CHAPTER IX

9.1. CONCLUSION

Women empowerment is an ongoing process. However there are many factors such as socio-economic, political, religious, cultural, physical and mental conditions, that play a vital role in either slowing down this process or encouraging this process on a fast pace. Today, women are being gradually recognized as important, powerful and meaningful contributors to the life of men and society, but till a few decades back their condition was pitiable. Ideologies, institutional practices and the existing norms in society have contributed much to their exploitation rather than their progress and growth as worthy and useful citizens of any country and also inhibited their capability to compete with their male counterparts in all walks of life.

In spite of the legislative measures adopted in favor of women in our society after independence, the explosion of education, the liberality of many parents in giving equal opportunities to their daughters, and growth of careers that are woman oriented, countless women in many urban as well as underprivileged rural areas of India still continue to be victims of the consequences of illiteracy, exploitation, harassment and deprivation of rights and privileges.

As a woman myself, his prompted me to take up the study of the process of empowerment among the women of Manipur and present a comparative picture of the process of empowerment among the tribal as well as the non-tribal communities of some of the prominent districts of Manipur. Also to analyze the various social, economic, cultural, religious, political and occupational factors that have an important bearing on the process of empowerment of women of Manipur; to find out if these factors inhibited or encouraged the empowerment process. The preceding paragraphs consist of the brief summary of my entire research work; the significant conclusions reached have also been mentioned. Based on my study I have also listed some valuable suggestions.
Majority of the respondents, from both the tribal as well as non-tribal communities were generally between the age groups 25-40 years. 88% of the non-tribal respondents were from the urban areas while 90% of the tribal respondents come from rural areas. Child marriage is not a common practice in both the communities, however early marriages of girls below 18 years (1.9%) is observed among the non-tribal communities (refer table no. 4.1, page 160).

Parents of respondents of non-tribal communities were found to be more educated than those of the tribal communities. It was also found that percentage of educated husbands was more in non-tribal communities that is about 78%, than among the tribals (54%). These positive factors have contributed to the fact that the respondents selected from the non-tribal areas were more educated than the respondents of the tribal communities. From this it can be reiterated that education does play a very significant role in the empowerment process. Among the women of Manipur education, has played a very important role in the empowerment process (refer table no.3.8. page 139).

The type of family setup as well as the size of the family was also considered, to see if it played a significant role in the process of empowerment among women. Joint family system was observed prominently in non-tribal communities whereas surprisingly nuclear family setup was observed more among the tribals. (refer table no.3.15, page 152). Size of family in non-tribal communities is comparatively larger than the tribal communities as joint family system is predominantly followed by the non-tribal community (refer table no. 3.10, page 143). However the type of family setup has not hindered the non-tribal women of Manipur from being empowered, thus from this I can conclude that the type of family does not have an important bearing on women empowerment however, the attitude of the family towards a woman’s progress is what really matters. Many families of the respondents of the non-tribal communities have respected the aspirations and capabilities of their womenfolk and encouraged them to go ahead. As far as the tribal communities are concerned, it is not the family type or size that has been an
inhibiting factor in women empowerment, rather the socio-economic condition of the families that have slowed down the process of empowerment among their women.

As far as age at marriage of the respondents is concerned, though negligent percentage (1.9%) have reported to get married before 18 years of age, a majority of people from both the communities get married at the age between 18-25 years. In relation to the age difference between the husband and wife, it was observed that about 70% respondents of non-tribal communities have 1 to 5 years of difference, whereas among the tribal communities the age difference was comparatively more. It is generally believed that women are faster after child birth therefore men usually prefer to take a woman who is much younger than him as his wife. This wide disparity in age has to a certain extent prevented an open and friendly relationship to develop between the husband and wife therefore many a times the women’s aspirations remain dormant. Thus I find age disparity as inhibiting factor in the empowerment process of women especially those belonging to the tribal communities of Manipur.

