Chapter VI
Economic Organization

An economic system deals with production, distribution and consumption of material goods and services. According to Smelser, the economy may be treated as a social subsystem that constitutes the mutual inter-relations among units involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of scarce goods and services. The economy of any society is related to the social standards of the community and the level of development in that particular society. The economic system generates activity in which people enter into social relations with one another and with non-human goods. Raymond Firth is of the opinion that "Economic organization is a type of social action. It involves the combination of various kinds of human services with one another and with goods in such a way that they serve the given ends".

Economy, being essential to the survival and continuity of every human society, is an important constituent of community life and plays a vital role in the formation of cultural and social structures of societies. Every society, be it a simple, a peasant, or an industrial one, has a distinct type of economic organization. D.N. Majumdar and T.N. Madan state that economic organization consists of the ordering and organization of human relations and human effort in order to procure as many of the necessities of day-to-day life as possible with the expenditure of minimum effort.

Loi Economic Organization

The Loi society has its own well-defined economic organization and mode of production that is mostly traditional and indigenous in nature. Like most small-scale pre-literate societies, kinship plays an

important role in shaping the economic organization among the Lois. Scholars argue that the economic unit in such societies is also a social unit and economic relationships are at the same time social relationships.

Land being the primary means of production, agriculture is the main economic activity. Other important sources of income, common to most of the Loi villages, are the distillation of country wine, rearing of silk worm, piggery and poultry farming. Some authors have classified the Lois into silk manufacturers, smelters of iron, distillers of spirits, makers of earthen vessels, blacksmiths, carpenters, woodcutters, fishermen, manufacturers of salt and so on (McCulloch,4 Ghosh,5). They further conclude that the Lois make a significant contribution to the economy of Manipur. Hodson writes: “the Loi villages are among the most prosperous villages in the State, for the reason that, untrammeled by caste prejudices, they are able and are allowed to practise industries which are denied to the Meiteis”.6 M.K. Singh, while supporting this view notes: “the industry of the state until recently, a very lucrative one ... is mainly the work of the Loi group”.7

Based on observations from the field and information drawn from secondary sources, it may be said that the occupations performed by Lois would have generated more income to the state if these were practiced by majority of the population. But the stigma attached to these occupations by Meities and others confined these activities to the Lois. Though most of the Loi villages had to perform assigned occupations during the monarchy, caste-based occupations were unknown to them. Thus, unlike the other states in India, caste-

based occupations such as those performed by the dhobi, barber, cobbler and scavenger are not found in the Loi society.8

**Division of Labour**

The organization of production involves the division of labour and the integration of each person’s contribution into a common task. Thus, the collective action among the family members plays an integral and important role in each society. Among the Lois, this division of labour is traditionally organized on the basis of sex, age, and skill. The allocation of labour, and the decisions for food procurement are taken at the family level, and production of food and other items takes place mostly at the subsistence level. The works performed by men are considered as ‘hard’ work as it embraces extracting wood from the hills and dense forests, ploughing, tilling, digging, carrying heavy loads, and so on which require physical strength. Besides these, performing office work is also considered to be men’s job these days. This, however, is not to imply that the work done by women are ‘soft’ ones.

A Loi woman performs indispensable domestic tasks like the preparation of food, the provision of water, taking care of the home, rearing children, weaving, marketing, de-husking, washing, cleaning the floor, and so forth. She also helps her husband at the time of sowing and harvesting of crops. Indeed, in economic pursuits, Loi women seem to take an even more active part than men do considering that they have all the domestic duties also to attend to. As in other parts of the country, the “working women” have not only to earn a living, but also be fully involved in household chores.9

Ideally, the rule of reciprocity governs the economic relations among family members, irrespective of sex and age. The principle of reciprocity dictates that a man is bound to protect and take care for his wife and provide her with food and shelter while, in return, a woman has to do the domestic chores and looks after the welfare of

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the family. It emphasizes that all those who contribute labor to the common task of providing food and shelter for the household are entitled to a just share in the product of their common labour.\footnote{Ibid., p.102.} Thus, a woman performs much the same utilitarian services as daughter in her natal home, and as mother, wife, and daughter-in-law in her conjugal home. As Fortes observed among the Tallensi, the Loi women are but a part of the whole configuration of co-operation, mutual help, reciprocal services, etiquette and mutual tolerance that keep the wheels of family life moving smoothly.\footnote{Ibid., p.105.}

However, like in other societies, in reality, an uneven distribution of power between men and women can be observed in the Loi society also. In this gender-based division of labour, normally women are loaded with multiple responsibilities of carrying out household activities as well as engaging in activities outside home. Usually men do not have to worry about any domestic chores since they consider it the domain of women. In that way, women are likely to put in more time and labour than men since they lack fixed working hours. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, in relation to women, men lead an easier life as their work occupy only few hours of a day. However, the notion of considering activities of men as more valuable than women and thereby regarding men as bread winners of the family is deeply rooted in the minds of the people. Even though women make vital contributions to the family by providing valuable services, their contribution is still considered as insignificant by men. The information collected from the villages under the study shows that though women in the Loi community significantly contribute to the economy of Manipur, they are not in a position to take independent decisions.

In the present study area, 80 percent of the people responded that they consult their spouses before taking important decisions. However, while seven percent of the male respondents said they...
hardly consult their spouses if their authority is not easily accepted none of the female respondents reported that they would refrain from discussing the problem with their husbands. Thirteen percent of the respondents, who are unmarried, said that they are still under the supervision of their parents. Thus, it can be concluded that the cooperation between husband and wife on any aspect, economic or non-economic, is high in the Loi society.

Besides the elderly persons, the youth form the axis of domestic production. They also take part in agricultural activities such as preparation of the field, weeding, harvesting, and so on.

**Agriculture**

Manipur, essentially a subsistence economy, is a predominantly agricultural state with more than 80 percent of the population depending on agriculture for their livelihood. Agriculture ensures the basic food requirements to the people and supplies raw materials for a variety of industrial units. It forms an important source of income for the Manipuri society, in general, and Loi society, in particular. Since rice is the staple food of the people, its cultivation also remains the most important economic activity. About 80 percent of the total agricultural land area is under paddy cultivation. Thus, land has incredible importance in the life of the villagers. In Sekmai and Khurkhul, there is no family without a home with a courtyard and a kitchen garden. But, people recognize the term 'land' in relation to the paddy field. All the members of the family act as a corporate group for production during cultivation. Thus, in such an economy, the family is a unit of both production and consumption.

The sons may share the harvest with their parents, though they may not share the same hearth. All the members of the family contribute their labor, even children below ten years help in guarding the paddy field and vegetable gardens from animals and birds. In the areas under study, almost all men and women below fifty-five years,

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unless they own permanent shops or hold government jobs, engage in some work or the other in the paddy field and/or in the kitchen garden, especially during the farming season. Female members, apart from involving in domestic chores, expend their labour in the field too. When a woman earns by working as a daily wage laborer in another’s field, the income so earned is considered as personal though the money is often used for fulfilling the family’s needs. Unmarried women usually use the money so earned to meet their marriage expenses.

There are no laws regulating the wages of agricultural laborers. However, the laborers earn a good amount of money during the agricultural season. A male worker earns Rs 100 -120 per day whereas a female laborer earns Rs 80-90 per day. Women are paid much lesser than men for the same kind of work because men’s work, such as ploughing, threshing and transporting grain-filled gunny bags from the fields to the houses, are considered as “hard labour” whereas women’s work, which comprises of transplanting, weeding, winnowing and so on, is termed “soft labour”. Sometimes, the laborers are also paid according to the area covered. In such cases, men and women involved in the work divide the money equally among themselves. Yet, unlike in most parts of India, there is no separate class of agricultural labourers and they are neither considered as inferior nor are they subjected to exploitation by the cultivators.

