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SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF MANIPUR
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SECTION-I
PHYSICAL ASPECT OF MANIPUR

4.1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the social structure of Manipur by using secondary sources. The north- eastern region as the name suggests forms the eastern frontier of Indian sub-continent. It comprises the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur. The region even though demographically not large, houses numerous racial and ethnic groups reflecting a culturally diverse region. Each tribe confines itself to a particular geographical area with its specific and distinct social, cultural and religious peculiarities. Yet, the north-east region form a distinct physical entity surrounded by China in the north, Myanmar in the east and Bangladesh in the south-west (see Figure 4.1). The climatic conditions vary greatly due to the dramatic differences in the topography and altitude. As Pandey argued that 'any generalisation regarding the climate of the whole region will hardly be apt for the individual state' (Pandey 2000: 47). However, the region enjoys a typical monsoon climate with variants ranging from tropical to temperate conditions.

Though north-eastern region is rich in minerals and natural resources, it lags behind the rest of India in industrial development. In this, the state of Manipur is a miniature replica of the entire north-eastern region.
Figure 4.1: India Map showing the location of Manipur

Source: Census of India 2001
In the first section of the present chapter, I attempt to explain the history, geography, physical aspects and position of the women workers in the social structure of Manipur. While in the second section the handloom sector as a social and economic organisation of weaving has been highlighted.

4.2: GEOGRAPHY AND PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF MANIPUR

Manipur can be broadly divided into two regions namely, (1) hilly territory and (2) valley territory. It has a sizeable ethnic group, which follows Hinduism and reside in the valley areas of the state. At the same time, there is large tribal population who are mostly Christians but residing in the hilly regions. But before discussing them, it is important to be aware of the history, geography, physical aspect, civilisation and cultural development of the region of Manipur. Thus, a brief account has been presented with maps and photographs displaying at places where it is found necessary.

Situated in the north-eastern region of India, Manipur has total area of 22,327 sq.km and population of 23 lakhs (Census of India 2001:9). It ranks twenty-third position among the states and union territories in India in order of population size. The state lies between latitude 23°50′N and 25°30′N and longitude 93°10′E and 94°30′E bordering Myanmar in the east and in the south, Nagaland in the north, Cachar district of Assam in the west and Mizoram in the south west. The unique geographical location of Manipur bordering Myanmar and its proximity to Bangladesh provided the people of the state the strategic advantage of being the trade partners...
with South East Asian countries (Directorate of Commerce and Industries 2002).

Among the nine districts in the state, five districts namely, Senapati, Tamenglong, Churachandpur, Ukhrul and Chandel are hilly while the remaining four districts namely, Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal and Bishnupur are in the valley region. The map of Manipur with its nine districts and other neighbouring states is presented in Figure 4.2. The hilly territory comprises of nine-tenth of the total area of Manipur (20,089 sq.km) yet, the population living in the area is about 41 per cent of the total population of Manipur (Directorate of Economics and Statistics 1995:1-2; Census of India 2001). The chart showing comparative size of area and population is presented in Figure 4.3.

The sex ratio which is an important index for gender distribution of population, in Manipur shows a maximum sex ratio in 1931 (1065) after which it started declining. Only in 2001 it has shown some increase (978). Figure 4.4 presents the sex ratio in Manipur. Within the state, Imphal West had shown highest sex ratio (1007), density (847 person per sq.km), and literacy rate for both males (89.1%) and females (72.24 %). While the lowest rates of sex ratio, density and literacy rate for female was recorded in Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Senapati respectively (Census of India 2001:10-11).

In 2001, of the total work force 40.5 percent were women as compared to 48.9 percent being males (Government of India 2001:40). These figures indicate a high participation of women in workforce in Manipur as compared to all India average of 25.6 percent. About 79.9 percent in rural area and about 70.2 percent of women in urban area worked as non-agricultural workers in the IS (Ibid:64).
Figure 4.2: The map of Manipur showing the nine districts and its neighbouring states.

Based upon Survey of India Map with the permission of the Surveyor General of India.
Figure 4.3: Comparative size of area and population of Manipur

MANIPUR

COMPARATIVE SIZE OF AREA AND POPULATION

2001

(DISTRICTS)

Source: Census of India 2001
Figure 4.4: The chart presenting the sex ratio in Manipur

MANIPUR
SEX RATIO 1901 – 2001

SEX RATIO = FEMALES PER 1000 MALES

Source: Census of India 2001
4.3: HISTORY OF MANIPUR

Manipur was an independent princely state till the occupation by the British in 1891. It merged with the Indian union after the passing of Indian Independence Act, 1947. Manipur was known by different names to other neighbouring states. It was known as 'Makhlee' or 'Mikli' by the Ahoms and Tripuris, 'Katha' or 'Kathay' by the Burmese, 'Kassay' or 'Kohse' by the Shans and 'Mogolei' or 'Moglei' by the Kacharis. But to the Manipuries it was known as 'Meitei Laipak' (the land of Meiteis) or 'Kangleipak' (royal land). The term 'Manipur' which is presently used was a Hinduised term introduced after 1734 A.D. when a bulk of Meiteis embraced Vaisnav cult of Hinduism (Pandey 2000).

The origin of Manipuries is not clear and is obscure. Scholars have different views as some have traced their origin to the Mahabharata, some to China and some to South East Asia. Scholars like Pandit Yumjao and Pandit Atombabu held the view that the present Manipur was the Manipur of Mahabharata (Yumjao 1966:56 quoted from Devi 2002:11). Pemberton discarded the above idea and gave the opinion that the Manipuries migrated from China (Pemberton 1966:37-38). Another theory of origin held the view that the history of Manipur began from the accession of King Nongdon Lairen Pakhangba in 33 A.D. Considering the tradition, physical features and composite nature of language, it was popularly believed that the Manipuries were akin to the descendents of Tibeto-Burman family (I.Singhl986:18).

In the valley region of Manipur, there were several independent principalities like Ningthoucha, Khuman, Agom, Luwang, Moirang, Khabanganba and Changlei. However by the 15th century, under the rule of Ningthoucha these principalities were amalgamated and formed the Meitei kingdom. Later on, these principalities came to be known as clans
There was constant interaction between the Meities and the tribes. So in the process, the tribes adopted many of the Meities values (Ranjit 1988:66-87). After the British rule the Meiteis, tribes, and other people from the east (Shan, Burmese, Chinese) were brought under one administrative system and thus the state of Manipur came into being.