As stated earlier, large size of family is observed among the non-tribal communities, therefore, number of respondents staying with in-laws is observed more in non-tribal communities (60%) than the tribal communities (40%). From my observation I have found out that the women living with husband’s kin do have restrictions imposed on them and to a certain extent the in-laws do become an inhibiting factor in the process of their empowerment. However among the tribals this is not very significant as other cultural factors have an important bearing on their empowerment process.

Considerable difference is observed among the tribal and non-tribal respondents in the amount of respect received from the family members. 68% of the respondents from tribal communities and 83% respondents from the non-tribal communities have reported that they are well respected by their family members. As we have
said earlier, since the non-tribal women have access to more opportunities of education, career options and employment, I have observed that the non-tribal women are well respected in their families as well as in the society.

Only 32% respondents of non-tribal communities and 27% respondents of tribal communities have reported that they have regular contact with their parents after marriage. This shows how far women have freedom to keep regular contact with their own parents whenever they like to. Majority of the respondents in both the communities have reported that they are being controlled by the family (refer table no. 4.7, page 160). In spite of their education, job and income, women are controlled by the family. The father and the husband are reported to be the main members of the family who control women among the tribals whereas the husband and in-laws are reported to be the main persons who exercise authority on women among the tribal communities of Manipur (refer table no. 4.8, page 169). The non-tribal communities have reported to be more in favor of being under control however, more respondents of tribal community have reported to be uncomfortable or unhappy of being under control (refer table no. 4.9, page 171). This point to male autocracy however has not significantly seen to affect the process of empowerment among the women of Manipur.

Discussions between husband and wife on family matters is observed in both the communities however respondents of tribal communities are freer with the spouse than the non-tribal communities (refer table no. 4.12, page 175).

With regards to number of children, majority of the respondents in both the community prefer to have 2-4 children. Preference of son is observed in both the communities. The sex ratio of Manipur state according to 2001 census is 978 females to 1000 males. Some of the common reasons expressed by the respondents over the preference of a male child to that of a female child is for the reasons that the son will be more capable, he carries the name of the family and the lineage forward into the future and also he will be the moral and physical support of the
parents once they grow old. Daughters are considered to be a burden for the family, less capable, and somebody else’s property after marriage. The daughter is not considered to be a permanent member of her parents’ family (refer to table no. 4.17, page 182). This attitude has contributed to the slowing down of the empowerment process among women.

When it came to settlement of familial differences, majority of the respondents of both the communities have reported that they just keep quite in order to solve the differences or problem. They do not speak up or argue for their rights. However, 20% of the non-tribal and 24% of the tribal respondents have reported that they expressed there views and articulate their views when solving differences between the spouses (refer table no. 4.20, page 186). This is one of the excellent indicators of women empowerment that I have observed among the women of Manipur.

Monogamy is dominantly followed by both tribal (100%) and non-tribal (86%) community in Manipur however, there are about 14% of individuals among non-tribal communities practice polygyny.

The plight of divorced women is not very good. The divorced women are generally not supported morally by members of both the communities. However, they are not restricted from participating in various social activities in both the communities. There is no difference in the perception among the widows in both the tribal and non-tribal communities. However, supportive treatment is comparatively high in tribal communities than non-tribal communities. Lower social status of widows, divorcees and separated women is observed in both tribal and non-tribal communities (refer see table no. 5.7&8, page 201&2). This is not healthy for the progress of the women of Manipur and their process of empowerment.

Gender discrimination is observed in both the communities 57% among non-tribals and 63% among tribals however, unequal treatment is higher in tribal communities than non-tribal communities. Males in the society are the ones who ill-treat women
at the community level. The husband and in-laws are the ones who ill-treat women at family level (refer table no. 5.6, page 199). Women in both the communities tolerate ill-treatment which is one of the main challenges to initiate the process of women empowerment.

