

**WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND SEARCH FOR
EQUAL STATUS: A CASE STUDY OF
MEETEI WOMEN IN MANIPUR**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment
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DECLARATION

This dissertation entitled "Women's Organizations and Search for Equal Status: A Case Study of Meetei Women in Manipur" submitted by Ms. Laisom Chanu Sheeleima in partial fulfilment of Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any University. We recommend that this dissertation should be placed before the examiners for their consideration for the award of M.Phil., Degree.

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Preface

In the last two and a half decades, we have been witnessing various women's movements. These movements have been trying to answer the questions posed by various women's groups, associations, organizations etc. The major questions that these groups address pertain to women being oppressed, suppressed and depressed. And the main aim of these struggles is to achieve greater equality for women in society.

Formal equality, it must be said, is not enough for improving women's life. This has been witnessed by us now. In spite of women being granted the same political rights, the problems faced by women have not been eradicated. Society remains biased against women and this is so because of the nature of the social structure itself. Consequently, we need to analyse the ways in which gender has been socially and culturally constructed and ascribed.

In India too, various women's movements have been struggling to bring about empowerment of women. Due to social changes and developments, these women's movements have been changing their priorities in different periods of time. The changes are made in order to take care of the problems faced by women in different periods.

The case of Meetei women's movement in Manipur is rather specific. They are active in the public domain and participate in the economy. They do enjoy greater freedom and equality than their counterparts in various spheres of life. However, as will be evident from this study there exist pockets of gender inequality even in Meetei society. This dissertation is divided into three parts. The first chapter focuses the history of women's struggle for equality. The Feminist movement is divided into three frameworks - Liberal, Radical and Socialist. The chapter also examines the Indian Women Movement (IWM) in different periods of time.

The second chapter tries to analyse the status of women in matrilineal societies of Khasi, Garo and Jaintia. It also studies the status of Meetei women in comparison with women in neighbouring tribes : Kukis and Nagas in Manipur. The main focus is to understand the status of Meetei women and see the extent to which Meetei women in patrilineal Meetei society are better or worse off than in other matrilineal societies.

The third Chapter takes up the study of women's organizations. The main focus is on two women's organizations : Manipur Chanura Leishem Marup (Macha Leima) and the Meetei Leimarol Sinnai Sang (MLSS).

The Women's organizations no doubt came up to address the issues of inequality and discrimination prevailing in Meetei society. The main findings based on these two organizations in particular, leads to the conclusion that the women's organization play an important role in society. In addition to empowering women they are an instrument for securing citizenship rights.

Introduction

Manipur was an ancient kingdom dating back to 33 B.C. Being a gateway of India to South East Asia was influenced by her geographical situation and ecology in the shaping of her history and cultural development. The state is located at the extreme northeastern corner of India, was the original home of the Meetei and some groups of Nagas and old Kuki groups. From the fifteenth century till the late nineteenth century, there settled in Manipur the Brahmans, the Muslims and new Kuki groups in search of a new home on political and other grounds. Imphal, the capital of Manipur is believed to date back to around 300 B.C. While the name Imphal is of recent origin, the town itself was grown and developed around *Kangla*, considered to be its most ancient and sacred site, one that dates back to antiquity. People living in the valley are predominantly Hindu and call themselves Meetei and they differ from hills people in their customs, dress codes, food habits and belief systems.¹ However, the term Meetei had gradually widened for historical reasons to incorporate in the recent past western immigrants of different cultural roots under the terms like Meetei Bamons (Meetei Brahmans) and Meetei Pangals (Meetei Muslims).²

¹ N. Vijaya Lakshmi Brara, 1998. Politics, Society and Cosmology in India's North-East, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.1

² Naorem Sanajaoba, 1993. Manipur: Treaties and Documents (1110-1971), vol. I, Mittal Publications, Delhi, p. XI.

Having divided geographically into the hills and the centrally situated valley. The Meeteis are the inhabitants of the valley. The inhabitants of the hills are divided broadly into three major tribes- Kukis, Nagas and Mizos and their sub-tribes (accounting to twenty-nine in numbers). The Manipur valley is cradle of Human civilization and Alfred Lyall rightly describes it as "Oasis of comparative civilization amidst the barbarians".³ In Manipur the tribals of the hill areas are Christians although they followed the primitive religion before the British period. Some of the Meetei still retain the primitive religion of pre-Hinduization and the same is the case amongst the tribal before Christianization. There are very few cases of Buddhists in the state.

Geographically, the state lies in between 23.47°N and 25.41°N latitudes and 93.6°E and 94.48°E longitudes, with an average elevation of 950 meters above sea level. Nagaland in the North, the upper Chidwin districts of Burma and Mizoram in the East and Assam in the West bound it. The total area of the state consists of 22,327 sq. Kilometers more or less remained fixed since 1834 where there was a controversial transfer of the Kobo Valley to Burma. The population of the state is 1,826,714(1991 Census). Physiographically, it can be divided into three regions - (i) Manipur Valley, (2) the Manipur Hills, (3) the Barak plain. The Manipur Valley is one of the

³ Quoted in M. Mc Culloh, 1980. Valley of Manipur, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, p.—.

Himalayan midlands, like the valley of Kashmir, the Dun Valley and the Kathmandu Valley. The Valley area is 700 meters above sea level and oval in shape and surrounded by hills in all sides. The valley has high concentration of population. In less than one twelfth of the state's area it accommodates two third of her population. The average density of population is above 64 persons per square kilometers. The unevenness of the distribution of the population can be known from the fact that 67.5% total population lives in the Central Valley.

The People: Manipur is a state where the 'Meetei' community form more than 60% of the population. The Meeteis are again divided into Hindus, Muslims (Meetei Pangal) and schedule caste (sub divided into 'Lois' and 'Yaithibis'). The other major communities are Nagas and Kukis. According to N. Tombi, before the conversion of the major portion of the valley population to Vaishnavism it is not know with authenticity whether there was any difference in respect of good habits and manner of dress between the valley and hills. This shows the changing pattern of relationship between the hills and the valley in the development of Manipur culture. ⁴

The Meetei and other tribes in the state evolved from a common social stock of the southern Mongoloid. The Meetei in the valley is regarded as having undergone profound social structure and

⁴ N. Tombi, 1972. Manipur: A Study, Raj Store, Poona Bazar, Imphal, p. 27.

evolution of its social prototype under rapid transformation. The tribals in the peripheral regions of hills retained their basic social organization and mode of interaction without much change for a long period in their history. Whereas the Meeteis in the plains have passed from the tribal phase into peasant society. And consequently into socio-political structure of the chiefships, and the state in its historical experience. From the above, we know what is the distinctive difference between Meetei and tribal structure. In fact, the people of Manipur cannot be divided in spite of the existence of several tribes with their own dialects, and customs and traditions. Each one of them has contributed more or less to the building up of the great Manipur tradition where there exists egalitarian form of society. In Manipur historical reasons greatly influenced the independent growth of these social groups with varying degrees of cultural development and civilization, of which the Meetei among these groups are regarded the most dominant and advanced community.

Looking back into the Meetei society in the eighteenth century, there was an influx of migrants and other ethnic inputs into the social stratum. So, since then we have the additional communities, including Meetei Pangal (Muslim), people from states like Bihar, Tripura, West Bengal, Orissa, U.P. etc in the name of spreading Vaishnavism. They intermingled (through with marriage) with the Meetei community and now formed the Meetei Brahmins and other non-Brahmin sections too. This is the reason we can see in the

Manipur Valley, there are people whose features are of typical Mongoloid stock and at the same time whose features are almost near to Aryans.

Political History

The Meetei society is divided into seven clans- Mangang, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Khaba-ngar.ba, Moirang, and Chenglei, which traces their descent. Even the Hindu converts perform ancestor worship (except Brahmins) and other forms of traditional or indigenous way of rites and rituals side by side with the brahminical ways. All these 'Clans' contributed in establishing stable kingdoms in different parts of Manipur.

The development of Manipur, her culture and political entity were never under one supreme political power. The cultural individuality and the feeling of one nationhood were build up through a number of small but almost independent kingdoms. All the clans could establish more or less stable kingdoms in different areas of the state. Moirang and Ningthouja made the most outstanding contribution in the development of culture and statecraft in the state. Various historical reasons greatly influenced the independent growth of these social groups with varying degrees of cultural development and civilization, of which the Meeteis among these groups are regarded the most dominant and advanced community.

However, the small kingdoms in Manipur were in the perpetual conflict of which not only consisted of accession of territory by means of warfare, but also of inter Kingdom competitions in sports and various kinds of athletic feats.⁵ In spite of endless rivalries adequate laws and conventions for diplomatic relations prevailed among the small kingdoms, which had tremendous mutual respect among them. They had a sense of unity and common purpose in the event of facing an external enemy. The most important enemy, which the country had consistent, wars now and then, till the British conquest (1891) was with Burma (present Myanmar). In the event of wars with Burma and with any neighboring country, the kingdoms were united. The individuals in the country were in the state of ceaseless tension for possible aggression by neighbors resulting in the development in every individual's nature, the instinct of self-defense. The small country delinked from the outside world had the means of survival especially in terms of food production, clothing, and other things necessary for life. The country flourished; rich culture and tradition. One of the unique feature of monarchy in Manipur is that of the King, according to Manipuri traditions was never allowed to hoard treasures for himself at the cost of the people. The relation between the king and his subjects was one of partnership in a social set up based on equality and justice.

⁵ N. Tombi, 1972, *Op.cit.*, p. 4.

The political history of Manipur since the first century right unto the end of 1891 A.D. was mainly the history of expansion of Ningthouja rulers at the expense of the said Salais (Clans), hill tribes (Nagas and Kuki groups) and also as that of the neighbors such as Burmese, Tripuris, Cacharis etc. Under 'His' (Ningthouja clan) began to react to the British rule, Kuki and the Meeteis in a positive way.⁶

The period from 1762 to 1891 Manipur State enjoyed an independent and sovereign status, excepting for a period of seven years (1819-1826), also known as Ava Lan or Chahi Taret Khuntakpa during which Manipur was occupied by the Burmese forces. During this period (seven years) the entire population of Manipur fled towards Assam, some were caught and taken to Burma as war prisoners. This was the worst period in the history of Manipur. And the second chaos is the period when king Gambhir Singh in association with his cousin Nar Singh took the help of British East India Company defeating and pushing the Burmese far into their own land and Manipur captured a vast stretch of Burmese area as a conquered land. But the extension of British empire into Manipur was consequent upon domestic strifes in the royal family on the one hand and the success of British diplomacy on the other.

⁶ Majid Hussain, 1994. "Hisotry", Encyclopaedia of India, Volume XXI, Manipur, Rima Publishing House, New Delhi, p. 19

See for futher details on treaties, agreements, and other related things in various works of Naorem Sanajaoba.

The turn in the history of Manipur came at the death of Maharaja Chandrakirti in 1886. He left two warring camps of his sons born to different queens (led by Surachandra and Kula Chandra)⁷. His eldest son Surachandra Singh succeeded him. It was during Surachandra's reign that the dark days of Anglo-Manipur relations set in.

In September 1890, there was fight between the two groups of Manipur princes, which resulted in a palace revolution. Mr. Greewood the political agent in Manipur tried his best to bring about a compromise, but without success. Mr. Quinton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam came to Manipur with a force to settle the matter in palace in March 1891. The Government of Manipur took the British attack as an unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of the state, and therefore the Manipur forces resisted the invading British forces. The British forces could not succeed in their attempt to capture Tikendrajit and Thangal General, the holders of the revolt (palace) and tried for a negotiated settlement. The attempt failed. The Manipuris murdered five British officers.⁸ Enraged by such action the British sent three columns from Kohima, Silchar and Tamu (Burma).

⁷ N. Tombi Singh, 1972. Op. cit, P. 14.

See also, R.C. Majumdar, 1963. British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance, Vol. IX, Pt I, Bombay, where the status of Manipur is discussed in great detail.

⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

The British forces defeated the Manipuris and took over the state administration on 27th April 1891. Manipur became a subordinate state since then.

On the issue of annexation of Manipur by the British, all the divergent views were debated in the British Parliament at London. Public opinion in the British press and the Indian press were unanimous against annexation. Lords Lansdowne, the Viceroy, while appreciating the British right of annexation of the state, remarked that Manipur had not been annexed as a mark of clemency.⁹ The state was regranted to the native Raja Churachand Singh (a minor of hardly five years old) on 29th April 1892. The British Government nominated the political agent in Manipur as urgent. Mr. Major Maxwell assumed a dual role of political agent and superintendent of state. By 1907, when the King attained maturity age, the administration of the state was transferred to the raja assisted by a Darbar – called Manipuri State Darbar. Various sets of rules and laws were implemented for the administration of hills and valley. Under the Manipur administration rule, 1907, the Darbar was bestowed with greater amount of power than the Raja. The vice-president of the Darbar was necessarily to be a British. So, the political head was delinked from direct administration of the state. In 1916, the administration rule was amended. The Vice-President of the Darbar

⁹ Majid Hussain, 1994. "History", Encyclopaedia of India, Op. cit, P.29

was made President and the Maharaja was to be kept aloof from the Darbar. The King was given the power to override the decision of the Darbar only with the approval of the political agent.

The British had introduced a certain dichotomy in the state administration. The Maharaja and the Darbar were not given any power in the administration of hill. They were given power to administer the plain areas only. The hills and hill tribes were to be administered by the political agent and the assistant political agent (Vice-President of Darbar). No Manipuri official was associated in any high ranks Office in the hill administration. It was only in 1931, after the Naga unrest that one Manipuri officer was appointed as Assistant to the President of the Darbar who was in charge of hill affairs.

In 1947, Manipur became a part of the Indian Union. Manipur State Darbar was redesigned as Manipur Council and its members were named as ministers from July 1, 1947. The Maharaja ushered a new era in the state by his administration reforms for associating the people with the governing of the state and announced the formation of a Committee to make the constitution with 17 members, 6 members from the hill areas and five official members. The draft was made and passed for Maharaja's approval. After obtaining the approval of the Maharaja and Interim government of India, it became an Act called the Manipur Constitution Act 1947.

By 15 August 1947, the former President of Manipur Darbar and sometime C.M. handed over the formal charge to Captain M.K. Priyobrata Singh¹⁰ The portfolios were distributed among the ministers with the approval of Governor of Assam. The Maharaja became the master of hill areas. The Maharaja celebrated the Indian Independence Day by hoisting Pakhangba flag in front of Council Hall.

Maharaja's reign lasted upto 1949 and the state for a brief period functioned as any independent Kingdom (He and Council of Ministers). Various movements in the form of strikes, Satyagraha, Hartals etc. Started in favor of merger with Indian dominion. The Chief of the Communist went to Burma for integration with Burma.¹¹ One of the local parties, who strongly opposed the merger, was 'prajashanti sabha' Maharaja left to Shillong by September for clarification of pending election cases. Shri Prakasa, the then Governor of Assam forced him to merge Manipur with India as the fulfillment of India's Government's desire. He signed the merger agreement with India under the pressure of Sardar Patel on 15th October 1949. He was given an annual pension of Rs. 3 Lakhs (from noon of 15 October). The Constitution Act 1947 became in operative. Legislative Assembly was dissolved, council of Ministers dismissed, the Chief Court was abolished by the order of the Government of

¹⁰ Pan Manipuri Youth League. 1993. "Bharatki Loilam Manipuri", Imphal, 25th Issue, p. 25.

¹¹ Ibid., p.

India. However, the validity of the 'merger agreement' of Manipur is still debated.

Manipur became a 'state' under a Chief Commissioner. The annual allowances of Rs. 6270/- Payable to Manipur for Kobo valley was continued by the British and the Government of free India upto 1958. The former Maharaja of (his Highness Churachand and his Highness Boddhachandra) urged upon the Chamber of Princes, Government of India, and the British authority for the suitable measures for the restoration of the valley of Manipur. A delegation met the Defense Minister who refused flatly to open the issue afresh. Under the Chief Commissioner all Central Acts had been extended in Manipur. By 1950-51 introduced an advisory form of Government. By 1957, a territorial Council of thirty elected members and two nominated members replaced the advisory rule. With the passing of Government of Union Territories Act 1963, the existing Territorial Council Constituted under the territorial Council Act of, 1956 had been converted into the territorial Legislative Assembly in June 1963. The Act provided a Legislative Assembly of thirty elected members and a council of three ministers for Manipur. Manipur continued to be administered by the President of India through the administration. The Congress with Sri M. Koirang as C.M. ruled Manipur till the next election held on February 1967. Next General Election Koirang got the majority and formed the ministry. In this ministry Smt. A. Bimola

Devi and Smt. R.T. Shining were nominated by the Central Government under section 3(3) of the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963.

By October 4th 1967, Mr. Thambou Singh became CM (he is one of the defectors from Congress who formed united front). Ten years of Congress ruled was over. Again there was tussle in the Assembly claiming by Koireng that he can prove majority in the house. The crisis was over by October 25, 1967 (twenty days of Thambou government) proclaiming President's rule (six months).

On February 1968, Koireng became CM again. His ministry falls on 24 September 1968 and by October 16, President Rule was imposed.

The Advisory form of Government introduced in 1950-51, under the Chief Commissioner with selected advisory council members was replaced by territorial council providing thirty elected and two nominated members. Manipur became a full-fledged state of India (20th state) on the 21st January 1972. And established sixty Assembly Constituencies. Nineteen out of these are reserved for the scheduled tribes. In the Lok Sabha, one seat is for reserved category (ST) and the other is occupied by 'general'. And there is only one seat in Rajya Sabha unreserved.

