CHAPTER - 1

BACKGROUND
CHAPTER-I

BACKGROUND

The land Manipur was situated in the north-eastern part of India. It covered an area of 22,327 square kilometre\(^1\), with two distinct natural regions – the valley and the surrounding hills. The valley occupied an area of one-tenth of the total area. The land was bounded on the north by Nagaland, Myanmar in the east, Mizoram in the south and Assam in the west. A map of the State was shown in Figure No. 1 at page 4 for purpose of easy reference.

The state was classified into eight districts for convenience of administrative purpose. The districts were Bishenpur, Imphal, Thoubal, Chandel, Churachandpur, Senapati, Tamenglong and Ukhrul. Out of these eight districts the first three districts were in the valley and the remaining five districts were in the hills.

The state was populated by 18,37,149 persons; of which 9,38,359 were male and 8,98,790 were female according to 1991 census\(^2\).

---

2. Ibid. p.12.
Out of the total population 1,80,778 were in Bishenpur district, 7,11,261 were in the Imphal district, 2,93,958 in Thoubal, 71,014 in Chandel, 1,76,184 in Churachanpur, 2,08,406 in Senapati, 86,278 in Tamenglong and 1,09,275 in Ukhrul district.

Out of the total population of 18,37,149, the total number of the literate persons were 9,16,692, of which 5,60,884 were male and 3,55,808 were female. The number of literate persons in each district were 82,063 in Bishenpur, 4,21,725 in Imphal, 1,26,361 in Thoubal, 27,711 in Chandel, 85,355 in Churachanpur, 81,047 in Senapati, 36,039 in Tamenglong and 56,391 in Ukhrul district. In Imphal district the female literate persons were 1,71,357 and male literate persons were 2,50,368 according to 1991 census. The number of female literate persons were 21,667 and male literate persons were 34,724 for Ukhrul district according to 1991 census.

The percentage of literacy for the state was 59.89 by 1991. The rate of literacy for males and females were 71.63 and 47.60 respectively. The districtwise percentage of literacy was 54.94 for Bishenpur, 70.74 for Imphal, 52.47 for Thoubal, 46.68 for Chandel, 58.17 for Churachanpur, 46.04 for Senapati, 50.16 for Tamenglong and 62.54 for Ukhrul.

4. Ibid. p.15.
The percentage of female literate persons were 58.32 and male literate persons were 82.80 in Imphal district. The percentage of female literacy for Ukhrul district were 51.57 and male literacy were 72.11. The percentage of female and male literate persons for Bishenpur were 41.13 and 68.59, for Imphal 58.32 and 82.80, for Thoubal 36.31 and 68.59, for Chandel 34.80 and 57.39, for Churachanpur 49.30 and 66.38, for Senapati 36.13 and 55.26, for Tamenglong 39.68 and 59.92 and for Ukhrul 51.57 and 72.11.

Imphal was the capital of Manipur. It covered an area of 1228 square kilometre. It covered nearly 50 percent of the valley area of the State. The district was surrounded by Senapati district in the north, Thoubal and Bishenpur district in the south, Senapati district in the west and also Senapati district in the east.

Imphal district represented the highest population among the districts of Manipur. Its population was 7,11,261 comprising of 3,60,566 males and 3,50,695 females respectively. The district was extremely urbanized which was supported by the census figures as 4,19,579 for rural and 2,91,682 for urban area.

Imphal district was the most thickly populated area with the density population per square kilometre at 576 which placed it in the first

5. Ibid. p.11,
6. Ibid. p.13
MAP OF MANIPUR

TAMENGLONG

SENAPATI

UKHRUL

CHURACHANDPUR

CHANDEL
position among the districts of Manipur. The district was populated by various groups of people representing Meitei, Tribals, Meitei pangals (Manipur Muslims), Bengalis, Nepalis, Marwaris, Punjabis, Biharis etcetera. Of the total population in this district Meiteis were in majority and had been inhabiting in the area with her rich cultural heritage.

For administrative convenience, Imphal district was divided into three sub-divisions, namely, Imphal East, Imphal and, Jiribam subdivision. Imphal was the sub-divisional Headquarter of the first two subdivisions and Jiribam was that of the third one.

Ukhrul district which were previously known as the Manipur East district was one of the hill districts of the state. It was situated in the north-eastern part of Manipur state. It had a common boundary with the Senapati district on the west, Chandel district on the south, Burma on the east and Nagaland on the north. Its district head-quarter was located at Phungrei in Ukhrul Central sub-division.

