CHAPTER - II

POSITION AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE TRADITIONAL MANIPURI SOCIETY
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The traditional Meitei society represented a patriarchal model in which father was the head of the family. Thus more importance was given to menfolk. Men were looked up as protectors of the families. Constant conflicts and warfares were the factors for the superior position of men.

However, it would be wrong to say that in the history of Manipur, women were placed in a much inferior position in the Meitei society. Although fathers were the head of the families, mothers were respected and they enjoyed a high position in their families. The custom of worshipping Lairembis\(^1\) since very early times prove that women occupied high position. Her decision and views in various matters was given due importance. She played an important role in all the social practices like births, deaths, marriages etc.

The worshipping of Lairembi by the Meiteis since immemorial times shows the importance given to women. There is also a long list of Lairembis worshipped by the Meiteis. It is evident that, the position of women was not so low like the women of Burma, Assam and other parts of India.

Although more importance was given to a boy than a girl, she was

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1. Female deities or Goddesses. For example: Leimarel Sidabi (Eternal mother), Panthoibi (Goddess of love and courage), Phouobi (the corn deity) etc.
well treated. Once a girl was born, proper care and love was bestowed upon her. She was brought up with care and attention. When she grows up she began to help her mother in the household chores. She would help her mother in domestic chores like cooking, cleaning the house, sweeping, washing clothes, utensils etc. She was kept under the protection of her father, brother etc. After marriage, she was under the protection of her husband and after the death of the husband, she lived under the protection of her son.

**Marriage:** When a girl reached the marriageable age, her parents had to find a suitable match for her. Generally the girls had the freedom of choice of their spouse in marriage. Ordinarily there cannot be marriage between a girl and a youth belonging to the same Yek or Salai.\(^2\) The Meiteis were divided into seven clans known as the salais.\(^3\) A popular form of marriage was after chenba or elopement. Chenba was followed by a ritual marriage ceremony with the consent of the parents of the boy and the girl. In case of arranged marriages the opinion of the girl was taken. Marriages for political purposes were also existed. In such type of marriages, the opinion of the girl was ignored. Such type of marriages were prevalent among the royal families of the kings, princes, and those belonging to the nobility.

Generally, bridegroom's party used to send messengers to the

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bride’s family for the first time and settlement was made afterwards between the two families. Before the actual day of the wedding ceremony, a round of preliminaries were to be observed such as Waroipot puba (a ritual held as a token of agreement). In this ritual fruits and sweets were taken by the parents of the boy to the residence of the parents of the bride. It was followed by another ritual known as Heiching Kharai Puba. Heiching Kharai refers to seven kinds of fruits placed in the kharai or carrier. Here also the boy’s parents took fruits and sweets to the residence of the bride. After these preliminaries, the date for the marriage was fixed. Generally marriage was held at the residence of the bride and then she was taken to the house of the bridegroom in a procession.

The traditional marriage system is also depicted in the mythology of Manipur. Panthoibi Khongkul (In quest of Panthoibi) gives an idea about the practice of proposal given by a youth to a girl, marriage, engagement, bride price, marriage ceremony and dowry of the bride. Panthoibi is the Goddess of love and courage. She was a princess of Mangang principality which is usually regarded as a Proto-Meitei Yek.4 King Sapaiba sent his friend and messenger Leichol Haoraba to speak to Panthoibi on his behalf. Heichol conveyed the proposal of Sapaiba to Panthoibi and praised the ability of Sapaiba. He said that King Sapaiba would come with the choicest fruits and flowers and other valuable presents. Moreover it was delivered that King Sapaiba would prepare

bamboo bridge on her way decorated with white canopy by spreading Kabok (puffed rice) as a gesture of welcoming her. In addition to this, he would prepare two pits full of fish. He had also to decorate and place seven beds on the east and seven beds on the west of his residence for Panthoibi. A nice path was also to be arranged for her with bright lights and two swords across the path. However in spite of these offerings, Panthoibi challenged the offerings as unfit for her and rejected the proposal.  

Traditionally, while performing the marriage ceremony, the bride walks around the bridegroom seven times. Then on completion of each round the bride used to cast flowers on the head of the bridegroom and finally placed garlands of Kundo flower (a kind of white flower) around the neck of the bridegroom. When the marriage ceremony is in process, two fish (Meitei ngamu or lata fish) are released in the water, generally a pond, to know the future of the bride and the groom. When the Ceremony is over, both the groom and the bride go inside the bride’s house and pray to Leimarel Shidabi and Lainingthou Sanamahi (God of the homestead) seeking a long and blissful life.  