Women in Manipur

Women have always made a very significant contribution to their societies, but a patriarchal conspiracy has prevented women's contribution from receiving its due recognition. The reason is that society legitimizing myths, the creation of written historical records and production of authoritative self-knowledge have all been enterprises controlled by males.¹²

So, various women's movement comes up to do away with the factors that are hampering the free growth of their personality. These movements have questioned the inferior status and position of women in the society.

The status of women in Brahminical India is far from being 'equal'. Many socio-religious factors including marriage, property, custody of children, restrictions based on taboos, customs and traditions, hamper to the fullest development of their personality. However, the case is not the same if we look into women in tribal society.

Women in tribal society enjoy greater equality than in the non-tribals spheres of free movement and greater social interaction, economic contribution in the family etc. But, this is not applicable to

¹² Patricia Oberoi, 1990 (April 28). "Feminine Identity and National Ethos in India Calender Art", Economic and Political Weekly, p. Ws-41.

those tribals who have accepted the Hinduized way of life. They suffer from various inequalities, associated with Hinduized norms. However, the status of tribal women in the NorthEast region is higher than in any other parts of India. This can be known from the fact that in the NorthEast, women play a very important role in the economic spheres. Most of them actively contribute in the economic well being of the family. In spite of all these, women in tribal societies in North-East as anywhere else suffer from various unequal citizenship rights – less literacy rate, non-entitlement of father's property, no rights to custody of children, and most importantly negligible amount of participation of women in politics.

But, if we look at the Meetei society, we have the Meetei society have adopted the Brahminical or Hinduized way of life since the last ~~two~~ and a half centuries back. In spite of this, the Meetei women do enjoy greater equality in society in comparison to women in other Hindu societies. Moreover, the degree of equality is in fact more than other neighboring tribes in the state itself. This can be cited especially in terms of greater economic participation and greater religious role of the women. Mention can be made of the Ema Keithel (women's market) exclusively run by women only. It is believed that this has been in existence since the last fifteenth century onwards.

However, Manjushree Sircar states that there are two historical events – a devastating male depopulation resulting from protracted

warfare (between Burma and Manipur, ended by Indo-Burmese treaty of 1926) and the advent of colonial rule in 1892 have had a considerable impact on Meetei sex role and social relationships.¹³ But these cannot be claimed as the sole reasons behind greater equality and freedom. Meetei way of life-custom, tradition and culture have had added the two historical reasons in bringing about greater participation of women in the public domain. Thus widened the space to women for free exercise of her rights in social and economic spheres.

Whatever the cases may be, the Meetei women's higher status and active participation in socio-economic and religious life do not lead to women's active participation in the political spheres. This has made us think that in Meetei society too there prevails the usual subordination of women. In spite of being in the public domain, they are not able to take up important and crucial decisions independently, mainly at political and family levels. It is doubtful whether the income incurred by themselves through small trading and otherwise are free to be exercised by themselves at their own will.

The problem in Meetei society is further added by various problems, which have been cropped up by changes and development in society, in the name of paving the way towards modernization. These have brought about various problems in the society and

¹³ Sircar, Chaki, Manjushree, 1984. Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley, Vikas Publications, New Delhi, p. viii.

society-cases of drug addiction, problems of AIDS, rising heights of unemployment rates among the educated youths, very much affects the whole society. Now, women are victims of various forms of discrimination – rape, molestation, victimization, harassment and others. In the process, various women’s organizations have come up to do away with the evils in society, which has been widening the gap between men-women.

However, in Manipur, it would not be wrong to say that the very idea for the establishment of a responsible government was successfully planted by the women.¹³ From the very ancient times, Manipur women always led non-violent and peaceful movements before menfolk use to take arms. They even corrected the injustice done, by the king or by any officials of the states, by reporting the matter to the king. They were able to postpone the scheduled program of the king if the royal programme affects the interests of the state. This was evidently proved when Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh postponed the catching of elephant or ‘Samutanba’ program upto the end of harvest.¹⁴ During the British rule, Nupi Lan was a great landmark. Although the movement was launched only by the womenfolk of the country, it brought a drastic positive impact in every

¹³ N. Joykumar Singh. 1992. Social Movements in Manipur, Mittal Publications New Delhi, p. 92.

¹⁴ Naorem Sanajaoba, (ed.), 1998. Manipur: Past and Present, vol. 1, K.M. Mittla Publication, Delhi, p. 168.

aspects of the life of people particularly in the administrative system of the state. After this movement, the colonial authority brought many changes particularly in the fields of revenue, law and justice etc., which was a long demand of the people. The unique nature of the movement was that though it was started spontaneously against the rice export policy of the Government and monopolistic character of the outside traders later on the character of the movement was changed. It became a strong movement for the Constitutional and administrative reforms in the state. This resulted in the emergence of new Manipur after the end of the Second World War. Thus, the process of responsible government was established. But in spite of having the history of women's participation in the political affairs of the state. In the present context women are not taking active part in politics. One of the reasons may be women are more concerned with problems which affect their daily life such as poverty, rising prices, unemployment, break down of law and order etc. The unity between politics, economy and social issues was one of the causes for greater participation of women before independence.¹⁵ And the divorce between social problems that affects women directly and the political process may be one of the causes of the lower participation of women in recent years.¹⁶ However, other than local political leaders,

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

women's organizations and women pressure groups have also a very important role in imparting real political education to women.

The main argument lies here on the fact that, in history, Meetei women, has taken up very active part in all spheres of life – socio-economic and political. In spite of this, Meetei women at the present time are not in equal position with men, in the real sense of the term. This has made us to think about the inherent gender biases prevailing in the Meetei society, like anywhere in the world. I have used the examples of two women's organizations: Manipur Chanura Leishem Marup (Macha Leima) and Meetei Leimarol Sinnai Sang (MLSS), in order to find out the issues of equality faced by women in contemporary Meetei society.

After studying these two organizations, I have concluded that, in the study of women's voluntary organizations, a new dimension has been added to the nature and function of women's voluntary organizations. The new dimension is on safeguarding citizenship rights, which is very much necessary in Manipur. Mainly due to various socio-political and law and order situation in the 'state'.

CHAPTER - I

Women share the burden and problems of men, suffering economically or politically, as well as from whatever social or communal discrimination there may be, but over and above they have the disadvantage of being women. Society remains male dominated even at the end the twentieth century. An increasing number of people, including men are realizing what Mahatma Gandhi stressed: namely that no movement, no programmes can succeed if half the population is kept out. So women's participation is an essential element of human development. Because by participation women are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political process that affect their lives.

People today have an urge, and an impatient need to participate in the events and processes that shape their lives.¹ Women are the major contributors in people's participation. They not only comprise the majority of those excluded from participation, but now they play a leading role in the emergence of groups, organization and movements worldwide, and are becoming increasingly active in their communities, governments and international arena. The importance of women's participation can be looked from various angles. Without equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and levels of decision making,

¹ Marilee, Karl. 1995. Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision Making. Women and Development Series, Zed Books Ltd., London and New Jersey, p. 1.

no true democracy and no true people's participation can be established. Women's full participation is very much required in the development process and the goals targeted. The participation of women helps in focussing attention on the most neglected portion of the humanity (women and girl children). It will help in the process of changing the unequal balance of decision making power and control in the relations of men and women in the household, in the workplace, in communities, in government and in the international arena. But inspite of the importance of their equal participation, most of the women are still behind four walls of the house. They seldom hold top positions and power in almost all the societies. In order to help in answering the question of women's oppression, various feminist² movements come up with the common aim of equality in family and society, the right to one's own body, the opening of wider opportunities for self development and a refusal to be regarded merely as sex symbols.

Feminism is not one, but many, theories or perspectives and each one attempts to describe women's oppression, explain its causes and consequences, and prescribe strategies for women's liberation. Taking into account these differences in ideological perspectives, analysts have often classified women's movements primarily as Liberal, Radical, and Socialist. Each of these orientations offer the question of 'equality'.

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² Ibid., p. 35.

An international workshop entitled 'Feminist Ideology and Structures, in the first half of the 'Decade for Women' 1979 identified two long-term feminist goals. The oppression of women is rooted both in inequities and discrimination based on sex and poverty, and the injustice of the political and economic systems based on race and class. Firstly, the freedom from oppression for women involves not only equity, but also right of women to freedom of choice, and the power to control their own lives within and outside of the home. The second goal is the removal of all forms of inequity and oppression through the creation of a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.³ Feminism aims not simply for equal rights but for a transformation of all oppressive relationship in society.

While this is the goal that is frequently shared by women's movements today, the first wave of women's movement was inspired by the philosophy of liberal democracy, particularly its emphasis on individual autonomy. The conceptual tools for demanding freedom of choice and the right to determine one's own desires, needs and interest was provided by the philosophy of liberalism. The liberal feminist used the idea of equality to demand equal rights for men and women. The struggle was for democratic rights of women. It included the right to education and employment, the right to own property, the right to vote, the right

³ Ibid., p. 35.

to enter Parliament. They fought for legal reforms for an equal position in law and society.

In the history of liberal feminist thought, although the French Revolution did little to further the emancipation of women in France, the ideas behind the revolution were important in the development of feminism in England and USA (the forerunners of liberal feminism).⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft's 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' was the one of the earliest statement about equality of women in England. Her writing remained an important ingredient in equal rights feminism throughout the whole of the twentieth century and has had a profound influence on feminist thinking down to the present day.⁵ Olive Banks says that in America the workings of the 'Declaration of Independence' was the inspiration for the feminist principles that emerged from the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. It is widely regarded as the beginning of organized feminism in USA and it arose out of a renewal of friendship between Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton when the Motts visited friends at Seneca Falls. Out of the paraphrase of the 'Declaration of Independence' the authors claimed that men and women are created equal and share in the inalienable rights endowed by their creator. They applied the language of natural rights to the relationship between men and

⁴ Olive Bank. 1981. Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement, Martin Robertson, Oxford, p. 28.

⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

women and laid claims to the equality of sexes that was at the centre of campaign for equal rights feminism.

In Britain, organised feminist movement came into existence only in 1856. Various feminist writers started working on women's problem through the formation of committee and by publishing journals. The main issues that were of immediate interests to the movement were property rights of married women, employment of women, higher education for girls, right to vote and other associated problems faced by women in society.

In both the countries, the battle for legal right was an important aspect of feminist movement. Questioning the doctrine of the unity of married couples, these feminist argued that without a legal identity of her own, a deserted or ill treated wife was unable to use the law to defend her interests. Within marriage she had no rights over her own person; her own property, her earnings, and even her own children. Commenting on this J.S. Mill described the authority of the husband over the wife as domestic tyranny comparable with that of the power of absolute ruler over his subject or that of a slave over his slaves⁶. But if we look deeper the struggle to change the legal position of married women was only one of the issues that occupied the early years of the feminist movement. More important than this was the struggle to increase employment opportunities for women and as a necessary

⁶ John Stuart Mill. 1955. The Subject of Women. Frankau, London J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., Aldine House, London. p. 247.

prerequisite to this, the need to improve the educational qualifications of those seeking employment.

Liberal feminism in the early years focussed on the concept of equality in the civil and political sphere. However, later on they extended it to areas of female experience formerly viewed as private and untouched by traditional programmes. It demanded child care facilities and control over one's own reproductive life as a basic right for all women. Issues of sexuality and sex division of labour in housework were also raised.⁷ In each of these spheres, liberal feminists wanted equal rights to men and they saw this as a source of their empowerment.

According to Diana Coole the structural reforms needed to bring the liberal version to fruition remained patchy within the liberal feminist.⁸ There was another kind of ambiguity that also plagued this framework. As a small minority of women succeeded in the job market, they paid other women to perform domestic work. Thus, for many the opportunity to work simply meant combining industrial and domestic drudgery inadequately. However, despite everything, it must be noted that liberal feminist movement laid the foundation of women's struggles.

⁷ Lise Vogel. 1983. Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory, Pluto Press, London, p. 47.

⁸ Diana H. Coole. 1988. Women in Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., Boulder, Colorado, p. 235.

Going beyond the framework of liberal feminism, radical feminist celebrate feminine values and traits, such as, nurturing and closeness to nature. They stress on the need to respect, value and incorporate these attributes in all aspects of social and political life. They also identify patriarchy, or pervasive male domination of society, as a root cause of women's oppression.⁹ Radical feminism, or the women's liberation movement, began early in the 1960's, when small groups of women activists in the civil rights movement began to be conscious of the limited role assigned to women in the movement and in particular their exclusion from decision making and their relegation to domestic and other auxiliary chores. The attempt by these women to raise the issues of women's rights had met with a refusal to listen to their arguments. As a result of the humiliation that some of them had experience personally at the hands of men, they sought new allies.

Radical feminist movement's main opposition is to what it sees as patriarchy or women's oppression by man, a concept far wider and more radical than the notion of equal rights used by the early liberal feminists. Radical feminists have replaced the struggle for vote and for legal reform with the demand for the destruction of patriarchy. Their main contention is that the roots of subordination lies in the institution of family, the hierarchical sexual division of society and sex roles themselves. Biological differences, in their view, have been translated into male domination over women. To

⁹ Marilee Karl. 1995. Op.cit, p. 34.

fight against this, they emphasize freedom of sexual preference, control over one's body, free sex experience and collective child care. In addition to it radical feminists stress the need to build solidarity among women and to make women self reliant so that they are not dependent on men in any sense. At another level, they place a positive value on the equality that women possess of child bearing and nurturing. On the whole they want to change the general perspective of society. In this connection some radical feminists opined that a literary work should provide role models for women. It should instill a positive sense of feminine identity by portraying women who are self actualizing, whose identities are not dependent on men. Literature should show women in activities that are not traditionally feminine to speed the dissolution of rigid sex roles. The women's liberation movement analyzed the programmes on television and on that basis argued that, even though a few series features female doctors or lawyers or television programme producers, women's behaviour and their relationship with men generally follows the familiar stereotyped pattern. Women are in most instances caricatured and represented as objects of gratification.

Radical feminism attempted to shift the perception of society, to restructure it in terms of a radically new set of woman-centred meanings. It aimed to recast personal identities, to reclaim language and culture from their masculine forms, to relocate significant political power to reassess human nature and to challenge traditional values. Radical feminists emphasized that

feminist goals cannot be achieved without changes in the relationship between men and women, and this entailed the transformation of traditional sex roles and traditional family structure. To realise this end, however, radical feminism did not prescribe any single doctrine. These were, and continue to be, significant differences among its exponents on the issue of how family can be restructured. So as to enhance equality and justice.

The third category of feminism, namely socialist feminism, emphasizes the interconnectedness of the oppression of women with oppression based on class, race and other social, cultural and political factors. Women's inferior status in their view is rooted in private property and class divided society. The overthrow of the capitalist system by itself will not mean transformation of patriarchal ideology, what is needed is a struggle against capitalism and patriarchy. Socialist feminist writer Mitchel differentiates women's condition into four separate structures: production, reproduction, socialization and sexuality.¹⁰ Each structure develops separately and requires its own analysis, but together they form the 'complete' unity of women's position. In the area of wage labour she observes that the most elementary demand is not the right to work or the right to receive equal pay for work but the right to equal work itself. Some socialist feminists speculated that family inspite of being associated with reproduction, sexuality and the realisation of children, also serves

¹⁰ Diana H. Coole. 1988. Op.cit, p. 242.

ideological, biological as well as economic functions. Even if a socialist mode of production requires the end of the family as an economic unit, it cannot end the family as an ideological and biological unit. Women's oppression will persist unless our psyches have a revolution equivalent to the economic one that effects the transition from capitalism to socialism. The main thrust behind this is that, even after the end of the struggle for 'class', inequality will still persist. The need is to fight against gender inequality and gendered biases.

Thus the women's movement has modified its goals according to the need of the time, and in relation to the stages of development. The present day feminist movement has not emerged in a vacuum; the seeds were planted by our mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers who fought for women's rights as strong individual women, as part of the movement for the right to vote or for education of women, as part of social reform movements, workers movements, independence and national liberation struggles¹¹. Among the liberation struggles mention can be made of the women who have played significant role in revolutionary movements, from the march of over 5,000 women to Versailles (France) in 1789, one of the major events of the French Revolution, to the twentieth century liberation movements. While women movements continue to be associated with the struggles for equal pay for equal work, right to abortion, the practice of birth

¹¹ Marilee Karl, 1995. Op.cit., p. 32.

control, the right to determine one's sexuality and other visible marks of gender inequality. On the whole, present day feminist movement is a struggle for the achievement of women's equality, dignity and freedom of choice. It battles to ensure that women have control over their lives and bodies within and outside the home. Hence the general aim is not only to achieve equal rights but to transform all oppressive relationships in society.