According to 1991 census, the total geographical area of the district was 4544 square kilometre. It constituted 20.35 percent of the total area of Manipur state. It was divided into five sub-divisions, namely, Ukhrul Central, Ukhrul North, Ukhrul South, Kamjong Chassad and Phungyar Phaisat. Ukhrul, Chingai, Kassom, Kamjong and Phungyar were

---

the respective sub-divisional headquarters. In its geographical area, it was comparatively as big as any other hill districts of the state. But it has got only one town known as the Ukhrul Town in the Ukhrul Central subdivision.

According to 1991 census, the total population of the district was 1,09,275 of which 57,997 were male and 51,2781 were female. The rural population was 1,09,952 while that of urban population was nil. The scheduled tribe population was 1,01,878 whereas the scheduled caste population was only 221. The district was inhabited by Thadou, Tangkhul and Paite tribes. But majority of the population was the Tangkhul Nagas.

With these demographic backgrounds of the two districts and also of the state as a whole the present work would make a thorough study to the position and role of women in Manipur in social economic, political and educational fields alongwith its role in the family during the pre-independence and post-independence period upto 1991. Comparative studies of male and female in their different fields were also made whenever possible. References were also made whenever relevant to the national positions in order to enable to have a comprehensive idea and thorough study of the work.

POSITION OF WOMEN IN MANIPUR DURING PRE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Different opinions were given on the social position of women in Manipur during the pre-independence period. E.W. Dun in his "Gazetteer of Manipur" stated that women in Manipur during 1880’s whether married or unmarried were not confined in Zenanas as they were in Bengal or Hindusthan. All classes were alike in this respect; neither do they cover their faces before strangers. He praised the industriousness of the women of Manipur and stated that they were very industrious; in this respect the opposite of men. He made a comparative study on the characteristics of both men and women. He described men as 'lazy and indolent'.

Women performed most of the work of the state except the heaviest and as such they were the mainstay of the family circle. All the marketing was done by women. All the work of buying and selling in public and in carrying to and fro of the articles to be sold were done by women. At home also they were busily employed in weaving and spinning. E.W.Dun in his 'Gazetteer of Manipur' stated that "It would be difficult to find a more industrious women in India than the Manipuri". 9

With all their industry and usefulness women hold but a very inferior social position as recorded in 1886. They were considered more in the light of goods and chattels than as persons to be treated with honour.

and consideration. This as argued by Dun was partly owing, no doubt, to
the laxity of their marriage customs. Marriage customs were regarded as
loose in the extreme but still more to the baneful system of domestic
slavery which was the prevailing custom of the state.

Regarding marriage custom T.C. Hodson in his “The Meiteis”
had written as the Meiteis were polygamous and the Raja might have three
principal wives, with as may be as one hundred and eight subsidiary
partners. In one instance, Devendro Singh, in a short reign of three months,
managed to amass 96 wives but it was implorable that they were
simultaneously members of royal household. The titles of the Raja’s wives
in order of precedence were (a) Maharani, (b) Apanbi and (c)
Leimakhubi.10 However, the Meiteis were patriarchal and patrilineal in
social system.

Contrary to the record given by E.W. Dun in his “Gazetteer of
Manipur” regarding the social position of women in 1886 T.C. Hodson in
his “The Meiteis” had written in 1901 that the women of Manipur hold a
high and free position11. Perhaps, there was gradual changes in the social
systems within a period of 15 years.

All the internal trade and exchange of the produce of the state
was managed by women as recorded by Hudson. Nearly every housewife

11. Ibid. P. 23
was capable of weaving all the cloths needed by her family, and the simple loom stands in the verandah of the house. These cloths were mainly intended for wear and not for decorative purposes, yet since the occupation of the state a trade in fancy and decorative cloths had sprung up. In every house the wife had woven all the cotton cloths for the family and the husband. The qualification of the bride was judged by the quality of the cloth she could weave.

All the girls whose position was at all respectable learnt to dance as recorded by Hodson. In Manipur the dancing profession was often a rode to royal dignity and was not despised in any way as was the case in India. Parties of girls with a master in charge travelled to Assam, Cachar, Sylhet, even as far as Calcutta where they gave public performances which were very attractive to the Manipuri exiles.¹²

Regarding the economic contribution of women and spending their leisure time, it was written by Hodson as “the habit of the state during those days was to have bazars at the convenient spots by the road-side, where a handful of women congregate at an early hours, whileing the time away with gossip and light work, and attending to chance customer when one offers himself.”¹³

¹². Ditto,
¹³. Ditto
One fact was certain from the two comments given by E.W. Dun and T.C. Hodson in their respective records that the women of Manipur were very skilful and industrious in making the cloth, spinning, pottery and performing their work except the heaviest one. Even in fishing, women played a very important role. “The women fished with a square net suspended from the central pole by four strings at each corner, and dip the net well under the turbid waters of the edges of lakes or ditches, and slowly raise it till the catch rises above the surface of the water, when they smartly bring it out”. 14

