of former times, dancing and singing and performing various evolutions in the holy presence'. On women's participation in public dance performances, he said, '.....all girls whose position was at all respectable learned to dance, for in Manipur the dancing professions was often a road to royal dignity and was not despised in any way as in the case in India'.

There are several information on women's pervasive role in trade, the presence of the priestesses on par with the Brahmins, a college of the maibis (priestesses), men and women participating together in the religious ritual in public. Yet there is no detailed enough writing on Meitei women until 1958. Chaki Sircar (1984) says more recently that Meitei authors have written about their history, culture and literature, but these display a significant lack of attention to the role of women. About women's political role, "The Manipuri male folk

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\* Mc Cullock was Political Agent of Manipur from 1844-1862.

considered it below their dignity to do so (i.e. to engage in non-violent collective protests as the market women had done). So they left it to the females".<sup>27</sup> Historian Yambem Sanamani (1976, 1980) offer a valuable perspective on women's socio-political role in his studies on the Second Nupi lan (Women's War, 1939) and the Night patrollers of Manipur. He said that markets were focal point of the women's community life. He pointed out that the markets have served as the crucible of women's politicisation in Manipur. Women's power in Manipur stems from two factors - their high economic participation, and their mutual association in the market-place (or their involvement with a non-family institution). He further pointed out that although the network of the market is based on the women's economic participation and livelihood, yet the strength generated appears to have transcended economic gain and sparked off political consciousness of their collective strength as women. This conscientization took place amongs the market women, but penetrated the entire state across classes and geographical areas, since almost each household in Manipur had a market-woman or was linked to such a woman for the sale of its home produce.

Chaki Sircar (1984) says that it was difficult to find like Meitei women in other Hindu society. One cannot expect the upper-caste

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<sup>27</sup>

Op. Cit., Sircar (1984), p.5.



'Sanskritized' behaviour model to prevail among the socially free Meitei women, nor can one equate them with any of the low caste or tribal communities in India.

All the above studies did not focus on how the women in Manipur take part in social, economic and political events and freedom over a period of time. Here we will focus on variations in trends that come out from the historical data. There is no doubt that women in Manipur enjoy relatively greater freedom since the ancient times. But we also need to analyse whether women's status is improving or going down over a period of time within the Manipur society.

A current study by Shivakumar (1995) examined the greater women's freedom, higher levels of maternal advancement, increased political participation, stronger social organisation and an overall system of entitlement protection which he suggests are important factors leading to a low Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in Manipur. He suggests that women's occupational status and marital choices combined with education enhanced women's capabilities. He shows that according to the 1981 census the state has a high proportion of women with 63 per cent engaged as cultivators and only 7 per cent engaged as agricultural labourers whereas the proportion at the all-India level was 46 per cent engaged as agricultural labourer and 33 per cent as cultivators. Strong

collective action combined the high work participation gave favourable impact on child survival. Thirty-five per cent of female population in Manipur worked as main workers against 14 per cent in India. Women's work participation was high in Manipur across all age groups. And apart from most of the women workers engaged as cultivators, the proportion of women engaged in household industry was highest in Manipur, 20 per cent against a national average of 5 per cent. He also pointed out that most of the women were engaged in handloom weaving, and in petty trade. He further suggests that features like most of the women working as cultivators on owned or leased land; not facing the threat of irregularities in employment as agricultural labourers; home based activity that does not require the workers continuous attention and also an opportunity to pay more attention during emergency provides greater capability for women to protect child than in other state of India.

He has identified the main components of maternal advancement, the indirect measures, a composite Index of Maternal Advancement (IMA) constructed by focussing on three types of deprivation : maternal deprivation in knowledge, in control over reproduction and in gainful employment. He also pointed out that the increased political participation and women's collective action organised

around the market place and at home in Manipur have special significance in terms of the public impact they are likely to generate by effecting changes in society's perception towards women.

Although Shivakumar suggests education alongwith occupational status and marital choice, political participation and community action, greater freedom provide higher capability that favours low IMR, he does not explore in detail the socio-cultural context of Manipur over a period of time. Here, we will explore and analyse what Shivakumar has suggested regarding socio-cultural, political and economic dimensions that provide women higher status in Manipur. In his article, he has pertinently suggested the aspects that give greater freedom for women which favours low IMR. However, the article focusses on defining and evolving instruments for the assessment of maternal advancement. He has focussed much more on literacy, occupational status and marital choice according to 1981 Census that provide women's capability in Manipur. Here, we will study through socio-historical perspective in details of these dimensions which provide us more insights into women in transition in Manipur. The question we are asking is given the changing socio-political context what is its impact on: (a) Women's status; (b) Social constitutions which play an important role in women's lives in terms of support;

(c) Shifts in the pattern of education and work; (d) Changes in the institution of marriage.

To answer these questions we explore the following aspects of women's lives in Manipur since the formation of the state and prior to it to the extent possible :

- I. Political Participation.
- II. Economic Participation.
- III. Social Freedom and Age at marriage.
- IV. Education.
- V. Sex ratio.

I. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION :

History of Manipur reveals that in Manipur women took active part in political sphere. Women stood in the forefront of every movement. Levels of political awareness of women vary from time to time. Until the colonial period there was a separate women's court with formal authority vested in women.<sup>28</sup> Women's court known as Paja, comprised eleven members. This court was headed by king's mother alongwith women members of the royal family. This court dealt with cases like adultery, divorce, wife beating, assault and other cases

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<sup>28</sup>

Op. Cit., Chaki Sircar (1984), p.29., Dun (1979), p.67.

where women were involved. Form of punishment was decided by the Paja. This system of the past indicates the important role played in the informal political realm and to some extent in the formal structure of the women's court. Women in Manipur even took active part in correcting the injustice done by the king or by any officials of the state, by reporting the matter to the king. They were able to postpone the scheduled programme of the king if the royal programme affected the interest of the state.<sup>29</sup> Women's Wars locally known as Nupi Lan of 1904 and 1939 which were directed against the administration of Monarchy and British show women's active role in politics.

In 1904, the Assistant Superintendent's house (Mr.Dunlop) was burnt and the people of Imphal were ordered to bring teak wood from Kabaw and to construct the house of the Assistant Superintendent.<sup>30</sup> It was after the thirteen years that the Political Agent, Col. Maxwell, imposed lallup for the reconstruction of the destroyed house. Under lallup system all adult males in the age-group 17-60 years were liable to ten days' service to the state in 40 days. The lallup operated equally on both Meitei and non-Meitei population.<sup>31</sup> In recognition of the services rendered, they were exempted from payment of revenue. Before the

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<sup>29</sup> Op. Cit., Bimola, ksh (1988), p.168.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.168.

<sup>31</sup> Op. Cit., Sanamani Yambem (1980), p.225.

men could comply, women of Manipur demonstrated violently against the proposed re-introduction of forced labour in 1904. The demonstrators who took active part and made sure that the house was reconstructed by paid labour were the market women.<sup>32</sup>

In 1925, Manipuri women agitated collectively against enhancement of the water tax. The outstanding unpaid water tax amounted to Rs.30,000, of which the women allowed the collection of only Rs.7000. Women of Manipur demonstrated near the Durbar offices.<sup>33</sup>

Again in 1939 women of Manipur agitated against the export of rice by the Durbar and Marwari traders. Apart from the economic activities the market is also an important venue of social and political interaction.<sup>34</sup> Women were in sole control of the trade in rice, which was their major source of livelihood. Although trade between Manipur and the outside areas in Assam was conducted even before 1891, it was only after 1891 soon after the annexation of the state. After Anglo-Manipuri War large scale export of rice began. The export of rice from Manipur to British India was closely linked with the growth of Marwari

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.231.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.231.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.231.

capital in Manipur.<sup>35</sup> Marwari business community gradually captured the cotton and handloom trade. In the period 1922-39, the rice export was increased by four to five fold, whereas cultivated area under rice was increased by only ten per cent.<sup>36</sup> The women's upsurge of 1939 had its immediate cause in a rise in the price of rice. Foreign merchants (Persons other than original inhabitants of Manipur) in Imphal who had set up rice mills, were buying all the paddy they could get, milling it and exporting it. The price of rice rose sharply i.e. before the outbreak of Nupilan. It was Rs.1.20 per maund. This rose to two rupees a mound. This combined with the bad harvest hit the poor people hard.<sup>37</sup> The women traders identified the Durbar and the Marwari traders with the rice famine. They were responsible for permitting the export of rice for establishing rice mills which substituted hand-processing of rice by women. The scarcity of rice hit the population directly in terms of restricted availability for consumption, but its impact on peasant-traders, mostly women, was the severest. Since there was no other source of income or means of livelihood, the peasants were forced to sell their stocks of rice to the marwaris. There was also a great scarcity of purchaseable rice. The women who traded

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<sup>35</sup> Sanamani, Yambem (1976); Nupilan : Manipur Women's Agitation, 1939; Economic and Political Weekly, vol.XI, 8, p.326.

<sup>36</sup> Op. Cit., Sanamani (1980), p.232.

<sup>37</sup> Op. Cit., Sanamani (1976), p.327.

in rice and paddy were deprived of their means of livelihood.<sup>38</sup> Nupilan ended after the achievement of their primary objective to re-introduce the ban on rice export, the women sustained their protest against the state and gradually turned their attraction towards administrative and political structure of the state.

In the 1940s, Mahila Sammelani (an organisation led by irabot Singh) was also one important organisation that participated actively in every political movement. He endorsed and encouraged the boycott of the Women's Bazaar, which commenced on 13 December 1939, and exhorted women not to co-operate with the state until the fundamental administrative, political and legal redress system had been altered.<sup>39</sup>

In 1954 and 1959 also women played active part in every movement demanding responsible government in Manipur. In 1960 women formed Women's Assembly Demand Committee to press the Central Government to grant responsible government in Manipur. In the Statehood Movement of late 1960s, women's share of participation was very great.<sup>40</sup> The above account shows that women's collective participation in political sphere even though women's participation of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.327.

<sup>39</sup> Op. Cit., Sanamani (1980), p.234.

<sup>40</sup> Op. Cit., Bimola, Ksh. (1988), p.169.



1954 and 1960s were not as dramatic event as 1904 and 1939 Nupilan.