Although the feminist movements frequently speak of oppression of women as a generic category, one must recognize the vast differences that distinguish the lives of women in different parts of the world. Even within a country parallel differences marked by class and community membership characterize the lives of women. Hence it is extremely difficult to offer generalization that provides a comprehensive description of the life and struggle of women as a whole so for that matter, even of Indian women in general. But in spite of everything what we call the Indian women's movement emerged as a part of the 'social reform' in the nineteenth century. The first Mahila Mandals (women's clubs) were organized by the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj, the Hindu Revivalist and Reformist Organisation, provided a space for socializing and education. Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833) fought against all kinds of social evils -- Sati, Child Marriage and Purdah. He was a stout champion of women's rights. He condemned the subjugation of women and opposed the prevailing idea that women were inferior to men in intellect or in moral sense. He attacked polygamy and the degraded state to which widows were often reduced . To raise

the status of women he demanded that they be given the right of inheritance and property.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's multifarious resources had convinced him that 'Contemporary Hinduism' was but a modern growth; its prevalent form was corrupt, in comparison with the much exalted philosophical religion of the ancient Rishis¹² He held that early marriage became almost universally prevalent among the Hindus. This results into thousands of young girls becoming widows before they had even seen their husbands or arrived at physical maturity.¹³ Widows in the higher castes were debarred from re-marrying. And act of polygamy was considered a sign of respectability. Another reform was to do with Purdah system. Due to this a woman is condemned to a life long prison, a helpless, prostrate and pathetic figure, with enfeebled health, without the light of knowledge illuminating her vision, steeped in ignorance and prejudice, groping in the dark -- a martyr to the conventions of the society in which she had been born.¹⁴ And the destitution of women lies in the custom according to which all the property is transferred to the male offspring. If the 'old law' (Hindu) would be reinstated, the doomed lot the women could get a ray of hope.¹⁵ The best example of his life long crusade against social evils was

¹² M.C. Kotnala. 1975. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Indian Awakening, Gitanjali Prakashan, New Delhi, p. 30.

¹³ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁴ Quoted in M.C. Kotnala. 1975, Op.cit, p. 29.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

the historic agitation he organised against the inhuman custom of women becoming 'sati': where widows are being murdered under a religious pretext on the funeral pyre of her husband.¹⁶ Through enormous efforts, finally on 4th December 1829, the famous Regulation no. XVII was passed which declared the practice of sati illegal and punishable as a criminal offence.

Another reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), worked for the upliftment of women and fought child marriage and widows remarriage.¹⁷ During his time a widow's right to marry was conceded by the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Later on, child marriage was kept under control by the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929. This was followed by the 'Inheritance Amendment Act of 1929' and the 'Hindu Right to Property Act 1937'. The social reformers of the nineteenth century felt that traditional Hindu customs and institutions, where women are pushed into subordinate position came in the way of progress. They realized that women suffered from various social and cultural hardships which needed immediate redress. There are many debates whether their rationales for the upliftment of women was the production of companionable wives and enlightened mothers, the strengthening of the family structure or simply humanitarian feeling for human and unjust atrocities. But it was the first public

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁷ See for further details in various works of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar.

propagation of belief that it is not destiny or fate of women to be oppressed, illiterate and ignorant.

The early social reformers worked for the upliftment of women by various means. But their works were later supplemented by various women's organizations which came up in the early twentieth century. Around this time women's organizations based on language, religion or welfare service proliferated all over India. And by 1930, mass participation of women was there in the Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. Under the Presidentship of Dr. Annie Besant, the Women's Indian Association was formed at Adayal (Madras) on 8th May 1917 with the main objective of working to achieve social equality for women.¹⁸ The All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) was established in 1924 and had grown to become the single largest national voice of the divergent groups and political tendencies. Its demands included co-education, reforms of law including marriage, divorce and inheritance, economic equality a right to one's husband's income and pension for widows and surprisingly the right to abortion. Many middle class women found a place in the expanding service and educational sectors, government structures or the professions. This numerically small but conspicuous entry into formerly prohibited areas gave rise to image of the new emancipated Indian women.

¹⁸ Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah. 1992. The Issue at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India, Kali for Women, New Delhi, p. 18.

Independence of India opened the doors for the women of the country to find their due place in society and partake in the political, social and administrative life of the country.¹⁹ In 1952, in India's first general election itself twenty two women were returned to the first parliament. Before the first elections (1950), there were only seven²⁰ women members in the 'House'. They were all members of the 'Constituent Assembly' and were later elected to the first Parliament of the country. And the new adopted Constitution of independent India declared, equality of sexes before the law.

After independence various efforts were made to improve the condition of women in society. Intercaste marriage was allowed by the Hindu Marriage Validity Act of 1949. In terms of property we had Hindu Succession Act of 1956.²¹ The Constitution guaranteed equality to every one (Articles 14 and 15). Some argued that the Constitution adopted a twin approach to the consideration of women's issues. On the one hand, it recognised equality between sexes and on the other, it gave special protection to women as one

¹⁹ Shanta Bhatt. 1995. Women Parliamentarians of India, Shiva Publishers, Udaipur, p. 44.

²⁰ Seven women parliamentarians (1953) are Smt. Jayashri Raji (Bombay), Smt. Annu Swaminathan (Madras), Smt. Dakshayani Velayedhan (Madras), Smt. G. Durgabai (Madras), Smt. Kamla Chaudhari (U.P.) Smt. Sucheta Kripalani (U.P.) and Smt. Uma Nehru (U.P.).

²¹ See for further details on Hindu Succession Act of 1956, Bina Agarwal, 1996. A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia, Cambridge University Press, UK and Foundation Books, New Delhi in association with the Book Review Literary Trust, New Delhi.

of the weaker sections of the society. For example, Article 15(3) states that 'nothing in this article prevent the state from making special provision for women.

The special facilities provided for women were very important in the Indian context, because in their absence women would be severely handicapped. For instance due to religious practices, many people are not willing to send the girl child to schools which provide co-education. Consequently if separate educational institutions were not provided they would remain illiterate for women have little opportunity to develop their personalities. So special rights are needed and they were intended to give an initial advantage to women so that they could compete with men in various fields effectively. Since women were suppressed for a long period, they lost their initiative, confidence in their capacity to face problems and to equip themselves for various types of professions. It is because of these facts that the Constitution makers considered them weaker sections of the people who required some definite help and initial advantage to compete with men in all spheres of life. Therefore this provision has been described by various writers as 'protective discrimination' and 'adventitious aid for women'.²²

After independence various women's organizations were formed. Many left the Indian women movement at the bitter debate and watering down of the Hindu Code Bill which had proposed

²² Smt. P. Najaboreshanam. 1988. "Social Justice and Weaker Section -- Role of Judiciary," Thesis, Faculty of Law, Cochin University of Science and Technology, p. 288-289.

equal inheritance rights prohibited polygamy, liberalised divorce and custody rights. The unified voice of AIWC faded to other organisations like the National Federation of Indian Women, 1954. It began a new phase of activity marked by increasing interaction and cooperation. It was not only on mobilizing women but on understanding and attacking the sources of their oppression. Till the early 1960's the Indian women movement was focussed on the political rights. But in spite of all these, what remained relatively unchanged is the social status particularly within the communities, family and society. Because in Indian society, the structural inequality is inherent in some caste and religious practices. Women are still subordinated to men. Indian society is predominantly based on the norms of patriarchy and society ordered by powerful ideology of female subordination -- the three bonds of obedience -- to father when young, to husband when married, and to son when old. For this reason, inspite of their participation in economic and political sphere, the question of gender equality remains unattended.²³

Later on various efforts were made towards forming organizations with women as leading protagonists. It occurred in a large number of situations. Women have been important participants in various mass movements aiming for a broad political or social change. Women in these movements do not strive

²³ The Confusian model as equivalent to Manu -- the Hindu Law giver, where women were made entirely dependent on men and subjected her to the authority of her husband, and son in her different periods of life as daughter, wife and mother.

for autonomous or independent articulation of their women specific demands. Women's exclusive demands include equal or better working conditions, equal pay for equal work, better or more job opportunities by strengthening informal sectors for female employees. The main cause of the uprising of these movements include the political or organizational unrest of the 1960's and 1970's. It created room for growth of organizations with women as leading protagonists. Mention can be made of the anti-price-rise movement which mobilized large number of women in cities like Bombay and Ahmedabad. The movement of Adivasis and the strength of the Sharmik Sangathana in Maharashtra's Dhulia district is another of the significant movement of the pre-emergency era. It was a movement for restoration of the social and economic dignity of the disinterested tribal peasantry of Shahad whose lands and assets had been appropriated by settlers from outside. Other movements where women were included as active participants are Bodhgaya land struggle, the Bidi workers in Nipani, workers' struggle in Chhattigarh, the farmers' movement in Maharashtra. Women's participation in these movements does not necessarily make them women's movements. But since a large number of women were mobilized, they acted as a pressure group for the formulation of struggles, issues from a women's perspectives. However, one of the most significant feature in this period is the Chipko movement in the Uttarakhand Himalayas where village women resisted commercial forest felling. The movement raised crucial questions of ecological balance and

developmental priorities. It based its campaign for women's mobilisation on the latter's special responsibilities for nurture related activities and generalized from this fact that women had a special concern for the preservation of life and ecological system.²⁴ Relating to this, Vandana Shiva stated that Indian Women have been in the forefront of ecological struggles to conserve forests, land and water.²⁵ Looking into the sphere of development process, the Indian women have challenged the western concept of nature as an object of exploitation and have protected her (nature) as 'Prakriti', the living force that supports life. They further challenged the western concept of economics as production of profits and capital accumulation with their own concept of economics as production of sustenance and needs satisfaction. In India women's ecology movements, as the preservation and recovery of the feminine principle, arise from a non-gender based ideology of patriarchy which underlines the process of ecological destruction and women's subjugation and the gender based responses which have until recently, been characteristic of the west. During this period there was often an entire range of issues around which mobilization took place. Fighting state structure, making demands on the state, questioning developmental or ecological paradigm each call for different levels of mobilisation, as do extensions of all

²⁴ Shobita Jain. 1984 (October 13). " People's Ecological Movement: A Case Study of Women's Role in the Chipko Movement in U.P." Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XIX, no. 41, p. 1788.

²⁵ Vandana Shiva. 1989. Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India, Kali for Women, New Delhi, p. 14-16.

political struggle into the personal lives of the women in the struggle.

By late 1970's, various women groups were formed. Several factors were responsible, including the Indian Government Report in 1975 (International Women's Year). The report of the 'National Committee on the Status of Women' gave a boost to the formation of many informal women groups in India. The document portrayed the conditions of women including low and declining female participation in the labour force, high unemployment and underemployment of women, an increasing literacy gap between men and women and the declining sex ratio in favour of males. The report attributed these developments to the process of modernisation and uneven development that has deprived women of their traditional productive roles and protection. Women have become devalued and subject to violence.²⁶ The other most important factor was the experience of women's activists in the protest movement. Women activists addressed women's issues, while male activists worked on the more important class or caste issues. And in spite of everything women's oppression was seen as secondary to class oppression. So, new consciousness of women and on women's issues concretized into a host of small voluntary women's groups. It was also concerned with violence on women. Rape and battery, divorce, maintenance and child custody, further legislative reforms, spreading of educational facilities and along

²⁶ Jodi Dean (ed.). 1977. Feminism and New Democracy: Resisting the Politics, Sage Publications, New Delhi, p. 112.

with these the attack on sexist and stereotyped text books. Equality not only equal work, but equal opportunities to work and with equal pay. This new trend in the women's movement was a product of changing social, economic and political climate in the country and a changing perception of women's oppression. AIWC and the majority of Mahila Mandals explain women's secondary status as the result of social customs, aberrations in religious practices and increasing materialist and acquisitive attitude of a consumerist society. So, the whole problem lies in the construction of gender relation in society.

Hence, in all campaign on violence against women gender relations were the primary point of focus. Oppression which came out of patriarchal system had to be fought automatically from other oppressions. There was the policy on the exclusive or essential understanding of violence against women. We can understand this from the position taken in the report of the 'National Conference of Women's Liberation' in 1988. "We started with the basic insight that violence is inherent in all social structures of society like class, caste, religion, ethnicity, etc. and in the way the state controls people. However, within all those general structures of violence, women suffer violence in a gender specific way and patriarchal violence permeates and promotes other forms of violence.²⁷ The present retrograde ideological developments and opportunistic politics has also brought in its make an escalation of violence

²⁷ Ibid., p. 113.

which particularly affects women. Rape is used as a weapon of political intimidation on women.²⁸ And also rape is a violation of a human right of a woman to have control over her body. It is not just sexual offence, it is an exhibition and confirmation of power.²⁹ Here mention can be made of the rape case of a 'Sathin' (Rajasthan) worker, Mrs. Banwari Devi who protested against child marriage. Because of her protest along with other workers, she became the victim of gang rape. The then ruling government could not solve the problem and it was pushed under the carpet. So given the patriarchal ideology of family and community honour as resting on women, they are invariably the primary targets of attack by the other groups. The newly formed youth and students groups look into the everyday realities of women's lives and the atrocities committed on them. Violence on women has been usually seen as symptom of class oppression, a breakdown of law and order or given humanitarian concern are now perceived as a manifestation of the unequal relationship between men and women in society. Their arguments are based on revised understanding of the concept of patriarchy or the domination and exploitation by men of women's labour, fertility and sexuality. The new groups called for a transformation in man-woman familial, economic and cultural relationship in society.

²⁸ Veena Poonacha. 1994. "Gender Step: Review of Two Decades of Women's Movement and Women's Studies", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. IX, no. 4, p. 725.

²⁹ Quoted in Jean Dean (ed.). 1977. Op.cit. p. 115.

Another dimension of contemporary women movement other than the focus on crime and oppression against women, is the development activities taken up by various women groups. Women's organizations adopted welfare approach; focussing their programmes on skill training and income generation schemes. So, they have been drawn into income generation programmes; rural credit activities, skill development programmes, marketing and social support system such as crèches, etc., requiring their participation in government schemes and gender training programmes.³⁰

Inspite of helping to develop women's economic independency, the government is on the other hand negligent in bringing about gender equality and various other related things. This can be counted from the fact that in our country more than 70% of the population live in villages and their main livelihood is agriculture and other agricultural related activities. Various reforms measures have been guaranteed in the Constitution to do away with the remnants of feudalism in the country. Various land reforms in 1950's and 1960's included the zamindari abolition and other types of intermediaries. One of the results is the creation of new rural elites. Due to them, there developed a feudal type of operation in the villages. So, over the last two or three decades, these upper and middle class peasants as a bloc have consolidated their economic power to the extent that they have not only come to

³⁰ Veena Poonacha. 1994. "Gendered Step: Review of Two Decades of Women's Movement and Women's Studies", Op.cit, p. 725.

control political, economic and social life in the village, but are now also extending their influence at the district, state and in recent years, even at the national level. The need of the hour is that the traces of feudalism should be abolished through proper implementation of 'laws'. Stringent measures have to be taken up by the state. Because even though land has been granted to landless peasants, in actual practice they are not in a position to have any say on the acquired land. Their life is circled around feudal norms, under the rich landed peasants. So proper implementation of land reforms with an aim to lessen concentration of land in the hands of rich and abled peasants are very necessary. All the above has been talked about with the understanding that women consists almost half of the population of India. Along with this idea will come up proper implementation of law granting property rights (land) to women of all communities. But this has not been without argument from various economists. Many argued that 'land' to the landless is in any case not enough.³¹ How are beneficiaries to farm their land without complementary inputs -- bullocks, water, credit and above all without training in farming skills? Either inputs will also have to be distributed (and skills will have to be learned) or the new cultivators will not be able to farm their plots. So any reforms that redistributes land should be accompanied by changes in the conditions of production. If this targeted goal is fulfilled, majority of the women (generally the

³¹ Inderjit Singh. 1990. The Great Assent: The Rural Poor in South Asia, A World Bank Publication, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, p. 329.

Hindu women) will be benefited through the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 (even though inequality³² still persists between son and daughter). Because for much of humanity, land rights are the economic basis for the survival of the family and women's preclusion from owning land inhibits their participation in decision how land should be used and its produce distributed.³³ This can be materialized along with recognition of equal rights for women.

In India multiple obstacles hamper the equal rights for women. Some are the problems of religious law over secular law. So, even after almost five decades of independence women still do not have access to equal legal rights. The main reason lies in religious laws. Because it has a significance in any definition of state and patriarchy. In all the religious laws women occupy subordinate position to men. Religion occupies an important part in the lives of most Indians and is specially relevant for women because it has a bearing on personal matters through religious 'personal laws'. Having achieved much towards uplifting the status of women in terms of marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody etc., the laws dealing in these areas are still governed by religious 'personal laws'.³⁴ In all 'laws' women have less rights than men.

³² See for more details on Hindu Succession Act of 1956, what is contained in "Mitakshara Coparcenary".

³³ Kotarina Tomasevski. 1998 (December). "Human Rights: 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration", International Social Science Journal, Blackwell Publishers, UNESCO, no. 158, p. 546.

³⁴ Broadly divided into five: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi, and Jews.

The Indian Constitution guarantees equality to everyone. Yet the 'personal laws' that discriminate against women are still being applied almost five decades after the adoption of the Constitution. At the time of framing of Constitution the idea of dual membership was accepted. Individual as a citizen of India and simultaneously he or she is also a Hindu or Muslim or whatever. This creates problems.³⁵ The protection of the cultural community identity and membership has meant a protection of the community's 'personal laws' and this has resulted in the continued subordination of women. There have been a few reformers in 'Hindu Personal Law' to give equal rights to Hindu women. But the 'personal laws' of other minority communities have been sheltered from reform. In any case, due to the existence of 'personal laws' women of all communities continue to have unequal legal rights, and they are yet to gain complete formal equality in all aspects of family law. But this, alone cannot bring gender equality in India. Because the decision of the state to continue with or modify the religious 'personal laws' is very much necessary. A radical change can be achieved when we can set up a structure where it incorporates equality between man and woman. Above this the attack on the 'personal laws' must be multi-dimensional and even so one can only expect to influence the pace of change.³⁶

³⁵ Archana Prashar. 1992. Women and Family Law Reform in India: Uniform Civil Code and Gender Equality, Sage Publications, New Delhi, p. 15.