Regarding the form of dwelling houses and the side where the daughters usually sleep Mc Cullock in his “Account of the Valley of Munnipore and of the Hill Tribes” recorded that “the dwelling houses of the Manipuris during these days were all of the same form, but those of the rich were larger and constructed of better materials than those of the poor, that is, the posts of the beams of the former were of wood, whilst those of the latter were of bamboo. The walls of both the houses were of reeds plastered with a mixture of earth and cowdung, and the roofs of all were thatched with grass. 15

He elaborated on the position of the house. All the dwelling houses faced to the eastward, in which direction they had a large open verandah. In this Verandah the family sit together during the day, and in it

14. Ibid. p.45,
all the work of the household is carried on, except cooking, which is performed inside; in the southern side of the verandah is the seat of honour. Here a mat or cloth is laid for the head of the family upon which no one intrudes. Inside the house was without partitions. The bed of the head of the family was placed in what was called the Luplengka close to the wall on the southern side about the middle. It was usually screened by mats.

There was a special side for the daughters to sleep in the house. The daughters usually slept on the northern side.\textsuperscript{16} There were no windows in the houses. The only light admitted were through the two doors, one opening into the open verandah, the other to the north near the north-eastern corner of the house.

Whether the social system was patriarchal or matriarchal women of Manipur particularly Meitei women played its role on the major problems of the state in 1904. They challenged the harsh punishment of the government to all the male members when the Assistant Superintendent’s house was burnt for the second time. In this incidence, instead of punishing or arresting the culprits all the male members of Imphal were ordered to take teak wood from Kabow (present valley in Myanmar) and constructed the house of the Assistant Superintendent. People protested against the wrong judgement of the government and

\textsuperscript{16} Hodson, T.C. : \textit{The Meiteis, Delhi, p.25}
injustice done to all the male members of each family. Punishing all people for their misdeeds committed by few was resented by all sections of the society. They assembled at Khwairamband Bazar. Seeing the situation the government did not allow to assemble more than five persons. Resenting at this situation all the women revolted to strike and bazar was completely at the stroke. It showed women's reaction to the overall situation. They could no longer remain as silent spectators. At this stage they were more courageous in their spirit and action.

Women disobeyed the orders of the government and entered the residency to see the British Political Agent and Superintendent in thousands. The demonstration continued for several days. It came to such an extent that the government was to import Army from outside. In the demonstration or rather agitation they got injuries including the dislocation of their teeth. Peace was restored at last through negotiation. This agitation made by the womenfolk of Manipur had been known as the first Nupilal (first Women's War) of Manipur. ¹⁷

In 1932 minor agitations were also made by both males and females on the water tax which was very uncommon in those days. The agitation continued for several days and ended resulting in the reduction of water tax from Rupees 2/8/- to 1/8/- per house which was within the water rate area. In economic front, as such, women shared an active role.

¹⁷ L. ibungohal : Introduction to Manipur. pp.47-48
Again in 1939 women started agitation by going to the rice-mills. This was in connection with the price rise in rice due to rice export. In order to stop the rice export they filed a petition to the State Darbar. Several thousands of women from almost all the parts of the valley assembled and demonstrated before the Darbar Hall on the day fixed for discussion of the petition.

Since the decision of the Darbar were not unanimous it could not be announced, in anticipation of sanction, to the women demonstrators who were in front of the Darbar Hall. The whole contents of the resolution were wired to the Maharaja, Sir Churachand Singh who was not in the State by that time. However, the women agitators insisted that the order to stop the rice export be announced immediately.

On seeing the situation the President of the Manipur State Darbar personally went to the Telegraph office to wire to the Maharaja. He was even followed by the women agitators. It came to such an extent that even the military personnel from the 4th Assam Rifles were requisitioned to disperse the mob. Many women got bruises from rifle butt in the effort of the government to disperse the mob. At night all cleared Telegram was sent to the Maharaja. The agitation continued for some days until the Maharaja arrived at Imphal. They were very tactful in achieving their goal to stop their rice export that even they went to the Political Agent Mr. Gimson to make the rice mills stop. It was done while they were awaiting for the arrival of the Maharaja.
Because of the agitation and also because of this pressure the Political Agent accompanied by the State Engineer Jeffery personally went to the rice mills with them and cut off the electric connections from the mills. After the arrival of the Maharaja the stoppage of the rice export was approved with certain modifications by allowing to civil supply at Kohima. This agitation had been known as the Second Nupilal of Manipur. Photograph No. 1 & 2 at page no. 15 had shown the Nupilal Memorial Complex.