As our review shows intense female participation in saving their food economy and markets over the first half of the Twentieth century. After 50s there were not many struggles worth mentioning. So we cannot say there is increased political participation. Women were more concerned with problems which affect their daily life. When we study the historical fact over a period of time, it shows that women's political participation is not keeping up with increasing female literacy in Manipur. It may be noted that in terms of percentage of female literacy in India, Manipur ranks sixth according to a report of the National Committee sponsored by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) on the Status of Women in India in 1974. Dr. Ksh. Bimola Devi (1988) mentioned that women formed a minority among the political party workers. She observes of active women's movements like that of 1904 and 1939, and the failure of the political organisations to mobilize women may also be the causes for women's defeat in the elections. There is also no effective woman leader. Leadership has become diffused and diverse.

After the dramatic events of 1939 Nupi lan, Manipuri women spearheaded a strong movement against the consumption of alcohol in

1975-77.<sup>41</sup> Meitei women fought the misbehaviour and conduct of men under the influence of alcohol. The overall objective of the night patrollers was to introduce temperance in the drinking habit so as to ensure that alcoholism did not erode family life, children's health and the potential for productive participation by the consumer of alcohol.<sup>42</sup> There was a sharp decline of alcoholic consumption due to closure of breweries after repeated raids by the night patrollers, mobilization of public opinion in favour of prohibition.

Women's electoral political participation relatively in Manipur is due to the greater freedom of women and social recognition passed through the ages in Manipur society. Socio-economic structure of Manipur gives opportunity for women's participation in politics. It has not come just with the introduction of modern concept of education and democracy.

The spirit of Meira Paibi (Night patroller) as a collective participation has been decreasing in the 80s and 90s. On the other hand, education of female and male has been decreasing gradually. According to Dr. Bimola (1996), 'Women in the present day society, Manipuri women are facing the complexities of modern life. Educated

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<sup>41</sup> Op. Cit., Sanamani (1980), pp.234-235.

<sup>42</sup> Op. Cit., Shivakumar (1995), p.86.

working women in the various departments of the government and semi-governmental organisation are increasing day by day. They are facing problem as apart from financial contribution that they have to make the family, these women have to work physically and mentally to fulfill assigned duties given by the family as well as by their employers in the work place. She argues that educated working women are not coming out to share social responsibilities with other groups of women, especially with the Meira Paibi due to their work-load. The educated working women are in between tradition and modernity.

Thus, though women are still active, the nature of their participation has altered. Apart from entering the market as sales women and workers in modern markets they have moved into activism of social nature (anti-liquor campaign). Thus participation into direct economic struggles is comparatively less. The electoral participation is comparatively higher but whether voting pattern shows increase of women voters over time is not clear.

Shivakumar (1995) also argues that women's greater freedom and social recognition was also reflected by the higher electoral participation of women in Manipur. But he leaves unexplained the question of relationship in voting and political activity. In Manipur we argue that it was women's direct involvement in struggles that gave rise

to awareness in political participation and voters. Today though they continue to vote, the pattern of active involvement is changing. To substantiate further our argument we look at women's work participation.

## II. ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION :

Next to agriculture, weaving has been the most important economic activity whereas for both sexes, it was entirely in the hands of women. Women were also in full charge of the marketing of both agricultural and industrial products, which provide cash income for herself and for the family. Meitei women had been economically self-reliant and independent from the past. Even though their status was not equal with the men in the Meitei society, their position had been relatively better than other Indian women.

Table 4 and Table 5 shows that women's economic participation has been high in Manipur. Majority of women workers have been cultivators and next to this large number of women workers were engaged in Household Industry followed by trade and commerce.

**TABLE 4 : WORK PARTICIPATION FROM 1901 TO 1931**

YEAR	Cultivators		Agricultural labourers		Household Industry		Total Population
	Nos. & % to total Population		Nos. & % to total Population		Nos. & % to total Population		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
1901	28,922 (10.17%)	1,202 (0.42%)	33 (0.01%)	182 (0.06%)	--	17,758 (6.24%)	284,465
1911	69,015 (19.93%)	11,802 (3.41%)	147 (0.04%)	13 (0.002%)	--	35,890 (10.37%)	346,222
1921	91,152 (23.83%)	59,883 (15.59%)	415 (0.11%)	38 (0.01%)	243 (0.06%)	33,734 (8.78%)	
1931	97,502 (21.89%)	61,688 (13.84%)	179 (0.04%)	165 (0.08%)	--	--	445,606

Source : Censuses of India, Assam State from 1901 to 1931.

**TABLE 5 : DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS IN MANIPUR FROM 1961 TO 1991**

YEAR	Cultivators		Agricultural labourers		Household Industry	
	Nos. & % to total Population		Nos. & % to total Population		Nos. & % to total Population	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1961	141,182 (77.07%)	92,996 (53.20%)	1186 (0.64%)	998 (0.57%)	7291 (3.98%)	71,875
1971	161,038 (68.06%)	81,442 (64.93%)	8,662 (3.65)	4,862 (3.53%)	5,882 (2.39%)	28,741 (22.91%)
1981	211,862 (63.96%)	152,862 (63.10%)	10,981 (3.31%)	17,652 (7.29%)	6,673 (2.01%)	48,822 (20.17%)
1991	224,650 (56.19%)	162,040 (58.40%)	26,908 (6.73%)	36,442 (12.89%)	11,683 (2.92%)	36,669

Source: Censuses of Manipur, from 1961 to 1991.

Table 4 shows that the proportion of women cultivators to the total population has been increasing from 0.42 per cent in 1901 to 3.41 per cent in 1911 and then to 15.59 per cent in the 1921 Census. In the 1931 Census the proportion of female cultivators to total population was decreased to 13.84 per cent. The proportion of female agricultural labourer was declined to 0.002 per cent in 1911 from 0.06 per cent in 1901. In the next two decades the proportion has increased. In 1921 it was 0.01 per cent and in 1931 it was increased to 0.08 per cent. The proportion of household industry has increased to 10.37 per cent in 1911 from 6.24 per cent in 1901. But it declined to 8.78 per cent in 1921.

As relevant Census reports of 1941 and 1951 for Manipur are not available anywhere even in the Registrar General of India office, New Delhi and National Archives, we cannot compare with these two sets of data. But Census reports from 1961 to 1991 in table 5 show that from 1971 upto 1991 proportion of women cultivators declined whereas proportion of female agricultural labourers were increased gradually. Even in the Household Industrial sector, women's participation declined since 1961 Census. There was a marked decrease of female participation in household industry in 1971. It declined to nearly half of

the female participation in household industry from 41.12 per cent in 1961 to 22.91 per cent in 1971 Census. This trend continued at a slow pace over 1981 and 1991 at 20.17 per cent and 12.98 per cent respectively. But women continued to be in industry based at home. Earlier most of the women worked on their own land or leased land. The nature of work was flexible. They could resume and stop their work at any time. This was because women dominated as cultivators. Over 1971 to 1991 Manipur has experienced a rise in women agricultural labour from 3.53 per cent to 12.8 per cent (over the 30 years). Shivakumar's (1995) assumption was that women in Manipur do not encounter the problem faced by agricultural labourers elsewhere, such as the threat of irregular employment. But our data indicates that women in Manipur have also started experiencing the problem faced by the other Indian women as the proportion of agricultural female labourer has been increasing. Sircar (1984) also said that women's nature of work in Manipur strengthens their position in the society. In Manipur there was strong informal association of women that provided valuable support to women. Women's participation in the market also strengthened their position in the society as the Nupi Lan of 1904 and 1939 showed. Market place in Manipur is a place where market women share their views, worries apart from earning income for herself and for



the family and thus develop strong ties as well as view of their own. Market place gives the opportunity to participate in politics and gain outside knowledge.

With the declining jobs in household industry, increasing agricultural labourers and slightly decreasing agricultural cultivators, there is a strong probability that women's relation with the markets is changing. Women's direct control on the produce is declining hence their role as agents of sale of produce. The more educated women are not now entering the market but more as employees. This transforms to some extent the initial place of women in Manipur society. While compared to other states, their status is high in a historical sense, the conditions necessary for status are not necessarily and equally improving.

Sanamani (1979) assumed that the long term decline in the share of females in trade and commerce in the present century has been caused mainly by an influx of non-Manipur traders from other parts of the country into the state. Thus this may have combined with the changing scene among the female workers in agriculture and household industry. As Dr. Bimola (1996) argues that working women in the government and semi-governmental organisations are facing the problem of the double burden of work, in spite of their greater freedom

and capabilities. Women in the hills work physically from the early morning till the late night. They still contributing a lot to the household management, agricultural works and development of the society as a whole. Women are facing sufferings as a result of ethnic clashes between the Nagas and Kukis over land disputes during the past three to four years.

There is no doubt that in Manipur women hold in high esteem and they enjoy high social status but if the trends coming out from data continue in the future, women in Manipur stand to lose and education alone will not save them from facing the same problem as faced by other Indian women.

### III. SOCIAL FREEDOM AND AGE AT MARRIAGE :

Women of Manipur enjoy relatively greater freedom. In Manipur socio-cultural context allows women late marriage. Age at marriage is higher than the other states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh where women's status are lower.<sup>43</sup> Mean age at marriage was even higher than the Kerala where female literacy was higher than Manipur. In Manipur, the mean age at marriage among women was

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<sup>43</sup> Op. Cit., Shivakumar (1995), p.67.

23.3 years in 1981.<sup>44</sup> Child marriage was unknown to Manipur.<sup>45</sup> Types of marriage like Chelhong, Keinakatpa and Loukhatpa<sup>#</sup> testify to the freedom enjoyed by Meitei women in selecting their mates. Such a social freedom of the women was also reflected in widow remarriage.<sup>46</sup> Marriage by elopment among the Meiteis was recognised and accepted as one of the ways of mate selection.

Women in the valley have had a tradition of collective action, organised around the market place, and at home. Many informal organisations, locally known as 'marups' (friendship association), have been formed by both men and women.<sup>47</sup> When a son or daughter of any of the members get married, each member of the association makes a small pre-determined contribution to cover part of the marriage expenses. Friendship associations also exist for the purchase of specific commodities like crockery, utensils, furniture, gold etc. There are also marups only for women where members offer wage labour to collect money for the association to be used for different occasions and purposes. There are trade marups organised around a common

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>45</sup> K.B. Devi, *The Meiteis of Manipur: A Socio-Cultural Study*, North Eastern Research Bulletin, Vol.7, Centre for Sociological Study of the Frontier Region, Department of Sociology, Dibrugarh University, Assam, 1976, p.78.

<sup>#</sup> Chelhong - Marriage by elopment.