In case of the Meitei Hindus, there are generally four forms of marriage. They are Brahma form, Asura form, Kanya katpa and Gandharva form or chenba.  

In the Brahma form, the daughter is given by her father as a gift to the bridegroom who accepts her as his bride in a marriage ceremony in the presence of many people invited to the ceremony. The marriage ceremony is preceded by Waroipot puba and Heijingpot. The marriage ceremony is held at the residence of the bride. On the sixth day of the marriage, there is a feast at the house of the bride known as Mapam Chakouba. In the Asura form, the father of the bride takes some money as bride price from the bridegroom’s family. In Kanya katpa form, the bride is given to the bridegroom without any elaborate ceremony. The couple have to exchange garlands and a Brahmin has to recite mantras. Gandharva form or chenba is the most popular form. Here the girl elopes with the youth and later on, the consent of the parents of both have to be obtained.

Traditionally Meitei women are expected to be gentle, good natured, physically and mentally pure, obedient, religious minded, simple and peace loving. The real qualities and mannerisms of being a woman has been prescribed by mythological Goddess called Emoinu Ahongbi. She is the Lairembi or Goddess of Phunga (hearth or fireplace). A book titled ‘Emoinu Ahongbigi Tungnapham’ gives a good knowledge about the qualities of good women.

The following are some of the degrading habits of women which goes against the likes of Emoinu. There are women who frequently
changes their dresses put on new clothes and takes intense care of face and bodily appearance for no proper reason. They smile outwardly but at heart they are impure and keep various deep and dark secrets. These women longed for other men and are not faithful to their husbands. They always try to conceal their impurity with false pretensions and thus can be compared with poisonous snakes.

There are also women who do not possess the qualities of a good housewife. They are in the habit of keeping the dirt and residues of food and utensils scattered after taking food. The lairembi also dislikes women who are dirty and shabbily dressed.

It is also improper for women to get up with tangled hair towards the back door of the house in the morning. Using violent and indecent, foul language to the children, disobedience and insincerity to husband form other ill behavior of women. The women who go around the neighbourhood without any reason tend to produce gossip which resulted into quarrels. Some women are in the habit of disclosing the secrets of their families to others thereby making the family an easy target or lauging stock of the neighbourhood.

Other undesirable activities of women are making a loud noise of the Chengphu 7 while taking rice from it, or while stirring the food by

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7. Container in which rice is kept in store.
Khabei\(^8\) in the cooking pots, chaphu\(^9\) and uyan,\(^10\) or sniffing the food by khabei etc.

Secondly, there are some qualities and mannerisms of women prescribed by the Lairembi. Women should be soft spoken, decent, gentle, truthful and maintain both mental and physical chastity. Such type of women are faithful to their husbands, they keep no secret from their husbands and dine only after the husband has taken the food.

They keep the house always neat and tidy, arranging things in the right places like keeping rice in the chengphu, vegetable for making curries in the Yelluk\(^11\), fish in the Ngarubak\(^12\) etc. Before going outside for the day’s work and after coming home, they do not forget to pray before Sanamahi, God of homestead and takes proper attention in keeping not only the house neat and clean but also the courtyard. There is no trace of garbage heap. They form the very foundation of a good society free from various disturbances. Thus Emoinu Ahongbi showers mercy and blessing on those women who observe her moral code of conduct.

**Polygamy:** The practice of polygamy was prevalent in the traditional Meitei society. It was mostly practiced by the kings and the nobilities.

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8. A big spoon or a long and flat piece of bamboo or metal used in cooking.
9. Pot to cook rice.
11. Basket woven by pieces of bamboo for keeping vegetables.
12. A small basket for keeping dry fish.
Although majority of the common people were monogamous, they also followed the example of royalty and kept many wives. Thus polygamy was a practice followed both by the kings and common people. For e.g. Meidingu Naethingkhong who ascended the throne in 663 A.D. and Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, the first king in the history of Manipur practiced polygamy. From the legendary folk-lore Khamba and Thoibi, princess Thoibi’s father had eleven wives and Nongban had ten wives. In fact polygamy was a common practice among the members of the royalty.

Polygamy was mainly practiced for the need of male children. Men were frequently engaged in tussle with the neighbouring peoples or tribes like the Burmese, the Pongs, the Takhels, the hilly tribes etc. Moreover, they had to protect their villages from the attacks of wild animals and build their own houses.