From the two major agitations made by the women of Manipur and also the minor agitations made by them it became clear that women played its role not only at the homefront but also at the major problems of the State including crucial and emergent matters. They were sometimes more courageous in their spirit and action than the male folk. They were patient but could not react and express but they agitated against any form of government if the decision of the government was to affect the people in mass.

From the movements launched by the women of Manipur it could be ascertained that women played a vital role in the economic and social life of the State. They took a major part in the economic life of the State in which they enjoyed maximum independence. The success of this agitation of the womenfolk against the price rise of rice due to exportation

18. Ibid. p. 50.
Photograph No. 1: Full View of Nupilal Memorial Complex

Photograph No. 2: Close-up of Nupilal Memorial Complex
had been regarded as one of the greatest pride of Manipur. The outbreak of the agitation was a turning point in the emergence of new trend of political and national consciousness in the State.

The deep rooted cause of the movements were directly related to the irregularities and malpractices in the administrations of the State. Another factor was the economic exploitation by the authority aided and abedded by the ill-treats of a section of colonial exploitatres. This situation was created by the feudal rulers who wielded power with the support of the Imperialists.

The out break of the agitation was directly related to the existing social, political and economic conditions of the State which developed after the instruction of the colonial administration system. It would be highly appreciated if they were given and could enjoy political and administrative responsibilities and also if they could participate in the decision making bodies. These movements were made during the pre-independence period against the British colonialism in Manipur against the wrong decision of the government and against the price hike in rice.

With this background the agitations made by the women in 1904, 1932 and 1939 provided a moral boost and encouragement to all the sections of people particularly the women section of the society. A new was also opened in the role of women of Manipur with the
establishment of women’s organisation called as Manipur Chanura Leishem Marup which was popularly known as MACHA LEIMA on 21st April 1969. It was organised by a group of educated women from various parts of the state \(^{19}\). This women’s organisation became very forceful in its effort to work against atrocities of women at home, eve-teasing, kidnapping, misbehaving and other social evils towards girls by malefolk of Manipur.

The Macha Leima came into existence at a time in Manipur society when “women had very little option to exercise their freedom outside the domestic domain, when they live in constant fear of abuse and forcible abduction by malefolk, when their right of choice and consent were considered unnecessary, when their lives were ruled by fathers, brothers and husbands, when their primary duties were that of a housekeeper and a mother, when they have very little say in family matters and decisions and when the social taboos and prejudices of a male dominated society continued in full force despite their active participation in economic activities. It was also a time when a wave of patriotism and nationalism was sweeping across the length and breadth of Manipur. It was at such a time, a few educated girls organised themselves and formed MANIPURI CHANURA LEISHEM MARUP.

The committed objectives of the organisation were emancipation of Manipur women, upliftment of the socio-economic and

\(^{19}\) In Defence of Our Rights (MACHA LEIMA : A profile): Manipur Chanura Leisham Marup, Imphal
legal status of women, active participation in nation building and realisation of both women’s rights and human rights. Their initial energies were directed towards the upliftment of the socio-economic condition of Manipuri women. It started weaving centers for its members and helped other weavers in marketing their products. It also started a campaign for self-reliance and encouraged the use of home-made products among the general people.

The organisation had also assessed their programme on socio-economic agenda. The broucher mentioning about the socio-economic activities of the organisation stated that “MACHA LEIMA was able to create an awakening among the Manipuri women as to their proper place in the Society”.

The seventies was a spurt of activities in diverse fields. MACHA LEIMA started a Junior High School at Imphal in 1972, with the sole objective of creating nation-builders from amongst the youths of Manipur.

From 1973, MACHA LEIMA began observing NUPIGI NUMIT (Women’s Day) on December 12 in the memory of those valiant Manipuri women who rose against the British colonial rule on two occasions, thereby giving a cue to the State Government to start its own observance of the
historic event of NUPILAL (Women’s War). This organisation had started observing 12th December as NUPIGI NUMIT first in the courtyard of one family and later at Imphal Pologround. Through the efforts of this Organisation the observance of Women’s Day and also through the participation of many female intellectuals it became very active and forceful.

In addition to its multi-faceted activities, MACHA LEIMA continued its campaign against eve-teasing, forced marriage by way of abduction, social taboos and prejudices of male dominated society and other forms of exploitation of women.

A molestation case of a women vendor by a non-Manipuri trader in 1973 brought MACHA LEIMA to the forefront of the movement for women’s rights. It also exposed the prejudices of the society against the victims of sexual exploitation, when the victim of molestation was ultimately forced by family members from giving evidence for fear of stigmatisation.