³⁶ Zarina Bhatti. 1973 (December-January). "The Problem", Seminar, nos. 161-162, p. 11.

The contemporary women movement in India has deviated now on the question of 'Uniform Civil Code'. For those who support on maintaining the 'personal laws', the question lies on the problem that the right of community can be maintained if it guarantees the good of the individuals in the community. Individual rights are precondition of community rights. 'Religious personal laws' centred on different communities can be accepted if they provide 'equality' between husband and wife in the family. But the most important problem lies on setting up the only criteria (which give equality to all women of all communities) to measure equality (between man and woman) among diverse communities, caste, religion, sects, etc.

Women's movement on rights and equality are very much necessary for the betterment of the better half of the society. Women are even sanctioned special laws in order to be able to be at par with men in every aspect. No doubt much improvement is there on the life of women. However, inspite of being given these rights and duties³⁷, we are yet to bring about total equality in society. For this reason, feminists emphasize the need to address gender inequality. According to Katarina Tomasevski, elimination of gender discrimination can be compared to peeling an onion -- once the first layer has been peeled off another one emerges below to reveal yet another underneath. The combination of those different layers required a change in terminology from sex to gender because sex is

³⁷ Fundamental Duties (42nd Amendment Act, 1976) renounces practice derogatory to the dignity of women.

only one of the issues to be tackled.³⁸ Moreover, where sex discrimination can victimize both women and men, gender discrimination denotes the multitude of discriminatory norms that victimize only women.³⁹ However, Gender relations are constructed differently in different cultures. According to variation in cultures, the status and position of women also vary. We need to look into upon the status of women at different cultures. It will help in looking deeper into women's actual exercise of power and independence in the community and society at large.

³⁸ Katarina Tomasevski. 1998. Op.cit., p. 548.

³⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER - II

Historically, up until 1920, the term status was more commonly used to refer to either the legally enforceable capacities and limitations of people or their relative superiority or inferiority. More recently the rights and duties fixed by law have seemed less significant than those fixed by custom. On other occasion, status has been linked to age, sex, birth, genealogy and other biological and Constitutional characteristics are very common bases of status. Nevertheless status is a phenomenon, not of the intrinsic characteristics of men and women, but of social organization and, this is a point that comes across in Dixon's⁽¹⁹⁷⁸⁾ analysis of the status of Woman. So, the analysis on women's access to social resources (including knowledge, power and prestige) within the family, in the community and society at large seem ore appropriate while taking into account the status of women.

Judging by the above criteria, in most of Brahminical India, the status of women is inferior to men in family, community, religious and social spears. Maintenance of he household is the main duty of the woman. However, here too she hardly takes decisions in family affairs. "She is always the shadow of her husband or other male members of the family or community. Because her place is confined within the four walls of the house: where her naturally keen sense dulled through inaction, without the light of knowledge illuminating

her vision, steeped in ignorance and prejudice, groping in the dark-a martyr to the conventions of the society in which she had been born.”¹ In religious practices, too women are never treated at par with men, as they are considered, on account of their biology, unclean. And most importantly in the social sphere the status of women is not due to her own merit but due to her position as a daughter, wife or mother of some man. The birth of a girl is generally an unwelcome event. Almost every-where the boy is valued more than the girl. As a whole women in our society suffer form various socio-religious taboos and restrictions which hamper the free development of ‘her’ personality.

Generally, in India women suffer from numerous fronts. Their concentration is in low skills and they are low paid. Due to the lack of involvement in political arena and economic institutions, they are more discriminated against in day to day life. Along with social and cultural taboos illiteracy is rampant among women. And there are frequent cases of atrocities against women, such as adultery and rape, maltreatment, physical beating and other acts of cruelty. It has been said that while a woman has played many parts in different times and societies, her fundamental role has always been to bear and bring up children in a family environment.

¹ Dr. M.C. Kotnala. 1975. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Indian Awakening, Gitanjali Prakashan, New Delhi, p. 29.

Generally in Brahminical society, the status of women is inferior in every aspects of life. This can be cleared further from the fact that as Srinivas put all India Hinduism as chiefly sanskritic, and under this fold, women still have extremely limited options to extend their role outside the domestic domain.² Among some lower socio-economic communities women enjoy considerable freedom outside their home, but they too are often subjected to pressures from high caste ideology and male domination.³ So Hinduism is associated with a multitude of derogatory attributes ascribe to women. Marriage is very important to obtain life long and special protection from their sons. The patrilineal social structure of Hinduism give importance attached to her sons for maintaining continuity of the live have strengthened patrilineal social structure of Hinduism. Women are also being treated unequal and inferior to men because of the ascribed impurity associated with child birth, restricted from joining religious ceremonies etc. There are many fasts and prayers women have to perform for her husband unlike the husband. And a widow is associated with misfortune and the tradition does not allow widow remarriage but this is not restricted to widower. It is generally perceived that women are being treated as mother and worshipped as goddess. But the object of worship is an embarrassment because of the hardships Indian women have to suffer in the hands of men.

² M.N. Srinivas. 1952. Religion and Society Among the Coors of South India, Asia Publishing House, London, p. 57.

³ Ibid.

However, attempts are sometime made to explain away aspects of women's inferior status. It is argued that women are the primary transmitters of culture, language, knowledge, music, traditions, rituals, remedies, recipes, and behavioural patterns all of which are central to each person's sense of identity. A society's culture is not a static package, and the definition of its essential elements varies from time to time reflecting current power structures and influences.⁴ However, we must remember that essential part of the socialization of girls is to give them the responsibility of transmitting ritualistic behaviour. This ensures that in the observance of the norms of socio religious behaviour women will remain the pillars which uphold those traditions which often resist the changes necessary for deployment.⁵

The inferior status of women in India can, to some extent, be traced to Manu, the Hindu law giver of later Vedic period. By that time women's status had already become gradually inferior. In course of time, there was a gradual erosion of women's rights, regressive customs like child marriage Purdah and sati were practiced. The British rule in India followed the policy of non-interference in internal matters in order to win their cooperation in the administration of the

⁴ Helen O'Connell (prepared by). 1994. Women and the Family, Women and World Development Series, Zed Books, Ltd. London and New York, p. 88.

⁵ Ibid., p. 88-89, Quoted from M. Mukhopadhyay. 1990 (May 14-15). Women's Struggle to Save Forest of India, in Women and Sustainable Development, Report of the Women Forum Bergen, Norway 14-15 May, London.

country. So, the women position went down perceptibly in social status. But the great social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy started the movement for the emancipation of Indian women from the clutches of ignorance and evil social customs. In the end the movement for emancipation of women starting from mid nineteenth century was quickened at the early twentieth century under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Following India's independence the Constitution guaranteed equal legal status to women under Articles 14 and 15. And an addition was made, with the declaration of fundamental duties in 1976 which states that all citizen are to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. But the social backwardness of Indian women points to the great hiatus between their legal status which is more or less equal to that of men, and their actual position in society which is still far from the ideal which exists on paper.⁶

At least in part this inferiority is explained which reference to the structure of patriarchal society. Etymologically 'patriarchy' refers to rule by the father. In patriarchal tradition descent is reckoned through the male line and the children belong to the clan of the male. S. Ruth observes that in a society where men have controlled knowledge and have interpreted the classical texts, it is not surprising that women have lost the power of naming, of explaining and defining

⁶ Kamla Bhasin-Kapur. 1973 (May), "In Education", Seminar, no. 165-171, p. 16.

for themselves, the realities of their own experience.⁷ In patriarchal set up only the masculine definition of every aspect of life is recognized. This indicates that patriarchy is a form of politics. Patriarchy is sometimes defined as the male oppression of women. It is a set of hierarchic relations which has a material base, and in which there are hierarchical relations between men, and solidarity among them, which enables them to control women. The term discussed can lead to the conclusion that patriarchy is a symbol of women's subordination to males.

It is generally believed that women in matrilineal society enjoy higher position; or at least there is parity of status between male and female. We will see whether this is actually the case and whether they, do enjoy equality in society and family.

In Matrilineal tradition descent is reckoned through the female and all the children belong to her clan and she is solely responsible for the children. According to Elise Boulding, although actual patterns of matriliney vary a great deal around the World, the house of the women and her daughter tend to be an important stabilizing element. In the pure form (as opposed to the transitional form of matriliney,

⁷ Quoted in Rehana Ghadhially. 1988. Women in Indian Society-A Reader, Sage Publication, New Delhi, p. 21.

called avunculocal) married bond is often weak and divorce frequent.⁸ Anthropologists often remarked matrilineal societies are high tension societies. In matrilineal societies rights over the procreative capacities of women are held in perpetuity by their kin groups while partial or total rights in their sexuality are transferred at marriage to their husband.

Unlike patriarchal society, matrilineal society gives freedom to women on her own choice to regulate and mind her own body. And women's right to property always gives advantage in maintaining balanced gender relations in family and at large. However, Andre Beteille states that while it is true that women enjoyed more freedom among the Nayars (matrilineal community) than among most communities it must be though that women have necessarily a dominant position in societies. In practically all societies whether patrilineal or matrilineal, women have in fact, a lower status than men. In matrilineal societies property is transmitted through women, but this only means that it generally passes from mother's brother to sister's son. In most cases the women instead of being under the control of her husband is under her brother's control.⁹ The same

⁸ Elise Boulding. 1992. The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time, vol. I, Sage Publications, Newbury Park London, New Delhi, p— .

⁹ Andre Beteille. "The position of women in Indian society" in Devaki Jain (ed.) 1975. Indian Women, Publication Division, Ministry of information and Broadcasting, Government of India, p. 64.

case applies to the matrilineal communities of Khasi, Garo and Jaintia (Meghalaya). In each case, though the inheritance of property and descent is followed in mother's side, a woman is not bathed in the splendour of power. She is a much burdened individual. Matrilineal principle of descent and residence puts heavy responsibilities on the mother to ensure the welfare of the family. Every household ceremony needs to be organized and it is her responsibility only. And in case of any difficulty by a household member, it is the duty of the mother to look after and provide financial security to them (heiress). In one way she is an over burdened person.

One of the arguments put forward by feminist is that in many matrilineal societies stability is associated with women because it is they who live on and use the land, attend the rituals and nurture children.¹⁰ But matriliney is a type of political economy in which the type of concentration of control over property and over women's sexuality is simply not available to women. There is always the question that authority is always a male function. In fact authority is very often diffused.¹¹

¹⁰ Leela Dube. 1997. Women and Kinship Comparative Perspectives on Gender in South and South East Asia, United Nations University press, p. 156.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 155.

In the words of Andre Beteille neither matriliney nor polyandry is a guarantee of the supremacy of women.¹² Women are being often subjected to subordinate position in various spheres of social life. This aspect will become further evident when we look at the Khasi, Garo and Jaintia societies in Meghalaya.

All the three tribes share a common matrilineal tradition under which descent is passed through the female line and all children belong to mother's clan. Property is transmitted through women, notably, the youngest daughter (Ka Khadduh). But in most cases authority and control are in the hands of the maternal uncles (U Suidnia) and the father (U Kpa). In political affairs a woman does not have any role to play and she is not allowed to participate in political decision making process.¹³ Women are not allowed to attend any durbar or council. Village administration is headed by men.¹⁴ But recently women also attend Durbar in some localities, for instance, the Lai Tumkhral, Nongrien Hills and Lachumiere Durbar do include women in the executive committees.¹⁵ Apart from this, there are

¹² Andre Beteille. "The Position of Women in India Society" in Devaki Jain (ed.). 1975, Op.cit., p. 65.

¹³ Soumen Sen. (ed.). 1992. Women in Meghalaya, Daya Publishing House, p. 41.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ M.N. Karna L.S. Yassah J. Thomas (ed.). 1998. Power to People in Meghalaya (6th Schedule and the 73rd Amendment), Regency Publications, New Delhi, p. 59.

various spheres in these matrilineal societies where women are in fact comparatively in subordinate position in society. So the role of women is inferior taken into consideration, in terms of defacto rather than de-jure.

In Khasi society the sub-clan group constitutes the mother, her children and grand children and their first cousins families from the maternal side. The woman is considered as the Goddess and Guardian spirit of the house. The woman as the paternal Grandmother commands great respect because she is the mother of the father progenitor. The paternal grandmother plays an important role in many ceremonies like naming ceremony of the baby. Since the youngest daughter is generally the custodian of the parents property, she is responsible for meeting family expenditure for ceremonial rites, look after family members, bear family expenses at the family get togethers etc.

The status of women is defined differently in different contexts and with reference to age, culture and community. The concept of status is sensitive to social, cultural and economic differences and it varies from one socio-cultural group to another. It is the complexities of this nature that make it difficult to offer a general statement of the status of women in India. These difficulties notwithstanding a committee appointed by the government of India on status of women in 1971, defined status as a position in social system or sub system

which is distinguishable from and at the same time related to other position through its designed rights and obligation.¹⁶ A more concrete indicator of women's status is provided by Ruth B. Dixon. According to her 'women's status' is the degree of women's access to (and control) material resources (including food, income land and other forms of wealth) and to social resources (including knowledge, power and prestige) within the family, in the community and society at large. It is measured de-facto rather than de-jure, both in absolute terms and relative to men.¹⁷

The Khasis follow clan exogamy. The typical Khasi marriage is one in which the couple choose their partner, which is motivated by personal preference rather than family consideration. For the non-Christian Khasi, marriage is purely a civil contract. For the Christian it is a sacrament. A man or a woman could divorce on grounds of barrenness and adultery. It usually proceeds with wife not allowing her husband to live with her.

Garos: Matriliney among the Garos doesn't imply female domination in any sphere of life Garo Women are completely dominated by the men. They are infact only a means of transmission through which property descends from one generation to another.

¹⁶ ICSSR. 1974. Status of women in India, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ruth B. Dixon. 1978. Rural women at work, John Hopkins University Press, London and Baltimore, p. 17.

Power rests with the males and the Mahari or the closely related member of a clan including those who married into the clan. The mother is not the head of the family; she is required to obey and respect her husband. Though women inherits property, she does not wield exclusive right over it and her husband has the final word in exercising authority over household possessions as well as landed property. There are instances when a nokkrom or resident son-in-law squanders the family possession and property and ruins the family while his wife remains a dumb spectators.¹⁸

Marriage within the mother's clan are forbidden. The daughter's (youngest) husband is usually chosen from father's clan (father's sister son). According to Dr. D.N. Majumdar, the Garo Women have no voice in determining their own fate. In the affairs of the Mahari the women have no voice at all. Such matters are decided exclusively by the male elders. And as males do not consider the opinion of women in such matters necessary, there is no way for the women to influence the Mahari affairs, except through their husband. Even regarding matters concerning women, the opinion of the women concerned or all the women in general of the Mahari is not considered as essential. Women must always abide by the decision of the male elders. Marriages are settled by the Mahari and the opinion of the girl is not considered significant. The Mahari can decide to give very

¹⁸ Somen Sen. 1992. Op.cit, p. 59-60.

young girl in marriage to an elderly person, and the person has no redress.¹⁹ Monogamous marriage is the usual practice among both the Christian and the non-Christian Garo. Polygamy is allowed. In such marriage, consent of the existing wife is necessary. The usual form of setting a marriage is by negotiation called Chawai Singa. Divorce is not very common among the Garos. When it occurs it is mostly in the very early stages of marital life. This is mainly because the husband - wife relationship is generally established firmly within the fold and control of both their local lineage. A Garo husband is eligible to marry the widow of his elder brother or the younger sister of his deceased wife. But forbidden to marry the widow of his younger brother or the elder sister of his deceased wife.

Women are quite excluded from village administration. A woman can never be a village headman (nokma), because a village nokma has certain ceremonial functions and a such ceremonial rites cannot be performed by a woman. The position occupied by the woman in village affairs is considered to be the lowest and equivalent to that of children.²⁰ In village feasts and ceremonials, women are not allowed to occupy positions reserved for persons of honour.²¹

¹⁹ Quoted in Soumen Sen. 1992. Op.cit, p. 60.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Jaintia: In traditional Jaintia system, after the marriage ceremonies and ritual are over the husband visits his wife only after dark and does not stay there. They stay together under one roof after the couple has children. The Jaintia women have full freedom to choose their own life partners and to re-marry after widowhood. Divorce is common. However, women have the right to custody of children, even if the child is born to woman from the husband with whom she was not formally married. Marriage within the same clan is a great sin regarded as I Wasang and the couple who dare commit such mistake would be both punished and driven out of the Jaintia society.