The practice of polyandry was not in vogue. However, the case of a married women deserting her husband for a lover is found in Panthoibi Khongkul. Panthoibi deserted her husband Khaba for her lover Nongpok Ningthou. But in the proper sense of the term, Panthoibi can be regarded as a symbol of energetic zeal, free will and adventurous spirit of women, thereby placing her on the pedestal of divinity as a Lairembi or Goddess.

**Right of Inheritance:** In earlier period of history women of Manipur did not enjoy the right of inheritance. After the death of the husband, the property went to the sons. However she was allowed to keep and use her individual property according to her wish. If she wishes, she could hand
over her property to her sons. But in most cases her personal belongings were given went to the daughters. Daughters had the right to claim their mother’s belongings.

Among the Meitei Hindus also, daughters are excluded the right of inheritance in the presence of their brothers. In case of a divorced daughter, she was given the right of abode at her father’s place.

It is evident that traditional Manipur represented a male dominating society. The importance given to male child, the right of inheritance, the system of pologamy, the honour given to a woman who first gives birth to male child allowing her to lead the marriage procession etc. clearly shows it. However it also cannot be denied that women were not looked down. The evil customs of Purdah, Sati, child marriage etc. could not rear their ugly heads in the Meitei society.

While comparing with the status of women in Assam and Burma, which share the same boundary with Manipur, the status and position of Manipuri women was much better. The practice of selling wives as commodities was prevalent in Burma and Assam. Michael Simps in his ‘An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Awa’ wrote that the Burmese consider women as little superior to the brute stock of their farms. Even T.C. Hodson in his ‘The Meiteis’ states that there was not

a single case of husbands selling wives in Manipur. However in olden days, we find cases of man giving away his wife to another man in Manipur. The legendary folklore of Khamba and Thoibi reveals it. The king of Moirang gave one of his wives, Ngangkha Leima to the noble Puremba as a gift for bringing laurels in the land after a battle.\(^{15}\) But these cases are rare in Manipur and the practice of selling wives as commodities was not in practice.

**Women and Culture:**

Traditionally Meitei women took active role in social gatherings, special occasions, festivals, religious rituals etc. There are references to women dancers as well as singers in the social history of Manipur. It is also on record that Polo or SagolKangjei was played during the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33 A.D.) of Manipur on the happy occasion of introducing his consort Laisana to his royal friends. In social ceremonies like births, deaths and marriages women were given due importance.

While studying the activities of women in cultural aspect, the ritual of Lai Haraoba may be mentioned. The role of maibis\(^{16}\) is more important than that of the maibas.\(^{17}\) According to Shakespear, the lais are thought

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16. Priestesses who are also expert in dance, oracles and midwifery.
17. Pre-vaishnavite priestly class as well as native doctors.
to take more pleasure in women than men. Women are also more likely to become possessed.\textsuperscript{18} Leihourol at Ikouba, the creation song which is sung to call up the lais (deities) from the water shows the process of possession of the maibi by the lai. This prayer is chanted by the maibi while sitting by the side of the water, bending her knees in front. She then experiences the possession, her body begins to shake violently and thereafter she deliver oracles. In traditional Meitei society maibis were recognized as ritual specialist.\textsuperscript{19}

Maibi Jagoi forms another important part of the Lai Haraoba. Some of the popular dances performed by the maibis include Leihou Jagoi, Khayom Jagoi, Leishi Jagoi etc. Even women folk of the local areas take part in the Lai Haraoba dances. Young girls enjoy the opportunity of learning dances during the preliminaries of the daily rituals. With beautiful traditional Meitei costumes, the young girls participate in the dances performed during the process of the Lai Haraoba. Meitei women are renowned for their inborn talents in dance and music.

It is not only the maibis who are engaged in religious rituals. Most of the rituals and omen seeking rites are performed by women. For example Ngamu Thaba,\textsuperscript{20} Phiruk Nungsang Kaiba\textsuperscript{21} in connection with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Sircar Manjushri - Feminism in a traditional society, Vikas Publishing House, Ansari Road, New Delhi - 2, 1984, P-167.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Releasing ngamu or lata fish in water usually a pond.
\item \textsuperscript{21} The opening of a basket of rice kept at the place of Lord Sanamahi to read the future of the couple.
\end{itemize}
marriage ceremony are performed by women. In case of Ipan Thaba ritual\textsuperscript{22} also women folk from the maternal side of the newly born child give presentations for the well being of the newly born. The items include eatables, sweets, fruits, vegetables, fish including Meitei ngamu, rice and even clothings, ornaments mattress, pillows etc. for the good future and prospect of the child.