Keinakatpa - An abbreviated form of wedding.

Loukhatpa - A traditional ceremony to legitimised elopment.

<sup>46</sup> Op. Cit., Vimala Khuraijam (1993).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.

product like fish marup, rice marup, etc. to provide mutual assistance. Despite the male dominant patrilineal society, several socio-cultural factors tend to influence positively women's greater freedom in Manipur.

In the past, it was usual for boys and girls to meet in groups. Young people played a cowrie game called likkol at a family Sangoi (Detached shed inside a compound used as a multipurpose room) or at verandah during special ceremonies.<sup>48</sup> Case study by Chaki Sircar (1984) at Nambol (Manipur) cited that young men came and talked to the young girls in the evening. They sat and talked with the girls in the presence of other members of the family. Old women often expressed real enthusiasm in talking about the romances of their youth. In Sircar's (1984) book, she mentioned that modernisation has brought some changes. The romantic boatrides and lily-eating outings are things of the past. Boys do not come to the house of girls for their daily meetings. Movie houses, walk to school and colleges, or the village corners have replaced the traditional way of meeting and enjoyment with young boys and girls. Women in Manipur are in transition.

We need to study the nature and reasons for this transition. The main influences have been shifts in women's economic role, her work participation, education and impact of cultural penetrations of other

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<sup>48</sup> Op.Cit., Sircar. (1984), pp.67-68.

socio-religious groups and their values. Though the egalitarian structure of Manipur has taken deep roots and women have been important beneficiaries, there is a need to check on trends and possibilities.

#### IV. EDUCATION:

Various studies on women's status reveal that education improves women's status. But Manipur's condition shows that greater freedom and active social, economic and political participation was higher even before modern education was introduced in Manipur by British in 1857. In Manipur's case, women's greater freedom, socio-economic status, capability and economic role provided useful formal education to women. In the beginning when the school was opened in 1857, women's participation was low. Hudson (1984) mentions in his book 'The Meiteis' that the education of women cannot be said to have made equal progress in the beginning although it was hoped, not without reason that, in a society like Manipur when women hold such an important and high position in the economic activity of the state, the efforts to establish a good school for the daughters of the higher classes would have been attended with more success than has actually been the case'.

**TABLE 6 : LITERACY**

YEAR	Total (No. & %)	Males (No. & % to total male population)	Females (No. & % to total female population)
1901	2,658 (0.9%)	2,596 (1.86%)	62 (0.04%)
1911	7,016 (2.1%)	6,889 (4.06%)	217 (0.13%)
1921	14,687 (3.8%)	14,396 (7.65%)	291 (0.15%)
1931	4,495 (3.3%)	13,806 (6.40%)	689 (0.30%)
1941	25,933 (5.0%)	24,339 (9.77%)	1,594 (0.60%)
1951	65,895 (11.4%)	58,933 (20.77%)	6,932 (2.37%)
1961	2,37,276 (30.4%)	1,74,656 (45.12%)	62,620 (15.93%)
1971	3,53,090 (32.9%)	2,49,383 (46.04%)	1,03,707 (19.53%)
1981	5,78,618 (41.4%)	3,84,231 (53.29%)	2,03,387 (29.06%)
1991	9,16,622 (59.9%)	5,60,884 (59.77%)	3,55,808 (39.59%)

Source: Censuses of Manipur.

Statistical Hand-book of Manipur, 1992, Government of Manipur.

Table 6 on literacy shows that there was marked increase in women's literacy rate from 1951. It increased to 2.37 percent in 1951 from 0.6 percent in 1941. And then in 1961 it increased to 15.93 percent. In the following decades till 1991, there has been enormous amount of increase in the literacy rate of females which even came up to 39.59 percent in 1991. There was increase in male literacy rate also. There was marked increase in male literacy also in 1951. It increased to 20.77 percent in 1951 from 9.77 percent in 1941. And then it increased to 45.12 percent in 1961. It increased gradually which came up to 59.77 percent in 1991 census.

Despite the British effort to introduce education, the pace of growth of education was slow still 1941. After the 1950s when Manipur merged into Indian State, Manipur also adopted India's national policy and plans to bring modernisation and increase literacy. Historically greater women's freedom, self reliance, active political participation and outside knowledge gained in the market place among the mothers provided the atmosphere to support the female education. Women's participation in decision making in the family matters was also a factor for marked increase in education. There is no doubt that education empowers but we also look at the historical background that indicates that education alone was not essential in Manipur's experience.

A serious observation by Dr. Bilashini (1995) in some areas showed that women in large numbers have become victim of drug addiction and alcoholism. These growing habits among men have resulted in a crisis for the family. Reports of inebriated men beating their wives are common in many places of Manipur. Dr. Blashini Devi further adds that Manpuri women have still a long and daring way to venture towards fairer and more civilized goal to come up at an equal pedestal and to be an equal to her male counterpart. She further observes that despite the women's achievement in the field of education, architecture, science and technology, medicine, sports etc., there is need to take serious note of the fact that the new problems have cropped up for women across the entire region. New forms of harassment and violence against women have made an entry along with the development process. Instances of eve teasing rate in communities increased which were quite uncommon in the past.

#### V. SEX RATIO :

Besides economic and political participation, sex ratio is also one of the indicators of women's status in any society. Demographers use sex ratio as an indicator of women's status. Manipur had been one of



the few states of India having of 1901 till the census of 1961, for 60 years the number of females had been more than the number of males.

TABLE 7: SEX RATIO OF MANIPUR FROM 1901 TO 1991

Year	No. of females per 1000 male
1901	1,037
1911	1,029
1921	1,041
1931	1,065
1941	1,055
1951	1,036
1961	1,015
1971	981
1981	971
1991	958

Source: Censuses of Manipur.

Table 7 shows that from the census of 1971, the picture of sex ratio has changed in favour of males and the ratio is 958 women per

1000 men in 1991 census. This table shows that in 1961 census sex ratio was 1,015 but in 1971 number of females per 1000 males was 981.

Although women in Manipur enjoy greater freedom and is one of the states where women's status is better, women in Manipur are facing the problem encountered by other women of patriarchal Indian society. Educated working women face the problem experienced by other Indian working women. They have to conform to both traditional and modern norms. The overall changes brought by the modernisation after the 1950s especially after the merger of Manipur into the Indian states, there has been a deterioration of the law and order situation, corruption, ethnic clashes between Nagas and Kukis, influence of westernisation and consumerist society in Manipur. This clearly has an impact on women's status as well. In Manipur women started facing sufferings due to economic backwardness and decline of moral and traditional values, modernisation etc. Women in Manipur are in transition. Instead of further improvement of their status with the coming of modernisation and democratisation, situation is effected adversely. So we, therefore, argue that in traditional Manipur society, socio-cultural context supports the higher status of women. Conditions

necessary for higher women's status in traditional society are not improving, equally with education.

***CHAPTER - IV***  
***TRANSITION THROUGH***  
***WOMEN'S EYES***

#### IV.1 - QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION THROUGH CASE STUDIES

Leimapokpam village is located in Bishenpur district of Manipur, which is 16 km from Imphal. According to 1991 Census, Population for this village was 5,803. Number of total household were 446, out of these 432 belonged to the Meiteis. Basic amenities like college, medical facility, main market were dependent upon this town, Nambol. There is only one High School in this village. There is one small women's market in this village. According to 1991 census total male workers was 1221 and female was 1118. Total male cultivators was 958 and female cultivators was 659, whereas total male agricultural labourers was 39 and female was 121.

In the following sections we present some selected case reports of the two generations.

#### SELECTED CASES FOR OLDER GENERATION

##### CASE 1

##### Introduction:

Nameirakpam Maipakpi is a 85 years old women. She belongs to Meitei Kshatriya. She is illiterate. She has four sons and three

daughters who all are got married. Her husband expired when she was 64 years old. She got married before puberty. It was an arranged marriage but parents took her consent before marriage. Now she is staying with her youngest son with two grand-daughters, two grandsons and daughter-in-law. When I started talking about her past life history, she was very eager to talk to me since no one has shared her life history before. She started saying that 'I have forgotten some of the things but I will share to you whatever I can recollect'. Then second sentence she said was that those days were very nice, harmonious, and joyous.

Occupation of husband and herself:

Her husband was agriculturist. He has got his own agricultural land. Apart from agricultural work he also did kitchen gardening on their own land. He had no income from any other source.

She earned money from weaving. She wove clothes for the family also. Not only did she sell clothes woven by her but also collected cloth from her locality and nearby areas to sell it at Imphal Bazaar which is the biggest market in Manipur. Imphal Bazaar is approximately 16 kms. away from her place. She got raw materials from Moirang, 32 km far away from her place. During agricultural season she did agricultural work. Beside all these, she did all the

household works. Only when she fell sick, her husband, children and young girls from her neighbourhood helped her in doing household work. Otherwise she took sole responsibility in maintaining the house. Her husband did works like sweeping and keeping the lawn clean, repairing the house, etc.

Income and her role in decision-making:-

She used to earn 75 paise per Chader (2.25 metre long cloth) earlier and then started increasing steadily. Sometimes it took more days to finish one cloth otherwise she could finish one cloth in two days. She could worked whenever she felt like and stopped whenever she was busy with some other work. All the income was in her hand. Their family had enough rice for the whole year, so the money she earned used to buy things for the family like fuel, oil, etc. They grew some vegetables on their own land. Her income was given priority to the family and it was under her control. She could use it to buy whatever she felt was the priority for the family. She said she had mutual understanding with her husband. He used to listen to her opinion. Both of them decided regarding important matters like marriage of children, education, etc. Whenever they required larger amounts of money for urgent matters, they sold rice. In that case when I asked if you sold the rice that was produced not more than the required rice for your family

for the whole year, then how could you manage in the remaining days till the next harvesting season comes? Then she said they sold not more than the share of 15 to 30 days quantity of rice that she could easily manage with the remaining rice. Otherwise they could buy after getting the amount from the 'marup' (saving mutual association). In buying the raw material for her weaving and selling the finished product, she herself took decisions. She had her own loom and her husband did not interfere with her trade.