According to North East Areas (Reorganization) Act 1971 section 20 (2), Manipur had a total of 60 electoral constituencies. Out of these, 19 seats were reserved for Scheduled Tribe and one seat for Scheduled Caste (Sharma 1987:2). The voting pattern was mostly based on ethnic identity, clan and place of residence. Despite the practice of adult franchise in Manipur from 1948, the persistent political instability in the state has given rise to muscle power, gun culture, individual cult (paradoxically based on the legitimacy of the ‘corrupt and affluent’) and loss of ideologies and values (Bhagat and Bimol 2002:519-20).

4.4: SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF MANIPUR

The inhabitants of Manipur can be broadly divided into two categories: (1) Manipuries and (2) Non-Manipuries. The non-Manipuries can be further divided into two (1) Foreigners who migrated from Bangladesh, Nepal, China and Myanmar and (2) Indian nationals from other states in India like Assamese, Marwaris, Bengalis, Punjabis, Tamils, Malayalees and Biharis. They are referred by the Manipuries as ‘Mayang’.

Among the Manipuries people never call themselves as ‘Manipuries’ while referring to one another, although it is the name by which they are known to outsiders. They are known by their tribes or community names. There are five major ethnic components forming the social structure of Manipur. They are as follows-
1. The Hill people or the Tribes
2. The Manipuri Muslims
3. The Manipuri Brahmins
4. The Lois and
5. The Meiteis

Each group has its own tradition, culture, history, social order and geographical settlement. In the recent past various communities have moved out of their traditional areas of residence. The tribes generally settled in the hills, Lois in the far fringe of valley (next to hills) and Meiteis, Brahmins and Muslims settled in valley. Each one of the ethnic group form a distinct entity, yet, together they form a unity in diversity. The unity is based on language and culture. The language called Meiteilon or Manipuri is the lingua franca among the different ethnic groups of Manipur. Further strong lineage and clan tradition is inherent in all the groups. In religious function like Lai Haraoba and on occasions like Mera Haochongba, we find interactions between the tribes and the Meiteis. The following Figure 4.5 presents the structure of the ethnic composition in Manipur. The succeeding part attempts to examine the position of the various groups in general, and position of women in particular in relation to the social structure of these groups.

4.5: THE HILL PEOPLE OR THE TRIBES

The people residing in the hills or called here the ‘Tribes’ are generally referred as ‘Hao’ by other Manipuries. But the tribals consider this as an abusive word. There are 29 recognised Scheduled Tribes in Manipur whose population varies from a minimum of 152 to a maximum of
Figure 4.5: Structure of ethnic composition of Manipur

Population composition of Manipur  23,88,634

Non-Manipuri

Indian National

Foreigner

Manipuri

Manipuri Muslim

Manipuri Brahmin

Meitei

Scheduled Caste

Scheduled Tribes

The Seven Clans / Salais

1) Lois
2) Dhobi
3) Pattni
4) Nama Sudra
5) Sutradha
6) Yaithibi

Naga / Kuki

1) Aimol (16) Maring
2) Anal (17) Any Mizo
3) Angami (Lusai Tribes)
4) Chiru (18) Monsang
5) Chothe (19) Moyon
6) Gangte (20) Paite
7) Hmar (21) Purum
8) Kabui (22) Ralte
9) Kacha Naga (23) Sema
10) Koirao (24) Simte
11) Koirang (25) Sukke
12) Kom (26) Tangkhul
13) Lamgang (27) Thado
14) Mao (28) Valphei

Assamees, Marwarces, Bengalis, Punjabis, Tamils, Malayalees, Biharis

Bangladesh, Burmese, Chinese, Nepalis

Ningthoucha / Mangang

Luwang

Khuman

Angom

Khanganba

Moirang

Chenglei

Sagies 222

Sagies 86

Sagies 128

Sagies 94

Sagies 38

Sagies 98

Sagies 51

Population composition of Manipur 23,88,634
Earlier these tribes aligned themselves with one or another of the two tribal categories namely, (1) Naga and (2) Kuki, but at present, the tribes are conscious about their identity and hence, they prefer to be known by their official names like Tangkhul, Chiru, Rongmei, Paite etc. However, we can not deny some common similarities among the tribes forming the ethnic groups. Among the Nagas, the more dominant groups are the Tangkhul, Kabui, Mao, Kacha Naga, Maring and Maram. While Thadou, Vaiphei and Gangte formed the dominant groups among Kukis (Sharma 1987:9; Kabui 1988a:39; Ranjit 1988:88).

The Kukis are considered to be the ‘migratory’ tribes. They claim to possess a common origin, language and culture yet they are perceived to have little organisational capability. They have settled mostly in the Churchandpur, Senapati, Tamenglong districts. On the other hand, the Nagas are considered to be ‘permanent’ settlers. All tribes under the Naga ethnicity need not share a common origin, culture and language (Meiteilon/Manipuri is the lingua franca among the Naga) but yet, they form an integrated group. According to Kabui (1988a:26), the integrated nature of the Naga group was a product of British colonialism, World War II, modernisation and the Naga movement for political sovereignty.

4.5.1: The Village Organisation
Among the tribes the village was not only a distinct political and economic unit but also a well-knit religious community. According to Das (1985:49-50), the village organisation was divided into two - (1) authoritarian and (2) democratic. The authoritarian form was mostly found among the Kukis. The chief was known as 'khullakpa' who controlled the village land. The other type of organisation was mostly found among the Nagas. In this type, the land belonged to all the villagers
as a community and the chief followed the advice of the council of village elders. The succession to the khullakpaship (chief) was hereditary. Even though the tribal society was considered egalitarian, a woman holding the post of khullakpaship was not found.

An important custom of the tribes was the practice of 'gena' which meant simply forbidden or prohibited from food and social relation. Genna is practiced in terms of individual or clan, or at village level and the prohibition could be permanent, temporary or occasional. The khullakpa and his wife, depending upon the tribe, were forbidden to use bad language and to consume particular vegetables and meat (Hodson 1996:172-76).

