PREFACE

Manipur women's world is often described by many authors as unique. They figure very significantly in the local market scene since time immemorial. While doing so, they perform a unique type of instrumental role in the society. They also join hands in agricultural and small-scale productions. Moreover, in many social festivals, they and their images occupy remarkable positions. Their extra-familial social group interaction is much wider than that of many women in patriarchal societies. Ms. Ursula Grahm Bowrr's non-professional description of Imphal market in her Naga Path (1950, p. 6) may arrest one's imagination. She notes, "Every evening in the Imphal Bazar was held the Sana Kaitel, the Golden Market."

"When the heat was out of the day and the light fell long and warm, files of villagers came padding in with their produce through the soft, thick dust of the roadsides. Along the edge of the polo-ground passed one endless procession of purple and scarlet, russet and green and the ever-recurring yellow of the women's shawls. Girls passed, their stiff, striped faneks wrapped round them and belted in. Women, their hair sleeked back and knotted, pressed by in groups of black-and-purple and black-and-gold ...
"By dusk the great square space was crammed. Hundreds of small lamps, wicks burning in saucers of oil, glimmered down the long aisles where the women sellers sat behind goods whose colours glowed again in the half-light - quilts in mauve and pink, stacks of white muslins, red-and-yellow loin-cloths, and the broad-banded scarlet-and-white cloths which the Tangkhul Nagas wore. There were brass wares and brass jewellery, bowls and dishes, armlets and bracelets, and crowns in imitation of Manipuri goldwork; a dried fish section, smelling to high heave; the potters' place, stacked with red earthenware jars; and betel, coconut and food-sellers of every kind, who overflowed from the stalls and cluttered the packed roads with titbits displayed on trays or on strips of plantain leaf. There was tingling smell of smoke, spices, dust and marigolds in the air, there were lorries nosing and honking through the press, there were half-naked hillmen stopping to stare, and away and beyond it all was a bronze-green twilight and hills of black velvet against a shot-silk sky."

R. Brown's account in his Statistical Account of Manipur (1873: 1975, pp. 90-1) clearly shows the unique character of women's behaviour in economy. "All the
marketing of the country is conducted in the open air by women.

"Many of these collections of women are to be found throughout the Imphal or capital, but the principal meeting-place for women trading there is on a vacant plot of ground to one side of a brick bridge; here, during the early part of the day, the women congregate with their wares for sale. In the afternoon this market-place is deserted, and the women all migrate to the side of the road leading to the raja's enclosure, quite close to the gate, and every short distance from the bridge. There is no attempt in any of the market-places at the erection of shelter of any kind, and the women remain exposed to rain or sun as the case may be. ... There is very little to interest a European in the contents of the various market-places, which consists of food, such as dry fish, rice, vegetables, pan, supari, clothes, ornaments for the hill-men, and sweetmeats. ... Men, with the exception of foreigners, are not allowed to enter the market places; all the buying and selling is conducted by women".

Manjusri Chaki-Sircar in her *Feminism in A Traditional Society* tells of Manipuri women in a wider perspective. Her views may be summarized in her own lines
"The subsistence base in Manipur Valley is agriculture. Next to agriculture, weaving is the most important economic activity. Whereas agricultural activities are open to both sexes, weaving is entirely in the hands of women. Women are also in full charge of the marketing of both agricultural and industrial products, which provide cash income for the family." (1984, p. 38).

However, it cannot be a universal generalization that every Manipuri woman conforms to the pictured image. Some of them are law breakers, deviants. This side of their lives is not observed by any of the authors so far. Because of it, there is a gap in our understanding of their 'ideal' and 'actual' behaviours in the larger social system of Manipur. Moreover, we cannot feel the pain, tension and disturbances experienced by this 'unique' social group.

The present study is an attempt to identify the general pattern of the strain and motivational process that generate deviant behaviours of the Manipuri women. This will be examined in the women's world of Manipur with the objective of clearly understanding the problem in point. Crime cannot be studied in isolation from the general context of social interaction; hence the location
of systemic strain will help much to the legal enforcers to check the direction of deviant action.

As the study will focus on the value-system as one of the orientation of human social action, the values that encourage the deviance will be highlighted. Again that part of value-system that disturbs the motivational equilibrium will also come into the picture. This will be a real contribution to the social planners and to the students of sociology of deviance.

Manipuri women's present position and their role conflict will be studied. The outcome that is directly concerned with female criminality will attract not only the students of social sciences but also several social workers, thinkers and social welfare agencies.

Again the present study is expected to be one of the first theoretically oriented studies of deviance in general and female criminality in particular in the north-east India. This will help many sections of the academic world in analysing such crime in the region from a sociological standpoint as a pure science.