Agricultural Cycle

Land is mainly cultivated by either the direct sowing method or the transplantation method. After a ritual ceremony called _lamtaiba_, ploughing of the land usually takes place before the onset of the rainy season, i.e., around the month of February or March. Only men

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_Lamtaiba_ is a ritual performed by the villagers as a whole compulsorily every year in the month of _Phairen_ which coincides with the English months February or March. The presence of the village chief, village officials, pundit and some elderly male members for the ceremony are required. In olden days, on the day of _lamtaiba_ the villagers imposed restrictions on entry of outsiders in their villages to protect the interests of the communities. One respondent said that in olden days, wars were a constant feature and were fought within the country amongst ethnic groups, and also with neighboring countries. This informant believes that probably on this day of _lamtaiba_, the villagers must have discussed some secret things to tackle the situation, which, they do not want to reveal to the outsiders by not allowing them to enter into the village.
perform ploughing because touching the plough by a woman is considered a taboo. It is believed by the people that if women touch a plough, some form of natural calamities like drought, flood, etc., will occur. The cultivators still resort to the traditional mode of cultivation, using bullocks, buffaloes and wooden ploughs. Many people, however, have started using tractors and other mechanized equipment. After ploughing the land, the crop is sown by the broadcast or transplantation method.

The Broadcast Method

*Punghul* or direct sowing of seed commences in May during the rainy season. The seeds for direct sowing are kept in a gunny bag and then soaked in water for one or two days after which they are kept in a moist area until they sprout. The farmers sow the sprouted paddy seeds on the muddy fields prepared for the purpose.

The Transplantation Method

The process of preparing the seeds and field for transplantation are the same as those followed for broadcasting. The seeds for the plants to be transplanted are usually sown in a nursery, carefully prepared for the purpose. Men sow the seeds in the nursery, around the month of May. During this period, while the seedlings start growing in the nursery the farmers start preparing the field for transplantation. After the young plants have unfurled about three or four leaves, transplantation (*lingba*) takes place. This involves the transfer of seedlings from the nursery to the field and is usually done in the month of June after the rains have set in. Transplantation is usually the responsibility of females. When the area sown is small, family members do this but usually cultivators engage hired labourers or use the reciprocal services of relatives and friends, locally known as *khulang*.

Weeding

Weeding is done from July to August and both men and women engage in it. Usually men work from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. before going for tertiary sector jobs whereas women leave home for the fields by 7 a.m.
a.m., after finishing the domestic chores. The latter take packed lunch (chakyom) for the day and return home only in the evening. Once the weeding gets over, the cultivators get some time for leisure until the arrival of the harvest season. However, the cultivators visit their fields regularly to check the water level. In case there is excess water, it has to be drained away into the nearby canals.

During this period, care is taken to protect the plants from diseases and other unwanted hosts such as insects and pests. Insecticides and pesticides are used in case insects attack the plant. In the past these were rarely used. Even fertilizer was considered unnecessary by many. In 1874, Brown had recorded “not a particle of manure is ever placed on the ground, and yet, year after year, good crops are raised at the same spot”. However, over the years, there has been a marked increase in the use of fertilizers and manures in the paddy field for increasing the yield. Even then, the yield per acre of paddy is not high. The reason for the poor yield could be that agriculture is still solely dependant on the timely arrival of the monsoon and good rainfall since there is lack of well-developed irrigation facilities.

Harvesting

The early crops ripen in four months and harvested around late September while the late crops ripens in six months, and is reaped by November. People cultivate the late variety of crops that lasts from mid May to November since the villagers generally follow single cropping system. As in the case of transplantation, at the time of harvesting also, family members involve in related activities but the cultivators mostly engage hired labourers or depend on reciprocal labour. Both men and women work together at harvesting time. Women always help their husbands by contributing the material and physical resources at their disposal.

15. The average yield is 80 gunny sacks of paddy per pari (one paddy bag is generally equivalent to 45 kg of rice). But the yield per pari varies depending on various factors like fertility of the field, timely availability of the water and variety of the yield.
The harvesting of the crop is to be accompanied by appropriate rites. Shakespear records an elaborate ceremony in which a *maiba* invoked the goddess to increase the rice yield. One such rite is the offering made to the rice goddess *phou-oi-bi* before cutting the crop. The process involves placing a mixture of rice, leaves of sacred plant (*langthrei*), banana, betel leaves, areca nuts and fruits on a plantain leaf and offered to the rice goddess, to bless them with bumper crops. After the offering is made, the person who starts cutting the paddy throws the mixture of rice and sacred leaves to four directions of the field.

The landowner provides refreshments (*heitha-potha*) like tea, snacks, betel nuts and leaves, fruits, sugarcane and so on to the labourers at intervals. The labourers also bring their own food to eat in the field. Six persons usually harvest one fourth of a hectare of a field per day if the stalk of the paddy is of tall variety where as eight persons, at least, are required for cutting shorter stalk variety of paddy.

The cut and gathered paddy plants are piled up into small heaps and placed under the sun for two to three days in order to dry up before threshing. On the day of threshing, heaps of paddy stalks are put on a threshing mat made up of bamboo. Threshing is done with the help of wooden frail called *cheirong* and men usually perform this work. Winnowing fan is handled by the women for removing particles like straw pieces, seeds of grass etc. Thereafter, the paddy is packed into gunny bags to be taken to the home. Transporting the gunny bags from the field to the transport vehicle is the work of the men.

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16. Parratt states: "that in pre-Hindu times, the rice goddess was offered the sacrifice of a black hen and also of rice beer. In Shakespear's time, this ceremonial was seldom observed, and today it has been completely replaced by a less elaborate rite." Among the Lois, however, the pre-Hindu rituals are still practiced by many of them. Our field data shows that some people still call the *maiba* to sacrifice black hen and offer rice beer or country liquor to the goddess *phouoiibi*. Though the offerings are not necessarily made on the day of harvest but on any auspicious day, it is directed towards securing a bumper harvest. S.N. Parratt, *Religion of Manipur: Beliefs, Rituals and Historical Development* (Calcutta : Firma KLM, Pvt.Ltd), 1980, p.32.

17. Cheirong-- a paddy thresher made from the branches of trees.
Nowadays, bullock carts, trucks, buses and tractor-trailers are used for transporting the sacks of paddy from the field to the house of the farmer. Men's responsibility is over once the paddy is stored in the family granary. Taking out the paddy from the granary either for consumption or for crushing in the rice mill is the work of women. The paddy stocked is sold in the rainy season when the price is high.

**Kitchen Garden**

In Khurkhul village, every household has a kitchen garden. In Sekmai, however, it has been noticed that houses having kitchen gardens, are very few in number. The reason for this may be due to the rearing of pigs which, if set free will destroy the vegetables. In gardening, there are different responsibilities for either sex. Men dig the ground and help women in the accessory works while women join men in the preparation of the soil by breaking the earth-clods finely. However, looking after the garden is considered as the responsibility of women. Older men and women usually do planting and weeding, while watering is the responsibility of younger girls and boys. A little amount of fruits, such as lemon, banana, pomegranate, papaya, guava, pear, mango, orange and gooseberry are also grown in the compound of every house, mostly for household consumption. Sometimes, the excess produce is sold in the local market but the amount is still not large enough to be sold outside the village. The families, which produce excess vegetables and fruits over their consumption, sell their products to buy necessary items. Marketing, either selling or buying, is considered as the responsibility of older women. The income earned from selling the domestic produce is considered as family fund and an older woman usually handles it. Kitchen garden, thereby, to an extent, contributes to the economy of the society and the contribution of men in this field is insignificant.