Among the Nagas, specialisation of work played an important role for marriage alliances. The women weavers of six Tankhul villages namely, Ukhrul, Toloi, Naimu, Sandang, Toinem and Phandang prevented their girls from marrying into a village where weaving was not practiced. On the other hand, villages that had a taboo from weaving believed that it was dangerous to infringe in others specialised occupation. The weaving activity also attached social position among different tribes. Among the Luhupa tribes, women never made cloth because their subject villages (those village captured by the Luhupa tribe during war) supplied clothes to them (Hodson 1996:47). In fact, they felt proud for not involving in weaving activity. But among the Thadou tribes women weavers who had exceptional knowledge for design work had a high reputation in the community (Paoki 1988:240). This was true among majority of the tribes in Manipur. Girls with weaving skills had a better prospect for marriage. Indeed a girl’s love and care for her boyfriend was expressed by the presentation of intricate design bag woven by her. Weaving also had some auspicious aspects. Among the Thodou tribe,
earlier, only widows, girls and barren women were allowed to weave significant traditional cloths because the designs were copied and transcribed from python (python is considered as sacred). The weavers performed 'kithenthou' (worship of the spirit) by killing one pig, one dog, and one fowl. The worship was performed when the weaving was half done (Ibid:241).

In addition to this, another major occupation of the tribal women was jhum cultivation. Among the Mizos, a group of boys and girls joined hands to work in their jhums, by taking shifts. They participated in economic work and simultaneously had a chance of courting (Sailo 1988:199). The study of the Rongmei Nagas by Makuga (1994:83) put forward that all the time women worked harder than men because besides their domestic duties, women took active part in cultivation. They fetched water by filling water into the bamboo tubes, collected firewood from forest, pound rice, checked whether their husband’s drink was in proper quantity and quality or any other household occupation except, sweeping the house in which they took no pride.

4.5.2: Social Practices and Customary Laws

The tribes in Manipur followed monogamy. A majority of the tribes followed clan exogamy but among the Hmar, Kom, and Paite cross cousin marriage was practiced. Among the Kom, the most common practice of getting a wife was by serving in his father-in-law's house (Serto 1988:270). The different ways of marrying found among the tribes were- elopement, through arrangement and forceful abduction of women. After the spread of Christianity amongst the tribes, only arranged marriage was permitted by the church. During marriage, economic transaction also occurred by paying the bride price. Bride price was paid
either in kind or in cash by the bridegroom’s parents to the bride’s parents.

Narendra (1988:72) remarked that ‘in the traditional tribal society the patrilineal pattern was a necessity because the service of the male folk was very much essential and important for providing security, making house, hunting, cultivation, and jhum making. Thus, a family without a man was not just possible’. He further analysed the customary inheritance of the tribes and found that in all the tribes of Manipur, women were not treated as heirs except that they might have a right to the estate property of the deceased father or husband. In the case of Kabuis and Mao tribes, women married their deceased husband’s brother to get further maintenance from the family. A widow, who was guilty of misconduct, forfeited her own right to maintenance (Ibid: 64-72). Thus, the tribes who were considered as an egalitarian society with women having free movement and autonomy continued to deny women ownership and significant control over moveable and immovable property.

In the family, the father was the head of the family, the mother was given the third position while the eldest son occupied the second. To remember the family lineage the male child was given a compound name with his great-grandfather or great-grandmother but for a female child it did not matter so much (Serto 1988:281). A woman was never expected to call her husband by name but the husband had the liberty of calling her by name (Capving 1988:251). However, there was free mixing of boys and girls, males and females during festivals, rituals and other economic activities.
4.6: MANIPURI MUSLIMS

The Manipuri Muslims are known as ‘Pangan’ among the Manipuries. They were the captives in war who originally came from Bengal. As I.Singh (1986:607) quotes ‘the word pangan was derived from Bengal’. In the early 17th century, during the time of King Khagembha, the Muslims were allowed to be married to Meitei women and also allotted Meitei yumnaks (household names). These were allotted according to their occupation. There were around 40 yumnaks but it appears that now they preferred the Persian style of naming (Ibid: 608). They used Meiteilon as their mother-tongue but their ritual, life style, food habits and dress upto certain extent, were influenced by Islamic practices. They did not allow women to conduct religious rituals. Regarding the dress, women wore ‘burkha’ (a kind of gown that covered from head to toe). Sometimes they wore phanek (a kind of warper used by Meitei women to warp around their body) and ‘kurta’ (long shirt) as a combination of both Meitei and Muslim dresses. They also covered their head with a cloth. Males wore ‘pyjama’ (trouser) and ‘kurta’ with a cap or ‘lungi’ (cloth that warp around a male’s body) and ‘kurta’ with a cap.

The traditional occupations of Muslims were agriculture and trading. They were also good in swimming, so services related to deep water or pond like fishing, were done by them. Manipuri Muslim women were restricted to work outside the house. However, they produced goods like woven fabrics, raised fruits at home and sold the surplus to others. But nowadays there are plenty of Muslim women working freely as vendors in the main market (Ghosh and Ghosh 1997:32).

Even though they possessed a low status and formed a minority group, they form an integral part of people of Manipur (Bhagat and Bimol 2000: 520). Other groups strictly prohibited interdining and
intermarriage with Muslims. They settled in compact locations in the valley regions near the river like Lilong, Heikrumakhong, Top Khongangkhong, Khetrigao, Hapta and some parts of Bishnupur and Thoubal districts.

4.7: MANIPURI BRAHMINS

The Manipuri Brahmins or Bhamon were considered to be immigrants from Orrisa, Bengal, Tripura, and Gujarat. After the conversion of the Meities into Hindu religion in the early 18th century, the Brahmins though numerically small, enjoyed a high ritual position. They performed all ritual ceremonies. Food cooked by Brahmin was considered pure and hence besides their priesthood occupation they also worked as cooks. The Brahmin women were referred as ‘thourani’ (a corrupt form of the Hindi term thakurani used for the Rajput women). Their works included plucking of flowers for offering to god, cleaning the temple and utensils. However, women were not allowed to practice ritual ceremonies. They also did not get the same status as the Brahmin males, hence not allowed to cook in the temple. Nowadays, there are many Brahmin women who work as weavers, vendors, and cultivators. This does not degrade their position.

