CHAPTER II

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Traditionally, women are considered to be weak and inferior to men. Women suffer from low self esteem because of social subjugation and lack of economic independence. But the role of women in a society is very vital and no nation can afford to ignore it. Women play a key role in development both in the context of the family and in society at large including its economy and social system. Besides this, women have never been recognised as primary person like men. As a whole women’s struggle for emancipation from social and culture bondage has been a historical fact in our country. Women have challenged the existing system which has made them socially, culturally crippled. However, man-women’s relationship continues to be dominating dominated relationship.

Women are discriminated against in many spheres and in different societies. In developing country they invariably work hard than man. They contribute to economic activity and to the welfare of the society through household jobs, child rearing, educating children and working in the field.

Most of the work is either under valued or ignored altogether. They do not get compensated for their work. In developed countries such cases is limited. In developing countries the discrimination, extends to every steps of women life. However, almost universally women are unrepresented politically in all levels. ¹

When we want to study the political status of women at the grass-root level in Manipur, we have to go deeper into the social norms, traditions and structure of the society.

There is always interaction between the social norms social beliefs and political culture of society. Usually there is a gap between the social norm, beliefs and political culture of society or the state if the level of civilization or development is at the lower level. This gap can be narrowed down or bridged if consciousness or the political culture grows from the society itself. With this point in view, let us study the social, economic and political status of women at grass root level in Manipur.

**Socio-Economic status of women:**

Historically Manipuri women had been playing responsible and constructive role in their society. The responsibility of running the family

was by and large entrusted to women in the absence of their menfolk who used to render their services to the rulers of the state under what is known as “Lallup” system during the peak time of the reign of the king. History witnesses to the fact that women of this land has to face a series of challenges in the society, when the menflok were away at war or be in a readiness to face any unforeseeable eventuality owing to possible threat of attack on their land either from neighbouring state or across their territorial boundaries. However in the 18th century during the seven years of war with Burma from 1819 to 1826 the number of menfolk was substantially reduced and caused enormous economic hardships in the state. Such a type of situation obliged the womenfolk to come forward and play a responsible and productive role in their society.¹ And social relationship between the members of the different families were mainly conducted through women.

Manipuri women have inherited their social responsibility even today. In addition to their household responsibilities and upbringing of child, it has become almost compulsory for every adult woman to participate in the social functions and religious ceremonies of their localities. In the family women are the main educator of social values, laws etc, to their own children and younger members of the family. One very often found children of a widowed mother better well-behaved than others.²

In Manipur women are not only taking important role in the family but also outside the family, in the cultural and religious areas. It may be said that women and religion are two inseparable things in Manipuri society. Women took active part in the performance of religious rites, rituals and ceremonies from early time. The worshipping of family God, Sanamahi is usually done by the eldest female member of the family. Every Meitei clan worship their ancestral God and Goddess once in every year. Some of the clans perform “Lai-Haraoba” for a larger duration of time i.e. one week or two weeks etc. In this Lai Haraoba, the main important religious duties and role are performed by the Maibies i.e. women who are experts in the performance of religious rites and rituals. Without the Maibies, no Lai Haraoba can be performed. The Maibie plays a more important role in the pleasure in female ritual functioning. In Manipur, there is no bar for women to participate in the religious and social gathering.¹

An important contribution of Manipuri women in the social development is in the field of culture. Culture includes dance, drama, literature etc. In our cultural heritage, women’s role in dance and song is famous in the world as important component Manipuri Dance. The success

of Manipuri dance may partly be due to the role played by women in the field of dance. It is said that a girl as soon as she is born, know how to dance. When the child completes 5/6 months the parents especially the mother taught how to dance with little fingers. In the field of theatre Shumang Leela (Jatra) women’s contribution is also of a great value. In the field of literature, women contributed equally.¹

Manipur women, especially the Meitei women are inspired by the image and personality of women depicted in literature, both mythology and legendary. Pakhangba, the first king of Manipur was able to defeat his brother Sanamahi in succeeding his father by following the advice of his mother. Panthoibi mythological Goddess asserted her rights in marrying Nongpok Ningthou against the wishes of her parents. Meitei women are still preserving the principles and norms prescribed by Imoinu, a mythological figure for the maintenance of peace and welfare of the family. These principles and norms to be observed by women indirectly encouraged leading a regulated and self sufficient family. Thoibi, the princess of Moirang principality also exercised her rights, though suffered a long time by obeying her father, in choosing Khamba instead of Nongban (her father’s choice) as her life partner. It is debatable and open for discussion the view