In each tribe matriarchy is the basic institution on which the entire social organizational pattern is based. Women are apparently given legal rights but in practice are subject to the whims and fancies of the men. Other than this, women in the matrilineal societies of Meghalaya are less equal to men in various spheres. Most importantly in religious, political and social spheres- where women are provided knowledge, power and prestige. In Khasi religion, Ka Niam Ing, is essentially a family religion and it is more of a personal religious relationship with the family and the creator. It is in this connection that the Khadduh (youngest daughter) is often referred to as the family priestess which is not entirely correct.²² She only makes

²² Soumen Sen. 1992. Op.cit, p. 24.

preparation for various religious ceremonies but it is her maternal uncle or brother who performs the actual rituals. The Khadduh is referred to as the keeper of religion (ka bat ia ka niam).²³ Similar case is found among the Jaintias. Women in the traditional Jaintia society have an important role to play in religious and ritual ceremonies. The mother is a person entrusted with the important duties of performing family priestess, though in actual practice, males who are her brothers, perform the actual task of sacrifices and other religious celebrations of the house.²⁴ But the mother prepares the necessary items of sacrifice among which are liquor (country made), special kind of bread, sacrificial animals, as well as various tools and instruments. And in Garo society, women cannot take active part in any religious ceremonies and the priest (Kamal) is always a male. Looking to the political spheres, as mentioned above women are not allowed to take active part in traditional village administration. But there has been going small change in recent time in this regard.

Looking to religious sphere, in Khasi society women and her children are being denied of certain religious attributes pertaining to some factors. Adultery especially by the woman, is taken very seriously by the clans concerned. The adulteress demeans herself in the eyes of society by her act and her children suffer certain

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

consequences. Her children for instance can no longer pay homage to ka meikha.²⁵ After her death her bones will not be placed in the clan's mawbah (family tomb). There is certain stigma attached to the children of an adulteress but by no means are they considered to be illegitimate.²⁶ And among the Jaintias, a woman who gets married to a non-Khasi or a non-Jaintia will lose her religious connections with her family at the time of her death when her ashes or bones would be kept outside the family tombstones. Her children too would lose the right of inheritance to property and participation in religious sites and ceremonies.²⁷ So, barring from certain religious and other related activities, reduces the power and prestige of women in the society.

However, in social spheres too, leniency towards men are more especially in terms of sexual freedom. Thus, if a man fails to meet his avuncular obligation, his wife is held responsible for it. If a man indulges in extra-marital affairs or polygynous unions, his behaviours is not only tolerated but is occasionally encouraged.²⁸ Statement's

²⁵ Ka *Meikha*: Khasi woman is not only revered by her maternal descendants but also has a special place as ka Meikha, the father's mother. Ka meikha, during her life time and even after her death is shown reverence by Ki Khun Kha (her son's children). A new born baby is first taken to Ka Meikha's house for her blessings. She is present at the name giving ceremony (ka jer Khun) of the baby and at most important events of the life cycle of her son's families.

²⁶ Quoted in Soumen Sen. 1992. Op.cit, p. 26.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

²⁸ Tiplut *Nongbri*, "Gender and the Khasi Family Structure in Patricia Oberoi (ed.). 1994. Family, Kinship and Marriage in India. Oxford University press, Delhi, p. 175.

such as 'so what, 'he is man of means' (Yu leisa ia uba neh kamai) support his behaviour. Infact, some families may even take pride when the brother has many children from different wives and may call him 'a man with many flags'. (U rang Khadar Lama). This sharply contrast with the adverse reaction towards female sexuality.²⁹ And even if a man decides to return to his sister's house, the sister is expected to offer him shelter and maintain him. His wife is expected to take on, single-handed, the onus of feeding, looking after his children. If a woman neglects her obligation to her matrilineal households she may be even deprived of her property, but if her brother fail to meet his obligation, she is expected to take over his duties.

Women possess only token authority in Khasi society, it is men who are the de-facto power holders. The system is indeed weighted in favour of male matrikin rather than male patrikin.³⁰

Women in tribal society: It is being generally perceived that women in tribal society enjoy higher status than non-tribals. This may in relative terms be true to some among most of the tribals in the north-eastern region of India who come under the fold of Christianity.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Vyass Mann Singh (ed.). 1988. Tribal Women and Development. Rawat Publications, Jaipur, P. XIV.

However, the status of women is at an inferior level, for those tribals who accepted the Brahminical or Hinduized way of life.

Over 7% of the Indian population is represented by the tribals. The tribals have generally been characterized as small, self contained, self sufficient communities practising subsistence economy. The tribals of India include a large number of primitive tribes who subsist on hunting, fishing or by simple form of agriculture. Almost 90% of the tribal follow Hindu religion in one form or the other. About 6% of them follow Christianity. And Buddhism, Islam or Jainism are negligible in number. But even those tribes who have not necessarily shed their local tribal beliefs, rituals and many of them are found to be practising their traditional faith along with their newly acquired faith.³¹ The origin of Indian tribals has been traced to such traces as Proto-Australoids, who at one time practically covered the whole of India and secondly the mongoloids who are located mostly in Assam and North-East and finally to a limited extent to the negroits strain as indicated by frizzy hair, among the Andamanese and the Kadars of the South West India. Geographically, their location can be divided into north and north-east, Central India or middle zone and the southern zone.

³¹ Nadeem Hasnain. 1983. Tribal India Today, Harman Publications, New Delhi, p. 28.

According to Bronislaw Malinowski, one can access and analyse the status of women in tribal society after taking into consideration the mutual duties between the sexes and the safeguards provided for protection of each sex against highhandedness of other.³² And moreover, it is recognized that the status of tribal women is better than that of their non tribal counterparts. The sex ratio is favourable, there is no bride burning, there is high participation in economic activities, infant mortality is low. All of this has lot to do with the tribal ethos which recognize the equal role of women. But in spite of these, there are cases of atrocities against women like adultery and rape, maltreatment, physical beating and other acts of cruelty. These problems are shared by the tribals who have largely come under the fold of caste society.

Status of tribal women is not uniform everywhere. In comparative terms women in north-eastern region enjoy a better status than tribal women in other parts of the country.³³ Even in Patrilineal system they enjoy a measure of influence and visibility which is not to be found elsewhere.³⁴ The female literacy figures are better than the national average and in some areas, especially where

³² Quoted in Nadeem Hasnain 1983, Op.cit, p. ,29.

³³ Status of women in North-Eastern States and Measures for Improvement (Proceedings of the Convention), 1995. National Commission for Women, New Delhi, p. 3.

³⁴ Vyas Mann Singh. 1988. op.cit, p. xiv.

matrilineal system is prevalent, many activities are under the direct control of women, giving them an edge over women in other parts of India.³⁵ Another example where we can see better status of north-east tribal women is related to 'ploughing the field'. Cultivation is practised by the plain tribes of India like Bhils, Gonds, Mundas, Santals, and Khasis. It is generally the duty of men to plough the field but in exceptional cases of among 'Ao' Nagas, women may also plough the fields.³⁶

But the states of tribal women are being affected due to social change and development process. The changes may be due to close affinity with the non-tribals or otherwise. This has been felt in north-east too. The changes taking place in society especially the input of modern technology for accelerating growth have solved less and created more problem for women. Many women are displaced from their livelihood and left without any alternatives. Development strategies have created employment opportunities for women of some classes, but they have at the same time displaced women from the labour force, forced them to migrate. The tribal women are the most affected ones, hence they are in the most disadvantageous position. However, in the sphere of social change too we can find that in

³⁵ "Status of women in North-Eastern States and Measures for Improvement (Proceedings of the convention), 1995, op.cit, p. 3.

³⁶ B.M. Marg. 1960 (September). "Status of women in Tribal Communities in India." The Indian Journal of Social Work, vol. xxi, no. 2, p. 193.

matrilineal tribal societies of Khasi and Garo, the influence of husband, uncle or brother, or any male nearest to her kin, is increasing day by day in terms of property management and other affairs of the family.

Since the objective lies in finding out the status of women in Meetei society of Manipur and their spheres of betterment or otherwise from other social groups in India. Here we need to look in brief at the patrilineal tribal societies among the tribals in Manipur. The tribals in Manipur are broadly put under the categories of Kuki (s) and Naga (s). No doubt there are Mizo communities in the state but they are miniscule in percentage of the tribal population. The Kukis, Nagas and Mizos are settled in the hill areas. And most of them follow Christianity. Women in patrilineal tribal communities in Manipur enjoy higher position. Most of these communities are democratic in attitude and egalitarian in interpersonal relations. In the family, the woman is as much independent in her field of activity as her husband. Like the father, the mother plays an equally important role. All her life a women enjoys a considerable freedom. She participates freely in singing and dancing during festivals and entertains the guests. Most marriage are love marriage. The young chose their partners and their marriage negotiations are conducted through elderly lady and male. In both the communities, there is a custom of paying bride price. But in case of divorce and other complications there are norms where the bride price are being taken back by the

husband and so on. A widow by custom can remarry but has to abandon her claims to property of the husband. She also loses the custody of her children. But usually she marries the brother or near relative (eligible) of the deceased husband, in which case, retains all her husband's property. According to M. Horam, among the Tangkhul Nagas, the wife helps her husband in making decisions, performs domestic duties and shares household responsibilities with him.³⁷ However, there are certain aspects, where women in these societies do not enjoy equality with man. For further clarification, we will look into the aspects of status of women in traditional societies of two communities. And moreover there are certain variations between the two communities and within a community itself too.

In the Naga society of Manipur, the focus is mainly on the three Naga Communities Tangkhul, Mao and Zeliangrong. The Naga society is patrilineal. They follow the rule of clan exogamy. In terms of inheritance females are not entitled to get property share. Ornaments brought by her husband are wife's only for her life time and go to her husband and his heirs. Widows are well provided for and girls may receive property as gifts from their parents at the time of their marriage. Otherwise they have no legal share.³⁸

³⁷ Masangthoi Horam. 1977. Social and Cultural Life of Nagas: The Tangkhul Nagas, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, p. 61.

³⁸ Ibid.

The Naga women are assigned some responsibilities of critical importance. During the head hunting warfare, women have a significant role to play. Even in the pitched battle between two warring parties, if women come in between with leafs or clothes and wave, the war has to stop immediately, the same applies even in ordinary fighting between two men.³⁹ This represents one aspects of the status of women in the traditional society. This shows that in politics and diplomacy also, women could influence in many ways directly or indirectly through the village councillors or at least through their husbands. And in the Mao society even though girls do not usually get a share of immovable property belonging to the parents, yet traditionally they have been enjoying property rights belonging to their husbands in the case of death of the husband. The widow does not lose her right on property.⁴⁰ In Zeliangrong society, though women are well protected, they are not given equal treatment, not even from their own parents.⁴¹ It is interesting to note that parents prefer boys to girls. This can be known from the fact that the birth of the male child is celebrated in the family with pomp and show. There have been instances of husband divorcing their wives for their failure

³⁹ Lucy Zehol, (ed.). 1998. Women in Naga Society, Regency Publications, New Delhi, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 44.

to give birth to a boy.⁴² At times boy child is sent for higher education at the cost of girl child. Women are also prohibited from taking active part in the social and public affairs. Women's inferior status can be seen from other spheres like, it is taboo for a warrior to sleep with his wife or even touch her inner clothes before going to war or for hunting.⁴³ And sometimes in case of illegitimate sexual relations, the girls are given heavier punishment than the boys. This emphasise gender inequality. However, with the advent of Christianity and western education, the status of women in Naga society have improved. Especially among the Zeilangrong, women are not only allowed to attend the public meetings but also to give public speeches as well. Otherwise, in general number of educated women are increasing day by day. Their outlook have changed too. They are responsible and ready to fight for any discriminatory acts of commitment coming across, due to various social change and development.

The second major tribe in Manipur, the Kukis are patrilineal society and their descent being based on the unilineal principle is reckoned from father to the eldest son. They practised clan endogamy. Where marriage is concerned, though not very common child marriage was allowed among some of the Kuki tribes.

⁴² Ibid., p. 40.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 44

Matrilineal cross cousin marriage is preferred form of marriage among the Kukis. There is no hard and fast rule restricting the practice of polygamous form of marriage. Polygamous marriage is mainly practised by the chiefs and outstanding persons and is considered as an expression of their social status. We also find that the levirate form of marriage is prevalent among them. However, there is an additional rule that the elder brother may not marry the widow of the younger brother. The object of this rule is to save the younger brother if unmarried from the cost of a wife and to save the burden of the property of the deceased brother. Where such marriages are compulsory and if the younger brother refuses to marry his brother's widow, he has to pay a fine, Meithi-(from seemingly a loan word of Meetei origin, meaning women's disgrace, mei-women and thi-shame.⁴⁴ And if women refuses to marry her husband's brother then her price is refunded and she is returned to her people.⁴⁵ Widow remarriage is practised, if the widow desires to do so. The Kukis practised the system of offering bride price. The price is usually returned in case of divorce and the same is given in the form of fine in case of adultery.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Aya Luikham. 1983. Cultural Implication of Ethnicity in Manipur - A study of the Socio-Political Relations, Dissertation, Centre for Studies of Social Systems/School of Social Sciences, J.N.U., New Delhi, p. 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

In Kuki society women are not given the right to vote and no participation in the traditional village polities. It is rare that women inherit property but woman inherits property but there are certain cases where women have inherited father's property.⁴⁶ Whatever the case may be, the advent of Christianity plays a very important role in bringing about education and broadened the mental outlook of the people especially among the males section. This is helping in paving the way towards greater egalitarian relationship (male and female) in society.

The brief description on the status of women in the two communities shows that even though women get freedom; are independent and treated equally in various sphere. But still, for greater fulfilment of complete equality, it needs time.

One very important thing to be noted is that when we talk about Meetei society, we cannot forget about the process of Hinduization the Meetei society had gone through, since the last, three centuries. Some changes have been brought about and certain things are amalgamated in the Meetei social norms. Differentiations are there between the two tribals (Kukis and Nagas) communities and the Meetei society. Meetei women's higher status can be claimed from her greater economic participation and special place in the religious

⁴⁶ Chander Sheikhar Panchani. 1987. Manipur: Religion, Culture and Society, Konark Publishers Private Ltd., Delhi, p. 71.

spheres. But these do not mean that Meetei women enjoy equality completely. It will be clearer if we look into the various aspects of traditional Meetei society. Contradictions can be found. For example, the state had a special court for women i.e., Pacha Loishang to deal with all the cases relating to women. And it was against the law of the state for a husband to ill treat his wife. Heavy punishment was been given. However, in certain cases there are spheres where women had been put into subordinate position. There was the system of giving Mang Kat. It was a kind of fee given to the family of the groom by the brides family. It was meant to get admitted to the burial or cremation ground of the groom's family. If not given, the groom had the right to send off the dead body of his wife to her parents family. This has led to the conclusion that gender inequality still persists in Meetei society. And moreover, regarding the active economic participation and women being in the public domain. There are arguments based on the historical reasons. Whatever the cases may be, the problems of women in the society has been added up by complexities in social change, thus curtailing their higher position in the society.

The Meetei society is divided into a number of clans (seven in numbers) which traces their descent. They came under the fold of Hinduized society. But still then, Meetei faith is a mixture of the two-indigenous (traditional) and Hinduized beliefs. Even the Hindu converts perform ancestor worship and other forms of traditional or indigenous way of rites and rituals side by side with the Brahminical

ways. Clan exogamy is strictly practised among the Meetei, each clan having a group of 60 to 70 surnames or family names. And the Meetei system of marriage is various and elaborate. Marriage is divided broadly into Chenba (elopement), Luhongba (proper marriage through engagement), Loukhatpa: social recognition of the couple afterwards when the couple got married through elopement. Before the recognition, marriage is solely done by husband's side. The afterwards social recognition through initiation by and from girl's side, and Kanya Katpa- this is a form of recognizing both the male and female as couple (wife and husband) through male elders from both the families in association with elder members of the community.

Polyandry was a common form of marriage in almost all matrilineal society. Here in Manipur, some scholars opined that, the present system (matrilineal) has succeeded a matrilineal society. Marriage of wife's sister and cross cousin marriage was in vogue in early times, but the system of marrying wife's sister is still continuing. There was the system of offering bride price from the early period. The price was usually returned in the case of divorce and the same was given in the form of fine in case of adultery. And there was the system of giving Mangkat too. In terms of property women had the right to inherit mother's property only. This is still continuing. But now being under patrilineal system, women are not entitled to get husband's property. A widow is supported by her husband's family in her life time. But widow remarriage is not appreciated by the

community. If so, not only she lost the control on her husband's property, she also lost the custody of her child. Except in cases, compromises are brought about, keeping the children with her. However, in the marriage system, certain changes have been brought about with the introduction of Hinduism in the state. The system of polyandry discontinued but polygamy continued to exist. It was encouraged mainly by the royal family. Garibaniwaj (one of the king) had ten wives and every king after him had more than four wives as permitted by the 'Law'. Their example was followed by the nobles and well-to do family. From the 18th century polygamy became a fashion amongst the officers. Not only this, there started the act of immoral works too. But even though polygamy was practised and still in vogue in the present day, monogamy is common and considered ideal for the masses. Taken into consideration, in the above paragraphs, we can say that Meetei women too suffer from various gender inequalities.

In Manipur, greater equality of women in religious sphere can be known from the fact that, women play important role in religious matter. Meetei women equally participated with the males. The post of priestess (maibis) and its institution (maiba Loishang) clearly indicate that that the women had equal status with the male in religious matter. In certain ritual performance of family and clan, and in Lai Haraoba (merry making of God), women play a very important role and in some specific cases, performances are done exclusively by

female only. Saroj-N. Paratt and John Abraham states that female maibi (priestess) is more important than her male counterparts. She plays a more prominent role in festivals.⁴⁷ The same is the case in the worshipping ceremony of family deity (once in a year, usually after the New Year, i.e., March-April). In the Meetei society in all life cycle: birth, marriage and death, the women played some specific roles. So, in religious spheres, the place of Meetei women is one of the unique cases.