**Agricultural Landholdings and Agricultural Products**

Out of the 300 households in the two sample villages, 85.3 percent of the families own at least a small area of land for the cultivating paddy. The agricultural land owned, however, varies in
size. 52 percent of the families have 0.25 to 1 pari (1 pari = 2 ½ acres or 1 hectare) of cultivable land, 20 percent own 1.1 to 2 paris, 13.3 percent occupy 2.1 to 4 paris and 14.7 percent have no cultivable land. Tenancy reforms and legislations were introduced in the state under the Manipur Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960. Under this Act, a person or his representative cannot hold agricultural land beyond 10 hectares. But if the number of members in a family exceeds five, the family is allowed to hold two additional hectares for each member in excess of five but it should not exceed twenty hectares. Since the size of land possessed by any household is very small, this comes within the permissible limit.

The families, which do not possess cultivable land of their own, lease in land from landed households through tenancy agreement. In such cases, the tenant has to give the owner of the land a fixed quantity of the product. The standard share of the product given to the landowner is 20 gunny bags of paddy (one gunny bag usually contains about 45 to 50 kg of paddy) per 2.5 acre of land. This practice has been in existence for a long period of time. However, the amount of paddy given to the landowner may vary depending on the fertility of the soil as well as the mutual verbal agreement reached between the landowner and the tenant. In case of failure of the crop due to flood or drought, the owner may even ready to forego or reduce his share on compassionate ground.

Besides agriculture, the Loi people are involved in other primary occupations such as animal husbandry, sericulture and so on. Though the share is not so high as in agriculture, they employ significant share of the population.

**Animal Husbandry**

In an economy, where agriculture is the most important occupation of the people, animal husbandry plays a very significant role. It is also one of the main sources of generating income in the villages studied. Like other villages of Manipur and other pastoral

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societies, cattle rearing play an important role in increasing the economy of the village. In both the villages, many families have cattle, but very few have buffaloes. Most of them are of indigenous variety. These cattle are mainly used for cultivation as well as for production of milk for domestic consumption. Straw and grass are the main fodder for these animals.

There is a common grazing field for each locality. The domestic animals are let loose around the house or in the grazing field. Sometimes, the owners of the cattle together hire a person to look after the cattle during the daytime. Interestingly, though the grazing grounds are intensively grazed by the cattle throughout the year, no efforts are made to rejuvenate the pastures. No agricultural settlements are allowed on the grazing grounds without the permission of the village administrator. The cattle and buffaloes usually return home at dusk, but if they do not, somebody from the house goes out in order to bring them back. They are tethered in a separate shed made up of mud and bamboo roofed with hay or corrugated iron sheets. At night, the owner gives special attention for feeding the animals.

In both the villages, almost every family rears at least two to three pigs and some families of Sekmai even keep as many as ten pigs. Like in the case of cattle and buffaloes, for pigs also, the villagers make a small shed made up of bamboo and wood, roofed with hay or corrugated iron sheets but rarely one can see ‘pucca’ sheds constructed for them. The villagers usually buy the piglets from the tribals who come to sell it in the markets at a price ranging from Rs.500 to Rs.800 per piglet. They prefer buying the piglet because, according to them, making the sow (female pig) to bear piglets is a very difficult and time consuming job as it requires lots of attention to bring them up. Piglets are reared for ten months to 1 year. When they grow up, they are being sold at a price ranging from Rs.3,000 to Rs.5,000. Thus, a household earns some lump sum amount by selling the pigs. Pigs which are generally used as common diet in
village functions including religious festivals, are also used for sacrificial purposes. In addition, almost every household rears ducks and hens in small number to meet their consumption of eggs and meat. If they are in need of money, they sell it to others. There are few butchers shop for selling pork and chicken. However, ducks, pigeons, geese and fowls are sold in the market only at times. Whoever wants to purchase these birds, approaches any household to find out if they are available for sale. Animal husbandry thus started gaining importance in recent years as a means of self-employment. Besides these animals, every household also has, at least, one dog of local breed. Dogs are very common in the present study area and they are reared to look after the compound of the house.

Sericulture

Rearing of silkworm and the production of silk yarn and clothes have a long history, dating back to the ancient period in Manipur. Several authors hold the view that silk manufacture was introduced by the Chinese settlers in Manipur in the 13th century (Hodson19, Kirti20, Brara21). According to the 1991 census, rearing of silkworm has been concentrated in the Scheduled Caste villages of Khurkhul, Leimaram, Phayeng, Thongjao etc. since time immemorial.22

The informants in Khurkhul are unaware about the origin of silkworm rearing despite being a leading subsidiary occupation in the village. They opined that it has been in existence from time immemorial as a part of their cultural heritage. The practice of giving silk thread as a tribute to the Meitei kings by the villagers of Khurkhul, Leimaram and Phayeng further strengthen their claim that rearing of silkworm has been their traditional occupation. This point is supported by the old Manipuri book Loigi potna, which records the kind of tributes given by different Loi villages to Manipuri kings. The

19. Hodson, op. cit., 1908:44
silk thread given by the Lois were used for making dresses of the king, queen and other royal ties. The importance given to silk among the Loi society can be ascertained from the studies of various authors. Brown observes:

The cultivation of silk which, if properly developed, would form a most important article of export, is unfortunately, much restricted. The silk culture is entirely in the hands of the Loi part of the population, and only five villages to the west and northwest of the valley close to the hills rear the worm. The fact of the Loi being the cultivator of silk is fatal to its extension, as by the custom of the country, which so much associates position or caste with the nature of the various employments pursued, any one wishing to engage in silk culture must lose position and will become a Loi; thus it is that the production of silk is on a very limited scale. The food of the silkworm is the mulberry leaf, and the species is common in Bengal, although the silk yielded is of a decidedly superior quality. About three hundred persons are employed in the silk culture, and they pay for the privilege some three hundred rupees annually.23

Hodson while emphasizing the caste hierarchy argues that the low social position attached to the Lois permit them to carry out many remunerative forms of employment which customs denies to the Meities and others.24 From the statements made by these scholars, we can say that rearing of silkworm was considered as an occupation of lowly placed groups and anyone who wishes to engage in silk culture must lose one's position in the caste hierarchy and treated as a Loi. Here it can be argued that silk could have been produced in Manipur in large scale if the production of silk was not considered as the occupation of the lowly placed Lois since the climatic condition is very much favourable for growing mulberry trees, which form the food of the silk worm.25 Nevertheless, even among the Lois, rearing of silkworm is not the profession practised by all the Loi villages but

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25. Hodson, op. cit., 1908, p.27.
there are exclusive Loi villages, as mentioned above, where silkworms are reared for this purpose.

The occupation of rearing silkworm, which was assigned to the Lois by the Meitei kings, is still mainly concentrated in the Loi villages of Khurkhul, Leimaram, Phayeng, Andro, Koutruk, Thongjao etc. At present, the Lois practise silk rearing and silk reeling only in a small-scale basis. The varieties of silk yarn produced by the Lois include mulberry, muga, eri and tasar.

**Silk Produced by the Lois of Khurkhul**

Among the Scheduled caste villages of Manipur, Khurkhul is well known for the production of a rare and superior quality of silk called *muga*, synonymously called as *Khurkhulmuga*, a term which combines the name of the silk and the village from which it is being produced. The silkworm reared by the people of Khurkhul is called "Leimaren" - a traditional indigenous variety of Manipur. It may be noted that rearing of silkworm is not an all year round activity but takes place according to the convenience of those who are engaged in this activity. Women perform this activity at least two to three times in a year, as a secondary occupation during the lean agricultural period. 60 percent of 150 households of Khurkhul who were interviewed reported that they rear silkworm at least once in a year, if not many times. The time period for rearing the worm from eggs to cocoon takes at least three months. When the worm starts growing up, a large quantity of mulberry leaves or allied leaves are needed to feed them depending on the variety of the worms. Women travels around 20 to 30 kilometers in search of mulberry trees since very few trees are grown in their courtyards and the amount of leaves provided by the sericulture farms of the State Government are not sufficient to feed the worms.