MACHA LEIMA championed the case of Chanu Rose of Ngaprum Village (Ukhrul district) who committed suicide after being repeatedly raped by two officers of the Border Security Force in March 1974 and for the first time a co-ordinated effort in the fight against violation of human rights by Indian Security Forces among various groups of Manipuri women was seen in the Chanu Rose case.
The need of further co-ordination among women groups was seen and the idea gained momentum in the following years with MACHA LEIMA spreading its wings far and wide, drawing new members from every nook and corner of the State. It started a series of camps, orientation courses, seminars, conferences, study circles and expedition aimed at creating mass awareness of women’s rights and basic human rights. Photograph No. 3 at page no.21 had shown the office building of MACHA LEIMA at Palace Compound.

Another group of local women’s Organisation called “Nisha Bandh” came into existence in Manipur in order to control the evil practice of drinking liquor by the general public in the society. Till the early 1970s consumption of liquor by general public was very rare in Manipuri society. Only a few scheduled caste and scheduled Tribe villages in Manipur were selling liquor freely. But from 1970 onwards drinking in Meitei society became a common feature and this effected the family and the society. As a result in 1975 women in different areas came out to control this evil practice in the society and also to prevent other anti-social activities in the State. This Nisha Bandh was started on December 29 from Kakching21.

In 1980 another movement was started by women of Manipur against the imposition of Armed Forces Special Power Act 1958 and also

Photograph No. 3: Office Building of Macha Leima
against the atrocities of women, children and youths by Armies. These groups of women came out voluntarily at night with torch in their hands and spend the whole night outside their homes sometimes in the respective clubs of their locality or at their convenient place for protecting the innocent people from the hands of atrocities by the Armies. These groups of women were known as “MEIRA PAIBEES”.

In 1980, members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in retaliation to an ambush by armed opposition groups went on rampage in Patsoi area of Imphal west killing, raping and molesting many innocent civilians. Three days later, a woman was killed by CRPF patrol in Khwairamband Bazar, the main market of Imphal. The two incidents provoked widespread protests against Indian Security Forces and it was a turning point in the history of women’s movement.

MACHA LEIMA immediately went into action and tapped the energies of the anti-prohibition women groups which were already existing in the villages of Manipur valley. Thousands of women came out in the streets and protested against the CRPF and security forces. The Government clamped prohibitory orders in many areas of Imphal and came down heavily upon the protesters resulting in the death of a pregnant woman.

Thus the anti-prohibition groups that is, the NISHA BANDH became the MEIRA PAIBEE, in Manipur. These Meira Paibees or the women
torch bearers became very active in protesting against atrocities of women and also against the atrocities of the innocent youths.

In the changed scenario of armed conflict and frequent excesses committed by security forces, MACHA LEIMA recharged its campaign for basic human rights. It however did not neglect its other activities aimed at the upliftment of the socio-economic condition of Manipuri women.

MACHA LEIMA, in addition to these activities, established schools and organised many socio-legal workshops. They also worked in collaboration with Manipuri women’s Co-ordinating Committee with financial help from OXFAM. They also organised a number of Anti-Poverty Awareness Generation Camp with the help of CAPART, a developmental agency in the later part of the 1980s.

The outbreak of “Meira Paibis” literally meant “women torch-bearers” launched purely by womenfolk of Manipur whether literate or illiterate was a new line of women’s role in the social, political and economic history of Manipur. It might be considered as one of the feminist activities for the protection, preservation and development of their sons and daughters as a mother. It now became very forceful movement in Manipur. These groups of women have been scattered in every parts of the valley area. In some areas it made compulsory to volunteer at least
one woman from every family. Photograph Nos. 4 & 5 at page no. 25 had shown some of the Meira Paibees in the MEIRA PAIBEE SHANGLEN. Photograph No. 6 at page no. 26 had shown the Meira Paibi’s on State issues. Photograph No. 7 had shown the observance of Patriot’s Day (13th August '99) by the Meira Paibi’s at night at Shahid Minar, Bir Tikendrajit Park.

Most of the women of Meria Paibi were illiterate. Very few literates joined in this group. The age-range of the Meria Paibis were approximately from 40 years upto 60-65 years. Most of the women who belonged to the Meira Paibee did not have small babies. They also should be one who could face problems. They were mostly engaged in the business of selling goods in the market.

The Meira Paibees participated at various levels sometimes at the issues, sometime at the issues of the locality and sometime at family disputes. They even participated at the International Conference of Women at Beijing. Women thus took different roles in the society. Above all it become very clear that women participated in the politics whether literate or illiterate.

In short, the women of Manipur in their participation in social, educational and economic fields could be viewed under two platforms. In one platform, the illiterate women participated, controlled and occupied the market place, known as IMA MARKET (Mother’s market) at
Photograph No. 4: Meira Paibis in the Meira Paibi Shanglen

Photograph No. 5: Meira Paibis in the Meira Paibi Shanglen
Photograph No. 6: Meira Paibis' rally on State issues

Photograph No. 7: Observance of Patriot's Day by the Meira Paibis at night at Saheed Minar, Bir Tikendrajit Park
Khwairamband Bazar. It was a big contributory factor towards economic development. It played big roles on issues and immediate man-made problems like price-rise in essential commodities, economic blockade, mass movement etcetera. Photo No. 8 and 9 at page 29 had shown some section of the Ima Market.