Brahmins married within their own caste. They followed gotra exogamy. Like the Bengali Brahmins, Manipuri Brahmins eat fish though they claim to be vegetarian. They used Meitei family names as prefix and males use last names like Sharma, Banerjee, Charkavarty, Mukherjee etc. but females like the Meities, used Devi as last name.
4.8: LOIS

The scheduled caste constitutes 2 per cent of the total population in Manipur (Census of India 1991b:30). Seven communities are recognised as scheduled caste in Manipur. They are - (1) Lois, (2) Yaithibis, (3) Namasudra, (4) Pattni, (5) Sutradha, (6) Dhupi or Dhopi and (7) Muchi/Ravidas (Sharma 1987:3). Of these, the Lois and Yaithibis are the original people while others are recent migrants. The scheduled caste villages are scattered in four districts of Manipur namely, Imphal, Bishnupur, Thoubal and Chandel. They follow pre-Meitei Hindu religion and worship their ancestor known as Umang lai, Koubrou, Wangbren and Sanamahi. According to Devi (2002:10), Lois were those communities who did not adopt Hinduism. This argument may not be relevant in the present context because there are so many Meiteis who follow Sanamahism and not Hinduism but still they are not considered as Lois or scheduled caste. There are three types of Lois namely - (1) lan-ngam loi (conquered one) (2) lanpha loi (captured one from war and rehabilitated by the king) and (3) loithaba (who were sent into exile as a punishment).

Earlier there were instances of absorption of Lois to the Meiteis community. This was done by performing a simple rite and given a surname and the clan name. The converts had to avoid certain food habit considered 'impure' and bad like liquor, meat etc. and follow the principles of purity. Thus, in the Meitei society conversion was more a matter of societal change rather than a change of religion (Raghumani 1988:34). Among the Lois any ceremonies related to birth, death, marriage, and other rituals were celebrated with liquor (Yu), rice and meat.

Agriculture, sericulture, distilling of liquor and pottery making were some of the major occupations of the Lois. There was some tendency to
specialise occupation among the Loi villages. In all the occupations women played an important and active role. Pottery was considered as a profession of the low caste hence practiced by the Lois of Andro, Sugnu and Chiral. Girls kneaded the mud until it became flexible, then roughly fashioned it by hand. They used either wheel or stick to shape the pot (Devi 2002:79). Due to the development of aluminum utensils, stainless steel, plastic etc. this trade is facing a crisis. The problem is comparatively less in place like Andro, Imphal East because these earthen pots were used for storing spirit (Ghosh and Ghosh 1997: 92).

The silk culture was entirely in the hands of the Lois of Leimaram, Khurkhul and Sekmai. This tradition is eroded in place like Sekmai owing to preference for the liquor trade, which gets more profit (Ghosh and Ghosh 1997:122). The silk yarn after reeling and spinning were given to the weavers of Kubbo. The method adopted for silk reeling is still very much primitive. After boiling the cocoons the women reel the yarn with the help of two bamboo sticks; and later the single yarn that is reeled is twisted to appropriate denier. During the reign of kings anyone wishing to engage in silk culture must lose his/her position and become a Loi. The sense of degradation in social hierarchy still plays in the minds of the Meiteis. Therefore despite various attempts by various development agencies, no other community except Lois accepted silk culture as occupation. However, weaving of silk cloth is also found among the Meiteis but rare among the tribes and Muslims.

The Lois of Andro, Phayeng, and Sekmai specialised in distill making. Consumption and making of distilled liquor was considered to be a derogatory by the Meiteis. But among the Lois, liquor played an important role in their religious practices. In Sekmai, three days before their Koubrou haraoba (ritual ceremony) women prepared 'pukyu'
(country liquor) at the house of either khullakpa (village chief) or luplakpa (assistant chief). Even though distilling liquor is a household occupation, women actively participated in it. They also prepared the yeast from various jungle herbs. Besides using liquor for religious purposes and household consumption, the Lois and some of the tribes manufactured alcohol for commercial purposes.

The Phayeng women were also traditionally famous for producing laishen phi (laishen - cotton, phi - cloth). Pisciculture was done by both men and women while carpentry, making of iron equipment and heavier agricultural operations like ploughing were the work of men. In regard to carpentry and making iron equipment, Sugnu Lois were known for boat making, Kaching Lois for certain specific tools and implements. But almost every Loi village manufactured weaving implements in which looms, spinning and reeling implements were common. Both men and women amongst Lois were hard working and contributed economically to the family and society. They respected each other, therefore the position of women in the Loi society was better in comparison to the Meiteis and Brahmins (Ghosh and Ghosh 1997:31).

Each of the Loi village was ruled by a village chief or khullakpa. Unlike the tribal society, the khullakpaship was not a hereditary post but selected by the Meitei king’s choice. But today with the introduction of the panchayat system, the role of khullakpa has been reduced to just titutary head (Das 1985:25). Studies conducted on the relation between the Lois and the Meiteis shown that ethnically, linguistically and religiously there was close relationship between them. Further, some Lois were influenced by the Meitei Hindus. Such Lois were known as ‘panathokpa’ (Devi 2002:9).
4.9: THE MEITEIS

The Meiteis form a major portion of the population of Manipur. They are the dominant group in the state. The Meiteis had a monarchy system, they followed indigenous religion, faith and rituals. Their personal laws were based purely on the puyas (Sacred books and records of the Meitei society written in Meiteilon script). The term Meitei denoted man detached from the image of God (Raghumani 1988:329). The king administered the state following a system called 'lallup'. Under this system, the entire Meitei population was divided into six pannas (Revenue Division) which was further divided into 197 loisangs (administrative departments). Out of the several loisangs, mention can be made of the (1) the ningthou phisaba (Department of manufacturing royal cloth) and (2) paja (Department of women).

The ningthou phisaba - the department was in charge of the superintendent who manufactured the royal cloth. The royal clothes were made taking special precautions.

The paja - the Meitei women had limited authority in the administration. Only women of the royal family had some legal power to dispose of matters related to adultery, divorce, wife beating and other crimes related with women. This department was known as paja (Kabui 1988c).

The males of Meiteis, Brahmins and Muslim who were of 17 years and above regardless of class, were liable to do duty under the lallup system. But the Nagas and the Lois were not liable to do so. They (Naga and Lois) were subject to heavier and menial duty (Hodson 1997:60). Women did not play an active part in the administration of the Meities. Thus, Sircar (1984: 25) stated that ‘while males were directly under a formal political structure, women stayed outside it, playing only an informal peripheral role’.
Work was allocated under a system called *yumnak mashin* (yumnak- household name, mashin-work). Under this system, different works were assigned to different households and the name of the household was given according to the type of work done by the household. Such works covered all socio-economic, political, cultural and religious functions. Thus, all households were functional to the existence of the society. The Meiteis classified the occupation neither on caste nor on village basis. The absence of occupational caste (except for the Brahmins) helped the Meiteis to develop a community life based on cooperative labour (Sircar 1984:24).