**Traditional and Commercial Values of Silk Yarn**

During off-season, after harvesting, silkworm farmers convert the cocoon (compact body of silk covering the pupa) to silk yarn by using traditional method of reeling (converting of yarn from cocoon) as
the latest technology is not available with them. This rudimentary method consumes a lot of time and labour. Reeling of cocoon to make one kilogram of yarn takes, at least, a week, since the women undertake this activity after completing their domestic chores. The women of Khurkhul, even buy cocoon from other villages, reel it and sell the yarn for a greater margin. The practice of reeling is mostly found in Khurkhul whereas the other Loi villages such as Thonjao, Phayeng etc. sell the cocoons directly to the market or to other people as they lack the skill of reeling.

Trading of Silk

Women earn a reasonable amount of money if the production of silk is abundant, since one kilogram of silk yarn fetches around Rs.2000. This one kilogram of silk yarn can be utilized for producing at least one inafi (upper garment) and one phanek (lower garment) worn by females. The price of weaving an inafi is Rs.200 and that of phanek Rs.400. Women also weave silk fabric for men. However, in Khurkhul, those who engaged in weaving silk garments are less in number compared to those who sell silk yarn.

It has already been mentioned that the number of women who specialized in weaving silk cloth is very few in the Loi villages. Therefore, they sell the silk yarn directly to the market or through middleperson who come to collect the yarn. This yarn is converted into very expensive clothes like pheege, mugafi etc. Pure pheege phanek (silk wrap around) costs between Rs.2600 to Rs.3000 depending on the quality. Despite the lack of expertise in weaving silk cloth, the skill of rearing the silkworm and reeling in the Scheduled Caste villages, especially by the women, is highly appreciable. The Scheduled Caste villages thereby dominate this domestic industry in Manipur and Khurkhul plays a leading role in it.

Uses of Silk

Silk cloth is traditionally used in Manipur mostly on festive occasions because it is considered as a sacred one. Among the Lois, those who can afford to buy silk costumes wear it while attending any
ceremony. The *maiba* uses pure silk thread while performing certain family rituals.

Partly due to the social stigma attached to rearing of silkworm and less availability of the mulberry trees and partly due to the lack of modern technology, the industry that could have generated considerable income is being confined as a domestic industry even though, recently, the government has taken up various programmes to develop sericulture in Manipur. Under the programme of mulberry development, a silkworm egg production centre is established at Khurkhul. Although Loi villages still continue to be major centers of silk production, the industry has now spread to a number of villages under the Government programmes for self-employment and development of Khadi and Village industries. To rejuvenate the silk industry from this sluggishness and to use effectively the innate potential of the industry, the Government of Manipur has been encouraging the plantation of mulberry trees along the foothills and hill slopes.

Besides these primary occupations, the Lois are also engaged in secondary occupations such as weaving, wine manufacturing etc. Though primary sector is the major employment and income provider, the secondary sector also holds a predominant place in the economy of Lois.

**Weaving**

Weaving is an important and popular cottage industry of Manipuri women. According to Hodson: “nearly every housewife is capable of weaving all the clothes needed by her family”. Brara writes that: “Women of all classes, in their spare time still weave their own and the family’s garments”. They sell the products either to the market or to other families. Economic necessity was not always the

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27. Ibid., p.21.
main criteria for the development of such a household industry. Weaving is a way of socialization, a hobby and a part time occupation for earning extra income. One of the informants told that there is a proverb in Manipur that woman who do not know how to spin and weave will not be a successful housewife. This proverb shows that the art of weaving has been traditionally associated with the life of Loi women.

Although there is no weaver class in Manipur as well as in Loi society, almost every woman of the Loi village has expertise on the art of weaving. In every house, the wife weaves the cotton clothes for her family and husband. But this is not the case with Sekmai. Sekmai women are mostly engaged in making country liquor (yu), which are far more profitable. For weaving, the women of Khurkhul sometimes go for traditional mode of production which make use of tools like iyong and loin loom, but, now a-days, as a result of modernization, more sophisticated and modern tools like fly shuttle (phisakon) have mostly supplanted these traditional tools. In Khurkhul, almost all the households have one or more looms placed at the corner of the house or in the outhouse (sangoi). Next to the loom one could find spinning wheels, threads, bobbins (langchak) etc. The threads used for weaving are mostly cotton, wool and silk.

The production is meant for consumption as well as for sale. However, hardly any family has taken up weaving as a principal source of income. Different kinds of clothes are weaved in looms, such as, phanek (wrap around for women), monpakphidak (bedcover), khudei (men’s dhoti), and phi (shawl). Even though women in all the Loi villages weave regularly, they cannot produce in abundance for lack of training and resources needed for weaving fine costume and specialized designs. Thus, the weavers of Loi villages weave only clothes for common and ordinary wear, which can be produced by any weaver. Consequently, these ordinary clothes are not so profitable because of the poor demand and intense competition in the domestic market. There is, however, a large demand for Manipuri textiles in
other parts of India and abroad, but poor marketing infrastructure prevented the people from capitalizing on this.

Weaving in Manipur is not a full time activity. Educated girls usually take up weaving after coming back from school or college as a part time hobby. A full time weaver earns Rs. 500 to 600 per month according to the quality and design of the product. However, as stated earlier, very few women in Khurkhul are specialized in weaving silk clothes. Lack of domestic demand, high cost of production and absence of a proper marketing mechanism restrain them from weaving expensive items. The weavers possessing extraordinary skill of making silk products earn about Rs.1000 to Rs.1200 per month.

Weaving is an important agent in women's development. The girls can turn into astute businesswomen during monetary transaction, as they are very alert about cost of production and profits from their commodities. The girl's earning is also meant for her own personal use and a portion of it is saved for her marriage. Sometimes, the girls spend their earning on the maintenance of the family when they find it necessary. Thus, weaving provides part-time employment to girls and young women.

In the past, indigenous substance extracted from some particular flowers such as urom lei and leisang lei were used for dyeing thread. The Loi women used to spin their own yarn, a practice, which is now rare because of the easy availability of imported yarn, thereby creating dependency on outside traders. An elderly woman may either stay at home or wind thread on loom bobbins or unwind silk yarn from the cocoon and sell the thread to other weavers thereby earning a small sum of money. Mostly they give this thread to their daughters or grand daughters who weave silk clothes. The flourishing weaving industry has often contributed to the rapid improvement of the village economy. The raw materials for weaving such as threads and bobbins are purchased from Imphal Town. Commercial contact with the north Indian traders such as Sikhs, Punjabis, Marwaris and Jains, to a certain extent, created an external market for the handloom products.
of Manipuri women beyond their families and localities. However, the weavers have been exploited to a certain extent, since the trade and commerce of the state have slowly come under the control of these trading communities. While the traders buy the beautiful varieties of clothes of different colours and designs at a cheap rate from the local producers, the same are sold at a heavy price to buyers in other parts of the country and abroad. Hence the profit from weaving does not accrue to the indigenous producer but to the traders from outside.

Wine Manufacturing

Wine manufacturing is another important occupation of the Loi. Higgin noted that country spirit is distilled from rice in the Loi villages of Sekmai, Khurkhul, Koutruk, Chakpa Phayeng and Leimaram. Various authors have emphasized the role and importance of this industry in the Loi villages (Hodson 31, Jain 32).

In Sekmai, wine manufacturing is a leading traditional industry and forms an important occupation of its womenfolk. The present survey reveals that, in Sekmai, out of 150 households, 66 percent are engaged in wine making while in Khurkhul, only 5 out of the 150 households surveyed are engaged in this particular occupation. This may be because the people of Khurkhul lack expertise in making wine while women of Sekmai possess the necessary skills required for manufacturing wine. In addition, as mentioned earlier, during the king’s regime, each village was assigned a different occupation in which the occupation of the people of Sekmai was wine manufacturing and that of Khurkhul was production of silk and they still continue with these traditional occupations.