Her perception regarding her life and changes in present generation:

She said during those days she enjoyed a lot, those days were really nice. She still remembers all those days. She said there were more varieties and amounts of fruits which they used to sit and eat together with a group of boys and girls. Before marriage they used to crack jokes, shared personal worries and happiness. In the evening they sat together with the boys of more or less same age in the Sangoi (Multipurpose courtyard). During the religious festivals they went out together with boys and girls in a group. She also said that during her time boys used to visit the girls house before marriage and they had conversation in front of the family members. Now-a-days she does not see all these things. These days girls instead go to the movie halls, restaurant etc. Boys stop visiting girls' houses. She said as the time



passed lots of things has been changed among the younger generation. She could not point out all the changes. She said she could travel freely without hesitation at the market place and anywhere for trading. She felt equal with men. She has been attending and interacting with men in social and religious functions of her relatives and locality.

Dowry giving practices:

During the past there was no dowry system but people used to give some necessary things by the parents of the bride. She said on her marriage her parents did not give much. These days there have been changes in dowry giving practices. Now-a-days brides parents started giving lots of gifts. It has become a culture to give all the modern goods that are available. She further added that somewhere in some family after the marriage of daughter, families find it difficult to pay back the debt. It has become a sort of competition among communities to give more. She felt that after a few years it will become worse if not checked very soon. She said after few years girls from poor family cannot get married. All her dowry belongs to her only. She got a cot, almirah, few clothes and utensils as a dowry.

Social Networks and Political Participation:

She said even if she could not participate in Nupi Lan (Women's agitation, 1939), since she was pregnant, women of those days were

very actively participated. She said any happenings of the state, they discussed at the market place. She said she was a member of various marups organised around the market place and at home. Whenever she needed urgent money, this mutual saving associations provided her help. She said such type of association also used to provide money for buying raw material for her weaving. All the women members of a particular marup met weekly or twice in a month. And there are marups organised around the market place where they have to contribute everyday some money like Rs.2/- or Rs.3/- and one by one all the members will get the same amount. Marup gave the amount first to those who really had very genuine problems that were very urgent. She could save some money also apart from providing support for buying raw materials.

## CASE 2:

### Introduction:

Yumnam Baran is a 86 years old woman. She belongs to Meitei Kshatriya family. She is illiterate. She got married at the age of fifteen. It was a love marriage. Her husband died in 1989. She has eight children. Now she is staying with her youngest son, his wife and their three sons. Now she is dependent on her son who is working in a government office as clerk. She is too old to be engaged in income

generation work but she can look after her grandchildren when their mother is doing household work.

Occupation of her husband and herself:

Her husband was a agriculturist on owned land. She was engaged in weaving. She learnt it during the childhood. Her mother sold cloth woven by her. Apart from weaving she also did agricultural work during the season. After getting married she started trading cloth woven by her at Imphal Bazaar or Nambol Bazaar. She does not have any plot on her name at the market place so she used to sit and sell it wherever she got any space at the market. She did all the household work till her children grew up. Her husband also helped her in cooking when she fell sick. Relatives from her natal family and girls of her neighbourhood also helped her. They had a kitchen garden where her husband grew different varieties of vegetables for the family. She usually went to sell at the market after the morning meal at around 10-11 a.m. and came back in the evening at around 4 - 5 p.m. At the time of festivals like Holi, Cheiraoba (Manipuri New Year) and Rath Yatra etc. she went a bit early to sell at around 8 a.m. When she went to sell clothes, her husband and neighbours looked after her child. She did not go everyday to sell cloth at the market. She could go twice or thrice

in a week. When her daughters grew up and her sons got married she started going everyday as they also wove cloth for sale.

**Income and her role in decision making:**

She could make a profit of Rs.10/- to Rs.20/- per day from her trading. Earlier she used to earn only Rs.2/- to Rs.5/- per day. Her income was spent for the family. Some of this money she could save for emergencies. Her income was under her control and she could do whatever she liked. She spent it for buying things for the family, children, for herself and for giving contribution of social and religious functions. Decisions regarding buying things for the household and children was decided by her. But regarding bigger matters like marriage of her children, education, etc. both her husband and herself took decisions. She used to provide money for children's education also.

**Perception regarding her life and changes in the present generation:**

She said she could talk with her male counterpart with ease and frankly. She did not feel uncomfortable while travelling. She could even come back from Imphal Bazaar which is 16 kms. away from her place after dark. She said she could even fight with her male counterparts at the market place and if any male talked nonsense or misbehaved, all the market women united and retaliated against that

particular man. She feels equal with male. She said she gave lots of respect to her husband and he also understood her. Both of them had mutual understanding.

She said during those days boys visited girls house and during religious festivals like Krishna Janmashtami, Rath Yatra, Holi, etc. boys and girls did boating at Sanapat (natural lake located near their locality) and ate Tharo and Thamchet (water lily) together and also played cowrie. She said that she no longer sees those things and even the Sanapat lake also dried up. Those days boys of her locality interacted in a brotherly fashion. They had no bad intentions and very simple. But now-a-days both boys and girls have become very fast and boys are not as simple as the boys of those days. She complained that boys and girls have become educated so they do not want to listen to old people like her. Educated boys and girls do not want to engage in those kinds of work like agriculture, trading, etc.

Dowry giving practices:

There was no dowry system during her time. During her time people did not give many gifts during marriage. When she got married, a cot, trunk, few clothes (2/3) and utensils were given to her as dowry. Dowry has nothing to do with the relationships of a couple, as a result, it had no effect. It was just a means to fulfill girl's necessity and given out

of affection by the girl's parents. The dowry belongs to her only. People did not bother about dowry. These days everything has changed. People start giving huge amounts of dowry. Even though dowry belongs to herself, boys family also expect more from girls family. It has become a sort of status in society.

Social Network and Political Participation:

She did not participate in Nupi Lan, 1939, but she heard about it. Women of her locality took part in it but she was very busy since her children were too young and needed care. She said women of those days were very active. She does not see the bravery of those women in the present generation. Women were very courageous to take up any issue related to the state.

She said she was a member of various marups organised around the market place and at home. At the market place, she shared her worries and happiness with other women. They organised feasts and other group activities among the members of marup at the locality. She said the marup which was organised around the market provided not only economic support but also an opportunity to interact with other women. At the locality, she has participated in various recreational activities organised by the members of women's marup. Women shared their family problem also among the marup members.

### CASE 3

#### Introduction:

Pukhrambam Tenbi Devi is a seventy-five years old woman. She belongs to Meitei Kshatriya family. She got married at the age of fifteen years. She is a illiterate woman. She has got eight children. All her children got married. Now she is staying with her youngest son and his wife and four grandchildren. She had love marriage. Her husband expired five years back.

#### Income and her role in decisions:

Now she is not earning anything. She is dependent on her son. Before marriage she started earning income. She could earn 75 paise per chader (2.5 metre long) before marriage. Women of her locality who did trade collect her woven cloth before marriage and sold it to market. Before marriage she woved whenever she felt like. There was no restriction on her work. Sometimes she could finish very soon. After getting married she has to work hard to earn more money. After marriage also she did weaving both for sale and for family. After having one child her income started increasing steadily upto Rs.10/- per cloth. From 22 to 65 years of age she earned a lot. When all her children got married and had grandchildren, they stopped her from going to the market. So now she looks after her grandchildren. She has stopped

weaving also. All her income was under her control. After marriage she started cloth trading. She had freedom to enjoy her income. But her income gives priority to family, sending children to schools, buying things for everyday purpose for the family and from the amount saved she spent for her children's marriage and others. From her income she used to contribute money for the social and religious functions (potyeng). Now she said that she asked money from her son whenever she wants to contribute to social and religious function.

Occupation of husband and herself:

Her husband was an agriculturist on owned land. They had kitchen garden also. Her husband grew vegetables for the family. She did weaving and trading apart from agricultural work during the season on their own land. Most of household chores was done by her. Her husband did sweeping and cleaning of the bungalow, gardening and repairing of the house, etc. When she was not well, her husband and close kin who stayed at neighbourhood helped her. She left her children at home when she went for trading. They were looked after by her husband and closed relatives at neighbourhood. She cooked morning meals before she went for trading. Usually she left for trading at around 9 a.m. When her daughter grew up she shared the housework which eased her burden considerably.



Perception regarding her life and changes on present generation:

She said, she could travel anywhere freely. At night, group of market women came back home together on foot sharing their days happenings, and about losses and profits of the trades. She said she felt equal with men at the market place. During religious and social functions she had attended, she could talk with men freely. She said in the present generation she no longer sees the young boys and girls in a group going out during religious festivals. Boys stop visiting girls houses before marriage to have hookah. Earlier boys used to visit and sit on the verandah at girls house. She said they used to crack jokes and had singju (vegetable salad) and fruits in the evening after they finished their days weaving. Both boys and girls of those days were very simple, boys had no bad intentions on girls. Boys were very helpful. Those days women were also faithful to their husbands, had less conflict in the family. These days both husband and wife lack faithfulness and have more conflicts in the family. She was complaining about daughters-in-law that they do not want to treat her properly and are very lazy. They do not do much work to earn income. During her times she said she did everything to maintain the house. She worked day and night to bring up their children. Women of those days were

very industrious. She said her daughters-in-law are very lucky that their husbands also contribute to maintain the family financially.

Role of Dowry:

During her days dowry has nothing to do with marriage. It did not matter whether one give more or less. During those days generally women's dowry consisted of items like a cot, trunk, some 3-4 clothes and 1 or 2 plates and bowl. In some rich families, parents gave gold rings, ear rings and some parts of agricultural land. In those days there were very few such families. But things have changed today. More families have started giving a lot of things like furniture, crockery, other modern goods, gold, etc. It has become a norm in the society. A sort of competition has set in and there is a great of competition as to how they got from their parents house. She said she can observe in some families boy's parents expect more dowry from girl's parents even though dowry belongs to the girl. When I asked why the boy's parents want more dowry when it is belonged to girls only then she said some families want to show off in society that they have got a rice bride, nor from a lower strata family background but from the same or higher background. Those days people did not say anything, it hardly mattered whether one gets more or less dowry.

### Social Network and Political Participation:

She did not take part in Nupi Lan, 1939. She was a member of Night patrollers. She said most of the women who participated actively in Nupi Lan were the market women at Imphal Bazaar. She said that women of her ages were active in all matters. They discussed happenings of the state during that time. Even among the night patrollers, when they came out to stop the consumption of liquor long time back (she cannot recollect the exact time) women were very active and had unity among them. Now she no longer sees that type of community action. Women night patrollers of present day are less active.