Another important ritual performed by women since traditional times is Saroi Khangba\textsuperscript{23} particularly on the Saturday of Lamda (March)\textsuperscript{24} and Sajibu Nongma Panba\textsuperscript{25} or Meitei New Year’s Day. It is an old practice but still continuing in the present society of Manipur. It is mainly performed to drive away the Saroi-Ngarois or the evil spirits. The womenfolk mostly elderly women make offerings of rice and vegetables to the evil spirits so that they should not cast evil eyes upon the people. Thus women play a significant role in cultural life also.

**Economic Contribution of Women:**

Manipuri women are engaged in a number of household activities like sweeping, cooking, cleaning the house and utensils, washing, fetching water to looking after the needs of the husbands and children and elder

\textsuperscript{22} A ritual held on the 6th day of a child’s birth.
\textsuperscript{23} A ritual to drive away evil spirits.
\textsuperscript{24} Last month of Meitei Calender which falls mostly in the month of March.
\textsuperscript{25} First day of the month of Sajibu which is the first month of Meitei calendar. It falls mostly in the month of April.
members of the family. In addition to the household chores the women also take a major role in the financial maintenance of their families. Women help the menfolk in cultivation like planting the paddy, weeding, harvesting, husking and carrying the paddy and collect both plants and vegetables from the field as well as from the kitchen gardens. Sometimes they also go for fishing and small trade and commerce is entirely in the hands of the womenfolk. They to a great extent bear the economic burden of the family.

The Lallup system also enhanced the economic activities of women. According to the system the menfolk had to render service in the palace for 10 days out of 40 days. The system was prevalent in Manipur from before the 11th century till the last part of the 18th century.\textsuperscript{26} During the time of war, the adult males had to accompany the king in his fight against the enemies and in times of peace, the males had to work for economic development of the state. In fact except the lowest kinds of service, there was hardly any work which was not covered by Lallup.\textsuperscript{27} Thereby the male members of the families had little time to devote their attention to family matters. So the system gave an opportunity to women to work freely outside for the maintenance of their families. However such freedom in no way degraded the morality of women.


Moreover, history reveals that Manipur was frequently engaged in tussles and wars with the neighbouring people specially the Burmese. These conflicts to some extent had resulted in declining the male population of the kingdom. Many women became widows and the hard task of rearing the children was before them. Thus they had to bear the responsibilities of taking the financial burden on their shoulders. In Manipur, most of the work except the heaviest is performed by women. The agricultural class has more females than males.\(^{28}\)

A clear picture of the importance of women in the economic life can be seen at the Khwairamband Bazar. In the economic life, women enjoys a high position and all the internal trade of the state are managed by them. Women from different directions gather at the said bazar with their wares for sale. Most of the merchandise in Khwairamband bazar are contained in baskets. The merchandise consist of rice, fishes, vegetables, salt, tobacco etc. All the exchanges buying and selling are carried out at Sana Keithel or Khwairamband Bazar, Imphal founded by king Khagemba in about 1580 A.D. This Keithel or market is exclusively managed by women. An attempt was made to introduce a men's bazar but then most men found the sedentary occupation unsuited to their dynamic disposition.\(^{29}\) This market remains open for business


\(^{29}\) Constantine R- Manipur, Maid of the Mountains, Lancers, Publishers, New Delhi, 1981, P-5.
all day. It would be difficult to find a more industrious woman in India than the Manipuri. 30

Another important trade managed by women was weaving. Weaving in Manipur started with the loin loom. 31 In Manipur, handloom weaving started primarily for providing the requirements of the family. But later on it became a profession to provide a source of income. It became a household craft for almost every household. In the folklore of Moirang, Khamba and Thoibi, Princess Thoibi was known for possessing high skill in weaving and needle work. Thus weaving became an important craft for women in Manipur.

In the economic life the women of Manipur made a great contribution. Besides the household work, they were engaged in the process of cultivation, fishing, kitchen gardening etc. Their economic activities at Sana Keithel (Golden Market) or Khwairamband market at Imphal formed another contribution in helping their families financially. Women from far and near in Manipur came to sell their wares in the market. In fact the women dominated the market. Another trade through which women earned income was weaving. Thus the economic contribution of women in traditional Manipuri society is praiseworthy.

Women and Politics during Pre-British Period:

The political role of women during the Pre-British period can be analysed under two categories, as a group and as an individual.