It is frequently held that the wines manufactured by the women of Sekmai are famous in Manipur. Sekmai produces different varieties of wine and liquor locally known as leiyu or yu, atingba and waiyu. Some of them are offered to the deities at the time of Lai Haraoba

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31. T.C. Hodson, op.cit. 1908, p.32.
ceremony. In Loi villages, offering of meat along with wine to the deities at any religious ceremony is a common practise performed by the people. The above argument is also supported by Jain who mentioned that the consumption of alcohol has been a daily dietary habit and an essential element of life cycle rituals.33

The Process of Distillation of Wine

The most common form of liquor produced by the people of Sekmai is *yu*. To distill *yu*, the ingredients required are unpolished rice (*chamang*), *hamei* or yeast (made from a mixture of rice flour and *'yanglei'*), a creeper), firewood and water. At first, the unpolished rice is boiled in an aluminium vessel. Then, the boiled rice is collected in a basket after draining out the fluid. The rice is then mixed with powdered yeast and covered with banana leaves and sacks. The next morning a fluid, locally known as *luthup*, start coming out from the mixture. The fluid is collected in a tub or a bucket and the mixture is again mixed with this fluid and fresh water. After that, the mixture is collected in a large aluminium vessel and kept in a safe place for two or three days till it gets fermented. Subsequently the mixture expands and rises up, with small bubbles coming up to the top.

During this process, the rice must come floating to the top of the tub without leaving a single grain at the bottom. It is believed that, if a single grain of rice happens to remain at the bottom of the vessel, then that rice is considered not a suitable one for making wine. Usually, on the third day of the fermentation, the mixture is siphoned out from the tub into an aluminium vessel. Thereafter, the vessel containing this mixture is exposed to heat. An aluminium tub with a big hole at the bottom is placed upside down on the mouth of the aluminium vessel. The joint adjoining the mouths of the two vessels is sealed with a kind of husk to avoid leakage.

A smaller aluminium container having cold water is placed on the top of the tub. A small hole is made on the side of the upper tub to insert a small plastic pipe through which the condense wine vapour

33. Ibid., p.235.
has to be collected (see the diagram). Another aluminium container is placed to store up the condensed wine vapour. When the lower aluminium vessel is heated continuously, the cold water of the upper most aluminium container gets heated up. Subsequently, the hot water is replaced by cold water. This is to make sure that the steam is condensed rapidly by injecting cold water into the container and the liquid gets stored in the utensil kept on the side. The people informed that in the absence of this process the wine would be caught by fire. The condensed wine vapour is slowly siphoned out from the brewing container into another aluminium container.

**Process of wine making**

![Diagram of wine making process]

For 10 kilograms of rice, the distillation time takes around 4½ hours and the whole process takes at least 5 days. As mentioned earlier, in Sekmai, the females generally do the distillation of wine. No formal training is required for making wine. It can be easily learned by watching the wine manufacturing process. Being a highly profitable business, the women of Sekmai generate considerable amount of income from wine manufacturing.

**Trading of Wine**

Restrictions are imposed by Manipur police personnel, excise department of the Government of Manipur and, to a certain extent,
the local associations such as the *meira paibi* organization (women’s torch bearer) against the open selling of wine to the public. Manipur has been declared as a dry state by the Government of Manipur.\(^{34}\) Thus, wine manufacturing can turn out to be a risky business as it is illegal to distill wine for commercial purposes. The various insurgency groups have also started coming out against wine manufacturing and sometimes even shoot the person involved in this particular activity as well as the person addicted to liquor. In spite of the ban and other types of barriers, a large number of households are still found to be engaged in making wine. It is also found that the brewers managed to continue with this illegal activity by paying a fixed sum to the excise officials. Wine brewers, however, rarely sell the product directly to the consumers. There are middleperson who collect wine from the brewer and supply it to the consumers. The middleperson either collects the wine directly from the manufacturer or the brewer transports the wine to the house of the middle person.

The business of brewing wine is the most profitable and easiest means of earning an income in Sekmai as well as in some of the Loi villages. From their estimation, 20 kg of unpolished rice can produce 17 to 18 bottles (liters) of wine. At present, the price of rice is Rs.15 per kg while the price of wine per bottle is Rs. 25. Thus, they fetch a profit of Rs. 70 to Rs.80 per 20 kg of rice after deducting other expenditures. Wine is brewed by the brewer on daily basis, thereby fetching daily income. However, more than the brewer, the middleperson or the wholesaler who collects the wine and sells it to other customers earn more money since they are charging higher price than demanded by the brewer. At present, the middleperson pays Rs.25 per liter to the brewer and sells it for Rs.40 thereby making a profit of Rs.15 on every liter of wine. One of the waste products of wine making, *khabang*, is used to feed cows and pigs, which make them healthy. If the household does not have animals then they sell the

\(^{34}\) Dry state means selling and buying of all kinds of liquor is restricted to the military personnel residing in Manipur.
*khabang* to other people who buy it to feed their pigs, ducks and hens. Thus, the industry of wine making though prohibited officially is still found to be very much prevalent in the Loi villages and acts as a major source of income to a large number of households engaged in it.

**Trade Relation Between Sekmai and Khurkhul Village**

From the ongoing discussions, it can be understood that even though both the villages have some occupations in common, there is striking difference in the principal occupation of women. The present study shows that the manufacturing of wine forms the principal source of livelihood for the women of Sekmai, while sericulture and silk weaving constitute the primary source of income for the women of Khurkhul. Since wine (*yu*) is distilled out of rice, the villagers of Sekmai cannot meet the demand from their own storage of paddy. This is because the women of Sekmai distill wine daily, thereby increasing the consumption of rice. This makes trade relationships between Sekmai and other surrounding villages including Khurkhul, inevitable. The traders mostly women buy paddy from their own and nearby villages. Later, they crush the paddy in the rice mill and take the rice to Sekmai market.

The women of Khurkhul travel a distance of two kilometers to Sekmai dragging around 50 kg of rice loaded in their bicycles. They supply the rice to the shops or households, whom they have made contacts over the years and, if necessary, they also supply rice to other customers. The women of Khurkhul, who are engaged in this trade, shuttle at least two to three times between Khurkhul and Sekmai per day. For each trip, a woman earns between Rs.12 to Rs. 15. Thus, if a woman makes three trips per day, she generally earns around Rs. 40. While returning from Sekmai, some women, re-load their bicycle with *khabang*[^35] (leftover fermented rice after making wine), which they bought from Sekmai. This leftover is used for feeding pigs, hens and ducks that are commonly reared in the areas.

[^35]: Khabang is cheaper than husk of rice thus making it more profitable while selling the pigs.
Besides the earnings from selling the rice, women also earn money by selling off the pigs. When enquired about the profits they make in the trade, one woman named Ng. Meipakpi said that she earns around Rs.600 to Rs.700 per month depending on the number of trips and the fluctuations in the price of rice in the market.\textsuperscript{36} Another woman, Kh.Lilapati reveals that she spends the money she earns on buying books, clothes and other necessities for her household.\textsuperscript{37} Though the profit they make is marginal, a large number of married women of Khurkhul are engaged in this trade. A few women of Sekmai also visit Khurkhul to sell wine and spend the money for buying rice, clothes and so on.

**Other Subsidiary Occupations**

In addition to the occupations mentioned above, men and women in the sample villages are engaged in some other traditional occupations such as carpentry, basket making, fishing etc. Those who are engaged in specialized occupations have clientele from outside the village. Villagers also seek help from non-resident specialists living outside the villages. In addition to the above-mentioned occupations, a large number of men and a small number of women engaged in official jobs too. Few men are also engaged in carpentry during the agricultural off-season. But these carpenters, unlike their counterparts in most of the states, mostly engaged in construction of houses. Thus, the paucity of ready-made furnitures in these villages makes the villagers to buy all the necessary luxurious household furniture from Imphal town. Though the craft is confined to domestic requirements and very little is produced for sale, a few of the carpenters earn some amount of money by constructing houses for others.