She was a member of various marups including the marup only for women. She was a member of marups meant for trade, marriage, shingyen (saving association for shradh for self and other close relationship) and other recreational activities. All the members of marup organised other recreational activity during the religious festival. Members of marup helped each other during times of suffering. At the market place she said women shared their worries and happiness. If one woman had some problem of getting a second wife by the husband women at the market place support and give suggestions and advice to solve the problem. She said marup organised around the home was

really helpful financially and emotionally. She said she is still attending the socio-religious functions of her locality and close relatives.

#### CASE 4

##### Introduction

Oinam Chonu is a 80 year old woman. She has 6 sons and 6 daughters. She is illiterate, she belongs to Meitei Kshatriya family. During her time there was no education for girls. All her sons and daughters got married. Her husband is now 85 years old. Both of them (her husband and herself) are staying with their youngest son. Her youngest son is teaching in a high school. He is around 58 years old. He has got 2 sons and 2 daughters. She got love marriage through elopement at the age of 14.

##### Occupation of husband and herself:

Her husband was a primary school teacher. He is an astrologer now. He is earning Rs.20/- to Rs.30/- per day. He was an agriculturist before and owned land. Now he has stopped doing agricultural work since he is old enough. When she got married her husband used to earn only Rs.5/- per month. After having two children, about four years after their marriage, his salary started increasing gradually. Before getting married, her mother sold cloth woven by her. She learnt weaving during childhood. Income from the cloth was in her mother's

hand. They had enough money to buy necessary things for the family during those days. They had their own agricultural land. After marriage she used to go to the market to sell vegetables grown on their garden and cloth woven by her. She did not go every day but went twice or thrice a week according to the things available which had to be sold. And moreover she was very busy with the household work. Earlier her family was very poor so her income was given priority in the family. She did agricultural work on own land. They could just produce enough for the needs of the family. To go regularly to the market means she had to collect vegetables from others to sell. As her children grew up and started helping her, only then she could give more time for trading. When she felt sick, young girls from the neighbour helped her. Her husband did not help her much in household work except cleaning and sweeping the lawn, repairing of house etc. She said, she was all the time very busy washing clothes for her father-in-law and husband. She also wove cloth for family apart from the ones for sale.

Income and her role in decisions :-

She said her income was under her control. She said she cannot recollect the earning exactly through different periods but she used to earn Rs, 10 to 20 as profit per cloth(chadar). It took three days

to finish that cloth. She used to weave mostly chadar to wear on formal occasions. She supported the family financially. Earlier when her in-laws were alive when she was newly married and her children were very young, she could not give much emphasis on income generation work. That time she did not take part much in decision making. As time passed she started taking part in decision making. Even her husband's income was in her hand. She had the freedom to spend the money. Still she takes part in decisions making. Her grown up sons and daughter-in-laws take her decisions. Her income used to spent for buying essential things for family, for education on children, contribution for socio-religious functions etc. She could save money also through marup. She did all the shopping for the family. Her husband always asked her opinion whenever he took decisions.

Perceptions regarding her life and changes in present generation :-

She could go out freely without hesitation. She could talk with men freely. While trading, she did not feel uneasy to travel any where. She participated in various socio-religious festivals and interacted with men. She felt equal with men even though her husband did not share the burden of household work. Husband did not treat her badly. They had mutual understanding. He listened to her. At the market no man

could cheat or misbehave her. Even if they did she could retaliate. She expressed that she took the burden of the family, at the same time she enjoyed decision making , freedom to spend money on her own and to travel and interact with the outside world and mutual understanding with her husband. She said her husband cared a lot for her. He was very good to her.

She said lot of things had changed but she cannot point out. Women of present age are no longer interested in trade and weaving. Young boys and girls in a group have stopped doing boating, and other group activity that was really enjoyed in the past. Boys no longer visit girls house before marriage. Situation in girls house has become very critical. Girls are not safe to go alone far away from the house. People were every simple in the past. Both boys and girls are fast in the present age.

#### Role of Dowry :-

All the dowry belonged to her. She could do whatever she felt like with her dowry. During those times people did not give much dowry. It did not matter whether people give more or less dowry. For her wedding, parents gave her a bed, an almirah, a small gold chain, two small gold rings and a gold earring, some clothes and utensils as a dowry. At that time people thought she was very rich and as a youngest

of her parents she got lots of dowry. There was no role for dowry in the relationship of husband and wife and between the family. People hardly bothered about dowry.

As time passed she said people started becoming very conscious about dowry. Girls want to get more on their wedding from parents and parents of the girls also want to give more. In some cases boys family wanted more dowry. She said during her time girls used to carry only the basic necessities. She did not ask anything to her parents regarding dowry. These days girls only want to carry as much as they can. They did not even think whether their parents can afford that much of their demands on wedding. She gave an example of a family in her locality after the marriage of a daughter, the parents still finds difficult to pay back the debt. She said her grand-daughter has finished education. Now she started collecting dowry through Marup so as she can take it on wedding. She said she never did such kind of thing before.

#### CASE 5 :

##### Intorduction :

Sagolsem Ashangbi Devi is 70 years old. She got married at the age of 13 by love marriage. She belongs to Meitei Kshetriya. She has



got 6 sons and 1 daughter. All her children got married. She is illiterate. She said she had no time for education because she was busy weaving cloth and household work. Her husband died 3 years back.

Occupation of her husband and herself :

Her husband was a agriculturist on owned land. He did kitchen gardening also on own land. She was a market woman at Imphal Bazaar. She did fish trade. She stopped it only 10 years back. She said those days while going for trade, she used to cook meals early in the morning and eat before going out for sale. After coming back in the after noon she used to go and bring fish to sell in the next morning. She collected fish from Ishok village, a fishing community village near her locality. By evening at around 3.30 to 4 p.m. she was at home. She did most of the housefold work before her daughter grew up. Upto one month before delivery women relatives from her natal family and girls from close kin who are also in neighbourhood helped her. She also did agricultural work on owned land.

Income and her role in decision making :

She could make a profit of Rs. 20 to 30 every day and sometimes even more or less. She gave her income priority to the family. Her income was under her control. She maintained the whole family. Any expenditure incurred for the family including children's

education was from her pocket. Regarding decisions on spending money, day to day matters like buying things for the kitchen and children, she decided herself. But spending money regarding marriage of her children both husband and herself decided. She spent for children's health and herself from her pocket. Whenever they have urgent matters they used to sell the rice produced on their own land. Before selling rice from their owned land both husband and herself discussed and decided the matter. She enjoyed the freedom to spend the money on her own. She did all the shopping for the family.

Perceptions regarding her life and in present generation :

She feels herself to be equal with men. She did not hesitate to participate in any socio-religious festivals. She has been attending various social and religious ceremonies of the locality, out side the locality, relatives etc. She could travel anywhere and there was no restriction in moving here and there. She could have conversation with oppsite sex with free and frank. She thinks hereself is not inferior to man but she said she gave respect to her husband. Her husband also understood her.

She said things have changed a lot in the present generation. Girls have become educated and are no longer interested in trade and agriculture. During her time most of the women earned and supported

their family. She said that 'I supported the whole family and provided them education also but women of today lack such industrious qualities and courage'.

#### Role of Dowry :

There was no system of dowry. Any one could give whatever they like on wedding. Nobody bothered about dowry. Only very necessary things like bed, some cloths and utensils used to be given. Now-a-days people are giving lots of dowry. Dowry belongs to women only. It has become a norm of society to give more, she said. For her wedding she got only a bed, 2 plates, 2 glass and bowl, 3 or 4 cloth to wear and 1 big pot to be used in socio-religious ceremony. Now a days she said people started talking about the dowry, counting and seeing the dowry on wedding, not the bride and bride groom. She said it will become very difficult to get her daughter married after a few years.

#### Social Networks and Political Participation :

She took part in 2nd Nupi Lan, 1939. She was an active member of Meira Paibi (Night Patroller) also . She is still a member of Meira Paibi but cannot take active part. She said Nupi Lan was started at the Imphal Bazaar when they met with scarcity of rice in the market. After that she took active part in fighting against the consumption of liquor by men and the problems created in the family.

She said whenever there is any serious problem in the community either the arrest of innocent person by the police or any alcoholic person harassed his wife and children by beating, all the members of Meira Paibi of their locality came out and discussed the concerned problem. After that all the women present took decisions to take up further steps. She said that there are lots of changes in the Meira Paibi's behaviour now. They are not as active as before. They just came out for the sake of it. She further mentioned that there is lack of leadership among the Meira Paibi group like those of the courageous women leaders of Nupi Lan.

She said she was a member of various Marups organised around the market and at home. Now she is still member of some old women's marup for recreational activity. But she said her sons, daughters-in-law and grand children do not want her to attend such activities. They want her to take rest at home. She said she preferred attending such activities than staying at home. These days whenever she needed money urgently either for trade or family matter, marup gave her financial support. Member of women marup organised feast and pilgrimage for every year. Apart from financial support, such marup gave her chance to interact with many people and gain outside

knowledge. She used to collect many goods for the family gradually through marup only.

### SELECTED CASES OF YOUNGER GENERATION:

#### CASE 6:

##### Introduction :

Asem Binodini Devi is a 35 years old woman. She got married at the age of 24. She has got one daughter and two sons. She studied upto class XII. She had love marriage. Her father wanted her to study more but she eloped with her husband after class XII. Her father was a school teacher.

##### Occupation of husband and herself :

Her husband is working in the police department under Manipur Government. Before getting married she used to earn Rs. 1000/- per month from weaving. Now she cannot give more emphasis on weaving as she is busy with household work and looking after the children. Now she can earn only Rs. 400 to 500/- per month. They have owned agricultural land but they do not engage in cultivation. They have given it for cultivation to some other family on lease. All the household work is done by her. If she feels sick girls from her neighbour helped her in doing household work.

### Income and her role in decision making :

Income is under her control. Before getting married her income was used for buying things for herself. She could save money for herself. Sometimes she used to give to her parents if they had urgent work. After marriage all her income gives priority to the family. She used to buy vegetables, oil, dried fish, fuel etc. for kitchen. She also used to take money from her husband to buy things for the family. Regarding decision making on sending children to school and other bigger things except buying things for kitchen and small things for household, her husband dominates. He also shares what he wants to do but she said that she also agreed to what he decided. Regarding buying things for modern goods like television, radio etc. he only decides. Regarding the contribution for socio-religious functions, she usually take money from her husband's income.