In Meetei society since time immemorial no women was recognized as the sole head of the family. But there were instances where the female (wife) took the full responsibility and power of the family in the name of husband. And ill-treatment of wife with out any reason was against the law of the state. The women had the right to demand Nupamamal or to confiscate all the property of the person except a drinking jar or piece of cloth or his loin. And the state had a special court for women in i.e., Pacha Loishang to deal with all the cases relating to women viz., adulterer, insult, beating, divorce etc. A heavy fine was imposed on the adulterator and the court took some share. On the other hand at the community level women have equal opportunity to mix freely with men. In festivals like Thabal Chongba (moonlight dance), held only in the month of Lamta (March) from first day to the tenth day of the month (there is no fixed date now). And this

⁴⁷ Saroj Nalini Paratt and John Abraham. 1997. The Pleasing of the Gods: Meetei Lai Haraoba, Vikas Publishing House, Pvt. Ltd., p. 33.

festival has been amalgamated with 'Holi'. In this dance both young males and female participated freely. Even the young married women too occasionally participated in it. Another game is called Likkon Sanaba, it is used to be played during the night on all important religious festivals like first Saturday of Lamta (March), Mera-Wa-Yungba, Waphutepa, Krishna-Jarma, Radha-astami etc. Both boys and girls mixed freely. Kang Sanaba is one of the most favourite indoor game among the Manipuris. It is played by both the sexes together in the ratio of three males and four females.⁴⁸ And in Lai Haraoba (merry making of God), both males and females participated. Mention can be made that, the nature of Lai Haraoba is just to initiate how the Gods created the universe and living beings. It also depicts plays and enjoyment of the Gods. So it is an attempt to appease the Gods and Goddesses by reminding them of their past events. Varied programmes are conducted lasting for so many days (usually more than a week). Here, the role of priestess is the most prominent one.

In Manipur women's greater participation in economic spheres and being in the public domain, is a well known phenomena. In relation to this, Manjushree Circar states that there are two historical events - a devastating male depopulation and resulting from protracted warfare (between Burma and Manipur, ended by Indo-

⁴⁸ N. Birachandra Singh 1987, Socio -Religious Life of the Mieteis in the 18th century A.D. Thesis, (Unpublished), Centre for Historical Studies/School of Social Sciences, Manipur University, p. 161.

Burmese treaty of 1826); and the advent of colonial rule in 1892 have had a considerable impact on Meetei sex roles and social relationships.⁴⁹ Expansion of women's economic roles and promotion of polygamy were the two prominent consequences. But above this, the ancient Kingdom of Manipur had the system of Lalup (force labour). Under this system one by four of the said calendar month was engaged in the state work. These are not the only reasons. May be particularly true in increasing the economic roles of women. But economic empowerment cannot be the sole reason for women's empowerment leading to equality between the two sexes. In India, where the society based on communities only, social status is very much important and is prior to others. In Manipur since ages there are many norms and traditions in society where females have been given greater freedom to exercise her independence at the community and social level.

⁴⁹ Sircar, Chaki, Manjushree. 1984. Op.cit., p. viii.

CHAPTER – III

In India, after independence, a model was started on which the state assumed a primary role in all areas of development. The state was portrayed as an instrument of egalitarianism in all areas including the economy, education, and even the social structure, where we had maximum inequality and injustice. Rajni Kothari, states that even the radicals, including Marxists believed in the role of state in India—that the state had to take on pioneering and regenerating and liberating role.¹ Most of the Gandhian followers, had accepted this assumption too. So, we had built on elaborate structure based on the assumption that the state was an efficient instrument of reorganizing and redirecting the process in what was hitherto a highly voluntaristic society. This could not be materialized totally in the long run.²

Our country, inspite of its diversity, one basic assumption common to all the different types is that the government has failed to bring about socio-economic changes, and hence that people should volunteer to contribute to them. This brings to the forefront the role of the voluntary groups vis-a-vis the role of the state and its agents. As several ideologues of the voluntary movement have observed, the initial efforts drew upon the base of social consciousness created by the 19th century social reformers, and

¹ Rajni Kothari 1987, "Voluntary Organizations in Plural Society", Indian Journal of Public Administration, vol. 33, no. 3, p. 434.

² Ibid., p. 434.

later by the national movement which attracted thousands of people to participate in what they felt as the larger cause of national independence and reconstruction.³

However, growing stateism has marked the post independence developments. In the model of development which our country adopted soon after independence, the state assumed a primary, pioneering, all pervasive and resource controlling role in every area of development. In spite of the state acquiring all the powers in its hands, equitable growth has not taken place. On the contrary, the benefits of development have been usurped by a select elite; and programmes basically catering to the consumption needs of the rich have been followed, while effectively widening the disparities between the privileged and the peripheralized. This does not mean that the government does not have any welfarist measures for the poor. It has an impressive array of rural development and poverty alleviation programmes, such as the IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme), NREP (National Rural Employment Programme) and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programmes (RLEGP), and the Training of Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM). But the net result is the limited impact of the programmes in terms of area development and alleviation of poverty. So, there was an inefficiency of the state as an instrument of reorganizing and redirecting the process of power.

³ H. Sethi, 1988, "Trends Within", Seminar, n. 348, p. 22.

Even though the 'Planning Commission' has envisaged many schemes. The schemes under the plans are not all comprehensive and on top of this, the ruling party could not implement the allocated plans. In other words non-implementation was part of the design.⁴ The situation of the state was further aggravated by inability to maintain law and order situation, one finds an increasing bias against the weaker section of society. The law and order machinery, which is supposed to protecting 'them', is infact, engaged in harassing and intimidating them. In some regions, people are not only harassed but literally exterminated through police encounters and face the terror of party Mafia. So, the general outcome of development became the spread of communal hatred and violence and the involvement of the agents of the state in these. And lastly, majorities of the political parties, which are presumed agents of change within the sphere of state, are found to withdraw from the grassroots process. Consequently, if democracy is to function effectively there has to be whole lot organizations other than merely electoral organization. Hence, agencies are required because, believing in stateism and a stateist view of development, we have undermined whatever was already there in terms of the voluntaristic base of Indian society as well as the new voluntaristic thrust that had come up during the national movement.

⁴ Rajni, Kothari.1987. Op.cit, , p. 435.

The term 'Voluntary Organization' (in India) has been used to refer to non-official societies registered under the Societies Registration Act or Charitable and Endowments Trust Act, covering any action promoted by the people's own volition. Historically, there have been two strands of thinking regarding voluntary action: one stemming from the anti state approach of Gandhi and the other from the traditional social collectivism of thinkers like Swami Vivekananda.⁵ But since independence, a number of government committees have underscored the importance of involvement by Voluntary Organization in development. For example, the reports of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) led to the introduction of Panchayati Raj as a new system of rural local government, the Rural-Urban Relationship Committee (1966) and the Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) have indicated that it is the people's local organization which can ensure community participation and support for local development activities. The sixth and seventh plans too have recognized the need for involving the voluntary sector. This also can be understood from the fact that, the 1977 (5th Lok Sabha) election brought to power a non congress government at the center - the Janata Party - led government under the Prime Ministership of Morarji Desai. Most Cabinet Members and P.M. Desai himself repeatedly emphasize the theme that the national government can devolve responsibility downward only to the extent that meaningful initiatives and willingness to

⁵ Quoted in U. Vindhya and V. Kalpana. 1989 (April), "Voluntary Organization and Women Struggle for Change: Experience with BCT", The Indian Journal of social work, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 185.

assume responsibility exist at lower levels.⁶ Within the party itself there was a number of differences as to how village based organizations were to be fostered. All the principal factional positions represented by the Gandhian, the Radical Socialist and the member of the former Jana Sangh agreed in 1977 party manifesto that there should be partnership of social action (Gandhian phrase of voluntary organization) and state action.⁷ The party agreed to give every support to constructive voluntary action in all fields.

Marcus Franda states that as technology and agriculture and life itself have all become more complex, voluntary organization have felt pressure to become involved in community wide projects and have found they need a variety of expertise in order to do so.⁸ Most voluntary organizations today routinely pay their staff and particularly their professional staff. They have also become professionalism because they have built up a corpus of specialized knowledge and experience about what does and does not work in bringing about socio-economic change. And moreover, the number of people who opt for participation in voluntary organization is increasing day by day.

⁶ Marcus Franda. 1983. Voluntary Associations and Local Development in India: The Janata Phase, Young Asia Publications, New Delhi.

⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

In the pre-independence period, all the voluntary organizations usually operated on a very small scale and their work were usually focussed exclusively on educational and medical care. The present impetus of modern large scale progress, focussing on integrated rural development, for entire communities derives its part from the major relief effort that had to be made in the sub-continent in the mid to late 1960's and early 1970's (famine, cyclone, flood related problems). The intrusion into south Asia of massive foreign funding for relief work, particularly when coupled with the obvious repletiveness of relief as economic crisis deepened during the 1960's and 1970's brought widespread recognition of the futility and wastefulness of mere charity. One result has been an upsurge of interest in the search for more permanent answers to vexing developmental problems through voluntary action.

There has been a proliferation of various voluntary agencies in India today, working with the following priority section: a) rural poor-agricultural labourer and Harijans, b) Urban poor-slum dwellers and unorganized labour, c) Tribals, d) Women. In the sixties the services of these organizations were more utilized for relief rehabilitation and charity oriented projects, while their emphasis since the 1970's has shifted to development, employment generation etc.⁹

⁹ U. Vindhya and V. Kalpana 1989 (April), "Voluntary Organization and Women's Struggle for Change: Experience with BCT", The Indian Journal of Social Work, Op.cit, p. 186.

On the other hand, Rajni Kothari, one of the advocates of the non party political formation makes a crucial distinction between development oriented voluntary agencies or the development NGOs, and the struggle oriented groups who work for the most deprived sections of the society- the landless, the dalits, adivasis, bonded labourers and women. All these are doubly discriminated against by state policies as well as the dominant element in the social structure.

The distinction is crucial because the underlying philosophy, orientation, direction and even funding of the two kinds of groups are not the same. The NGOs are development oriented, and they work towards supplementing government efforts. While those have formed the action groups (they might not even be registered) critical of the prevailing pattern of growth, they are struggle and alternative development oriented.¹⁰

Thus, we have on the one hand a number of organizations, which have a debureaucratising influence on social action. They consider society to be sufficiently homogenous, all that is needed is to play in the government's inadequacies. On the other hand, we have the struggle oriented groups, whose basic premise is that unequal access to resource and power by different sections in society should be the issue to be addressed, posing challenge to the growing insensitivity of the state. Relating to the second one, we can take up the whole questions of alternative development at

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 186.

grassroots level in a number of areas. The struggle against deforestation in the Chipko movement and many other such movements or the coal mining sector in Chhattigarh and large tracts of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar and variety of places affected by the rise of new technologies and large projects that are directly and openly anti women. Organizations led by women are taking a more holistic conception of development and welfare, including that against unhygienic practices all combined together as part of a single struggle. There is a tremendous scope for this way of looking at things and increasing the role of women as one sees the whole relationship between backwardness and poverty in its true meaning, in which the planning commission and other development agencies have totally failed to see. So, here is a whole resource base, with people who have time on their hands, who are relatively unemployed, who are looking for opportunities and who are contributing to the growing activism of the grassroot level.¹¹ Hence, the new social groups and movements, whether there be the peasants movements or the women's movements or the environment movements or the whole breed of human rights and civil rights movements or the ethnic movement among the minorities - this is a whole new concept. And they composed a non party space.¹² Its note is to deepen the democratic process in response to the state that has not only ditched the poor and the oppressed but has itself turned oppressive and violent. It is to

¹¹ Rajni Kothari. 1987. Op.cit, p. 442.

¹² Quoted in Marcus Franda. 1983. Op.cit, p. 18.

highlight dimensions that were not considered political and make them part of the political process. So, the whole agenda of the political process is getting transformed. Looking at the party manifesto in 70's and 80's, issues were being considered by politicians. But, it will be error to think of voluntary organization and the role and the work of voluntary organization in a non-political sense. Because, their key contribution lies in making and giving to politics a new orientation, to reconceptualize, political process.

Several voluntary organizations are operating in India at the national, state and regional levels. International voluntary agencies do sometimes coordinate with the national voluntary organizations for developmental work. But the success or failure of voluntary organization are judged on the basis of two schools of thought. One school would judge success by the ability to get things going at the local level and then 'wither away' or 'move elsewhere', leaving solid village institutions as a legacy or product of good professional work. The other measures in terms by the growth permanence, with public recognition of the size and importance of the voluntary associations often associated with programmes viability. According to Verghese, the ideal situation is one in which an agency is sufficiently large and influenced to have some impact beyond welfare, but not so overpowering in a local environment that its clientele become dependent on it in

perpetuity.¹³ But, whatever the case may be, it is the voluntary sector of the struggle oriented groups and alternative development oriented groups among the weaker section that show some sign of hope and strength. There are various weak points on voluntary sectors. Including that, they operate (generally) only at the micro level; they are not well coordinated among themselves; and they find it often difficult to work with such each other; and above all they usually do suffer from the problem of leadership. Nevertheless, the voluntary sectors are building the only bridges we have between, the urban and the rural poor. But, voluntary organizations (including NGOs) in their efforts to bring empowerment, the goal of empowerment is particularly critical for women who have been deprived of power within the family by mainstream religious and social tradition. In this sphere, women's organizations can act as support structure for a women's movements.

Traditionally the early women's organizations devoted specifically to 'social work' aimed at ameliorating the distress of the disadvantaged women folk in the society. The task was undertaken by elite women and approach was one of social welfare. Women's organizations also raised the issue of women's backward status in society and focussed the communities attention to the social evils which afflict women. These organizations were in many cases, the precursors of the latter day women's movements. In Asian

¹³ Marilee Karl. 1995. Women and Empowerment Participation and Decision Making, Zed Books, London and New Jersey, p. 22.

centuries like India, Philippines, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh, this was the broad pattern of the growth of women's organizations.¹⁴

Most women's organizations which started as militant agencies fighting for women's rights during the national movement, had in the post independence era acquired the role of voluntary agencies engaged in welfare work. The main objectives of these organizations were to joined together women for their own moral and material progress without any distinction of caste and creed.¹⁵ Social workers and reformist played active role in a social as well as economic upliftment of women. They also gave proper directions to the activities of such institutions. Basic idea of such activities was to impart training of some art, craft and trade which will make the beneficiary women self-dependent from the economic point of view. This will help them in raising their social status in the society. The basic objective of such organization was to form women's groups for the purpose of self-employment and education and for definite service to others.¹⁶ In the process these organizations needed to evaluate and redefine their roles and ideologies in the context of recently identified problems, and issues facing women and their diagnosis.

¹⁴ B.A. Pandya. 1994. Women Organization and Development, Illustrated Books Publishers, p. 84.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁶ Vindhya, U; and Kalpana, V. 1989, (April). "Voluntary Organizations and Women Struggle for Change", Op.cit, no. 5, p. 195.

With the ending of 'Emergency' 1975, there was a widespread sense that democracy could no longer be taken for granted, and a call for active involvement of people for deepening of freedom and democracy. There was an upsurge of new movements dedicated to the attainment of human rights and socio-economic progress across the country.

One can differentiate between two essential organizational and ideological clusters. One, which is largely urban-based. Its leadership is provided by educated women who had long been engaged in political work through unions, political parties, social service agencies and research institutes. They focus on women's issues of rights, equality and protection by courts and police from violence against women. All India Women's Conference (AIWC), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), All India Democratic Women's Association (AIWDA) are few examples of the first cluster.

"Other women's organizations" operating within the right wing (1st cluster) are resolutely autonomous and unaffiliated with any large groups. They are largely of both rural and urban components and emphasize on women's empowerment and liberation. For these women's organizations-counseling, consciousness raising, and support activities are just one aspect of the "organizations" work; they also engage in agitational political activity such as demonstrations and public meetings designed to gain publicity for their causes and bring pressure to bear on the government to change laws or implement existing ones. Such

organizations have few members. Some examples are Saheli (sisters) in New Delhi and Women's Centre in Bombay. Since by definition, the autonomous women's organizations are small, localized, and unaffiliated with any larger group, it is impossible to get an accurate account how many exist. But it is spreaded in all parts of India.

The other organizational and ideological wing of the movement, which we call the 'empowerment' wing, aims at the personal and community empowerment of poor women in both urban and rural areas. Here, if the emphasis is on rights, it is not on civil rights but on economic and social rights - the right to determine one's own future, which requires both political empowerment at the local level and access to the tools of economic well-being. Some of the most prominent organizations in this cluster include Self-employed Women's Association (Ahmedabad) and its branches in several states, the Working Women's Forum (WWF), Madras having membership 13,000 of and its environs, and the Annapurna Mahila Mandal, Bombay has between 7,000 and 10,000 members. The category also includes small groups for women in the rural areas which undertake actions aimed at the government and landlord class or launch campaign against social evils like gambling, alcoholism and bride price. Sometimes groups are formed at the spur of the moment when some provocation created by the vested interest or the governmental agencies. These 'women', focus on empowering the grassroots and generating self-reliance through schemes and projects beneficial to

their members. Under this cluster, the women's organizations abstain themselves from electoral politics that come within the ambit of party movement sector. Each of the organizations has been particularly attentive to the need to organize women within its community, because women's participation is seen as critical to the actions of the community as a whole and because of a recognition of the specific gender related needs of women. They concentrate more on creating structures and educating for direct political participation in decisions that affect the local community. Decision-making occurs within small youth leagues and workers associations in simple decision making process.