4.9.1: Religion

On the basis of religion, the Meiteis could be divided into two groups namely, (1) Meiteis who follow *Sanamahism* and (2) Meities who follow *Vaishnavism/Hinduism*. The followers of Hinduism worshiped god and goddesses of both Hindus and *Sanamahi* while the followers of *Sanamahism* worshiped only god and goddesses of *Sanamahi*. The two followers differed in the way of putting mark on forehead, language of religious hymns, plantation of *tulsi* plant and naming of person. Among the Meitei Hindus, the Brahmins took the place of Meitei priest and priestess. Women were not allowed to dance in the temple. However, after the revivalist movement in Manipur, certain changes which were in opposition to the Hindu culture were observed. Women were allowed to dance in temple and thus tried to preserve the indigenous culture of the traditional Meiteis. The acculturation of the Meiteis was described by Nilkanta (1993:87) as 'the adoption of vaishnavim by the Meiteis was not mere adoption but a rebirth, a new creation as expressed in distinctive
Manipuri way of life in consonance with the creative spirit of the people and their old traditions.

4.9.2: Clan Structure

Different scholars have given different views regarding the origin and number of clans (I.Singh 1986; Amubi 1999; Indramni 1999; Narendra 1999). Generally seven clans are recognised. They are -(1) Ningthouja (2) Agom (3) Khuman (5) Moirang (6) Khaba-nganba and (7) Changlei (Hodson 1997; Khelchandra 2001).

During the process of formation of these clans some merged into other clans. For instance, the Mangang clan, which initially was an independent clan later on merged into Ningthouja clan (I.Singh 1986). However according to I.Singh (1999:7), the Ningthoucha and Mangang belonged to different origins and hence should be treated as different groups. During the study people did perceive Mangang and Ningthouja as separate clans; 32 percent of respondents said they belonged to Mangang while 47 percent said they belonged to Ningthouja clan. No respondent came from the Changlei clan. This might be because their numbers are very small.

The contact with the Hindus by the Meiteis dates back to 15th century. But the nature of contact went to a tremendous change by the early 18th century. With the help of the Hindu missionaries, King Pamheiba (1709-1748) declared Hinduism as state religion. After the adoption of Hinduism each clan was given a Hindu gotra name. Among the clans, Ningthoucha possessed the highest position while the other clans possessed the same position. However, the persistence of clan exogamy made the Ningthoucha clan to marry from other clans. Thus at least in the institution of marriage, all clans including the Ningthoucha are
at the same status. Each clan was subdivided into several *sageis* (lineage). The sageis consisted of several households having same household names and they worshiped a common ancestor. But households having identical names yet belonging to different clans were excluded from the sagei group. The clan and lineage structure of the Meitei community is presented in Figure 4.6.

### 4.9.3: Caste Structure

According to Kunjbihari (1982) after the adoption of Hinduism, the Meiteis were divided into two social groups namely, (1) the Brahmin caste and (2) the Kshatriya caste. However he did not include the scheduled castes reflecting his bias. The intermarriage between the two castes was restricted, yet if a Brahmin boy married a Kshatriya girl, then the food cooked by her for the temple or family was considered impure (*mangba*), otherwise, she enjoyed the social status of a Brahmin. Occupation was not restricted to both caste except the degrading jobs like distilling or scavenging.

In the case of social sanctions, Brahmins and women were considered equal, as both were not given heavy punishment. If punishment was given, then the form of punishment awarded to both Brahmin male and a woman was banishment and *‘khungoinaba’* (a kind of punishment where the culprit’s body was painted and his deeds declared to the public audience) (I.Singh 1988:334). But such kind of lenient punishment which was practiced in the past is now socially and legally withdrawn.
Figure 4.6. Clan structure of the Meitei

Community

Clan (Salai)

Lineage (Sagei)

Family names

(Yumnaks)
Apart from the social sanctions, there are instances of gender inequality in Meitei customary laws. Like the tribes, a Meitei woman was not entitled to the property of her father or husband. But after the death of her husband, if partition took place among the sons, then she could demand a share equal to that of a son. In the case of marriage, polygyny as well as marriage by forceful abduction of girls (*chingba phaba*) was socially accepted. This made the girls insecure. Ghosh and Ghosh (1997:29) had given two reasons for the increase of polygyny in Manipur. The first was the lust for dowry and the second, which also sounds more reasonable, was that since male contribution was less in economy, increase in number of wives assured better economy. The consequence of polygyny was that, since males married another girl, anytime, for any reason, then the Meitei women should be prepared to be economically independent. This made them hard working.

### 4.9.4: Occupation

In the Meitei society, women contributed to the economy of her family by participating in various occupations. They are usually active in economically productive work till old age. The various kinds of work in which women involve in Manipur are presented in Plate No. 4.1 to 4.6. Most of the women workers worked in agricultural related activities, followed by weaving as an occupation. In agriculture, women’s labour is mostly performed in team called ‘*khulung*’ (group labour). Women of various age groups (usually between 15 to 65 years) joined the *khulung*. Thus, women work in *khulung* either to get the labour in the work of their field or work for the cash. Strict gender division of labour occurs in the agriculture, with men doing the work of ploughing, sowing seeds, spreading pesticides, fertilizers, while women are involved in
Plate No. 4.1: Women performing embroidery works on the border of phaneks

Plate No.4.2: Women vendors in the Imphal city
Plate No. 4.3: Women transplanting paddy in the field

Plate No. 4.4: A woman coming back after collecting firewood
Plate No. 4.5: An old woman drying bleached moirangphis

Plate No. 4.6: A woman fishing by using traditional fishing net in a stream

N.B: Women usually fish in this kind while men fish another way
transplanting, weeding and winnowing. Both male and female do harvesting. Wages for males were higher than females because women’s work are considered as ‘soft job’. Further, there was a taboo against women using the plough. In the dyeing occupation women during the period of menstruation are not allowed to touch the pot in which the dye is preserved. The asymmetrical nature of the taboos, for which there are no corresponding taboos for men, shows that they are meant to establish an unequal ordering in the society (Alam 1997:3).

In the rural areas, during the agricultural season women preferred agricultural labour than weaving because they could earn more money. Weaving is done by women of all ages. Young and old women usually work in spinning, warping, putting thread in the reed and bleaching, while married and women of marriageable age did the weaving activity.