¹ Ibid. p1-3
that the present day marriage system mostly by elopement among the Meitei women is an impact given by the image of Panthoibi and Thoibi. For the principles and norms prescribed by Imoinu, it may be said that most of the women are preserving in varying degrees, of course, these norms in discharging their duties in the families.¹

With the dawn of modernisation after the First World War and especially after the Second World War, Manipuri women started to contribute in the fields of literature by writing poems, novels, short stories etc. Among the early women writers mention may be made of T.Thoibi, Kh. Pramodini, and M.K. Binodini etc. M.K. Binodini won Sahitya Akademi award in 1979, T. Thoibi Devi was given Sahity Akademi award in 1989 for her translation work. It may be worthy to note that these early women writers had created a new culture of Manipuri women in the field of literature. In course of time there appeared a host of new young women writers in the following five decades, more especially in the 1980s the 1990s.²

²Ibid.
The women in addition to family, culture and religious duties, they used to supplement their family income sometime by weaving and selling the home made products outside family in market. The social system is closely related to the economic life of the people. A state or a community can have a sound social system only when the economic structure is good.\textsuperscript{1}

Outsiders never go back from the Manipur without praising the hard working qualities of Manipuri women. They are very industrious and take a very important role in the economic development of the state. The most of the work of the country expect the heaviest is performed by them. It would be difficult to find a more industries women in India than Manipur.

Manipuri women played a major role in the productive process of the state. Agriculture is a family enterprise in Meitei villages. Rice cultivation relies heavily on women's labour i.e. almost all women below fifty years of age (unless they are owner of permanent shops) engaged in some work in the rice fields. Some older women work in the field in the morning hours and come to bazaar in the late afternoon.\textsuperscript{2} The women hold a high and free position in Manipur, all the internal and exchange of the produce of the country being managed by them. The habit of the country is to have bazaars

\textsuperscript{1} Aditha, "Socio-economic and cultural constraints affecting political participation of women" Report of Training rural Women, Pondicherry, 1994, Pp-1-2.

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid p. 57.
at convenient spots by the road side, where a handful of women congregate at an early hour, whiling the time away with gossip and light work and attending to a chance customer when one offers himself. Imphal possesses the largest and most important of these bazaars, called Ema Kaithel in Khwairamband bazaar, Imphal.¹

It is said to have been founded by Mongeanba in about 1580. It is close to the pat or Royal enclosure and now consists of a number of embanked mounds which are allotted to the different trades, the cloth weavers being found in one place all together, and the dried fish, vender gathering their savoury wares in another. The above statement was made by T.C. Hodson in his book ‘The Meithei’ written in -1908.²

The culture of handloom, being the traditional and the oldest industry is an indispensable establishment for every house of Manipur. Today, this industry plays a vital role to the upliftment of socio-economic life of the people. Mostly women are engaged in handloom weaving. It has become a tradition for every housewife to make available the requirement of clothes to the family.³ In the agricultural season in rural areas women often complain

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¹ Manjusri; C. S., op.cit, p 56.
of "double work" i.e. cultivation and domestic activities. The participation in
the cultivation work during the agricultural season enables the women to
earn additional income to their families.

In urban centres, the women traders are challenged not by the Meitei
male but by a number of Indian traders with much larger capital, who came
to Manipur after British colonization. This presence is in pervasive in the big
stores of the main urban bazaars Imphal. Nevertheless, alongside, a vast
number of women traders are to be bound in the bazaar shed sitting on their
own plots. Although there are a considerable number of medium of the
larger stock of imported goods is under the control of the non-Manipuri's
coming from other states of India. However, women still have control over
the local agricultural produce and the weaving industry. Contact with the
non-Manipuri traders created an external market beyond their families and
localities for the goods produced by women. The status of women of
Manipur is better than the status of women in the remaining parts of the
country in the social and economic life. They are playing a very important
role not only in the socio-economic development but also in the politics of
the country.¹

¹ W.Kumar singh., 'Declining sex ratio in Manipur An explanation' The Indian Economic, No. 4,
Thus, the women of Manipur are always inspired by the active social and economic participation of women since the early history of Manipur. They continue to play an active and important role in the social and economic life in the family as well as outside the family. The very fact that there is no beggar in the Manipur society may be due to the socio-economic role of women in the family and in the society. The traditional saying “it is better to die rather than begging” always guided the mind of the Manipuri women in their endeavour for their better social and economic life.