Indian women's organizations outside the two clusters include those organizations where women are not only made economically powerful. But the focus is given on equality and women's consciousness at community level. Here, mention can be made of the Bhagavatula Charitable Trust (BCT), an organization involved in integrated rural development of 50 villages in Yellamanchili and Rambilli Mandals of Visakhapatnam district in Andhra Pradesh. The BCT programmes are based on the concept that villagers development could not proceed without the involvement and participation of the villagers themselves. So, the first step was the formation of Mahila Mandals. Through these, various economic empowerment programmes were launched. And afterwards, in the long run women were able to fight against the gender issue. A very prominent example is the unwanted motives

amongst the male members in stopping women candidature in the post of Presidenship (Community level election).

The distinction of the Mahila Mandals lies in the fact that it has brought about awareness in the women to use their collective strength in relation to community issues. This struggle has empowered women to be vocal, visible and confident of their potential to bring about changes in their village, without depending entirely on men. Although the BCT had not really initiated any significant attempt to break through the rigidity of the gender structure, and had organized the women mainly on economic demands, the Mahila Mandals of Marrisipalem demonstrated that it was the struggle on common issues, rather than mere income earning which empowered them to be vocal participants at the community level.¹⁷ So women's Organizations have different pictures - those concentrating on rights and equality, violence and exploitation (rape, molestation, harassment and other forms of empowerment mainly through economic independence and those which are focussed on making women active participants at the community level.

Women's Organizations in India give thrust to the Indian women in terms of political participation and development of personal and community empowerment. Through their efforts,

¹⁷ Vindhya, U; and Kalpana, V. 1989(April). "Voluntary Organizations and Women Struggle for Change", Op.cit, no. no. 5, p. 187

women have got the 'law' in their favour. But the vast gap between the passage of legislation and its implementation can be pushed and done through public pressure only. Generating this pressure can be done to the maximum extent by voluntary women's organizations. Because they are as partners, innovators, advocates and critics can bring about a better fit between needs and resources and generate people's fuller participation in programmes directed towards their own growth. However, one thing we have to take into consideration, is the question of relation between economic empowerment and social status of women. Voluntary groups, which attempt to promote women's economic development, without questioning the status quo, land themselves in a contradictory situation. It has by now been well documented that improvement in economic status leads to aspirations for better social status, but that often means withdrawal of women from labour force and imposition of restriction on them. It appears that economic development does not make much sense unless it is combined with social change and equitable growth. Unless we come closer to explanation of the roots of women's subordination and the social mechanism by which they are perpetuated, formation of new strategies of economic development may prove to be futile exercise.¹⁸

¹⁸ M.N. Karna (ed.). 1989. Social Movement in Northeast India, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, p. 47.

Women's Organizations in the North-East

Since the last two decades, the entire North-East States have been witnessing popular anti-state movements. In Nagaland, Manipur and Assam there have been militant movements. During the Naga insurgency, the Assam movement, the insurgency in Manipur, Bodoland demand movement and during the ULFA activities, rape of both tribal and non-tribal women particularly rural women, by army have become focal point of the movements in the North-East. In the women's movement rape is a social as well as a political issue. Rape stands for the oppression of women in general and thus has a strong emotive appeal for organizing women to protest against social oppression and assert their dignity as well as human beings.¹⁹ Women of the North-East are forced to be subordinated both from external pressure of the men folk to conform to the community norms as well as due to lack of self-confidence.

Women's Organizations in the North-East are varied and many. Most of them are focussed on discrimination against women, and economic empowerment. In Assam, mention can be made of All Assam Lekhika Sanstha and All Assam Lekhika Smaroh, which are primarily cultural organizations. Newer organizations include Mula Gabharu Sanstha and Assam Jagrata Mahila Prasad, Karbi Women's Progressive Association and the Tribal Women's Welfare Organization. All of these Organizations

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

(newer) focussed on the discrimination against women- rape, murder, molestation, harassment and others.

The women's movement in Arunachal Pradesh has been initiated by various socio-cultural and voluntary organizations constituted by enlightened and educated women. These organizations are of different types. There is at least one women organization in each tribe. The state level organization is All Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS) formed on October 10, 1979. Its main focus is on upliftment of women folk in general. Special emphasis has been given on eradication of evil practices of the societies viz., child marriage, polygamous marriage, payment of bride price etc.

Coming to Meghalaya, we have the oldest women organization in the state called Mothers' Union founded in November 1941 at Tura in Garo Hills. It was founded on the general principles of Christianity. The main aims and objectives of the union are to work together to bring up their children in the best moral character and conduct, to educate the Garo Women who came to Tura almost exposing their bare anatomy on markets etc. Another prominent organization is the Ka Synjuk Kynthei (1947). It is the oldest voluntary welfare organization of Khasi women. It focussed primarily on economic empowerment including emphasis on education and health care facilities for women and children. One of the prominent organizations which had taken up

the issues of socio-cultural including active political participation amongst women is Ka Synjuk Ki Kynthei Rieulum or the Tribal Women Welfare and Development Association of Meghalaya.

In Nagaland apart from the old women's organizations, which are focussed mainly on economic empowerment, the newer ones include the NMA youth and women welfare organization established in March 1988. It works on solving the problems of drug addicts affecting most families, and setting up of various counselling cum after care centre to cater to the drug addicts.

Even though women in the North -East are taking active part in the public and having various women's organizations, their political participation is negligible. It can be seen from the fact that women in states like Meghalaya and Manipur are economically and educationally advanced. But in fact there is a strong tradition barring women's participation in politics in both these states which consequently have a poor showing of women in even in conventional electoral politics.²⁰ Women's movement remains fragmented, hesitant and localized. Various women's organizations, while taking up the general society's consciousness of women's issues, should develop the strong sense of identity as women necessary for self assertion through collective and individual efforts.

²⁰ Phanjoubam Tarapot. 1997. Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in North East India, Vikas Publishing House Private Ltd., New Delhi, p. 7.

MANIPUR

Most of the women's organizations in Manipur come under the fold of 'autonomous groups'. Since most of them are non-political and autonomous in their way of functioning and operation, the women's organizations in the state try to bring consciousness about the place and capacity of women and the poor through schemes designed to generate economic self reliance. It also facilitates decision making by participating in their respective organizations. Demonstrations and public meetings are designed to gain publicity for their causes and bring pressure to bear on the government to change laws or implement existing ones.

In Manipur, mainly due to the increasing number of educated people, we cannot ignore the importance of the participation of the half of the population (women) in the process of solving social problems and safeguarding the 'beautiful social traditions.' Women are very much needed in every sphere of life because, due to social change along with political and economic development, the women section is needed to safeguard their rights, and dignities in case of any difficulties involving women's issues. The organizations (not exclusively of women's) in the state were not enough to take care of the women's issues. Any women related issue can be taken up and better safeguarded by the women's organizations and associations. As a result women's voluntary organizations, institutions, associations with different

objectives have sprang up in every corner of the state - local, district, state level.

Manipur in the 1980's was full of problems. The problems include effective implementation of the provision of the 'Manipur Merger Agreement' 1949 with India, prolonged agitation against aliens, students unrest, counter emergency operations, assassinations and killing of local political leaders and different types of crimes, threw the state into an uncertain future. Anxieties prevailed among the people in the early 1980's as there was a heavy deployment of security forces as part of the counter insurgency programme in the state. Over 10,000 womenfolk from different parts of Manipur valley gathered at Imphal and marched in a procession on 22nd May 1980 in protect against the proposal to impose, the 'Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Power Act' 1958 (AFSPA). Even before declaring Manipur as a 'disturbed area' under the Act, the protestors argued, security forces tortured harassed and killed innocent civilians at Langjing and Patsoi areas in Imphal district. According to Phanjoubam Tarapot, a parliamentary fact finding committee into the incident at Patsio & Langjing said, 'it appears that the CRPF assaulted villagers including women and children; caused the death of four persons and also illegally took away the property of the villagers.'²¹

With the likely imposition of AFSPA, more and more women poured in from every part of the state and the Manipur government

²¹ Ibid., p. 8.

apprehended the trouble. With a view to prevent any untoward incident, the government decided to pick them up in security vans and free them at the periphery of Imphal. The reckless handling of the situation resulted in the death of a pregnant woman.²² This incidence angered the womenfolk and the agitation was intensified. Ever since then, the women in different parts of the state have been organizing themselves against the combing by the army personnel. The women folk started to guard their sons /husband from the harassment of the police and paramilitary forces by holding torches in their hands through the night. These women came to be known as 'Meira Paibi' (Torch bearer), and they are also fighting against consumption of liquor, degradation of social norms and values etc . The Meira Paibi are fighting against these problems with boldness, vigour and unity.²³ The women in Manipur, instead of representing a symbol of 'protection' and 'secondary' roles, they have been able to take active part in the society. And they also have been able to put effective check to a great extent on the variety of social evils against themselves, men and children. So, we see in Manipur a different dimension of the women's movement. In other parts of the country, women's organizations are concentrating primarily on rights, equality and economic empowerment of the women section. However, in Manipur,

²² M.N. Karna (ed.). 1998. *Op.cit.*, p. 77.

²³ Mention can be made of the XIIth Asiad Games Gold Madallist (Boxing), Mr. Ngangom Dinkoo was brought up in the Orphan Home run by the Organization.

women's Organizations are in fact concentrating more on safeguarding the civil and political rights of the citizens.

There are more than seven hundred women's organizations. Out of these, many are purely trade guilds especially meant for Handicraft, Weaving, etc. They are meant to improve the economic conditions of the people in general. There are also women's organizations, which work even upto the level of national standard operating in the state. Mention can be made of some women's organization or groups like Nisha Bandh or Meira Paibi, Macha Leima, Meetei Leimarol Sinnai Sang, which are active women's voluntary organizations in the state. A neat and tidy society completely free from alcohol, drug addicts, and narcotics and also from anti-social elements of any brand is their main goal. In course of time, according to the time and change in societal priorities, these organizations shifted their strategies and style of functioning. Mention can be made of the 'Meira Paibi which, since the last five to six years has shifted its attention to safeguarding human rights violation. The Macha Leima, which formerly focussed on economy issues, has now shifted its major attention to human rights problems. Meetei Leimarol Sinnai Sang, started for economic self sufficiency among the women section has shifted the strategy to health awareness camps especially women and children.

All the women's organizations have the common goal in connection with various aspects of social development. The written

constitutions of the organizations are more or less the same in spirit and approach, though there are slight variation in the clauses simply to suit the local situation and conditions. All of them are established for social welfare services and especially for the betterment of women's status in the society. Women's organizations of various political parties are also operating in the state. Mention can be made of Congress Wing's Women Organization, the Women's organization of CPI., MPP's. (Manipur People Party) Women's Wing etc. These organizations are to achieve greater representation of women in higher decision making bodies - state legislature, parliament etc. Political education and awareness building is extended to promote women's representation in the electoral process, to establish and lobby for women's agenda, to sensitize both women and men to women's issues and role of women in politics.

Before going through the two specific women organization in the state, we need to have a brief look at other effective women's organizations. The All Manipur Women's Association is a voluntary organization. It is non-political too. It is socio cultural in nature and was formed for the betterment of the condition of women in Manipur and India at large. The main objective of the organization is to make women conscious of their rights and duties in the present society. Well-maintained status of women in society can be achieved through social, educational service. This can be established with proper cultural activities and understanding of the place of morality in social order with the help of mutual

understanding, cooperation and coordination with the various social elements. The organization aimed at safeguarding the democratic rights of women in society and looks after the matters for the improvement of right and hygienic living. Role of women in society is given extra importance for better living and for upliftment of human as a whole.

Another significant women's organizations are Manipur Mahila Kalyan Samiti, established in 1965. It works especially for the welfare of women and children. It also takes up schemes in respect of socio-economic programmes and also to improve upon the lot of needy women and destitute orphan children as a whole.²⁴

An organization which is running at par and affiliated to the 'Central Social Welfare Board' New Delhi, is the State Social Welfare Board.' It is working for the benefit of women and children in the society under the directorate of 'Social Welfare Board' Manipur.

Naga Women's union, Manipur established in 1994 works exclusively for Naga women in the state. Its activities include awareness building among the women members themselves, of their position, problems, responsibilities and support for women candidates in the Lok Sabha election for upholding the rights, dignity and status for women. Other related issues include

²⁴ Speech of the then President of the Macha Leima on the Third Annual General body meeting held at Gandhi Memorial Hall, December 9. See, 1973.

women's equality in terms of property, marriage, equal wages, divorce, representation in the general administration of village.²⁵

All the women's voluntary organizations in the state pull on different directions. Some of the organizations took up the issue of development economy in the state in general. Some act as pressure groups in their style of functioning, take the issue of the state with special emphasis on women and girl child, and some are running small units of economic developments. But all these organizations follow more or less the democratic norms. All the office bearers of particular organization are elected. But many organizations failed to sustain their life long activities especially due to the lack of funds and organized human resources. Many of the organizations live on donations, charity works, gifts and regular subscription of magazines, journals etc., as their source of income. Since most of the organizations are autonomous (non-political), their sole survival depends on the sincerity of the members in the organizations.

Many women's organizations are mushrooming in every nook and corner of the state. No doubt, they are registered under the 'Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860'. Their main aim consists of redressing the finances and problems affecting a certain section of the youths. Their activities can be put under as socio economic activities, working for the development of socio economic position

²⁵ "Raisunriang" (News Link). 1998, 4th Issue, Naga Women's Union, Manipur.

of the people in general and the women section in particular. In addition to these, they also create the sense of social awareness and cooperation amongst women. Because of various economic programmes (grants and loans) many women are given employment and helped in improving economic conditions. Child care facilities by running crèche centres, Balwadis, Orphanage centres are the major works of some organizations. Lastly, social reformation and development activities are also taken up: for any social evils, rectifications are done along with the cooperation of various women's organizations. In this case women's organizations including both registered and non-registered, come forward to work towards common cause.

The two women's organizations taken into consideration for study are Manipur Chanura Leishem Marup (Macha Leima) and Mectei Leimarol Sinnai Sang (MLSS). The main interests are on their nature, role, linkage with state and other agencies or organizations, funding system, leadership structure and most importantly the support from the people and their perceptions.

The Macha-Leima - The Macha Leima, a leading women voluntary organization, acting as a pressure group was established in the year 1969. Its firm objectives were to enhance the standard and status of women folk of Manipur, so as to make them at par with developed women of the rest of the world, in every field of work. In

the words of Huidrom Chanume Banrkeinya,²⁶ the Macha Leima meaning (Daughter of Manipur) was established for the welfare of the women section; safeguarding women's rights; moral upliftment of the society, sustaining culture and tradition of Manipur; betterment of the weaker and destitute section of the society and most importantly to keep the Manipuris as dignified existence in the universe.

Nature of the Organization - In terms of making the women economically viable, the organization focuses on the establishment of institutions involving the skill of handicrafts, handlooms and also encouragement of the skilled workers and experts in these fields. Its other activities include taking up of socio-economic projects, enhancing the economic conditions of the urban and rural poor and also to implement successfully. In order to realize the above goals, the organization give financial help, loans, grants and subsidy to artisans, woman weavers and skilled employees also are in the trades of handicrafts and handlooms. But this financial assistance is taken from various financial institutions, state and central government, individual members and any other agency that can afford it. Other than the area on economy, there are measures to make the women aware of the problems in day to day life (of themselves and in general). For this, the framework includes the organization of study camps, study circles, workshops, seminars,

²⁶ The Activities mentioned above are in relation to the campus and expeditions held between 1981 and 1984 (Only). The places include: Wangun village, Konaitong village, Khoibu village in Manipur.

symposiums to broaden the mental outlook of the women. Discussions in battering of social, economic, political states and to find out measures to solve the problems faced by the women. Publication of literature to make the women of Manipur well acquainted with upto dated information and relevant knowledge about the society and women in particular by publishing dailies, journals, monographs, pamphlet, and souvenirs. Education on environment and health are also been taken up. The varied nature of the Organization includes establishment of school for the children and development of relationship with other school of equally framed curriculum. The nature of Macha Leima. includes, taking up all the necessary and projects which it thinks fit to take up and also to go to the court of law for any occasion when their interests are affected or when one individual is victimized by the miscreants. In order to attain the objectives of the organization, it seeks subscription, grants, royalties, Securities, endowment titles and all sorts of presents and gifts from all organizations and sources government, semi government, non-government, voluntary organization etc.

The role in performance of the organization can be known from various activities taken up so far in its efforts to attain its objections. Since establishment it has been making continuous efforts for the removal of the social evils like rape and favorable kidnapping of women in the society. To upgrade the degraded position of women in respect of status, education, male

domination, economic independence and hard and fast imposition of fifties from women at the time of marriage.

To be in touch with the development of the society, seminars and conferences have been arranged at suitable intervals in connection with specific events and incidents in the society. In these deliberations, important and relevant topics of women are taken up along with the issues involved. Scholars and qualified persons, with the technical know how is often invited since the inception of the organization for such discussions.