Women also play an important role in the internal trade and exchange of handloom products. The weavers handloom products are sold by the women traders in the main women cloth market known as Laxmi Bazar, Imphal (see Plate No. 4.7). Earlier the whole process of preparing yarn from cotton, weaving and marketing of the handloom products was done by the women weaver themselves. Now weavers used readymade yarn, while marketing is done by themselves or by the agents. However, the yarn market is in the hands of male traders. These yarn traders are generally non-Manipuries known as Marwaries by the Manipuries. The yarn market in Khwairamban Bazar, Imphal owned generally by the non-Manipuries is presented in Plate No.4.8.

Sometime some of the yarn traders also become cloth merchants and hire weavers through a middleperson. In the olden days weaving was done by women cutting across class and social status. This was indicated by the cloth woven by princess Thoibi reflecting the high standard of
Plate No.4.7: The main women cloth market (Laxmi Bazar, Imphal) where handlooms products are sold by women cloth traders.

Plate No.4.8: The yarn market own mostly by non-manipuries, Khwairamban Bazar, Imphal
craftsmanship and high sense of artistry. It is still preserved in the Thangjing temple for display for the visitors (Moirang Thangjing Jageirol Marup 1972).

Sircar (1984:43) identified the gender division of occupation in her study of feminism in Manipur. She found that weaving, embroidery, rice pounding, maibi (midwife and ritual diviner) and hotel-keeping (snacks and tea) were exclusively conducted by women workers. Their male counterparts did not help. However, in occupations which were considered as males' jobs namely, carpentry, house-building and smith work, women helped in finishing the products and selling them. In house-building, women helped in painting and plastering. In the case of fishing, both males and females worked but the techniques used differed. A picture of a woman fishing in a stream by using a traditional fishing net has been presented in Plate No. 4.6. while men fish in a different method. Among the Meiteis the age between 40 to 60 appeared to be most efficient and active in terms of production (Sircar 1984:47). Though the Meitei women did not lead a secluded life, young women seldom moved within or outside the village for working as an IS worker. This was considered as an embarrassing moment. Yet the position of the women in Manipur society is still considered to be much better than elsewhere in India, primarily because women are economically active, hard working and they have freedom of mobility (Ghosh and Ghosh 1997:215).

In case of the hierarchy of the ethnic groups, it is difficult to classify them into a strict category. Because in the caste hierarchy, the Brahmins are considered the highest. Yet the Meiteis are the dominant group. Amongst the Meiteis, those who follow the Sanamahism consider themselves as ritually higher than the Brahmins. However all the Manipuri Brahmins and the Meiteis consider themselves as higher than
the tribes, Lois and Muslims. However, according to the Mandal Commission Report the Manipuri Brahmins and the Meiteis are declared as OBC (Other Backward Class). Amongst the Tribes, Lois and Muslims the hierarchical stratification is not clear. The Tribes either belong to indigenous religion or Christianity have been classified as Scheduled Tribes, while the Lois comprises the Scheduled Caste. The Muslims are considered to be a minority group in Manipur.
4.1: INTRODUCTION

From the discussion on the social structure of Manipur it was found that women of all five communities namely, Tribes, Meities, Manipuri Brahmins, Manipuri Muslims and Lois practiced weaving. It was a traditional occupation of these women however, some groups among the Tribes and Lois did not weave. According to Ghosh and Ghosh (1997:32), the Manipuri Muslims were influenced by the Meiteis in the art of weaving. This can be debated because the Muslims were also known for their high skill of weaving in places like Lucknow (U.P), Kolkata and in certain areas of Gujarat. The Manipuri Muslims were migrants, so they might have brought the weaving culture with them. However, unlike these states—the Muslim weavers in Manipur are only women. They wove variety of fabrics needed for their family as well as for the market.

In Manipur the occupation of weaving does not connote a degradation in the position; but in the mainstream India, weaving being practiced by the lower caste signified a degrading position. The handloom sector was found related with the institution of marriage among the tribes, Meiteis and to certain extent the Lois. The techniques of looms, place of weaving and types of yarn used in weaving differed from Tribes to other communities. Even though the whole process of weaving is done by women of all communities, the production of looms and other weaving
tools and implements are done by males of the tribes and Lois communities.

The handloom sector is also the unit of domestic economy. It ranks next only to agriculture in employment generation. Many rural people were and are dependent upon it and people belonging to different clan and castes are also socialised about weaving from their childhood. Thus, the handloom sector occupies a position of socio-economic significance in the life of the Manipuries. Unfortunately the handloom sector in Manipur is predominantly homebased and being not regulated and organised finds it hard to compete with cheap mill cloth imported from the neighbouring states and countries. Several factors are responsible for this situation. However, handloom sector has its own strength. The products are largely determined by the local needs governed by the local traditions and customs. The skill of weaving, techniques used in different stage of production are historically evolved and so also are the property of the community. For this reason we need to understand not only the demand and supply principle of the market but also the cultural significance of handloom sector.

4.2: HANDLOOM SECTOR AND SOCIAL NETWORK IN THE MEITEI COMMUNITY

For the Meitei community, weaving has always been a traditional occupation of the women. In the mythical literature of the Meiteis, the introduction of the cotton plant and the art of weaving carried a notion of sacredness (Devi 1991:253). The goddess of weaving symbolised the mark of wealth and prosperity. Again, feminity of the deity that introduced the art of weaving meant the association of the occupation
with the females. Hence, traditionally it was compulsory for every Meitei woman to be trained in weaving because it was believed that a woman without the knowledge of weaving did not possess the quality of womanhood. Weaving was also culturally esteemed in the tradition of the Meitei. This is reflected during the Lai Haraoba in which the ritual dance called ‘Panthoibi jagoi’ (Panthoibi dance) performed by the priestess (maibi) symbolised the sequences cultivation of land, sowing of cotton seeds, picking of cotton, ginning, carding, spinning and weaving of clothes. After cutting the cloth it was finally dedicated to Lainingthou (God) and Lairemma (Goddess) for the prosperity and well-being of the people and the land (Sircar 1984:150).

Further, traditionally the division of labour for handloom related works like production of dye colour, dyeing and weaving was based on the kin- groups. The work of dyeing was specialised on the basis of household. In the 12th century, during the time of King Meidingu Loiyumba (1074-1122 AD) the work of extracting dyes from flower plants and colouring of the threads and cloths were assigned to eight yumnaks. Each yumnak was given a particular flower plant from which they had to extract the dye. For instance, the Khumanthem yumnak extracted dyes from the flower plant, Hikok Nanoulei (light blue in colour) (for further detail refer Bahadur 1997:25).