**Political status of women**:  

The Manipuri women had been playing responsible role in the politics of Manipur since the early period of history. The political activities and political role of Manipuri women may be described under two categories i.e. as an individual and as a group.

As an individual many Queens and female members of the royal family took important role in the administration of the state. One chief Queen Laisana (Maharani) was a member of the council of Minister (Mantries) in ancient Manipur 33A.D. She headed the women’s court called ‘Patcha’ where all women related cases taken up and settled. There were
many chief Queens who took active part in the administration and political affairs of the state.¹

One of the chief Queens called Maharani Linthoingambi was the women who fought fearlessly against the enemy in the absence of her husband, the king of Manipur. In 1443, Maharani Linthoingambi defeated the Tangkhuls² who launched an attack against the Meitei king taking the advantages of the absence of the king. Not only this Linthoingambi also fought in many occasions to surprises and control the enemies in the absence of the king. She fought against the kabui yangla in the north. Linthoingambi also fought against the chief Make Sayapal in the South. She was able to maintain the political Supremacy of the Meitei, sovereignty over the neighbouring chiefs by her thought-out and well-prepared plans in the absence of her husband, the king of Manipur. Even today Linthoingambi is remembered as a woman who could successfully carried out the obligations and responsibilities of being the head of the state. The ministers and the people were not afraid of any revolting chief as Linthoingambi was there in the absence of the king.³

² Thangkhul is one of tribes of Manipur.
³ O. Bhogeshwar, Ninhourol Lambuba(Edt), O. Bhogeshwar, Imphal, 1967 Vol No. 1 pp228-229.
Tangjakhombi is another personality who fought courageously against the enemies. Pithetleima was the daughter of Leihou Ningthou (Leihou king) and wife of Nongpok khongphen, brother of king khunjaoba (1652-1666). She was the mother of king paikhomba who ruled after the king khunjaoba as the king had no heir.\(^1\) Pithetleima, like Queen Linthoingambi fought against the enemy in the absence of the king. Pithetleima went for an expedition at Tangda village. Hence after the expedition she was popularly known as Tangdakhombi or Tangjakhombi. When the king went for an expedition to kabow a place in the Manipur Burma border the tribes of kuyom took the advantage of the absence of the king in the palace and attacked. They killed many innocent people and many houses were also burnt down. Leima Tangjakhombi led a team of women as soldiers and defeated the rivals. Thus along with the women teams Tangjakhombi could suppressed the rivals. The women were simply housewives in their families but the situation compelled them to come out as soldiers and fight the enemies courageously. It proved that Manipuri women are brave, courageous and spontaneous.\(^2\)

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2. O. Bhogeshwar, op.cit Pp310-311.
Kuranga Nayani, the daughter of Gourshyam who was married to the Ahom King of Assam, Swargadev Rajeshwar. She is still remembered in the political history of Manipur and Assam as a brave and courageous lady.¹

After the death of her husband, she adopted a political strategy to protect her younger brother in-law, Laxmikant. In 1769, she killed the leader of the Maomaria revolt, Borbaruah and made her brothers’ in-law Lakshimikant the ruler of Assam. She was successful in her political manoeuvres and Lakshimikant finally become the king of Assam. Like kuranga Nayani, many other princesses were given in marriage to the neighbouring states to promote and maintain good relationship with neighbouring territories.²

Induprabha was another Manipur princess who married the ruler of Cachar and became Maharani from 1804 and 1831. After the death of her husband Govindchandra, she ruled Cachar efficiently and successfully. It has proved that the women of Manipur taking important role in higher political administration. But at the lower level of administration they could only influence the decision making process of the state. As a whole women’s struggle for emancipation from social and cultural bondage has been a historical fact in our country.³

The common women as a collective force had also played the important role in the political affairs of the state. During the reign of the king, in the pre-British period, there was Lallup system. Lallup system was strictly enforced in the pre-British period. It was a kind of compulsory military service to be rendered by every adult male member of the family for every 10 days out of 40 days to the king. Under this system every adult male members of the family had to attend the service of the king in the palace. As a member of the family had to attend the service of the king in the palace. As a result, most of the male members were away from home either attending service in the palace or accompanying the king in war against the neighbouring rulers or chiefs. Women had to shoulder the social responsibilities and the day to day management and maintenance of household affairs in the absence of their male members. They used to discuss and interact with one another about the social and political matters in the morning or evening in the market places. This enables them to participate indirectly in political matters of the State. They even corrected the injustice done by the king or by any official of the state by reporting the matter to the king. They were able to postpone the schedule programme of the king if the royal programme affects the interest of the state. This was evidently proved when Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh postponed the catching of elephant or “Samutanba’ programme up to the end of harvest.1

Thus, the political status of individual woman who belonged to the royal circle was quite high and for the common women, they could only influence the decision making process of the state at all levels administration.