### Perception regarding her life :

She said she felt uneasy to walk alone in front of 2 or 3 boys outside their locality before the marriage. Now she felt better than before getting married. Most of the time she went out with her mother or female relative or friends before marriage. But she said she could go out freely to the neighbour's house and to nearby areas within their locality without hesitation. She said she used to meet her husband

before getting married outside her house in the nearby locality without the knowledge of her family's elder members. Most of the soci-religious functions are attended by her husband. She has attended only for close relative's, friend's and neighbour's functions. She said there is a gap between the man and woman. She cannot feel free with men other than the close relatives. She also said boys enjoyed more than the girls as there is no compulsion for them to do household chore, child caring etc.

#### Role of Dowry :

She said her husband and in laws did not bother for her dowry but she wanted to get more that time. She said getting more items from the parents has become a status symbol for the bride's family. It is matter of prestige among friends' circle, relatives and the locality. In this society she said women who get more dowry is a sort of prestige in front of the husband's relatives and their family's friend's circle.

#### Social Networks and Political Participation :

She has not participated in any community action nor aware of it. She said her husband does not want her to participate in such activity like Meira Paibi and moreover she is very busy with her household work and child caring. She said during her grandmother's time women were very active.

She said she was a member of marriage marup before getting married to buy dowry for her. Now she is not a member of any marup. Her husband is also a member of one saving association organised at the office. Moreover she also saves money in the Bank. She has not participated in any recreational activity organised by the members of women marup. She said only the older women participate in such type of women's marup for recreational activity (like Khubak Eshei, Nupi Pala etc.)

#### CASE 7 :

##### Introduction :

Leimapokpam Sanajaobi Devi is 36 years old. She got married at the age of 18 by love marriage. She is staying with her husband, mother in law, two sons and one daughter. She was educated upto Class X. Her father was a Chaprasi at an aided college and mother was a market women.

##### Occupation of husband and herself :

Her husband is a lawyer. Her husband does not earn enough money to support the family. He has just started practicing law as he has no alternative option. She said practising law is not a stable income. In two or three months he earned only Rs. 300 to 500/-. She does waving but cannot earn much because she is busy with housefold



work. Sometimes her mother in law also does weaving on the same loom. Whenever they get free time they used to weave. Usually around 12 noon to 2 p.m. she has less household work. After 2 p.m. her children get back from school so she gets busy in household work and child caring. She get up early in the morning at around 4.30 a.m. takes bath and starts household work. They usually eat lunch at around 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. At night they eat dinner at around 7 or 8 p.m. and then she has to finish all the washing, cleaning and mopping before she go off to sleep at around 10 or 11 p.m. Her mother in law helped her in doing household work like sweeping and cleaning. Washing utensils and cooking is done by her only unless she falls sick.

Income and her role in decision making :

She earns only Rs. 300 to 400/- per month. This money is spent for buying things for the family and for children. She pays school fees for her children. It was very difficult for her to manage with that amount since she is sending children to private schools which is very expensive. They have a small vegetable garden. Her mother in law grows some vegetables for their family. She said she cannot save money. She used to discuss with either her mother in law or husband for buying things. Most the time she did not take part in decision-

making. Most of the marketing is done by her mother in law. She cannot decide anything on her own.

Perceptions regarding her life :

She said she does not go out much. Before getting married she felt uneasy to go out alone . She did not go out much other than the school when she was at her parents place. Now also she goes out only for important work but she feels more comfortable than earlier. Most of the social and religious functions is attended by her mother in law. She has attended only for very close relatives. When she went to doctor her mother in law went along with her. She said her husband never treated her badly and she also very faithful and loyal to him. She never did anything that was against her husband, she said. She said men enjoy greater freedom than women. They can go out anywhere, at any time and don't do household work also. Women have more restrictions than men.

Role of Dowry :

She said she did not get much gifts from her parents at the time of wedding because she got married very early.(She said her parents wanted her to study further). Her parents got angry because of her untimely elopment. However, accepted her to get married. She said that her husband and in laws did not bother about the dowry she got.

But day by day dowry started increasing. During her time also people used to give lots of dowry. She said society has become very materialistic and people looked down if some girls got less dowry.

Social Networks and Political Participation:

She has not participated in any community action like Meira Paibi. She said she has no time to go out for that. Her mother in law sometimes took part. She is personally not a member of any marup. But their family is member of marup organised in the locality. Any recreational activity or feast organised by the member of that marup is attended by her mother in law.

CASE 8:

Introduction :

Oinam Pramodini is 43 years old. She belongs to Meitei Kshetriya family. She got married at the age of 22. She eloped with her husband just after class XII. Her parents got angry as they wanted her to finish graduation before marriage. Her father was a Pradhan. Besides her incomplete education, parents did not like her husband because at that time he had no income of his own. She got married at her husband's place without her parents and relatives. After one year her parents did Loukhatpa(formal acceptance of daughter). She

studied upto graduation after marriage. She is staying with three sons, two daughters and her husband.

Occupation of her husband and herself :

Her husband was teaching in a Primary School sometime after marriage, but he quit and opened up one pan shop near Leimapokpam market just ten minutes walking distance from her house. He does agricultural work during the season on their owned land. From the Pan shop her husband can make a profit of Rs. 10 to 15 per day. She has no income. She does agricultural work during the season on owned land. She does all the household work, child caring and rearing. When she falls sick neighbourhood help her.

Income and her role in decision making :

She has no source of income. Whenever they need money urgently she takes permission from her husband to sell rice that is produced from their land. They do not have surplus rice so if they sell some amount of rice then they have to buy the required amount. She does marketing for the family. She also takes part while taking decisions.

Perception regarding her life :

She said, she never thought of status whether man is higher or woman is higher. Sometimes she felt that if her husband helped in

doing household work and child rearing, she would get time for relaxation. She has attended most of the socio-religious functions of the locality and relatives. When she falls sick girls from the neighbourhood helped her. She hardly gets time for relaxation since the whole day she is busy in maintaining the house. She also does kitchen gardening.

#### Role of Dowry :

She did not get any dowry on her wedding as she got married at her husband's place. On Loukhatpa Ceremony (formal acceptance) she got dowry. Usually dowry which is given on Loukhatpa is less than the dowry given at the wedding. She said her husband did not bother about dowry. But she wanted to have more. As time passed dowry also increased day by day. Giving more items has become a status symbol for both the bride's and groom's families. She said that she felt herself let down in front of the other members and relatives of the husband's family when she was newly married as she had nothing for herself. She had to ask each and everything from the new family. She felt shy to ask for clothes to wear when she went out. Family did not say anything but she said "how can I ask for each and everything what I need for the new family. I had to wear whatever they gave me." Moreover, she said, she felt shy in front of the brother in laws wives who had more dowry. After Loukhatpa ceremony when she got some dowry felt better. She said in

the present day people are very conscious about dowry. She also mentioned that 'we should check this kind of culture that did not exist earlier.'

#### Social Networks and Political Participations :

She is a member of Meira Paibi but did not take active part. She is more busy with household work. Her husband also does not want her to take active part. She said it is no use of participating such thing. It does not help their family problems. Women participating in Meira Paibi has no unity, she said. She is a member of marup organised around the locality. She takes help from women members or from neighbours if she needs any financial or moral support.

#### CASE 9 :

##### Introduction :

Sundari Devi is a 26 year old unmarried lady. She is a Meitei Brahmin. She graduated in Science in 1991. She is the third child of 11 children of her parents. Her father is a school teacher and mother is a vegetable trader. Her mother gets vegetable from Imphal Bazaar and sold at Leimapokpam Bazaar which is within minutes walking distance from her house.

Her Occupation:

She knows knitting and weaving. She can earn Rs. 600 to 700/- per month from knitting and weaving. She said she goes for agricultural work. When I asked if your mother falls sick did you go to sell the vegetables then she replied no, she does not go but sometime, for few minutes like 10 to 20 minutes she used to look for when her mother has some very important work to do at home. She said she does not want her mother to sell vegetable at the market place. She said she wants to work in government sector as it is more prestigious and secure but now a days very difficult to get government job. Government is very corrupted. She does household work also.

Her income :

Her income gives priority to the family. Some of the money she can save through marup around Rs. 50 to 100/- per month. She provides money for her brother's expenditure and some of the money she earns gives to her mother.

Perception regarding her life :

She said she herself feels equal with man. But sometime she gets very angry when boys pass comments while moving on the road. She said she was staying in a rented house in Imphal when she was doing graduation because there was no proper transportation. She said

women should polite so as to decrease the family problem. When she go out usually accompnay with one or two friend. She did not interact with men very often and freely because people do not consider it as a good character of a girl. She said she has got the freedom to choose her own partner and does not force her to get marry soon. Parents want her not to get married upto the age of 28. Regarding choosing her mate, parents preferred to choose the boy from the Meitei Brahmin family as she belongs to Meitei Brahmin.

Role of Dowry :

She is also a member of marriage marup organised around the locality. She said her family is rich enough to give all the modern goods so she is saving money for her own income. She said these days girls used to carry lots of dowry like refrigerator, VCR, TV, 3 or 4 almirahs, other electric appliances for home used and lots of cloths, crockery and gold etc. She said some men also looked for women's wealth. In this situation it is better to earn enough money before getting marriage.

Social network and political participation:

She has not participated any collective action. She said such kind of activity is participated only by the married and matured women like her mother's age. She is a member of only one women's marup i.e marriage marup. It contributes Rs. 50 per month. Among the



members whosoever gets married first, will give either goods or cash to the girl. Once in a month on a specific date, all the members meet and contribute money on that day. Members decide to whom they will give the money or they select randomly also where there are many people who need the money or no one has urgent need. On that day all the women members have tea and snacks and usually they fix the gatherings in the evenings when most of the women has less household work. She also said that now-a-days there are other ways of savings like bank etc. She further mentioned that modern system saving is better because it has rules and regulations.

#### CASE 10 :

##### Introduction :

Naorem Ingalei Devi is 25 years old lady. She belongs to Meitei Kshatriya family. She is getting married within one month with the persons whom she got eloped one month back. She has finished graduation in Arts. She has one elder brother and six sisters. Her father is a agriculturist on owned land and mother is a market woman. Mother sells fish at Nambol Bazar, 3 km from her house.

Her occupation and income :

She does weaving for the family and for sale. She does not do agricultural work where her mother and sister in law engaged in agricultural work during the season. She can earn Rs. 200 to 300/- per month from weaving. If she works more she can earn more than that. She said there is no hard and fast pressure from the family to work more hour. She can work whenever she feels like. She gives priority to the family problem. She gives her income to her mother. Her mother bought raw materials from the market and sold the finished product to the people of their locality. Income is under her mother's control. She said she also helped her sister in law in doing household work.