The system of dowry and Mehr is practiced only among the non-tribal communities whereas bride-price is practiced more commonly among the tribals. Most of the respondents in both communities have expressed that the practice of dowry, bride-price, Mehr should be stopped as it contributes to the lowering of the status of women (refer table no. 5.33, page 229). Most of the respondents in both the communities are not aware of right to property and as such they do not have any share in their parents’ property (refer table no. 34&35, page 230&1). This is one of the elements that obstructs the process of women empowerment.

Women working on their own farms are observed more in tribal communities than the non-tribal communities. As compared to non-tribal communities, the respondents of the tribal communities depend on farming and agriculture. However, large land holdings are observed more among the non-tribals than the tribal communities (refer table no. 5.18&19, page 214&19). This definitely proves that tribal women have the hidden potentials in them to become good entrepreneurs as is evident from the skills they exhibit in the fields of agriculture, weaving, basketry, farming etc. The women of Manipur need more exposure to educational opportunities and vocational training, to bring out these talents in them and make them more self-reliant.

When women economically self-reliant, they become authoritative in allocating their earnings for the family according to their will, prioritize their needs and free to take important decisions related to the development of themselves as well as their family. Women of both the communities who are employed have expressed that they have to work in order to support their family and some work because they want to become financially independent (refer table no. 6.2, page 237).
Working six to eight hours a day is the usual working hours and about five to six days are the usual number of working days in a week (refer table no.6.3&4, page 238&9).

The monthly income or salary of the respondents ranges between, Rs. 3,000 to 10,000 and above. Income of the individual depends upon the educational qualifications and the nature of work they do. Higher income is observed more for respondents of non-tribal communities than the tribal communities (refer table no 6.5, page 240). As the non-tribal respondents are more educated and have better jobs, it is evident that they earn more. Monthly payment in cash is naturally followed. Most of the respondents are of the opinion that there is no inequality between men and women in wages. Bus, bicycle and own vehicle are some of the means of transportation used by the respondents (refer table no. 6.10, page 246).

Almost everyone feels that they have equal facilities with men but heavy pressure at work, strike and competition are some of the main difficulties faced by the respondents during their past working experiences (refer table no. 6.12, page 248). Women are not always allowed to spend their salary as they wish in both the communities (refer table no.6.14, page 251). They have to consult with the parents or elders before spending their own income. Usually the head of the family spends more money for family matters (refer table no 6.16, page 253).

Very less proportion of women 49% in non-tribal and 28% in tribal respondents reported that they take active part in the decision-making process at home. Considerably low proportions of women 56% in non-tribal communities and 39% of tribal respondents have their own bank account. In spite of education or the fact that women are employed there is considerable influence of family members on various aspects of a women’s life.

There has been a significant lack of good and adequate health facilities for the tribal communities. Hereditary diseases are prominently observed in non tribal communities whereas they are quite negligible in proportion among the
respondents of the tribal communities. About 50% of the respondents of both the communities have reported that the distance of health centers is about 1 to 2 km away from their villages. 21% of respondents in tribal community have reported that the distance of health center from their house is even more than 6 km away. Availability of proper health care especially for women is much better among the non-tribals than the tribal communities that are comparatively quite neglected (refer table no.7.3, page 266). As far as the Immunization programs for the children are concerned, the overall situation is very poor; however, the non-tribal communities are more aware about proper health care and health facilities than the tribal communities (refer table no. 7.4, page 268). Availability of balanced diet or nutrition is much better among the non-tribal communities as compared to the tribals who lack very much when it comes to proper health care, adequate health facilities and a proper well balanced diet. Because of the pressures of domestic work and the difficult terrains tribal women often neglect their health and even the family members do not care much. (refer table no. 7.5, page 269). In my observation this does have a deleterious effect on the well being of a woman.

Individuals indulging in various habits such as chewing tobacco, pan and consuming liquor or intoxicated beverages is observed more in non-tribal communities than the tribal communities (refer table no. 7.6, page 271). It is surprising that women also indulge in these habits which lead to many health problems as well as increasing the incidence of cancer and other such diseases among them.