**Women and Movements in Manipur:**

Manipuri women are known for their active participation in the socio-economic movements of Manipur. During the British period, the role of Meitei women in the socio-economic movement is worth mentioning. The recorded political history of the land contained innumerable women's movements which took place in different crisis periods of the history in order to tide over a number of critical political situations. The history also records abound ant stories of brave women who went to battle field leading the royal army in the absence of the king and earned great frame.¹

The Meitei women never remain inactive in any of the critical political phase of the state. They always render yeoman service to the state when the state is under the pressure of grave political problems. They are always ready to fight against the injustice done to them and to accept any

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challenge which threatens the security of the people and hurts the interest of the womenfolk. Their participation in the political activities is not less than that of the menfolk. Thus the parallel and complementary participation of both sexes in the important political movements shows the importance of women in the political life of the state. The common women of Manipur emerged as a strong political force in collective capacity during the British period.¹

The political attitudes, awareness, commitment and behaviour of the Meitei women can be depicted by studying two important women’s movement popularly known as Nupilans (woman war). The first Nupilan was in 1904 and the second in 1939. Both the movements took place during the colonial administration of the British as against the Government orders which the people thought in human and unjust.²

**First women’s Movement, 1904:**

The first women’s movement or Nupilan which occurred in 1904, took place following a new export policy that is known as “Free Trade Policy”, adopted by the British authorities in Manipur. The political agent

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Major Maxwell in order to rebuild the house of the Assistant superintendent, which was down by an unruly mob ordered the menfolk of Imphal to go to Kabow (Tamu)\(^1\) to bring teak woods and bamboos. The people especially the women protested against it and demonstrated against the British authority demanding the withdrawal of the order. Consequently the Government promulgated curfew orders prohibiting the assembling of more than five persons. Women gathered in thousands and entered the residency of the Political Agent and superintendent disobeying the orders.\(^2\)

The womenfolk of Manipur were very much agitated at the oppressive measure of the British authorities. Whenever injustice was done either by the king or by the officials a group of women used to go to the palace and reported about the injustice and authorities. Though they were not given political and administrative responsibilities, but whenever the authorities committed some illegal acts towards the innocent people they come out and fought for justice.\(^3\)

During this agitation also, the womenfolk of Manipur were compelled to prepare for a fight against the injustice of the British. As a result of the Khwairamband Bazar which was the biggest market place in the heart of

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1. Kabow (Tamu) is an area in the border between the Burma and Manipur.
3. N. Joykumar Sing, op. cit p. 120.
town also closed. The demonstration of the women continued for several days. The agitation had gone to such an extent that the Manipur government had to import additional army from outside in order to suppress the agitated women. However, the government could not suppress the movement with the help of the army and had to withdraw the order.¹

**Second Women’s Movement, 1939:**

The second women’s movement or Nupilan was in 1939 as a protest against the official policy of the Government to export rice when Manipur was on the verge of famine because of poor harvest. Thousands of women particularly the women traders from all over the Manipur valley gathered in the capital. They boycotted Khwairamband Bazar, the daily market of Imphal. However, the Government turned a deaf ear to their plea for the withdrawal of the orders. They then demonstrated before the Durbar, which was in session, for the discussion of their demand. The Durbar was unable to take any decision because of the absence of the Maharaja of Manipur. Many women got injuries when army tried to clear away the agitated women. However, the women were successful in keeping the Durbar member confined in the Durbar Hall till mid night of 12th December 1939.