\textsuperscript{36} The interview was held with Ng. Meipakpi Devi at Khurkhul on 30\textsuperscript{th} January 2001.
\textsuperscript{37} The interview was held with Kh. Lilapati Devi at Khurkhul on 30\textsuperscript{th} January 2001.
Bamboo Industries

Basket making and net (lu) making are important crafts possessed by the menfolk of the villages. The raw material used is bamboo and is available in plenty in the villages. Almost all the elderly men of the villages know how to make basket, which is required for day-to-day use at home. This fetch them a small income to meet their households’ financial needs with the limited skill available with them. Nevertheless, baskets are produced only in a limited scale to meet the local demand. The lack of a proper and an efficient marketing mechanism explains why the opportunity to commercialize the production of the handicrafts has not been explored fully.

Fishery

Most families rear fish in the ponds for their domestic consumption. A very few rear fish for commercial purpose and earn income out of it. Generally, the sources of fish production are mainly rivers and streams. Fishing by women is a common sight in the Loi villages and more often during the rainy season. Usually, the fish are not consumed immediately after catching it but preserved and stored with great care to be consumed later. Like the other communities in North East India, fish constitutes an important food item of the Lois. There are, however, very few ponds in the Loi villages where fish is reared for sale by the local people.

Mat making

Mat making is another occupation of elderly people, mostly performed during the agricultural off-season. The raw material used is reed (kauna), which grows in water and available in plenty in some of the villager. Any villager, generally women, who got an expertise in this profession can make one to two mats per day depending on the design, size and shape of the mat. Generally, a usable mat is sold between Rs. 80 to Rs. 90.

Forestry

There is no forest in the sample villages except the trees and bamboos that are grown in one’s courtyard. However, just after
harvesting season, some villagers go to the nearby hill to get some firewood for home consumption and at times for sale. It is a common sight in these villages to see people especially women going in group with sword in hand and coming back with a bunch of sticks tied together on one's head. These forest products are generally used as fuel for cooking purposes. Nongbri's article on Timber ban in North-East India brings out the importance of forest to rural household. In her words: "for the indigenous communities in the state forest has been an important source of livelihood, providing them not only with fuel, fodder and timber but also food, fruit and medicine". Even though most part of the forest produce collected go to the family kitchen, some people sell it to shops or other people and earn a small income to fend themselves in times of need.

**Market**

Several authors have highlighted women's contribution to the economy of Manipur. According to Dun: "Most of the work of the country, except the heaviest, is performed by them (women), and they are consequently the mainstay of the family circle. All the marketing is done by women, all work of buying and selling in public, and carrying to and fro of the articles to be sold; whilst at home they are busily employed in weaving and spinning". Hodson supporting Dun's view writes, "The women hold a high and free position in Manipur, all the internal trade and exchange of the produce of the country being managed by them". In contrast to North Indian shops which are run by males in the markets of Manipur, one can hardly see any Manipuri men selling daily wares. According to Clair Grimwood: "It was a pretty sight in the evening to see all the women hurrying alone with their wares on their heads and their little babies slung on their backs. The whole market has always been managed by the women and this

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40. T.C. Hodson, op. cit., 1908, p.23.

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practice is still continuing". The women sell the articles, which they produce by themselves and buy from wholesalers and earn a marginal profit. The items sold in the bazaar include rice, vegetables, fruits, fish, tobacco, sugar, salt, oil, basket, hand woven clothes and other things. Our fieldwork shows that women continue to play a prominent role in the economic activities of the Loi society without whose contribution, the state's economy would have virtually collapsed. In this context, "S.Yambem notes: "a boycott of the market by women would mean a virtual hartal of the whole bazaar and even could give the economy a jolt". In Imphal, the Sana Keithel or Golden Market is a bustling bazaar where 2000 women "own" squatting spaces which have been cherished for generations and handed down from mother to daughter. In this market, the Meitei women have a louder and dominating voice and the presence of Loi women is unnoticeable. This is not only due to the long distance between Imphal and the village where the Lois are being domiciled but also the policy of segregation followed by the kings where the Lois were made to confine to some traditional occupations. It is the measure of their entrepreneurial spirit that despite this policy the Loi women are dominating the local markets.

**Sekmai Market**

The rural economic system of the Lois offers various alternatives in occupation for women in the villages. A Loi woman does not lead a secluded life and has ample opportunity to move about within or outside her village, especially in search of economic pursuits. Most of the Loi villages do not have their own market centres. Being one of the most developed areas inhabited by the Lois, Sekmai has its own market called Sekmai bazaar. The bazaar is one of the major trading centres located in the northern side of Imphal valley, on the national

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highway (No.39) Imphal-Dimapur road that connects the State with the rest of India via Nagaland. A large number of buses, trucks, which transport essential commodities, and other vehicles, have to pass through Sekmai bazaar when they shuttle in and out of Manipur. These vehicles halt at Sekmai bazaar to have refreshments in the restaurants on the roadside of the bazaar where business is brisk. It is being frequently held that the driver of the vehicle who are in constant touch with the hotel owners, over the years, get free meals as commission for bringing passengers to these hotels. These restaurants sell not only meals but also country liquor and pork for which Sekmai is famous thus earning thousands of rupees per day. The restaurants though are mostly run by the Meiteis who have migrated to Sekmai in search of business opportunities. Some of the informants commented that the immigrant Meiteis in Sekmai are becoming richer than the Lois since they have better knowledge of doing business.

The women independently deal with all the activities involved in the marketing transaction. Traders from the surrounding villages as well as within the village come to the market to sell clothes, products of their kitchen garden, and also to buy necessary items. There are about 60 permanent plots under a huge shed where the women have sitting places to sell their wares. Male plot owners are non-existent and male customers are rare. There are around one hundred and twenty-two permanent shops, grocers, chemist shops, tea stalls, tailoring shops, run by Loi and Meitei men and women. The consumer items being sold in the Sekmai market are also sold in Imphal Market. The bazaar attracts traders from distant places like Imphal, for wholesale trading of the country liquor and meat that is abundantly available in the village. The major imported items that sell in the market are cooking oil, betel nuts and leaves, dried fish, yarn, metals and so on.

The residents of Sekmai and other neighboring villages buy almost everything they need for their daily life from Sekmai Bazaar. They only visit Imphal bazaar to buy items such as imported clothing,
utensils and food that are superior in quality, available in variety and unavailable in the local market. Women traders from distant villages leave before dark; but the locals may continue to sell their stuffs till late evening. Thus the bazaars of Manipur, big or small, are totally a woman's world.

**Khurkhul Market**

Unlike Sekmai the other study village Khurkhul only has a very small market comprising just one line of shed. There are very few women who sit in the market to sell basic items of consumption. This made it imperative that almost all the households produce their own food requirements for consumption. For other essential items, the village depends on the weekly markets and bazaars situated in Imphal.

**Weekly Market**

The people of Khurkhul and Sekmai visit to the weekly markets of the nearby tribal areas to obtain goods. One such weekly market is *hapta keithel* of Leimakhong Bazaar, which is situated one kilometer away from Khurkhul towards the western side. In this market, the tribals of the nearby hills sell their products such as plantain tree, ginger, arum, sweet potato, mushrooms etc., and the people from Khurkhul sell the seasonal products of their kitchen garden such as mustard leaf, cabbage, cauliflower etc. Both the tribal women and the Loi women, particularly from Khurkhul, also sell the poultry products like ducks, chickens etc. In this market, besides Loi and tribal women, one can see many Nepalese as well as *mayangs* (non tribals with non-mongoloid features) because of the proximity of the market to the Leimakhong army camp. Interactions and intermingling among different groups of people, without any prejudice against each other, can be observed in this small market also. Thus, the weekly market also turned out to be one of the major places of social interaction between people of different communities.

Any form of market, big or small, brings people together from different ethnic groups not only for economic transaction but also for
other social purposes. The market, thus, acts as the most powerful channel of communication in the region. Therefore, the overall picture reveals that the markets in Manipur despite being the place for economic operations, also acts as a place for social and political interactions.