The educated working women and the educated girls played its role through another platform. They played their role in a multipronged approach as an economic contributor, as a wife looking after the household duties and the family, as a working woman, as a resource person in the academic and social organisations, as a participant in the organisations etcetera. The educated working women formed Organisations and took loans through Non-Government Organisations. They framed policies, programmes, developmental works with legal framework through different fundings and their own contributions and sacrifice. The activities of these organisations were issue-based in addition to their own organisational structure.

Among other working women's organisations other educated girls' organisations a group educated working women organised the All Manipur Working Women's Voluntary Association under the All India Voluntary Working women's Association in 1973. The organisation, which was organised by the educated working women, among other activities had been proving boarding facilities through the construction of one hostel,
Paona Road, Imphal for those working women from far and distant places for purpose of security, protection and safe-guard. This had been mainly established for providing safe and sound facility to the special problems of those working women from distant places. The organisation had also been contributing in women's welfare and development through various programmes like women's health awareness campaign, legal awareness, group discussion etcetera.

In this way women's organisations had been taking up programmes for the upliftment of the position of women in the State. In short, women in Manipur were not only bread-earner but also distributors which became a distinctive feature in comparison to other states of the country. Moreover, when policies and programmes were taken up by the educated working women through their respective NGOs, benefits were given to the uneducated woman groups also.

Women in Manipur had participated in various fields, organisations and statutorial positions either in administration or in active service or in teaching or in medical or in ministerial work or so according to their educational levels and status. Thus, the educated women of Manipur participated in various movements. However, they lacked of participation in politics and decision-making bodies.
Photograph No. 8: Women selling goods at the 'Ima Market'

Photograph No. 9: Women selling fruits at the 'Ima Market'
With active participation in every movement of the society women had its role in politics like in their political attitudes-awareness, commitment and behaviours, participation in the spolitical process as voters and candidates in elections and their impact on the political process of the State. Perhaps Manipuri women enjoyed first the right of participation in political process as voters after the Indian independence. The women of Manipur participated as voters in the election of 1946 which was held under the Manipur State Constitution Act 1947 for framing a responsible government in Manipur. From this time onwards, the women of Manipur had been participating in the political process of the State as voters in every election.

Women voters always outnumbered male voters in every election. But no woman was elected either in the Assembly or Parliamentary elections till 1990. Of course, one woman shrimati M.K.Binodini Devi was the lone exception to be elected as a member of the Electoral College which was formed for the election of Rajiya Sabha Member from Manipur in 1952. She contested from Khurai Constituency and got elected by defeating three male rival candidates.  

Women participants in the political life of the State were collective and they were mainly from the valley area particularly from the capital district itself. Gradually it reached the other valley districts also. Perhaps education and urbanisation have also influence both awareness and participation.

EDUCATION OF THE GIRLS IN THE PRE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

With these backgrounds in the social, political and economic participation by the women of Manipur the educational background was also required to be studied during these periods. For, "education was the most powerful instrument not only of personal realisation but also for national development. Education can play two roles: (i) it may strengthen and perpetuate the status quo with some marginal modifications as may be necessitated from time to time merely in the interest of the survival of the status quo itself; or (ii) it may create a new social order based on national needs and aspirations". Taking into consideration of the close link between education and development an attempt was made to reveal the educational background of the girls and their relative positions and status in the society of Manipur.

Although the Chapter Act of 1813 was passed which merely compelled the East India Company to accept the responsibility for the education of the Indian people, and although the Despatch of 1854 prescribed an educational policy for India in detail which fromed the second important period in the history of education in India during the British Rule, formal education in Manipur was not started before 1885. It was only after 1885 that the first Middle English School was started at

Imphal\textsuperscript{24}. Photograph No. 10 at page 33 had shown the first school in Manipur, "Johnstone Middle English School".

Although the Despatch of 1854 and the Hunter's Education Commission Report had recommended for girls education, the education for girls in Manipur was first started with the enrolment of two girls in 1898\textsuperscript{25} in the schools of Imphal area. It did not signify that effort were not made for girls' education. It seemed that in a girls' school the teachers should be lady teachers. Perhaps with this mind in view efforts were made for contacting lady teachers from other states and other districts like Cachhar of Assam and Sylhet of Tripura during 1894-95. As such by December 1899 one girls' L.P. School was established at Moirangkhom of Imphal District with 12 girls with the availability of one lady teacher.\textsuperscript{26} And the number of enrolment was increased to 53 by 31st March, 1900. This was the first girls' school in Manipur Photograph No. 11 at page 33 had shown the school.