Literature in the form of hand bills are also brought out from the time, to give reflecting specific case of rape and kidnapping and also the issues of drug addition etc. Journals and souvenirs are published. A quarterly journal 'Macha Leima' has been published since 1972 (it was unable to published for few years in between). The journal focuses on latest political position along with columns by doctors: medical advice, latest information about India and the rest of the world in connection with important topics or issues and also about women problems and related issues.

The organization has been observing 'Women's Day' on 12th December every year in honor of all the women who struggled for independence against British during the colonial rule (Nupi Lan Day). The day has been declared a state holiday.

Since 1972 June, at Yaishkul Janmasthan, the organization is running National Kinder Garten school (Balwadi type). In

addition to this a school of the children was established at Konaitong a border hill village to the east of Heirok, a village of Thoubal district, on 15th June 1984. It was established for the children of the lowest strata of society with the help of villagers. The school has been taken up by the government nos. At present attached to its Head office, there is a school upto class-VIII.

The organization since its establishment (1969), had taken up various issues relating to women, the case of rape, victimization, molestation of the innocent and helpless people etc. Sometimes the pressure given to the government for solving particular cases, are taken-up in collaboration with other Organizations. But, whatever cases tackled single handedly or by any women's organizations, the outcome was not to the satisfaction of demands made by the organization. The demands and approaches were in form of pressure groups style of functioning. The organizations pressurize the authority concerned for fulfilling their demands. Unfortunately most of the time, the government is not able to fulfill the demands made by them. Most of the time the culprits are ended up escaping from any severe form of punishment through bribery or otherwise.

The organization in order to create healthy relationship between the hills plain organized various camps and expeditions. The main emphasis on overall development of both urban and urban areas and creating awareness amongst women and children. Their health related issues are the chief components of the annual

activities every year. During the camps, many experts in specific subjects delivered lecture on important topics relating to education, health, habits, first aid, child care, hazards of disease and epidemics, family planning and different technique of handicrafts and handlooms etc. Voluntary efforts are made by the campers for repairing of roads in remote area and free health check up. They also created the sense of awareness of imparting education for the children.

The Modus Operandi of Macha Leima is almost like that of pressure groups. In case of any women related issues, protests and demonstrations are made. Pamphlets, Leaflets and circulars are distributed to the public in any related issues taken up. In this way mass awareness and backing can be brought about. Along with these, pressures are given to the authority concerned to find out the solution to problems and acts of crime. However, one thing we have to remember is that the issues are not exclusively on women only but on every discrimination of civil and political rights of the citizens.

The Macha Leima was established with the firm objective of enhancing the standard and status of women folk of Manipur to be at par with developed women of the rest of the world. In its process to trying to fulfill the objective, all works are carried out in association and cooperation with thirteen branches spread in different parts of the state, the headquarter being at Imphal. The leadership structure is both rural and urban and most of them are

well educated. Since the working of the Organization is very democratic, the decisions made by the majority always prevail. And so far there is nothing-significant animosity amongst the members or what we call intra- party rivalry.*

In the beginning, the organization gave main emphasis on economic empowerment of women by giving loans and grants on handloom, and handicraft industries. And in the following years (till around mid 1980's), the focus was on legal awareness campaign and programme i.e., on the rights of women being 'women' and as 'citizens' of India. Since late 1980's the human rights situation in the state deteriorated. Women are facing various forms of discrimination in terms of rape, molestation, harassment, torture etc. They face these problems in the hands of "Army Personals" more than from their fellow citizens in Manipur. Everyday one or the other form of discrimination is being faced and complained by women. Various workshops, seminars and awareness camps have been conducted at different places, especially at the outskirts of Manipur, here because people are tend to be less educated and aware of their rights. The quick effectiveness of the programmes can be cited from one example. The Macha Leima had just finished their workshop (Human Rights) at Toubul (around 10 kilometers from Imphal) on 8th January 1999. On the following day itself one girl while she was cooking, an army personnel molested and tried to rape her. She could

* Information got through Miss Landhoni M., Finance Secretary of Macha Leima.

manage herself to escape and informed other villagers. In that way, the 'man' did not dare to do anything to her and others afterwards.²⁷

No doubt the organization could not function properly for few years in late 80's till the beginning of 1990's. The reason may include financial problem or intra organizational feud. But nevertheless the ML's voice for equal rights between male and female remain intact. Our (women) rights have to be demanded by ourselves. We need to know what our rights are.²⁸ The cry for women's solidarity and empowerment, for building this, women need to find out their position in day today life and their role in political and economic spheres too. Along with social changes new problems are added and also old problems are needed to tackle with new strategies. The new strategies include, removing all the hurdles, which the women are facing, so that they are put at higher level. In the fulfillment of its aims and objectives, supports from the local people are enormous. They are joining hands together, for giving support for every genuine cause taken up by the organization. The organization fights and struggles hard for any women related problems. But the incooperatives of government is not totally in hands of the organization.

²⁷ As narrated by Miss. Landhoni M. Finance Secretary of Macha Leima on January 9, 1999, Head Office, Imphal.

²⁸ Ibid.

Meetei Leimarol Sinnai Sang (MLSS) - Manipur, a land of diverse characteristics has been facing many social and economics problems. Economically, Manipur is one of the most backward states of India. With the increase in the rate of literacy the number of educated increase in the state of literary the number of educated unemployed youth also increased. As a result the morality of the youth, has been hampered and consequently many unwanted social evils emerged. On the other hand the existence of dangerous intoxication like heroine number, liquor, cocaine, ganja etc., very much exploited the youths and hence there emerged many social problem every where in Manipur.; The people are more concerned about their personnel benefit rather than the costs fared by the society. And moreover, due to the process of modernization, various changes are brought in society-the increasing problem of drug addicts, restriction towards women's freedom, and other cases of rape, discrimination, molestation. These have given harassment to women folk. In order to fight such social problems and to encourage the participation of the people particularly the women folk, the MLSS is a registered voluntary organization registered under the societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 bearing registration number 5082 of 1983, was established.

Nature - The organization pursues to harness and exploit the resources of the people as well as the state to uplift, the social and economic life of the people by taking up prevention and control of AIDS project, handloom and handicraft projects, embroidery works and such other related aspects. The organization also aims for

developing the health of the youths, women folk as well as the children so that a healthy society could be achieved. Apart from the spheres on health, the organization arranges for rendering welfare services of the members and non-members of the society especially for women and children. And focuses on, establish, maintain and conduct training centres for imparting adult literacy and non formal education to the adult women and children, to eradicate illiteracy among them. Schools are being opened for children. As a measure to impose in the minds of the members, the qualities of leadership, discipline, modesty, team spirit, cooperation, sportsmanship and self sacrifice for social welfare, the organization hold conference exhibition, demonstrations, meetings, lectures, competitions etc.

Like the previous organization (Macha Leima), the MLSS is to arrange for opening childcare center, child feeding center and orphanage home for destitute women and children. And receiving donations, subscriptions from member and public and financial aids from the government and local bodies carries financial assistance.

The roles of the MLSS are varied. Through grass root mobilization, the organization helps in developing the skills of women for economic self-realization through development of work culture, dignity of labour, increased production, resource mobilization etc. For the fulfillment of these, various institutions are established indifferent parts of Manipur. Discussions are held

regularly in relation to the social, political and economic problem faced by the mass and women in general and try to bring about some measures to solve the problems. This is complemented by production of pamphlets, journals and souvenirs from time to time, writing about the problems faced by women in Manipur society.

The organization has ten branches altogether. A complete network is established amongst its branches for successful performance of any work by the organization. The active role taken up by the organization can be divided broadly into three: (a) community health and hygiene; (b) youth and morality; (c) income awareness programmes and policies. Regarding to the first one, various health awareness checks up are also included. Health workers training in coordination with other voluntary health associations are conducted on regular basis. The most dangerous problem in Manipur in the last few years has been AIDS. In relation to this, training on AIDS prevention and control are conducted in coordination with other organizations. Group discussion on 'Women' and Health is a regular feature of the organization's work. And one of the unique features of the organizations' role is the training of traditional birth attendants on regular basis in cooperation with Manipur Voluntary Health Association.

Under the categories of youth and morality, various programmes are conducted in All India Radio, Imphal - on morality and youth (the role of women in development), on the involvement

of teenagers in immoral trafficking. Interaction with Meira-Paibis (Torch-bearers) is one of the regular work done on safeguarding Human Rights and prohibiting intoxication and immoral trafficking at different places in the state.

Economic awareness programmes are focussed on the mobilization and utilization of resources available in the state. The current work is focussed on silk reeling training conducted and sponsored by the organization. And the 'members' themselves in different parts of Manipur do run vegetable firms and the products are sold and the income is used for organization's expenses.

Another feature of the organization is that other than the programmes conducted by organization (itself) and in cooperation with others, members of the organization participate in various seminars, meetings, workshop, training, convention etc. The programmes focussed on women and law, women and health, women and economy, and women and morality etc. The process of interaction with other women's non-governmental organizations in the state is the regular feature of MLSS.

For proper understanding of any women's organization, we need to look at the structure of the organization especially leadership and inter and intra party relations. The leadership

structure is both urban and rural based like in Macha Leima. And no doubt, there are intra party rivalries. But, it has so far not affected the working of the organization. The relation of the organization with state is mutual, but many a times the state fail to deliver its duty, in total fulfillment of the organization's wishes and demands. Unlike Macha Leima where direct approaches are made for state's intervention, MLSS in trying to solve any problem, in its initial stage, works in cooperation with other organizations. It does not work as pressure groups in the true sense of the term. The organization gets greater support from rural areas. Because the role taken up by the organization is more in tune with the mobilization and utilization of the indigenous and traditional methods. In such a backward state like Manipur, we need more organizations like this.

In order to solve various problems faced by women, the Manipur Chanura Leishem Marup (Macha Leima), Meetei Leimarol Sinnai Sang (MLSS), All Manipur Women's Reformation and Development Samaj, and various other women's organizations are operating in the state. The main common aim is the overall development of women in Manipur especially for the overall improvement in social, political and economic conditions. But the priority lies in social and economic conditions. Some efforts are being made to enforce prohibition, sale of liquor, prostitution, and practice of polygamy and welfare programme for women and children. Taking note of the effectiveness and success of the women's organizations, the Government of Manipur had even

accepted the request of these organizations for the recruitment of women volunteers in the police, excise and home guard departments.²⁹

²⁹ M.N. Karna (ed.). 1998. Op.cit, p. 71.

CONCLUSION

The women voluntary organization act as a source of generating self-awareness and self-confidence in the Indian women who have always played subordinate role in the society. The aims and objectives of these organizations are to fit the Indian women into a new image which matches equal with the men folk. Though their priorities, their method of implementing programmes and research may be different, their goal is one. They all are working for the emancipation of Indian women. They all have the same interest a better future of the Indian women.

To take an example: self-employed Women's Association (SEWA-Ahmedabad, 1972) was founded by a woman called Ela Bhatt especially to serve the unprecedented sectors which composed of 94% of women.¹ It was the trade union for self-employment among women.² Many income generating projects were started by SEWA. Here mention can be made of the opening of its own 'Bank' in 1974.³

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1. Only 11% of the total Indian labour is 'salaried' and remaining 89% is "unsalaried" of the working women in India, 94% are "unsalaried". These 89% or 94% are kept away from the official trade unions. They are classified as "unorganised" "marginal" or "informal" labour.
 2. Shanta Bhatt. 1995. Op. cit., p. 37.
 3. Ibid.

SEWA also takes up the case of women's health. While doing a routine check on loan defaulters, SEWA found that many of its members of 35 out of 500, were unable to pay back their loans because of postnatal complications or death.⁴ After a dialogue with the Government, SEWA became the intermediate body which registered pregnant women, collected a minimal fee and gave health and financial assistance. Moreover, SEWA also involves in the training of traditional birth attendants.⁵ The 'Association' along with Government worked to provide both funds and health benefits to women workers.

Other women's organization includes All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) formed in March 1981. Its main aims and objectives include strive for social, cultural, education and mental upliftment of women so that women can develop as responsible and democratically conscious for the implementation of all legal and Constitutional rights for women and to ensure that the struggle for equality covers all fields-social, economic, familial and cultural.

4. Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, 1992. Op. cit. p. 151.

5. Ibid., p. 152.

And other small and localized organization like Saheli (Delhi) Originated in the early 1980's as 'anti- dowry' campaign. It provides informal counseling to troubled women with their various problems, from domestic violence to health and employment concerns. Sometimes it engages in agitational political activity, such as demonstrations and public meeting to gain publicity for themselves and bring pressure on the Government to change laws or honestly implement the existing ones.⁶

So, the above mentioned organizations (few) have one common goal, that is, to bring about women's empowerment. In order to attain this the main focus is given on economy and social injustice against women.

Women groups are working for the upliftment and emancipation of women. However we find that women's organizations in Manipur are capable of performing a wider range of functions concerning the well being of all citizens. This can be known from the fact that so far, various women's organizations in the state (Manipur) have taken up cases concerning women as well as male sections in the state. For example, the incident of 'Keibi Kumuda' village where twenty-three innocent girls were charged as extremists, K.C.P. (Kanglei Pak Communist Party). The members of the 'Macha Leima' appealed to

⁶ Shanta Bhatt. 1995. Op.cit., p. 35.

the authority to solve in favour of the innocent girls. After much persuasion along with various other groups and organizations, it was announced that all the twenty three members of women front of Keibi Kumuda village were not extremists of K.C.P. They were broadcast and published wrongly. So, the Macha Leima succeeded in bringing about the secrecy of the high ranking officials.⁷ Other cases where the Macha Leima did not handle single handedly include the case of Miss Nilam Panchavaya, she was tortured beyond measure and raped and left her death body at the Imphal river bank near Sanjenthong bridge (Imphal). The case of Miss. R.K. Tamphasana Devi being raped by a group of unidentified culprits. She was kidnapped, raped and brutally murdered by gang and thrown at the Mahabali forest. And other various cases of rape, molestation and harassment by 'Army' personnel are always taken up by the women's organizations.

In Manipur, the law and order situation of the state have been deteriorated day by day. The armed and uniformed personnel who are supposed to safeguard the rights and liberties of the people, and assist the civil administration in securing peace and order inside the society, people instead started feeling insecure in their presence. The situation got aggravated to such an extent that it started drawing attention of the 'International Human rights' bodies like that of the

⁷ Macha Leima 1982 (June), 275h Issue, Imphal, p. 36-40.

'Human Rights Committee' of 'United Nations' and the 'Amnesty International' (Heiraingoithong incidence of 1984, Oinam incident of 1984 and 1993 Regional Medical College campus incident).⁸

Frequently, males are the victims in the hands of the central reserved forces and other police personnel in the state. If they dared to fight against their rights, they ended losing their lives. Women's organizations have been fighting against these repressive measures of the state.

Regarding the emergence of the organizations working for Human Rights in the valley, the year 1980 is a significant landmark. It was on 29th December, 1980 that a section of women in the valley formally pledged to take upon themselves the responsibility of securing and protecting the 'Human Rights' of the people. It was also from this day onwards that the women torch bearers keeping vigil at night against possible danger to 'Human Rights' of the people came to be known as 'Meira Paibi'⁹ (Torch Bearer).

⁸ Phanjoubam Tarapot. 1997. Op.cit, p.

⁹ Meira Paibis groups are the pioneers. These groups were more or less those groups which were already there actively working in prohibition campaign as Nisha Bandh from 1975. However, since December 29, 1980 and the subsequent use of force as symbol of Human Rights activities, the title Meira Paibi gradually replaced the earlier one (Nisha Bandh).

The mode of operation of the women's organizations in their efforts towards safeguarding the citizenship rights includes many ways. Other than keeping night vigil, in order to stop the security forces to enter and search the houses by blocking their passage, they even gherao security outposts and police stations until the detainees are released. The Gherao may even last the whole day or night. They organize and conduct protest rallies, gheraos, road blockades, sit in protest, hartals, strikes, relay hunger strikes, fast unto death, bandhs, market closure, closure of entertainment programmes etc. They also organise public meetings, group discussion, seminars and lectures etc in pursuit of their goals. Besides submitting memorandum, representations etc., to the way to the Indian capital, to press their demands and organise protest programmes there from time to time. But in many cases, their wishes are not fulfilled.

The recent examples are that of capturing of Mr. Bijoy and Sanamacha (a school student) who had been picked up by the 'Army' (CRPF) without any warrant and were never freed. In the end, after much persuasion and various investigations, it had been found out that they are nowhere in the police custody. It was well understood that they had lost their life, without knowing where, how, when and why? In both these and other similar cases, women's organizations took leading role in fighting against the state, for the violation of citizenship rights. Hence, women's organizations and groups in the state, their work now includes protection of citizenship rights and this have widened the scope of the women's voluntary organizations. This has belied the

character of women's voluntary organization - not exclusively working for the upliftment and emancipation of women (in socio economic arenas), but as well as citizenship rights.

We have found that the nature and character of the women's voluntary organizations in Manipur is different from any other place. This gives a moral support to other women's voluntary organizations in India, to widen their scope encroaching on overall betterment of the citizens. It may take more time to materialize on this scale. Because in Manipur, there is greater freedom of women's participation in the social and economic spheres; and women are still keeping the tradition of greater participation in the welfare of the state.

By widening their range of function, Women's Voluntary Organizations might help in solving more problems in the state, and create healthy democratic atmosphere of exercising the rights and duties by citizens in any democratic state.

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