¹ N. Joykumar Singh, op. cit p. 120.
Consequently, Mr. Grimson, the Political Agent had to issue the orders of slopping the operation of all rice mills. The Maharaja of Manipur, after his arrival, issued an order banning the export of rice. It may be noted that the success of Nupilan paved the way for the constitutional reform movement started in 1938 by the menfolk of the state. The women’s agitation 1939 called “Nupilan” was one of the most important events in the colonial history of Manipur. The deep rooted cause of the movement was directly related to the irregularities and malpractices in the administration of the state.¹

These two women movements popularly known as Nupilans played very important and significant role in the political history of Manipur, The two movements could change the political direction of the state. The movements remembered as the red letter days in the political history of Manipur. Today, 12th December, the date of the second Nupilan is 1939 being observed by the state and day the people of Manipur as the “women’s day” to symbolised the mark of respect paid to the sacred memory of the women who actively participated in the movement and who could change the political direction of the state. During the British period the ordinary common women especially the urban market women asserted their political

¹. Ibid p 121.
rights from the grass-root level and had given a political direction to the people of Manipur. The people of Manipur became conscious of their democratic rights and it was after the second women’s movement, and Second World War 1939-1945 that the demand for the introduction of democratic government in Manipur became stronger.¹

**Manipur Women and Modern Panchayat System:**

It was after independence that modern local self-government was introduced in Manipur only in 1947. From this year the responsibility of administration in the Hills was vested in the Maharaja in council and exercised in accordance with the Manipur State constitution Act, 1947 and provisions of the Manipur State Hill peoples (Administration) Regulation 1947. In the valley local bodies-Gram Sabhas, Gram panchayats and Nyaya Panchayat were introduced for the first time in Manipur in 1960 under the united provision Panchayati Raj Act 1947.²

After the implementation of U.P Panchayati Raj Act 1947, the 1st election of Panchayat was conducted in the year 1964. For the first time the Manipur women exercised not only the right to vote in the election but also participated in the election process as a candidate in the panchayat election.

It may be remembered that Manipur women for the first time enjoyed adult franchise in 1948 when elections were held in Manipur under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 to chief representatives to the State Assembly. It was a very significant step for Manipur women. Women in other part of the world especially in western democratic countries like U.K. women had to fight for a long time for getting their political right i.e. right to vote. To enjoy the right to vote as well as candidate, there was no hurdle for women in Manipur to fight for.¹

In the 1st election of panchayat 1964, the Manipur women participated as a candidate without reservation of seat in the Panchayats four (4) women were elected as a member of gram panchayats in four districts.² And in the second elections of panchayat, 1970 eight (8) women were elected as a member in open contesting with men in four districts.³ Those elected women were ornamental in nature, Political consciousness is found lacking among them. They were members on record only. Women are, in principle, treated as equal partners but when it comes to taking major decisions, it is the males who mostly have the final say with the women having to accept a subservient status. Thus the final decision of the panchayat was taken by the man who were the majority in number and dominated in panchayat.⁴

² Govt. of Manipur, Director of Panchayati Raj Manipur gazette compilation 1964-65 Pp9-10
³ Govt. of Manipur Director of Panchayati Raj Manipur gazette compilation 1970-71, Pp92-118.
But women could influence the decision making process of the panchayats. It is because of lack of recognition and inadequate compensation that still they stick to the traditional age-old technology.¹

Women are giving maximum contribution in the socio-economic development of the country even though they are considered as second class citizens. They remain entangled physical, mentally and spiritually in the age-old social and cultural traditions.² To improve the lot of rural women it appears necessary that women should get a chance to participate in decision making process so that only women may consider the problems of women from their own angle and they should have the authority to solve those problems. They can do so provided they are involved in a big way in administering the village i.e. they are inducted in large number in panchayati Raj Institutions, which have been made responsible for managing the welfare and development aspect of the village communities and are responsible for deploying the available resources for various welfare and developmental activities.³

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At the grass root level women have to be empowered to participate effectively in the political process because the decision of the local government have profound effect on the problem of women and might lead to a redefinition of public life itself.¹

The contributive factors for the active participation of women in politics are to make women conscious about their political responsibility and encourage them to participate and remove the visible and invisible gender bias.² The participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution is considered essential not only for ensuring political participation in the democratic process but also for realising developmental goal for women. The women folk should carry the cause forward participating in administration at various levels of the local self government units.