As a group: Manipur had a feudal monarchy. So the common women had no share in political affairs of the state. However they could influence in decision making process of the state and even corrected any injustice done by king or officials of the state by reporting the matter to the king. The market place became the main centre for interaction among women about social and political awareness.

As an individual: Women belonging to royalty and nobility enjoyed political rights. Their decisions in matter of politics were honoured by the king, nobles and the people. They also could interfere in the struggle for succession. The Chief Queen was given respect and highest status. Mention may be made of ‘Patcha Loishang’ which was a women’s court. The chief queen was the chairman. There were also other women members. Laisana, the Chief Queen of king Nongda lairen Pakhangba who ascended the throne in 33 A.D., headed the Patcha Loishang. In such court, all cases of family disputes relating to women like wife beating cases, adultery etc. were tried. Serious cases were referred to the Cheirap which was the highest judicial body.

Even a woman who happened to be the wife of a Piba (head of a Sagei or sub-clan), had to assume leadership of the women belonging to the same Sagei. Among women who took significant role in politics, mention may be made of Yaoreiba Chanu, Langmai Pitanga, Maharani Lingthoingambi etc.

**Yaoreiba Chanu**: She was the Leimaren (Chief Queen) of Meitei king Meidingu Naokhamba who reigned from 421 A.D. to 428 A.D.\(^{34}\) She was known for her ‘Justice and did not differentiate in her treatment among her sons for the sake of fair judgement. Her timely action and fair judgement solved the tussle between her two sons on the question of succession.

Before she became the Queen of king Naokhamba, she was married to Thangji Khongjrongba of Chenglei clan. Charmed by her beauty and intelligence, King Naokhamba made her his queen. Soon after her marriage to the king, she gave birth to a son from her first husband. The son was named as Naophang Ahanba and was brought up by the king. She also bore a son and a daughter to the king. The son was named as Naophangba and the daughter as Wangamlon Yairumchengbi.

King Naokhamba died in 428 A.D. After his death a conflict started between the two brothers, Naophang Ahanba and Naophangba for the throne. Naophang Ahanba claimed the throne on the ground that he was

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the elder and so had the right to ascend the throne. But Naophangba denied the claim of Naophang Ahanba on the ground that he was not the real son of the late king. Even the people were not ready to accept Naophang Ahanba as their king because he was not the real blood of the late king. The situation became tense as Naophang Ahanba remained adamant to his claim. At this juncture, the Queen Mother, Yaoreiba Chanu decided to do justice. She asked both her sons to undergo a test to prove themselves as the rightful heir to the throne. According to the test the rightful heir ought to be able to dive under a Laigi Pat (a sacred lake or water). As expected Naophang Ahanba failed in the test as he was unable to dive under the water. He could not prove himself as the rightful heir to the throne. And Naophangba, the true blood of the late king proved himself to be the worthy heir to the throne. Thus the decision of the Queen Mother was duly honoured by the people.

**Langmai Pitanga** Urakonthouba, king of Manipur ruled from 568 A.D. onwards. He was succeeded by Naethingkhong, his third son by the first wife in 663 A.D.\(^{35}\) Naethingkhong’s early name was Hongnemyai Khunjao. Before becoming the king of Manipur, he married Pitanga, daughter of Wamei Lanthaba of Achong Yumlemba family of the Seloi Langmais of Nongmai hill. Hongnemyai Khunjao stayed at Nongmaiching hill in his father-in-law’s house with his wife.

In the meanwhile the Sheloi Langmais intruded in the Meitei territory and invaded Haokip Chingsang and Khunpham Ngangjing. However the Sheloi Langmais was slaughtered by king Urakonthouba and his strong army. Only ten persons of the Sheloi Langmais narrowly escaped to report the incident at home.

The Longmais swore vengeance against Urakonthouba but could do nothing as he was a powerful king in those days. So they decided to take revenge by killing his son Hongnemyai Khunjao the prince and husband of Pitanga. One night they surrounded the house and demanded Pitanga to produce her husband. Pitanga pleaded to spare her husband’s life as he was innocent. But all her wails and appeals went in vain. At last she requested the Longmais to allow her to serve boiled taro-root to her husband before he was put to death. She then served the Longmais with wine. When the Longmais got drunk, she helped her husband to escape. She requested her husband to remember her when he became the king and also advised him to take shelter in the palace of Punshi Yumoiba, the king of the Khumans. In this way Hongnemyai Khunjao was freed from the killers only due to the skill and presence of mind of his wife Pitanga. Although she did not directly took part in active politics, the credit for making Hongnemyai Khunjao the future king of Manipur goes to her. In fact the real maker of the political career of Hongnemyai Khunjao, who was later known as Naothingkhong was Pitanga. So she indirectly helped in shaping the political career of Naothingkhong.
Maharani Linthoingambi:

She was the queen of Meidingu Ningthoukhomba, the king of Manipur (1432-1467 A.D.). She carved a special place for herself in the political history of Manipur as one of the most heroic woman by dealing successfully against any odds. She took active part in the administration and possessed amazing wisdom, presence of mind and patriotic spirit.