**Education**

It is an undeniable fact that there is a strong relationship between education and the level of development in a society. Education gives knowledge and skills to the people, which are not only augmenting the capabilities of human resources, but also enhance their economic performance. There was little encouragement for education in the days of kingship in Manipur. Learning was confined mainly to the priestly class and the Brahmins. There prevailed the Brahmacharya system of education, according to which, the pupil had to go to the house of the teachers for learning. The system was based on oral transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. The Manipuri language was important in spreading such form of traditional education. In Manipur, formal education was established only in 1872 by Major W.F Nuthall.44 Modern education of the western type arrived quite late in 1885 when the Johnstone Middle English School came into existence.45 Thus the locals were indifferent to the new form of British education. Brown asserts that: “The Manipuri prefers remaining ignorant. So illiterate are they, some of the highest officials can neither read nor write, and are not a whit ashamed for their want of knowledge”.46 On the other hand, the Manipuris refused to allow their children to acquire English education, in fact learning English language was considered to be a taboo. Furthermore, those who attended school had to perform ablutions. This may be one of the reasons why the people preferred to remain ignorant rather than being educated. However, in due course, with the advent of the Christian

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44 Brown, op .cit.,1874, p.93.
46 Ibid.
missionaries and efforts of the British officials, the locals gradually accepted English education.

After integration with the Indian Union and having received substantial financial aid from the Central Government, education has received further impetus. According to 1991 Census, the literacy rate of the general population in Manipur is 59.8 percent and that of scheduled castes is 56.44 percent higher than the all India average of 52.21% and 37.41% respectively. The literacy rate of Scheduled caste in Manipur is lower in comparison with its general population but the difference between the two is considerably higher in the Indian context. However, the quality of education leaves much to be desired in the state. Vocational education, technical education and higher education are yet to be developed.

The reason for the lower literacy rate of Scheduled Caste in general and the Loi in particular as compared to the general population could be because of their segregation and confinement on the foothills of the state where enlightenment of education is missing. In addition to this, prior to India's independence and after, most of the schools and colleges are confined to the urban areas. The sorry state of the transport facility fuels the situation further and, as a result, most of the Loi students, hailing from distant Loi villages, are finding difficulty in commuting to urban areas to get education. One of the informants, a 70 years old man recollected how his mother was against his going to school. He further stated that to reach school he had to commute by bicycle, from Khurkhul to Imphal, a distance of around 18 kms. He added, he had a hard time going to school after ploughing in the field and there was no money to buy books, which cost just few annas (16 annas make a rupee). The long distance involved and the heavy cost of education made it practically impossible for most families to send their children to school.

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48. The interview was held with Kh. Nongyal of Khurkhul on 25th February 2001.
The situation has not changed much today. In this context, K.Ghosh and Shukhla Ghosh write: “while government administration took care for the spread of education amongst Meitheis (Meiteis), Poggons (Pangans) and Bishnupriyas and Christian missionaries for the tribals, no one was there to take care for Lois for which spread of education was lowest among them and they remained backward in all respect even today”. The above statement is true to a large extent, since the education spread by Christian missionaries could not reach the Loi villages and education spread by government institutions reached very late in the area. However, it is an undeniable fact that after the reservation policy provided by the Government of India and Manipur for the backward caste people, a section of Loi population also has been accruing the benefits in terms of admission, scholarship and job. Nevertheless, they still remain backward in respect of education because people are still unaware of utilizing the facility provided by the government. Even at present, the Koutruk Loi village does not have pucca road, which could connect the village with other main roads. In order to go to the nearest high school, one has to walk at least 2 to 3 kilometers, thereby increasing the number of dropouts after primary schooling. It would be relevant in this context to cite Dube’s statement on education as:

“Education is both an instrument and an indicator of development. It may not be a sufficient condition for development but it is nonetheless necessary. The present system is highly restrictive and its benefits naturally go more to the privileged segments, of society. People living on the outskirt the poor and the underprivileged either have no education at all or at best they have only the notional education”.  

Some of the parents in the villages studied are very keen on providing their children with quality education. Thus, according to their means, they try to send out their children to the most prestigious schools and colleges located in Imphal, Shillong and even to Delhi, Bombay and so on. Many parents prefer to send their children out of

the state for higher studies since quality of education in Manipur is deteriorating day by day. Thus, the villagers, nowadays, spend a major part of their income to educate their children. In the villages studied, the parents are aware of the importance of educating their children. The field data shows that very few families have uneducated children or dropouts in their household.

**Modern Occupation**

The present day educated youth of the state do not want to continue the occupation of their fore-fathers; yet at the same time there are no other alternative economic avenues since even in the modern job market, the tertiary sector predominates in this society. The fact that this state, which had once been self-sufficient, has now become totally dependent on ‘outside’ forces, makes the people disappointed. Like any other people of Manipur, the Loi population also prefers to work in the government organizations. For many people being a government servant is the fulfillment of a dream. The lack of employment opportunities and the existence of a large percentage of unemployed educated youth have thrown up serious social crises in contemporary Manipuri society.

Though very few opportunities are available in the government sector, the aspiration of the people is always directed towards attaining a government job. Since corruption is rampant and with each post available at a price tag, Manipuris, in general, and Lois, in particular, have to buy jobs from the politicians and administrators who are in-charge of each department by giving a good amount of money to them. People usually sell off their paddy field or any property they possess to garner any type of government job, whether clerical or non clerical.

Sekmai, being the most developed scheduled caste village of Manipur, has produced many doctors, engineers, advocates and teachers. At present, there is a deputy Commissioner, one superintendent of police and many other gazetted and non-gazetted

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officers who are working in government institutions. Compared to Sekmai, Khurkhul is still backward having produced only a few number of class one officials. There are just two medical doctors, two engineers, one university teacher and one magistrate hailing from Khurkhul. However, both the villages have many individuals working in class three and class four level jobs in the government offices. Besides practising the traditional occupations or working as a public servant in the government institutions, few of the households also possesses rice mills and saw mills, established businesses which generate regular income and own transport vehicles such as bus, truck, car and so on. In Khurkhul, there are about 50 buses owned by different families and many of the households have, at least, a two-wheeler for their personal use.

**Property & Income**

Property plays an important role in shaping the nature and form of social organization. The concept of property has constantly shifted with the development of technology and changing moral ideas and economic conditions. In earlier times, the most important assets possessed by the people were cultivable land and house. Even though land, house and shop remain the most valuable physical capital till date, the trend in recent years is to acquire vehicles such as bus, tractor, cars etc. that generates daily income to the owners. In the Loi community, such property is usually in the name of the head of the family. However, once the sons established their separate household the family's property will be divided and held independently by each married sons. Wife may get some part of the property especially a piece of the paddy field before or after the death of her husband. Whatever she brought at the time of marriage, whether movable or immovable, remains as her property. The earning of the children either married or unmarried belong to the individual, subject to the nominal over-right of anyone who has authority over him or her, in particular by the head of the family.
When the researcher put up the following question: "Do you share your earnings with your husband? Most of the respondents said they share with each other when it seems necessary. Even though the husband takes major decisions as the legal custodian of the land and shops owned by the family, it is being done mostly with the consent of the wife. Most of the wives handle the finances for the management of the household; but they must get the consent of their husbands for buying anything required by her or by any member of the family.