Perception regarding her life :

She said she does not feel free while going out alone a bit far away from her locality. She usually goes out with her friends. She used to meet her boyfriend outside the house nearby locality without the knowledge of elder people of the family and close relatives. She had an appointment while going to college. She said boys enjoy more freedom. Girls are mostly confined to the house-hold work. She cannot interact with men freely without any hesitation.

Role of Dowry :

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She said marriage has become very expensive. Family of the bride gives lots of gifts. No family wants to give less. People of the community decide whether the brides family is rich or poor according to the dowry that the bride gets. When I asked have you come across any case of divorce due to dowry. Then she said no. She has not come across such cases but situation has become very difficult to get married. Even her family is borrowing money from some other family to give her dowry.

Social Network and Political Participation :

She has never participated in any community action organised in their locality. Such activity is participated only by the older women. She is not a member of the marup. She has not interacted with many girls except some girls in the college and her locality. She shared most of her feeling with sister-in-law and friends staying in the neighbourhood. She said unmarried girls who organised marup and moving frequently on the road is not considered good in the society.

## IV.2 - SUGGESTED TRENDS

The case study of thirty women, consisted of twelve older generation and eighteen younger generation in Manipur shows that women in Manipur are in transition. Suggested trends from the case study are of (1) changing perception regarding social interaction between the sexes; (2) changes that have come in the levels of education; (3) Age at marriage; (4) Shift in the occupational patterns; (5) Control over money; (6) Declining the role of Marup as a social network; (7) Declining the family size and (8) Decreasing levels of political participation.

**TABLE 1 : PERCEPTION REGARDING SOCIAL INTERACTION**

	Total Number of cases	Greater freedom	Less freedom
Older generation	12	12(100%)	0
Younger generation	18	3(16.67%)	15(83.34%)

Table 1 shows that older generation's self perception is of a much higher level of freedom. They enjoyed their freedom. Of the twelve

older women interviewed, all of them (100%) felt that they enjoyed higher degree of freedom during their young age. They said that during those days young boys used to visit young girls house before marriage and chat in front of their family members. They did not feel uneasy while going out for trading or any other social and religious gatherings. Old women often mentioned that those days, boys and girls went out together during religious festivals like Rath Yatra. Krishnajanma Ashtani etc. But among the eighteen younger generation women taken, only 3 (16.6%) said they enjoyed greater freedom, and most of the women 15 (83.34%) felt that they enjoyed less freedom. They felt certain restrictions which had now been imposed on them like going out before marriage. They could move freely within their own community but not beyond that. Some women also complained of passing comments by men before marriage while moving. Among the married women of the younger generation there was more reluctant to participate in the social and religious ceremony other than their close relatives and freinds. In some of the cases only husband or in-laws used to attend such social functions.

However, some old women who did trade mention that they did not feel shy while moving anywhere. They fought with their male counterparts at the market place if any man misbehaved or talked

roughly to any of the market woman. This indicates higher and more or less equal status at the work place in the traditional Manipur society.

**TABLE 2 : EDUCATION**

	Total number of cases	Illiterate	Schooling	Graduate
Older generation	12	12(100%)	0	0
Younger generation	18	3(16.67%)	11(61.12%)	4 (22.23%)

The above table (2) on Education shows that among the 12 older generation, all the women (100%) are illiterate. But among the 18 younger generation women most of them are literate and only 3 (16.67%) are illiterate. Eleven women (61.12%) have done at least schooling while 4 (22.23%) have done graduation. This shows that education has increased steadily. With the passing generation women have become aware of the formal education and its importance. Among the older generation of women some felt that education is useless as it could not provide jobs. They also felt that educated men and women do not want to engage in traditional occupation like agriculture, weaving

etc. They said it is useless and waste of time giving education to children specially to girls. It is much more better to learn weaving, spinning etc. as it helps to earn an income. But some old women favoured education of children even though they themselves illiterate. Some of the illiterate woman proudly said that even though they were illiterate, their knowledge was not lower than the modern days educated person. They said they are very much aware of the outside world, local politics and the issues that were critical for the village communities.

**TABLE 3 : AGE AT MARRIAGE**

	Total number of cases	Married before 13 years	13 to 17 years	18 to 24 years	Above 24 years
<b>Older generation</b>	12	1 (8.34%)	10 (83.34%)	1 (8.34%)	0
<b>Younger generation</b>	18	0	3 (16.67%)	11 (16.12%)	4 (22.23%)

Table 3 shows that among the older generation, only 1(8.34%) each married before 17 years of age and between 18 to 24 years. There was no child marriage system in Manipur as the literature

revealed. Most of the women 10 (83%) of the older generation got married between the age of 13 and 17 years age. Age at marriage was higher among the younger generation. No one got married before 13 years. Only 3 (16.67%) got married between 13 and 17 years. Between those age group highest numbers of old women got married. In contrast to it younger generation women got married between 18 and 24 years at higher proportion. This was 61.2%. Among younger women 22.23% (4) got married at after 24 years. Even some of girls who got married before 24 years said that their parents wanted to get married after 28 years of age. Parents don't force the girls to get married early. In both the generations they have the freedom to have late marriage but among the younger generation age at marriage was higher. One woman of younger generation mentioned that her parents wanted her to get married after 28 years so that she could earn and save more money before marriage. And another woman said that her parents wanted her to get married atleast after the graduation.



**TABLE 4 : OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN :**

	Total number of cases	Engaged in Agriculture	Household Industry	Trade	Others #
Older Generation	12	10 (83.34%)	10 (83.34%)	10 (83.34%)	0
Younger Generation	18	8 (44.45%)	8 (44.45%)	0	2 (11.12%)

# Government service, Semi Government service, Anganwadi Worker etc.

The above table - 4 shows that there is a shift in occupational pattern, among the older generation, most of the women engaged in traditional activities like agriculture, household industry and trade. In some cases, women engaged in all the three occupations - agriculture, household industry and trade. Household industry mainly in weaving, cotton and textile spinning, tailoring, embroidery etc. In other cases, women used to engage either one or two of the three occupations. In each of the occupation i.e. Agriculture, Household industry and Trade, older women engaged or 10 (83.34%). This indicates that older women's participation in such kind of jobs are high. There was no woman engaged in any occupation other than these three.

But among the younger generation we see that pattern of occupation has shifted and become more varied. Only 8(44.45%) were engaged in Agriculture and 8(44.45%) were engaged in household industry. There has been a decline of women's participation by 38.89% in Agricultural and Household Industry sectors. There is no women engaged in trade among the younger generation. We found 2(11.12%) women engaged in occupations other than these traditional job. This is an absolute increase in modern type of occupation where as women's proportion has declined by 100% in trade.

Declining traditional pattern of occupation indicates that there have been change in their nature of work. Traditional kind of work gave women more flexible (Shivakumar,1995; Sircar,1984). Shivakumar (1995) has analysed that women's nature of work in Manipur is related to low infant mortality in Manipur. But if the trend is changing, then this safeguard may not stay for long. With modernisation women's nature of work has been affected. Then secondary studies at the larger context also show that due to modernisation educated working women had to adjust the traditional roles with the modern formal kind of work at the office (Bimola 1996) . There is no flexibility in the modern kind of work. One cannot stop and resume at any time whereas they can do so in their traditional kind of work. Not only the traditional kind of work, most

of women enjoyed greater freedom as cultivators on owned or leased land. There are strict rules and regulations in the modern kind of occupation and modern society's work place. As the women become educated they do not preferred traditional occupation. As one trade woman said that 'I have educated daughter like you, they do not want me to sell things at the market place.' 'Market place not only earns income but there, they share their worries and happiness and gain outside knowledge', she further added. So decline in the traditional occupation and the need to enter and compete in the modern service sector may be one of the reasons of increasing education. These patterns are limited to the nature of work and the type of freedom women enjoyed in the traditional Manipur society. Even though some of the women still engaged in Agriculture and Household industry, there has been a total decline in trade among the younger generation.

**TABLE 5 : CONTROL OVER MONEY**

	Total number of cases	More control	Less control
Older Generation	12	12 (100%)	0
Younger Generation	18	10 (55.55%)	8 (44.45%)

Table 5, clearly shows that women in the past had more power to control over money. All the 12 cases of older generation taken could have controlled over money. Even though they gave priority to the family, money was under their control. They could buy whatever they felt necessary. But among the eighteen younger generation taken only 10 (55.55%) had control over money. 8(44.45%) women had very little control over money. Even though more than 50% of younger generation still had more control over money, it has comparatively declined as against the older generation.

If this trend continued the future of Manipuri women may not remain the same. We can say that even though Meitei women of Manipur enjoy relatively higher status, they are also gradually following prey to the longer forces which are forcing them into more dependent position. How long women of Manipur may remain self reliant and economically independent. Women will depend upon the pace of these larger changes.

On enquiry on perceptions of shift in dowry giving practices shows that 100% of women both among the older and younger generation perceived that dowry giving practices had changed. As the time passed, marriage has becomes very expensive. Women of both

the generations opined that it has become the norm of the society to give as much gift as one can. It has today become a competition. Carrying and giving as much as one can is seen as a prestige issue in the community. Earlier people did not give many gift during marriage. Older women used to carry as dowry only basic necessity like cot, trunk, few cloths, utensils. Dowry has nothing to do with relationship of a couple as a result it has no effect. It was just a means to fulfill girls necessity and given out of affection. Perception on dowry, giving practices is very important indicator of women's status.

Even though women in Manipur enjoy the right over their dowry, shift on the perception of dowry giving practices have affected women's status.

**TABLE 6 : SOCIAL NETWORK (ROLE OF MARUP)**

	Total number of cases	Active Participation of Marup	Less Participation
Older Generation	12	12 (100%)	0
Younger Generation	18	4 (22.23%)	14 (77.78%)

Table 6 shows that in the older generation marups played very important role in maintaining strong social network. Marup is a mutual saving association. There are also marups only for women that organised around the market place and near community. In the past women took active part in Marup. all the 12 women (100%) are active members of Marup. This shows that in olden days there was strong social network. Every old women taken for case study talked about the role of marup organised around the market place, family and locality etc. Table No. 6 shows that collective action is breaking down gradually. Shivakumar (1995) talked about the functioning of Marup that provides women's capability and ensures low infant mortality. He did not focus on the declining role of marup . Our case study shows that role of marup has been declining among the younger generation. Only 4 (22.23%) women are active member of marup and most of the younger women 14(77.78%) participated much less . Some of the unmarried girls participated only the marriage marup. Some educated women talked about other ways of saving in the modern society such as bank. Even though women of younger generation are still members of marup, the extent of the practice has been decling. Mutual asociation that supports the mother has been declining may also affect in maternal and child health.