In 1443 A.D. King Ningthoukhomba came to know of a possible attack in his kingdom by the people of Senbi Akla. So he left immediately to deal with the impending invasion, leaving the administration in the hands of his queen Lingthoingambi.

In the meanwhile, the Tangkhuls inhabiting in the surrounding hills of Manipur became restless. They came to know about the king’s absence. They took advantage of the King’s absence and revolted against the suzerainty of Ningthoukhomba. But Maharani Lingthoingambi was not a woman who give up easily. She knew how to deal with the danger as well as how to over-power the rebels. With great wisdom and presence of mind she came out under the disguise of the king along with patriotic womenfolk in the male attire equipped with arms and armour. The rebels took her to be the real king and so

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they were shocked to see the king in his person. They were frightened at the king’s sight and gave up their plot.

Maharani Lingthoingambi, still in the king’s robes, received the Tangkhuls warmly, pretending to be unaware of their plot. She enquired about the well being of the Tangkhuls, asked them to take part and enjoy a feast which would be celebrated as a gesture of love and welcome for the Tangkhuls. In the feast that followed, the rebels were served with strong liquor. When the Tangkhul rebels were drunk and in a semi-conscious state under the influence of the strong liquor, the shrewd Maharani overpowered them. Thus the Maharani through her bravery and wisdom saved the kingdom, and her subjects from the horrors of invasion and above all raised the prestige and status of Meitei women.

Politically, the common women had no share in this field in the traditional times. However as a group they influenced in decision making process of the state. As an individual, women belonging to royalty and nobility enjoyed political rights. In fact the Chief Queen was the chairman of the Patcha Loishang or the Women’s court. References are made on leading women of the royalty to show their influence in politics. Thus women in traditional Manipur influenced the political process both as a group and as an individual.

Emerging Trend:

Women throughout the ages have suffered gender discrimination. They are the easy targets of social crimes and injustices. Their life is
endangered by various factors. It is always the women who suffered most in wars, poverty and any sort of armed conflicts everywhere in the globe. They are deprived of their rights and suffer exploitation in the form of molestation, sexual abuse, forcing to be sex workers, domestic violence etc.

In India, women enjoyed a respectable position in the ancient times i.e. the Vedic period. Gradually, their position degenerated and thus became victims of social evils like Sati, child marriage etc. Such ugly practices and tradition continued in the male dominating Indian society and Female foeticide became a common practice in India.

In Manipuri society, women enjoyed a far better position than women of the rest of India. So far there are no cases of dowry deaths in Manipur. It clearly indicates a better position of women in Manipur. However, male superiority over women is not altogether absent in Manipuri society. Moreover, many Manipuri women still suffer from domestic violence like ill treatment, torture, harassment by the husbands, in-laws and other members of the family.

With the passage of time, the importance of women as an integral part of the society came to be realized. Women on their part became aware of their rights. The spread of education and advancement in the field of science and technology have played a major factor for such change. The American women factory workers launched the first form of protest demanding better working condition and other rights. The incident has been observed as the International Women’s Day on 8th
March every year. The tide of feminism and various developmental measures for the cause of women have been spread in the various places world wide. Among the various international measures taken up for the upliftment of women, mention may be made of CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women) passed by the United Nations in 1979. It aimed to ensure the promotion of human rights of girls and women in all countries of the world.

In India the realization of the importance of women came due to the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and other eminent leaders. Since independence, the India Government had framed various Legislations for the betterment of women. Though not fully satisfactory in its implementation, the measures are gaining momentum and there is no stoppage on the side of the Government in its efforts. The 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992 and 1993 have provided reservation of seats of women in the Panchayats and Municipal bodies. It aimed to bring equal participation of men and women in social as well as political affairs of the state. The Government of India had also adopted the National Policy for the Empowerment of women. To quote former Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Bajpayee, “It is befitting that the policy has come into being this year, which we are observing as the Year of Women’s Empowerment”.37

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The constitution of India has guaranteed equal rights to both men and women. But in actual practice, the inequalities between men and women are obvious in many respects. The participation of women in political process has increased. But the increased political participation is only as voters, not as representatives of the people. The election results of the State Legislatures and the Parliament are indicators to this fact. In spite of the development measures taken up relating to women, the traditional customs and social norms which restricted the freedom of women still persist everywhere in India.