In the case of weaving, yumnak was also the yardstick for the division of work. In the early 12th century, it was highlighted in the Loiyumba Shilyen (a treatise on the distribution of occupations during King Meidingu Loiyumba) that the weaving of different types of clothes were assigned to weavers belonging to different yumnaks (households). This specialisation of work was not based on hierarchy but to avoid mixing up of different works. Weaving of royal clothes as well as clothes
that were treated sacred were assigned to 31 yumnaks. During the Lai Haraoba, the God and Goddess were taken out of their temple and circumambulate the locality in a palanquin. The cloth used to cover such palanquin is known as Dolaikup-phi. It was produced by the Wahengbam yumnak (for further detail refer Bahadur 1997:11). But this custom is no more followed hence, weaving is open to all the people of the Meitei community.

The traditional skilled artisans specially in silk production-spinning and weaving- were found concentrated in Thangmeiband and Chingmeirong areas of Imphal valley extending upto adjoining villages like Heingang, Ahallup and Khabam villages.

Skilled weavers specialised in cotton cloth like lamthang khullak⁵, moirangpi⁶, and turban were found concentrated in Wankhei and Singjamei. Weavers who had skills in producing phanek mapanneiba⁶ in loin loom was found in Maibam Leikai (Devi 1988:167). This concentration of skilled weavers in a specific region; later on, made the region to produce their respective specialised clothes. The functional aspect of regional specialisation is that clothes produced in the region are branded as ‘original’, ‘of good quality’ and hence the weaver can earn more money. While the dysfunctional aspect is that clothes produced by other weavers even though, highly skilled are rated as ‘low quality’ and thus priced low. Thus, the regional control lead to regional discrimination against the weavers.

In the traditional society, weaving has always been a criteria for choosing a bride among the Meiteis as well as the Tribes. Gailangam (1997:24) stated ‘the better brides were considered to be those who knew the art of weaving’. Weaving items such as khwang iyong (loin loom), pang iyong (throw shuttle loom) and other weaving accessories were
some essential items of dowry. Girls wove their marriage gifts like shawls and phaneks before the marriage. These gifts played an important role in our life as the more shawls a bride could present or the more gifts she received then the relationship in her future family deepens and strengthens (Khayi 1997:18). Because of the culture, girls were taught weaving as part of their socialisation. Thus, the art of weaving became institutionalised among the Manipuri women. It was a custom among the Meiteis, that unmarried girl of a particular locality brought their weaving items and assembled in the house of a senior woman and learnt the work of spinning and other work related to pre-weaving activity. This tradition was known as Sinnaibham kaba (going to work). (Bahadur 1997:9). In Sinnaibham kaba boys were allowed to meet their girlfriends till late night (J.Singh 1999:73). Since women involved in weaving from an early age, various weaving tools like ‘Kuptring’, ‘Kapon’, ‘Huitri’, ‘Taot’, ‘Tem’ and looms like throw shuttle looms and loin looms were considered as their dowries. But such kind of custom is no more existent. Ch.Singh (1995:4) states ‘now the children of the present generation do not even know the names of the looms—the custom of giving looms during marriage are replaced by items like fan, cooking gas, T.V. and refrigerator etc. which are not related to work’.

The handloom industry in Manipur started from small home based enterprise. Nearly every housewife was capable of weaving all the cloth needed by her family. These clothes were mainly intended for wear and not for decorative purposes yet a trade in fancy and decorative clothes had sprung up. The Nagas, who were the suppliers of raw cotton to the Meiteis often purchased clothes from the ‘Sena keithal’ (royal market). It was believed that the industry was artistically supported by the royal decrees punishing any Naga who failed to buy clothes in the Sena keithal
Weavers usually did their own weaving as well as producing of yarn from raw cotton. Hence, the process of weaving was time consuming and a laborious task. But at present, after the establishment of a spinning mill in Manipur and other imports of yarn, weavers use readymade yarn and hence production became fast. The Meiteis, Manipuri Muslims and Lois use usually three kinds of looms. They are loin looms, fly shuttle and throw shuttle looms. It was kept either in the verandah or in the sangoi (a multipurpose shed of a Meitei home). But the Tribes generally used loin looms and did not have a specific site for their looms. They wove anywhere, in the verandah, inside the house or on an open site. They carried the loom if they happened to migrate or move temporarily to other place. In 1983, in some parts of Churchandpur district, the cooperative societies with financial assistance from the Government introduced fly shuttle loom among the Tribes (Bahadur 2000:9). Generally weavers used wool and cotton yarn because of its cheap price and availability in different colour at anytime in the market. Wool could also achieve quick accomplishment of its work and was free from the hard and poor method of vegetable dye.

In the past, as mentioned before, both valley and hill dwellers of Manipur practiced dyeing by using varieties of plant leaves and bark. After the arrival of chemical dye in 1905 in the Imphal market, women abandoned their traditional technique of dyeing. In the mid 17th century, Tribes like the Maring, the Thangal, the Chothe, the Makhan etc. paid compulsorily a pon of *kumna* (*Strobilbus flaccidifolius*-used for extracting indigo colour) annually as tribute to the Meitei King Khagemba (Bahadur 2000:13). The dye culture in Manipur has also other ritual and social sanctions. It was a taboo for women during menstrual period to touch the pitcher in which *kum* (dyeing colour) was preserved.
Yet the making of dyes and bleaching of yarn and cloth are in the hands of women only. In the festival of *Kanglei Umang Lai Haraoba* (celebration of sylvan deities) of the Meitei, the Tangkhul coming to the Imphal market to buy dye for textiles was highlighted in a dramatised ritual performance (Bahadur 1997, 2000). Thus, in the traditional Meitei society, the handloom sector is partly maintained by religious ceremonies and the king’s authority.

No doubt, modern sophisticated machines have been gradually developed for the production of mill made and power loom fabrics, in different parts of the world at a cheaper rate. But still handloom has maintained its significant place in the production of certain fabrics and textiles. Through the textile that is used, one indicates status, clan and type of community. As usual, the kings and queens of Manipur wore clothes different from the commoners. Sometimes male weavers, even though not frequently found, wove particular clothes meant for the kings and queens (Bahadur 1997:12). The noblemen wore turban and a particular dhoti called ‘*khamenjetpa*’. Those men who were awarded for bravery by the King could also wear *Khamenjetpa*. Among the commoners, men wore simple cotton half lungi (till knee length), girls wore *phanek* and shirt and women wore *phanek* and, blouse, and *khudeimatek*.