Regularity of medical check ups during pregnancy is observed more in non-tribal communities while this facility is lacking for the tribals. (refer table no.7.8, page 273). Curiosity to know the sex in the child while in the womb of the mother is observed in both the communities, whereas the sex determination tests are conducted more by women of the non-tribal communities rather than tribal communities (refer table no. 7.9&10, page 275&6). Nutritious food is available for pregnant women in non-tribal communities and delivery at home observed more in
tribal communities. Thus women of the tribal communities face problems of infection and even death after delivery as unsanitary practices are followed in tribal communities post pregnancy. Family planning is practiced more among in non-tribal communities than the tribal communities (refer table no. 7.16, page 283).

A healthy lifestyle is an indicator of progress in any society. Moreover, for a family to function well women in the family should lead a healthy life, and must be well taken care of as she bears the entire burden of taking care of the family members and attending to all their needs. In fact, she is the most indispensable part of the family. However, in many communities it is the women and her needs that is neglected most, not only by the family but by the woman herself. Thus I feel that the health has an important bearing on the process of empowerment. Women who lead a healthy lifestyle do so because they give importance to themselves and such women do not stop at trying to progress in all aspects of life.

Religion from time immemorial has played a very important part in the life of the individual. In the case of the respondents’ grand-parents’ religion, most of the forefathers of the non-tribals followed Hinduism and traditional meitei’s religion. Islam is another religion followed by some of the members belonging to the non-tribal communities. Traditional tribal religion or Animism was followed by many of the forefathers of the tribal communities (refer table no. 8.1, page 291).

What has been observed for many years is that tribal people are more susceptible to conversion than the non-tribal communities. Conversions have helped in improving the social status of the tribal people; this is what ahs been said by about 49% of the respondents of the tribal communities. Respondents of the tribal communities have more freedom to take part in religious activities than the respondents of the non-tribal communities (refer table no. 8.5, page 295). Although greater involvement in religious activities, and more respect given to women in the religious field is observed more among the respondents of non-tribal communities than the tribal communities. Women in non-tribal communities are much happier about their
position in their religion. Feeling of honor when participating in religious rituals is observed more among the non-tribal respondents than the tribal respondents (refer table no. 8.9, page 299).

About 80% of tribal respondents and 60% of the non-tribal respondents have reported that they observed communal harmony which has to a great extent influenced the process of women empowerment.

Endogamous marriages in the tribal communities is still most commonly practiced even today (refer table no. 8.14, page 303). The practice of purdah system is still quite relevant among all the Muslims in Manipur.

Participation of women in politics is less both in tribal (43%) and non-tribal (64%) communities. Women are active as party members of various political groups’ However women are not given much privilege to occupy places of position and authority. This indicates that participation of women in politics is still lacking. 46% respondents of non-tribal communities and 42% respondents of the tribal communities are still not aware about the reservation privileges of women in politics. Preference or support of son to participate in politics is the rule of the day in both the communities (refer table no.8.22, page 311).

One of the core areas that more or less both the groups are deficient at, is when it comes to the availability of good and adequate sanitation facilities and the basic amenities such as drinking water in every home. In this case the respondents belonging to the non-tribal communities are much better off compared to the tribal communities. Cooking gas is available for 87% of the non-tribal respondents whereas only 40% of tribal respondents have access to cooking gas facility. 87% of non-tribal community respondents have electricity at home whereas only 11% respondents of tribal community have electricity.

As regards to the toilet as a basic amenity a very pathetic condition has been observed. Proper toilet facilities are available in only 28% of the non-tribal communities and only 6% in the tribal communities. This again clearly shows that
the tribal community are grossly lacking in basic services needed for survival and even in the non-tribal community it needs to be improved.
(refer table no. 3.13(a), page 147).

A clear difference is also observed in the size of the house and number of rooms. Respondents of the non-tribal communities have large sized houses with adequate number of rooms (refer table no. 311, page 144). Women of tribal communities spend considerable amount of time in fetching water for drinking and domestic use (refer table no. 3.13(b), page 150). The life of the tribal woman is etched with lot of difficulties hence this has hampered the empowerment process among them. They are left with no time, energy to fulfill their aspirations as they are constantly burdened with the responsibilities of the house. Moreover motivation to attain an education and pursue a career is very negligent among the tribal respondents.