The gender discrimination in politics is also being exhibited in the functioning of different political parties. To quote Shri Atal Bihari Bajpayee, “I once again wish to call upon all the political parties to evolve a consensus on one of the most important promises we have made to Indian women namely, reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures”. The reservation of seats for women in the Parliament and State Legislatures would surely help in increasing political participation of women as representatives of the people.

**National Commission For Women**:

The Government of India strongly felt the need to set up an agency for the upliftment of women. As a result, the national Commission for

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38. Government of India, (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting), Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Bajpayee’s speech at a discussion on National Policy for Empowerment of Women in New Delhi on 17 August, 2001, P-11.
Women came into being as a statutory body under the National Commission for Women Act 1990. Under Section 3(1) of the Act, the Central Government shall constitute a body to be known as the National Commission for women to exercise the powers conferred on and to perform the functions organised to it under this Act.\textsuperscript{39} The functions of the Commission are to be carried out effectively through various programmes like seminars, workshops, conferences etc. Such programmes would surely help in obtaining suggestions and recommendations for solving all kinds of grievances suffered by women and enhance the process of Women’s empowerment. The Commission also provide financial assistance to NGOs, Research and Study Centres of Universities and other organisations etc. to organise seminars, workshops, conferences etc. to create awareness among womenfolk.

The National Commission for Women (NCW) undertakes research on various issues relating to women. This task is entrusted to NGOs, Research and Study Centres of Universities, State Commissions for Women etc. Financial assistance is given to the organisations concerned.\textsuperscript{40} The organisations mentioned have to carry out the activities on behalf of the Commission. The NCW thereby framed various schemes for financial support.


\textsuperscript{40} National Commission for Women, Guidelines for grant of financial assistance to NGOs, New Delhi, P-1.
assistance to organisations for carrying out research studies related to women. The schemes are given below.

(i) Special studies/Research projects are sponsored with a view to making policy recommendations in respect of issues relating to advancement, welfare and empowerment of women.\textsuperscript{41}

(ii) Seminars/Workshops/Conferences are organized for obtaining different view points and suggestions from cross-section of society in order that the commission may formulate suitable policy recommendations for consideration of Government.\textsuperscript{42}

(iii) Public hearings are organized to obtain first hand knowledge of the conditions of women in their own area, without relying on secondary sources. The hearings are organized, with funding from the NCW by State Women Commissions and Government Agencies. The public hearings provide forum for listening to problems faced by women and recording their dispositions with a view to gaining insight into the problems and finding redressal measures.\textsuperscript{43}

**Manipur State Commission For Women:**

The establishment of Manipur State Commission for Women is a

\textsuperscript{41} National Commission for Women, Guidelines for grant of financial assistance to NGOs, New Delhi, P-1.

\textsuperscript{42} National Commission for Women, Guidelines for grant of financial assistance to NGOs, New Delhi, P-3.

\textsuperscript{43} National Commission for Women, Guidelines for grant of financial assistance to NGOs, New Delhi, P-4.
great landmark giving a boost forward for improving the condition of women leading to empowerment. Manipur State Commission for Women started functioning on 12th December, 2006. It was established to study the status of women, protect the rights of women and take up measures to solve their grievances.

For effective functioning of the Commission, the state government provide financial grants. The Commission on its part has to submit annual reports of its work to the Government. One of the functions of the Commission is to, “make periodical reports to the Government on any matter pertaining to women and in particular various difficulties under which women foil.” The commission again has to extend suggestions, recommendations and comments to the National Commission for Women. It shall be the duty of the Commission to furnish comments and recommendations on any report of the National Commission for women on any matters with which the state government is concerned as the State Government may call for. Since its establishment, the MSCW has started working for the betterment of women in Manipur. It has organized many seminars, conferences, workshops, public hearings, open discussion etc. relating to different crimes and violence against women. Thus the MSCW

44. The Manipur State Commission for Women.
is taking up momentum in fighting for the protection of rights of women. Through the Commission the women can express their grievances and obtain proper judgement. Cases of various kinds of violence inflicted on women have been registered. After proper study of these cases, justice is to be delivered to women. The cases are analysed through various means like investigation, counselling etc. The nature of violence include rape, molestation, ill treatment by husband and in laws and any other crimes against women. The MSCW within a short time is able to take up measures for the upliftment of women.