It is difficult to give detail accounts of income of the households because the informants were reluctant to disclose their income and many were actually not in a position to give their exact income for the simple reason that they maintained no proper account of earnings and expenses. Those who have disclosed their monthly income belong to the salary-earning class who cannot hide their income. While collecting the data on the monthly income of the 300 households under survey, we have taken into consideration other sources of income also in addition to their primary source. Depending on the type of occupation and the income of the informants, rough estimates have been prepared and is shown in the following table:

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Group</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-1000</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1001-2000</td>
<td>84</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Estimated from the Primary Survey
The table and the graph depicted above show the income distribution of the respondents from the villages under study. 1.6 percent of the total respondents did not want to disclose their income. The graph shows skewed distribution, which implies the prevalence of unequal distribution of income. If we are dividing the people according to the income into low (0-5000), middle (5000-10000) and high (10000 and above) income groups, it can be seen that a significant section of the informants are falling in the low income group followed by middle and high income categories respectively. It can be noticed from the table that only 3.9 percent of the surveyed households belong to the high-income group.

**Marup (Friendship Association) or Co-operative Societies**

An interesting aspect of the village economy, which has been in existence in the Loi villages, is a type of voluntary co-operative credit and savings organization, called *marup*. In other words, *marup* is a kind of Self Help Group that acts as a small-scale, self-financing, micro-credit institution. They are numerous in number and existing in different types in both the villages, Sekmai and Khurkhul, under
study. Some of the marups have membership belonging to both sexes, while some other types have only either males or females as members. There are different marups for different purposes such as marriage (luhongba) marup, lineage marup, rice marup, roofing marup, paddy marup, money marup and so on. Anything and everything, which the household needs in day-to-day life, is mostly acquired through these marups. Except marriage and lineage marups that are being formed to provide some type of contributions to the members only during marriage and death ceremonies, most of the marups are usually on monthly basis. Each marup functions as an independent unit having its own office bearers such as secretary or/and cashier chosen by the members.

The fundamental objective of marup is to reduce the people's exclusive dependence on local moneylenders and other financial intermediaries for financial aid and to save some amount of money. In this context, it is desirable to quote Nongbri's observation concerning Self Help Groups as she writes: "with a little bit of planning, commitment and determination to save a part of what they possess, they could form a group, pool their savings and lend the same to one or two members so that they can set up an enterprise."52 The marup collects money from all the members at a time on monthly basis on a specific date decided by the agent who runs the marup. The duration of a marup is usually 2 to 3 years depending on the size of the membership. Thus, in most of the cases, except lineage marup, after the completion of a marup another one consisting of different members might be formed.

Peisa marup: The most common form of marup is money (peisa) marup. In Khurkhul and Sekmai, peisa marup collects cash contribution, from each member that ranges between Rs.100 to Rs.5000. Being an autonomous organization, each marup takes into account its members’ capacity while deciding about the monetary

contribution. Thus the nature of contributions of money varies a great deal. Each member who joins a marup would contribute the amount fixed by the organization. The amount collected is given to each member by rotation. The member would receive a lump sum amount when his/her turn comes, which is often decided by lottery. The member who fails to give the contribution in time has to pay the fine that will be decided by the marup itself. However, the marup gives special consideration to a member at the time of an emergency. The rule of providing special consideration differs from one marup to another, which is often decided by the members on the day of its inception.

Luhongba marup (marriage marup): Marriage marup is usually meant for unmarried girls and boys. The marup collect contribution from each member and then, buy the article/s they have decided to give on the day of the member's marriage. For example, if the marup has decided to give a refrigerator, it gives the bride/groom a refrigerator purchased utilizing the money contributed by its members.

Lineage (sagei) marup: Some of the lineages have formed marups with the names of their lineages, which is often called as lineage marup. The lineage marup is traditionally a male marup, but widows without a male head of the family may also join. The membership is compulsory for all the male members belonging to the same lineage. Members of the other lineage are usually not allowed to join the lineage marup. In Khurkhul, it has been observed that on the death of any of its lineage members, the members of lineage contribute some fixed amount of rice to the deceased family to be utilized on the day of karma, the last rite performed for the deceased.

Most of the lineages have deposits or collected money worth thousands of rupees, which they lend to its members or other people with a fixed interest rate. The interest rate is usually lower for the members while they charge higher interest rate from others. The marup members meet regularly to evaluate their account which they
have lent out as loans to its lineage members or to other people. Lineage marup also distributes money to its members at the time of festival such as cheiraoba and chakouba from the interest they have collected. The association may organize a feast every year. This is a kind of marup, which shows the solidarity of the lineage in times of need.

Although most of the marup members are matured adults, unmarried men and women of the village also form marups for their own benefit. An average salary earning person joins two to three marups according to his/her economic capability. People consider marup as one of the best forms of saving which meets their requirement in times of need.

Saving

Marup, whether small or big, is a common investment scheme participated by the family members. Besides marup, some of the informants have joined saving scheme such as bank, L.I.C., to name a few. 28% of the informants opined that they have invested money in the bank, 7% of them joined L.I.C., and another 5% invested in both bank and L.I.C. while 60% of the informants do not join any saving scheme. The behaviour of saving money through bank and L.I.C. is low among the scheduled caste population of Manipur.

Money Lenders

There are many part-time moneylenders in the villages under study who are usually well off persons in the village. Whenever a person is in need of financial assistance to meet his/her immediate requirements, he approaches either a relative or a marup or a moneylender. 20.6 percent of the informants told that they have lent money to other people while 32 percent of them borrowed money from other people or marup while 47.4 percent neither lent money nor borrowed from others. If someone borrows from a moneylender, usually no security or written agreement is given since it is based on

53. The term moneylender here means persons whose primary job is not money lending and they are engaged in some other occupations. But, if they have the money, they lend money to other people for interest.
the trust between the lender and borrower. But if the borrower is unknown to the moneylender he might be asked to give security. The security given is usually gold or patta of the land. The interest rate charged by the marup or moneylender varies from 4 to 10 percent per month. However, the general rate of interest is 5 percent per month.

Many of the respondents told that they prefer taking money from marup or moneylender since they can give back the money whenever they want rather than taking money from relatives. They further opined that relatives always expect them to return the money immediately since they usually do not charge interest from his/her relatives. In case the borrower fails to pay the interest or the principle amount, the marup takes away some objects (almost equivalent to the amount borrowed) from his/her house as compensation.

The shift in the means of production from the traditional to mechanized form has opened up new avenues of activity. The bulk of the jobs created in the recent past are in the tertiary sector. Nevertheless, such employment has absorbed only a fraction of the available manpower. For the women, however, the situation remains more or less the same because their allotted occupations have not been rendered obsolete by the progress of time. The number of women who have taken up jobs in the hospitals, schools, colleges and other government office is negligible. The quest for innovation process or invention is very low as far as the occupation of Loi women is concerned and consequently, they are stagnant and hardly made any progress. The loom, the field and the market continue to keep the women as busy as ever while men have changed their occupations over time from primary to tertiary sector. The Loi people also attempted to augment their wealth by greater accumulation. However, there is still a sense of mutual obligation, sharing and cooperation among the neighbours and kinsmen in all spheres of activities including economic aspects.

Conclusion

The Loi society has its own well-defined economic organization, and mode of production that is mostly traditional and indigenous in nature. Land being the primary means of production, agriculture constitutes the primary source of income and 80 percent of the population depends on this source for their livelihood. In addition to agriculture, the Lois are also engaged in other occupations such as animal husbandry, sericulture, wine manufacturing, etc. to name a few. Meiteis and others consider the occupations performed by the Lois as degraded hence disinclined to take them up. While this ideology contributes to the continued subjugation of the Lois, it can be said that the occupations performed by them would have generated more income to the state if practiced by majority of the population.

A close examination of the educational system of the Lois shows that the quality of education has been deteriorating day by day. The study attributes the reasons to the confinement of the educational institutions to the urban areas, sorry state of the transport facility, and the very late reach of the education spread by the Christian Missionaries as well as the State Government. Despite these shortcomings, the villagers spend a major part of their income to educate their children. On the other hand, the lack of employment opportunities and the existence of a large percentage of unemployed educated youth have thrown up serious social crises in the Loi society. Overall, it can be said that in the absence of modern industries as well as the slow pace with which the changes are taking place in the economy, the traditional sector still holds a prominent place in the Loi society.