Taking an insight into the colorful aspect of the tribal and the non-tribal communities, I have observed their love towards festivities. As far as festivals are concerned, Christmas and Kut are most favorite festivals of the tribal respondents whereas Holi, Ningolchakouba, Laiharaoba and Id are some of the most favorite festivals of the non-tribal respondents (refer table no. 5.3, page 195). Gossiping, watching TV, weaving, gardening, visiting friends, art & craft are some of the activities that recreation womenfolk indulge in during their free time (refer table no. 5.5, page 198). Arts and crafts is the most popular hobby whereas reading is the most popular hobby of the tribal respondents (refer table no. 5.4, page 197). Going to market, visiting friends and relatives, learning art & craft and involvement in cottage industries are some of the ways where women interact with the outside world (refer table no. 5.6, page 199).

The most common language spoken by the non-tribal communities is Manipuri, whereas Rongmei, Tangkhul and Thadou are the some of the major dialects prevalent in the tribals communities. The Kukis and the Naga's are the two prominent tribal communities in Manipur (refer table no. 3.5&6, page 134&5).
Thus my overall conclusion of this intensive project that I have undertaken, in order to study the process of empowerment among the women of Manipur and the working of various significant factors on this process, is that the women of Manipur are still trudging the path of empowerment. Various social, cultural, economic, religious and political factors have contributed to the empowerment process but not to the extent that they must contribute. However, in spite of these factors and the hurdles they impose, the women of Manipur are putting efforts to raise their standard of living. But the tribal women are still lagging behind as compared to the non-tribal women who were enabled to move forward. Much can be done for the tribal women as there are lots of provisions made by the government of India as well as the state governments for the upliftment of these women. It is for the society and to a very great extent the family members to encourage and support the woman to pursue her dreams and use her potentials to make a considerable difference in the society and to the nation as a whole.

9.2. Suggestions

It is true that Modernity and Christianity has brought about changes among the people of Manipur in general and women’s condition in particular. However, it is noted that there still some areas untouched that continue to chain women in both the tribal and non-tribal communities.

Following are some suggestions made for the empowerment of women in Manipur.

1. Legal provision for equal rights of ownership and inheritance among men and women should be made for both the tribal and non-tribal women in Manipur. Through this provision, gender discrimination should be discouraged and reduced.

2. There is need of equal participation of women in decision-making process at the individual and the family level. Women should have an equal say in the family matters.
3. Politics remains another area where more women participation should be allowed. Participation of women in both the communities should be supported; only then maximum effectiveness can be achieved.

4. Religion is also another area where status and role of the women should be improved. There should be equal involvement of men and women in all the areas of religious activities and administrations.

5. Condition of women’s health especially the tribal community should be seriously looked into. Medical assistance should be available to all women. Special care and attention should be provided to the expectant mothers.

6. Adequate health facilities such as primary health centers that are well equipped with medical staff and medicines must be made available to the people at a reachable distance. Moreover the people should be educated on the use of these health facilities provided to them as most of the tribal communities for instance rely on traditional medicines and ways of treatment. Women are still cloaked in cultural restrictions.

7. Regular immunization, free eye checkups and health awareness programs must be made available to the tribal communities.

8. Awareness programs on the ill effects of alcohol, tobacco and pan on health should be conducted regularly.

9. Basic amenities such as tap water, electricity, drainage, and proper toilet facilities should be made available to all the homes especially among the tribal communities.

10. Over all development of tribal women is needed as they are lacking almost in all the walks of life as compared to the non-tribal women.

11. Women themselves have to recognize their contribution in the domestic work, rearing children and their role in the family and society. And men have also to be made aware of the role of women in the home and the society and accept women as individuals not merely helpers or subordinates.