The MSCW also focused its attention to women in the rural areas and interior villages in Manipur because these women represent the general women in Manipur. Therefore with an aim to create awareness upon women about women's rights, the MSCW had launched a programme under the banner, “Chalo gao ki Or : Khungang Maikei Panglasi”. The programme aimed to bring upliftment for the women in the interior and rural areas in the state. Under the banner, the MSCW organized legal awareness programme at Churachandpur on 15th and 16th February, 2008, Mao Maram in Senapati District on 28th - 29th October, 2007, Jiribam on 15th - 16th April, 2007 and so on.\(^47\) Moreover the MSCW had also organized Public Hearing on women's Rights at Sandangsemba

Maring Khul on 18th March, 2007, legal awareness at Moreh on 12th May, 2007 and visited Kwatha Village on 13th May, 2007 to have a deeper knowledge of the condition of women. The Chairperson and members of the Commission attended conferences held outside the state at the national level thereby extending its assistance to the cause of women. Through the various awareness programmes the MSCW is able to establish direct contact with women not only in the urban area but also with those in the interior and rural areas in the state.

**Women Development Corporation:**

The establishment of Manipur State Women’s Development Corporation can be regarded as an important step for promoting the welfare of women. The Government of Manipur felt the importance of developing the condition of women as they play a very important role in the society. Without improving their condition, the developmental measures and schemes in the state would be incomplete. Therefore the Manipur State Women’s Development Corporation was established on 24th December, 1993 and registered on 5th April, 1995 under Indian Companies Act 156 bearing Registration No. 12-04418 of 1995. It started

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functioning under the supervision of the Social Welfare Department, Government of Manipur.

In order to supervise and for effective implementation of various schemes and measures for the welfare of women, there is a Board of Directors. The members of the Board had been appointed for a term of 5 years. As per Article No. 9(3) of the Article of Association of the MSWDC (Manipur State Women's Development Corporation) Ltd. Imphal, the following are the members of the Board of Directors.

(1) Commissioner (Social Welfare) - Director
(2) Principal Secretary (Finance) - -do-
(3) Director (Industries) - -do-
(4) Director (Health) - -do-
(5) Director (SW) - Managing Director
(6) Director (Vety.) - Director
(7) Director (Agriculture) - -do-

In addition to the above, a woman Chairperson and Directors are also appointed. The first chairperson of the Corporation was W. Joymati Devi and the next Chairperson, Km. A.K. Mirabai. The main objective for establishing the Corporation is to take up steps and measures for the all round development and welfare of women. It has been clearly mentioned in the progress and Achievement of Social Welfare Department
that “One women Development Corporation is running for taking up economic viable scheme for the poverty women in which 70 individual women vendors is being given floating loan Rs. 10,000/- each”. 51

Thus the establishment of the MSWDC has opened another chapter for promotion of the well being of women in the state. Whatever schemes and measures taken up by the Corporation will be meant only to accelerate the process of women’s upliftment and obtain benefits.

Through the Social Welfare Department the Government of Manipur has also undertaken other welfare schemes for women in the state. The Department on its part implement many schemes and measures. So far various awareness programmes for women have been organised. With grant-in-aid from Government of India Training cum production units are established by NGOs located at different districts in Manipur. The Department also run one working Ladies Hostel at Takyel, Imphal. The hostel provide accommodation to low paid working women of Manipur.

Another noteworthy scheme related to the welfare of women is the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme). Under this scheme, job and orientation training courses for Anganwadi workers and helpers are organised. The children as well as nursing and pregnant mothers

obtain benefits from the scheme. Most of the measures are related to health, hygiene and sanitation of women and children. It also helps in imparting job training courses and orientation training to Anganwadi Workers and helpers.

In the recent years due importance is given to the welfare of women. The observation of International women’s Day on 8th March every year shows the importance given to the cause of women. The adoption of the National Policy for Empowerment of women and declaration of the year 2001 as the year of women’s empowerment are the steps which fasten the process. Moreover, the emergence of the National commission for Women and the establishment of the Manipur State Commission for women on 12th December 2006 have further accelerated the process with no doubt. Since independence till recent times various legislative measures, various types of schemes and steps have been taken up for the good of women. It should also be remembered that in North-East India, women enjoy greater mobility and visibility than women of other communities in the country.\(^52\)

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