The late and poor enrolment of girls was because of social stigma. The education of women could not be said to have made equal progress although it was hoped, not without reason, that in a state like Manipur where women hold such an important position, in the economic activity of the State, the effort to establish a good school for the daughters of the high classes had been attended with more success than had actually been the case.

\textsuperscript{24} Th. Mangoljao Singh : \textit{Western Education in Manipur}, Vol. I, p. 17.  
\textsuperscript{25} Ditto.  
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p. 18.
Photograph No. 10: Johnstone Higher Secondary School

Photograph No. 11: Moirangkhom Junior High School
In this case T.C. Hodson stated in his book entitled “The Meitheis” that “the failure is not improbably due to the rumour, started by malignity and disseminated by stupidity, that “as soon as the girls had been satisfactorily taught to read, write and speak English, they were to be shipped off to England where there was said to be a scarcity of marriable women. The sole basis of this untoward myth lay in the fact that at that time among all the officers of government, Civil and Military, then serving in Manipur, not one, was married. Such rumours are constantly arising in Manipur, and derive their wide circulation through the agency of the bazaars, where time hangs so heavy that such gossip is eagerly retailed and receives too often ready acceptance.”27 Thus lack of awareness of the value of education by the society and also due to social stigma slowed down the progress of girls’ education in Manipur. Consequent on this rumour the number of enrolment was reduced to 22 during 1900-1901 and the number of enrolment was increased to 24 with an attendance percent of 18.29 during 1901-02. In this connection the political Agent of Manipur A.E.Woods was not satisfied and written in the Administration Report of the period as “the girls’ school can hardly be considered a success, the attendance is very poor (average daily attendee is 18.29 and only about half are Manipuri subjects), and if it does not improve this year I shall have to close it, as the expense is altogether out of all proportion to the benefit it confers. The Manipuries apparently see no benefit in educating their female children and I cannot inclined to disagree with them.” 28

27. Hodson, T. C. Meitheis, Delhi, 1987, p. 25
28. Administration Report, 1901-02, Government of Manipur, p.17
The Report had shown lack of administrative will power and it also seemed to weigh more on expenses than on the real value of imparting education to the girls. It also showed lack of psychological and delicate handling of the social position of the state during those days. Discouragement perhaps might have been resulted from the introduction and the study of Manipuri subjects. If the administration was fair enough to spread knowledge and impart education to the girl children of Manipur there could have been more efforts and more contributions towards the introduction of education to the girls. It showed lack of effort, firm decision and strong will power of administration to impart girls education in those days. Of course, the social stigma prevailed in every part of the country and it was because of various effort and open patronage of government that the social stigma was gradually removed.

The same feeling prevailed and expressed in the Administration Report in 1902-03 also as "The girls' school succeeded no better than I thought it would and it had to be closed at the end of the year". It could be analysed from various angles-first, the medium of instruction. Instead of taking up steps for the introduction of education through mother tongue, Bengali medium of instruction was introduced. Second, instead of nurturing the mother-tongue it nurtured a different language which was foreign to the child. Third, lack of will power, effort and commitment of the administrator.

By 1920-21 in the Middle Vernacular School 15 girls were enrolled. Thus from 1921-30 the number of girls enrolled were 22, 28, 28, 25, 29, 26, 26, 24, and 35. During 1930-31 the number of girls enrolled in M.E. School in the hills were 41. From 1915-16 to 1920-21 no girl was enrolled in L.P. schools in the hills. In the enrolment of girls in the valley also there were ups and downs having 45, 31, 40, 41, 39 and 24 upto 1920-21. The number of girls enrolment was increased in L.P. school during 1929-30 and 1930-31 with the enrolment of 57 and 56 respectively. By this time the number of girls enrolment in the hills was also increased.

There were ups and downs in the enrolment of girls from 1921-30 in the Middle Vernacular Schools. In the L.P. School there was no enrolment of girls in the hills by 1908-09. However, in the plain area 13 girls were enrolled. During 1909-10 two girls were enrolled in the hills in the L.P. school and 11 girls were enrolled in the valley as such there were ups and downs in the enrolment of girls having a number of 54 girls upto 1914-15.