**TABLE 7 : FAMILY SIZE**

	Total number of cases	1-7	8-12	13-17
Older Generation	12	1(8.34%)	8(66.67%)	3(25%)
Younger Generation	18	10(55.56%)	7(38.89%)	1(5.56%)

Table 7 elaborates that family size has been declining over a period of time. Among the older women only one (8.34%) had the family size of 1 to 7 members category. For 8 women (66.67%) the size of the family was in the 8 to 12 member category. Most of the women were in this category. And 3 (25%) family are in the 13 to 17 members category. In contrast, among the younger generation highest number of family is in the smallest family size category 10(55.56%) families are in the 1 to 7 family size category. 7(38.89%) families are in the 8 to 12 members category. And only a small number of families 1 (5.56%) are in the biggest family size category i.e. 13 to 17 members.

**TABLE 8 : POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

	Total number of cases	Participated in collective movement	Not participated in any	Women's opinion on more active participation in olden days
Older Generation	12	3(25%)	9(75%)	9(75%)
Younger Generation	18	3(16.67%)	14(77.78%)	3(16.67%)

The above table 8 shows that there has been decreased in the political participation of women in Manipur. In the olden days even though only 3(25%) took active part in the collective movement like Nupi Lan and Meira Paibi, most of the women, 9(75%) said that women in olden days were more active than that of the present day. Most of the women were aware of Nupi Lan though due to some or the other reason they could not participate. Old women usually mentioned that women of those days even took up matters related to state. They used to discuss and chat regarding any happenings of the state at the market place.



Among the younger generation only 2(11.12%) women participated in the collective movement, 14(77.78%) did not participate in any such activity. Only 2(11.12%) women op-ined that women in the present day society are not active as the women of older days. Out of the 18 cases taken 18 (88.89%) did not give any opinion.

This trend is also mentioned in some of the previous literature like Bimola (1996). She mentioned that increased in female literacy rate does not reflect in increased political participation.

This evidence emerging from the case studies of Meitei women supports the secondary studies at the larger context of women in Manipur. It indicates that in traditional Manipur society women hold higher status than the women of other states. Women in Manipur are in transition. We can see the generational difference from our analysis. Although there has been increased in literacy rate, age at marriage and smaller family size among the younger generation, we can see decline in the level of freedom, increased amount of dowry, and breaking social network.

## ***CHAPTER - V***

### ***DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION***

Manipur and Kerala which are two low per capita income states in India, are also well known for their low infant mortality rate. Clues to better child-survival conditions in Manipur are attributed to the better social conditions enjoyed by women, particularly with respect to marital and occupational choices, high female work participation and tradition of women's collective action<sup>1</sup>. While a number of studies have suggested this for Kerala, much less is known about Manipur. Therefore the over all objective of the present study was to assess the historical trends of women's status and to explore qualitative shifts in it among the higher caste group of Meitei households who constitute majority of the population. For our study purpose we have done an extensive review of literature of the social history of Manipur and status of women, analysed data pre and post state formation on female work participation, literacy and sex ratio. In order to explore qualitative shifts in women's lives we have done indepth interviews with thirty women across generations from a village called Leimapokpam in Bishenpur District of Manipur which is located 16 kms from Imphal.

History of Manipur reveals that Manipur was more or less an egalitarian society. The large land holdings were negligible and there

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<sup>1</sup> Shiva Kumar , A.K. , Women's Capabilities and Infant Mortality: Lessons from Manipur, in M.D. Gupta, L.C. Chen, T.N. Krishnan(ed.), Women Health in India Risk and Vulnerability, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.54-56.

was no rigid caste structure like that prevailing in other parts of the country. A variety of occupations could be undertaken by any person except for practising religious rites and rituals for which only the Brahmins of higher status were entitled. There was no system of child marriage. Even though Manipur has deep historical roots that favour relatively higher status of women, our data analysis clearly shows three important trends:

- (a) Declining female agricultural cultivators and increasing female agricultural labourers.
- (b) Declining sex ratio.
- (c) Increasing literacy among females over time.

Declining proportion of female agricultural cultivators and increasing proportion of agricultural labourers indicates that economic position of women has worsened. Women have been losing control over agricultural land and resources over which they had greater control among the earlier generations. This would clearly affect their status and the level of freedom that they enjoy. In the traditional Meitei society women enjoyed greater freedom, they stopped and resumed the work at any time because most of the women worked as cultivators on land that they owned or on leased land. Cultivators are economically better off compared to the labourers so if women cultivators engage in

household industry, they enjoy more freedom than the women labourers who are engaged in household industry. There cannot be any single factor which shapes patterns of female labour participation in agricultural production. It can be the nature of production, demand for labour, the labour supply available, cultural factors such as who may work at which job. All these are, important to varying degrees in different places and times. Again declining household industry also affects the economic position of women. Our data shows that next to agriculture, household based, weaving is the second activity where women are engaged in large numbers. Here too, women are losing the power to control production and sale of the products. In the traditional Meitei society women used to weave not only for the family but also to sell in the market which provided each woman additional income for herself and for the family. This sale too is passing out of their hands.

Declining economic position of women also reflects itself in the political participation of women. Our review on political participation of women shows shifts in the nature and extent of political participation. The involvement of the earlier generation in the struggles of women's agitation 1904 and 1939 was clearly illustrated through our case reports. Women are losing their power in the society as their economic position has worsened. Though women are still active, the nature of

political participation has altered. Participation in direct economic struggles is comparatively less. This is well substantiated through our interviews with the younger generation of women.

Another macro trend that emerged from data analysis is a decline in sex ratio despite increase in literacy rate among women. Though we have not collected data on these aspects to pinpoint the cause of decline, it can surely be explained by declining socio-economic status of women for which we have evidence, even though female literacy rate has increased since the formation of state. Our present study shows a lack of impact of education on sex ratio. In fact literacy rates were very low till 1941, they became 15.9 per cent in 1961 and 39.5 per cent in 1991. Thus, the earlier higher social status of women was despite a lower literacy rate among women and the later improvement in literacy rates did not stop decline in social status. This reveals the importance of entitlements and economic and political status of women and their participation in political and economic processes.

This is indeed a paradox because in most other areas, like Kerala, high levels of female literacy is associated with higher sex ratio. Available studies on Manipur have not really explained the paradox. Ashish Bose (1975) while explaining declining sex ratios in India mentioned that demographers have put forward various hypothesis to

explain the lower female to male ratio. The reasons cited included the higher underenumeration of females in the Indian census, the higher mortality rates of females, the neglect of girl babies, the general neglect of women at all ages, the diverse impact of frequent and excessive child bearing on the health of women- especially those in the reproductive age groups - and the higher incidence of certain diseases particular to women.

Education alone cannot improve the status of women in Manipur. Therefore, actual increase in literacy must not lead to complacency. Besides education we need to improve other socio-economic conditions for improving the status of women in Manipur.

These changes in the larger context of status of women in Manipur are reflected on our qualitative explorations among the Meitei women. Some of the suggested trends emerging in women's lives are:

- Declining women's role as traders in the market which was the central focus for women in the earlier generations;
- Declining control over money and decision making at the family level.
- Though the level of freedom in matters relating to choice of marital partner and decide their age at marriage are still enjoyed by women, the levels of freedom to move freely are decreasing.

- Declining role of social institutions such as 'marup' to provide support to women.
- Decreasing women's participation as collective action in the political sphere.
- Increase in the practice and amount of dowry taken at time of marriage
- Increased literacy among the younger generations.

These changing trends indicate decline in socio - economic position of women. Even though education has increased among the younger generation, their control over money and decision making seem to be declining. Women's relation with the market is changing. Women's direct control over decisions regarding what to do with agricultural produce and woven cloth is declining because their role as producers has reduced. Moreover, educated women prefer job in the government or semi-government sector. Our qualitative exploration shows that educated daughters do not want their illiterate mothers to be traders. The more educated women now place value on jobs in government or semi government sector. Besides this transformation, society has also placed value on the amount of dowry family gives. This means Meitei society is changing gradually from a more or less



homogenous society to a stratified one even though comparatively it is less stratified than other highly stratified populations in India.

Social institutions such as 'Marup' that used to provide support to mothers are also declining. In such a situation we can raise many questions regarding women's status and well being. what will be the likely impact of this on their health status? How long will Manipur maintain the low infant mortality rate which is closely linked to women's capability if these trend still continues?

Shivakumar's (1995) index of 'maternal advancement' that focuses on maternal education (knowledge), control over reproduction and gainful employment shows an indirect relationship to maternal mortality. Even though he has suggested that Manipur's socio- cultural context gives greater freedom to women and favours low infant mortality rate, he has given much more emphasis on literacy, occupational status and marital choice in his actual analysis. However our analysis of the socio-economic context of Manipur over a period of time shows status of women is not improving along with education. Declining economic hold of women on resources must have an affect women's well being and for child care. Although women in Manipur still enjoy relatively greater freedom, their status has been declining so

we need to check these trend and ensure the future for their well being and health.

Therefore, we can conclude that besides education the socio-economic and cultural context shapes the status of women in Manipur's Meitei society and it has great importance in improving their status and well being. Though our indepth study is small, it gives important indication for further research and its direction. Apart from exploring groups other than the Meiteis and strengthening the quantititative analysis, the present study has raised some interesting issues on the nature of Manipur's social transformation. These questions need to be further examined systematically to highlight the importance of comprehensive development rather than piece meal interventions to improve education and reproductive health of women alone.

## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW GUIDE :

To explore women's life history , experiences, opinions, ideas, suffering, level of freedom that they enjoyed etc., interview guide was focussed mainly on the following aspects.

- Age at marriage and marital choice.
- Occupation, income and role in decision making.
- Control over her own income and spends on what?
- Household chores.
- Relationship at home, work place, social and religious activity.
- Husband occupation and income.
- Dowry practices
- Rights over property
- Her preferences, struggles and priorities
- Perception on changes in women's life over a period of time.
- Perception on herself and women's life during her time.
- What are the changes taking place at the present generation.
- Role of marup as a community bonding.
- Her life history and background, etc.

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