Since long, Manipuri women have been deprived from decision making in the panchayats. Their potential remain largely unrecognized and their contributions are often overlooked³ several factors are responsible for women's low participation, the most important are illiteracy, traditionalism, prejudices, economic dependency and unfavourable potential opportunity structure, with its high rate of predominantly male incumbency and slow turn over.⁴

The representation to women in panchayats was considered essential not only for women upliftment but also thought necessary for ensuring that special knowledge and latent of women is utilised for guiding and supervising programmes meant for women and children. Thus women functionaries in panchayats can play a vital role in programmes relating to nutrition, small saving, literacy, sanitations kitchen garden, poultry farming and family planning.¹

Our Nation leaders had full faith in the equality of all citizens, both males and females. Gandhiji had openly denounced all references regarding inferiority of females. He knew that for improving the position of women they should be associated with Panchayats, discharging functions relating to education and medical needs etc. He considered development of women and their equality with men, necessary for all round village development.²

*The Balwantrai Mehta and Ashok Mehta committees considered the position of rural women from 1975 itself. The committees felt that adequate assistance be given to women to enable them to increase their income and to improve their positions. This committee recommended that at least two seats should be reserved for women in every gram panchayat.³

The report of the Ashok Mehta committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions 1978 had also pin-pointed the role of relevance of women representatives in decision making on the integral part of total development of the villagers. Thus, the state was directed to make provision for this purpose accordingly many states had provided at least one woman in each panchayat. There usually was no reservation for the offices of chairpersons of the Panchayats, at least until the early 1980s.¹

In Manipur Panchayati Raj system was first introduced under a borrowed Act, namely, the U.P. Panchayati Raj Act, 1947 but there were no reservation seat for women. Then the state passed its own Panchayati Raj Act, in 1975, providing a three-tier system of gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samities, and Zilla Parishads. Manipur had accepted the Mehta committee recommendation by reserving one seat in Panchayats. The inclusion of women however became a formality.²

Since 1975, the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, women reservation was made for the first time under the provision 15 clause (3) as shown below:

"Any one of such wards referred to in section 16 shall be reserved by lot for electing one women member of Gram Panchayat such reservation ward shall be rotated for every election"³

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² Bharat Singh, P, "Relationship between officials and elected Representatives of the Panchayats" Panchayat Paajet Vol.4, Manipur state Panchayat parishad, 1998, P34.
The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act. 1975 is a major event in the history of Manipur women. The act came into existence in the year 1976. The Act, provide reservation of one seat for women in every gram Panchayat. The act had provided that women participation at the lower level of administration is compulsory for the development of women and children. The Act provides that all the seats reserved for women would be rotated among the different constituencies of that Panchayats. The rotation was done through lots.¹ The member seats reserved for women differ from one state to another.

The Karnataka village Panchayats and Local Boards Act, 1959 provided for reserving not less than two seats in the village Panchayats and not more than two in each Talluk Board. The Andhra Pradesh Mandala praja Parishads, Zilla praja parishads and Zilla Abhivrudhi Sameeksha Mandal Act 1986 provided for reserving nine percent of the offices of chairpersons of the Mandala praja parishads and Zilla praja parishads respectively.”

Similarly, the Karnataka Zilla parishads, Taluk Panchayats Samithis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act, 1983 Provided 25 percent of seats in each Mandal Panchayat and Zilla parishad to be reserved for women. But these were rare examples. Majority of the states had provided for an insignificant reservation for women. More over, the life of Panchayats was

¹ Government of Manipur, op.cite. p10.
highly dependent on the whims and fancies of the state therefore the question of justices to the issue of women’s representation never really was taken seriously.¹

Among the various measures for the upliftment of Manipuri women, the reservation of one seat to the every gram Panchayat has been considered to give sweeping changes. Women’s entry in the grass roots level democratic institutions is a positive indicator of changes in the socio-political dynamics of the rural society.²

It is a new chapter for Manipuri women to participate in the modern democratic panchayat administration. Since 1978 they started to play their role as member of the panchayats through reservation provided under the Manipur Panchayaste Raj Act, 1975 of course, there were women members in the panchayat bodies before 1978 also. Now under the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 the number of women members has increased as a result of 33 percent reservation given by the Act. There are women Pradhans in the Gram Panchayats and Adhyakshas (chairpersons) in the Zilla Parishads. It is a testing period for the women members including women pradhans and

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¹ Sudhir Krishna, 'Women and Panchayati Raj : The law programme and practices', Journal of rural Development, Vol. 16, No.4, Pp652-6533,
Adhyakshas to prove themselves worthy of the position and role of the Manipuri women inherited form the brave women of the post in the pre-British, British and post independence periods. The women members are expected to play important role in the Panchayats and Zilla Parishads so as to enable women to come up at the higher political level as members of Legislative Assembly and participate at all levels of decision making bodies in the state.