The number of girls’ L.P. School was increased to three. However, by 1933-34 there were cancellation of three girls’ L.P. school and establishment of another girls’ L.P. school by 1934-35. Although there were adjustment here and there in the location of the school the total number of girls’ L.P. School were four during 1934. From 1939-40 to 1942-43 no administration report was published because of the World War II.
During 1934-35 one girls' High School named as Manipur Girls' High School was established and in the next year another girls' private High School was established in the month of May. The school was named after the princess of the State as Tamphasana Girls’ High School at Purcilomba Khongangkhong, the venue of which had now been changed to Nityaipat Chuthek. As such, the school was aided by the State Darbar. The former girls’ High School was abolished. With the gradual expansion of education of the girls by 1945-46 there was one girls’ high school with an enrolment of 149 girls which increased to 299 in 1946-47. In 1946 the State established one co-educational College called Dhanamanjuri College (D.M. College) which was named after Dowager Maharani Dhanamanjuri Devi. Photograph No. 12 & 13 at page no. 38 had shown the T.G. Higher Secondary School and the D.M. College.

Expansion of education had been made in the post-independence period with the constitution of Territorial Council and installation of Popular Government by 1948-49. The number of government girls’ school were eight and the number of girls’ enrolment was also suddenly increased to 4527. The total number of girls’ educational institutions were also increased. From 1951 onwards there was a rapid growth of Colleges in Manipur, from 2 Colleges with an enrolment of 1194 including 75 girls in 1952 to 48 Colleges including 6 for women with an enrolment of over 35,000 students including 11,000 girls in 1987 & 1988. Of these 48 Colleges, 24 were government Colleges and the rest were aided and unaided
Photograph No. 12: Tamphasana Girls' Higher Secondary School

Photograph No. 13: Dhanamanjuri College, the first college in Manipur
private colleges. Some more privately manages colleges were still coming up in Manipur. In 1980 a University was also established at Canchipur. Until 1980 all the colleges were affiliated to Guwahati University. From 1980 onwards all the colleges were brought under the Manipur University.

Thus in 1990-91 the State had one University (for both sexes), 06 Colleges for general education, one College for Professional/other education, 45 high/higher Secondary School, 24 junior high/M.E. Schools, 86 Junior Basic/U.J.B. Primary school, 78 schools for other education and one Nursery school. Thus the total number of girls’ educational institutions were 240.\(^{30}\)

The number of the girl scholars during 1990-91 were 585 in the University, 16,597 in the Colleges for general education, 1,708 in the College for Professional and other education, 57,811 in the High/Higher Secondary Schools 34,748 in the Middle Junior High/Senior Basic Schools 85,655 in the U.J.B./J.B./Primary Schools, 514 in the Schools for Professional education, 38,669 in the Schools for other education and 21 in the Nursery Schools. Thus the total number of enrolment of girls in the different institutions by 1990-91 were 2,36,298.\(^{31}\)

---


WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN TEACHING PROFESSION IN DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS UPTO 1990-91

The number of lady teachers employed in different educational institutions were 80 in the University, 330 in the Colleges for general education, 68 in the Colleges for Professional/other education, 2,540 in High/Higher Secondary Schools, 1,745 in the Middle/Junior High School/Basic Schools, 2,575 in the U.J.B./J.B. and Primary Schools, 77 in the Schools for Professional education, 1,128 in the Schools for other education and 05 in the nursery Schools. Thus the total number of lady teachers employed in different institutions of Manipur during 1990-91 were 8,548\(^\text{32}\).

WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS UPTO 1991

The total number of women employees in Manipur by December 1991 were 8,781\(^*\). This figure was inclusive of both Public Sector and Private Sector. Under the Public Sector the total number of women employees were 8,553 and under Private Sector it was 228. Thus the total figure for both Public Sector as well as Private Sector for women employees comes up to 8,781 out of a total of 55,849.

\(^{32}\) Ibid. p.53
Thus the land of Manipur having 18,37,149 population with 8,98,790 female population has got the literacy percentage of 59.89 with a female literacy rate of 47.60. The role of two major groups of women in socio-economic, political and educational aspects would be revealed, discussed and analysed in the following chapters with a review of the related literature and also with the research designs and tools adopted and utilised for the present study.

With the total number of literate girls and also with the total number of women employees the role of educated working women in the valley and in the hill areas of Manipur had to be studied in various perspectives. Although women in the valley and in the hills of Manipur enjoyed the fullest possible liberty as compared to women in any other part of the country, its position had to be assessed in the pre and post-independence period. Moreover, looking at the role played in most of their working life namely buying and selling at the market, weaving and spinning at home along with their household work, in the working place, the position in the literacy figure required to be assessed.

The role of educated working women in the family, in the working place, in the society, in the economic contribution and the
political participation along with its relative responsibility in decision-making, impressions and abilities and role conflict required a through and indepth study. The social attitude and recognition and status and positions accorded to them on the lines of the role played by them needed thorough study. The gender dominance in the family, in the working place and in the society including social attitude and recognition in both the hills and plains needed an analysis.