In festivals or on occasions, widows used to wear a type of *phanek-mapanneiba* called *Kumchingbi hijam mayak*. The different colour and patterns of *phanek-mapanneiba* worn by women signified the different clans. For instance, the Ningthoucha clan wore lotus colour and *kuhi-kum* with red stripe, Agom wore *langhou phanek* (black and white stripe), Luwang wore blue and black stripe *phanek*, Khuman used *kumchingbi* (fine white stripes and the black), Moirang used yellow...
phanek with reddish stripe, Khaba-nganba wore *kuman* of *chingonglei* colour (black stripe) and Changleis wore *loirang phanek* (reddish brown and white stripe).

These kind of *phanek mapanneiba* used by the Meiteis was similar to that traditionally worn by females of the old tribal folks of Anal, Chothe, Kabui, Hmar, Aimol, Chiru and Lamkang. But during the time of King Yanglou Keiphaba, embroidery works on the border of the Meitei *phanek mapanneiba* was introduced. This could be considered as one of the remarkable cultural marker, which began the differentiation of the Meiteis as a distinct cultural group from the hill tribes (Devi 1991:126).

With such a historical background the culture of weaving is still popular in the Meitei society. The products of the handloom industry have created a wide market within and outside the state. But the remarkable change in the tradition of weaving in Manipur, particularly among the Meiteis, is that the art of weaving has changed from the household consumption, one person process to a more commercialised and organised process.

Male weavers, even though not largely found in weaving, are ridiculed and socially looked down. Yet the need of money for the survival makes the people take up jobs that are easily available like weaving. In this context, we need to focus on the growing impact of the market forces from areas outside Manipur upon the Manipuri traditional economy. If these markets continue to have the present impact, then it is doubtful whether the Manipuri women in the future would be able to maintain their economic hold and monopolisation of the handloom sector. What are the various factors affecting the weavers and over a period of time and what changes have come about in the handloom sector needs to be examined. An attempt has been made by using secondary data to
explore the position of the women weavers in Manipur before and after independence. The schemes available for women weavers and the role of cooperatives in developing the women weavers have also been explored.

4.3: POSITION OF WOMEN WEAVERS IN MANIPUR BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

As early as 1891 the Meitei women using cotton grown in the hills, manufactured cloth on indigenous looms. However, during the colonial period, the fly shuttle loom methods of manufacturing cloth was introduced. Further, in 1930’s, training schools for weavers and a separate department for arts and crafts was established in Manipur by the colonial government. Since the handloom industry was in the hands of the British, some cloth was exported to foreign countries. Thus, the industry was fully developed until the Japanese bombing of Imphal in 1942, when it was disrupted. After the Second World War, the industry could not function properly due to non-availability of yarn. Owing to this, there was an increase in the import of machine manufactured clothes (Gailangam 1997:149). Heavy influx of Manchester clothes crippled the traditional handloom industry (Hodson 1997). The study of socio-economic movement in Manipur valley, during the colonial period found that the total number of weavers came down from 46,764 in 1911 to 39,384 in 1921 and 5,667 in 1931 (L Singh 1990:131). However, according to the Handloom census in 1988, the number of weavers in the valley area increased to 2.3 lakh. The increase in the number of weavers after independence, was expected because of forming of the WCS and other developmental policies of handloom sector. However, the high
discrepancy in the figures between 1988 and that of 1931, may also be a result of adoption of different methods of data collection.

During the colonial period the import and export of handloom and trade in other commodities especially rice, was under absolute control of the non-Manipuries especially referred to as Marwaries. The weaving industry, as a result, continued to remain only as a household occupation for women and to which women could devote time only during their leisure period. It was no longer a profitable business. The British policy imposed tariffs on the export of cotton in Manipur. Further, after the passing away of kingship in Manipur, in the late nineteen forties, many of the royal dresses became obsolete. The present weavers did not, therefore know how to make certain traditional dresses; and even if they knew they could no longer weave the traditional patterns and designs. The assignment of particular yumnak to weave particular cloth had been banished, thus making weaving an open occupation.

4.4: POSITION OF WOMEN WEAVERS IN MANIPUR AFTER INDEPENDENCE

During the post independence period the Indian constitution emphasised on equality through the decentralisation of economic and political authority. The cooperative movement in India, which started in 1904, became an effective system in organising the workers as well as employing the workers without exploitation. But the cooperative societies were established in Manipur only after 1947 (I.Singh 1995:7). These cooperative societies are found to be capable of rendering services to the workers in achieving their economic ends. One of the important industrial cooperative societies, exclusively dominated by women in Manipur is the
WCS. The women weavers had made a remarkable contribution to the handloom cooperative society. It undertook various functions such as production, provision of raw material, inputs, sales and common services. The main handloom products of the state which had demand inside and outside the state were saris, bed sheets, curtains, towels, tablecloth, fashion garments with intricate designs, cushion covers, pillow covers, upholstery, draperies, scarfs, chaders, woolen shawls and lungies (Directorate of Commerce and Industries 2002:4).

Being an IS and having an extremely scattered production base, handloom had looked to the government for its survival and development. Both the state and central government had rendered service to this handloom industry in many ways. In the development plans of the state it had allocated funds and schemes for promoting and strengthening the weavers. Some of the central sponsored schemes implemented gave equipment subsidy to ex-trainees of weaving, and staff subsidy to primary weavers cooperative society, subsidy to build workshed for the WCS and individual weavers, share capital loan, assistance for modernisation of looms, thrift fund scheme, health package scheme and project package scheme (Government of India 1993). Further with a view to provide marketing facilities, several emporiums and trade fairs were organised at the state and national levels. To cater to the needs of raw material (yarn), in March 1978, a cotton-spinning mill with a running capacity of 16,614 spindles was commissioned at Loitang Khunou, Imphal. It produced 1,300 kg of thread per day. But the rich merchants purchased the most popular ‘forty coil-thread’ at low price and sold at high price to the local market. Other bottlenecks of the mill were lack of raw material (cotton) and power subsidy (Laiba 1992:269).
In the field of research work, the government had instituted study groups to investigate and come up with solutions for problems faced by the weavers. Mention may be made of regular publication of journal by the Manipur Cooperative Society, Manipur and the Handloom Census by the Government of India. The census is the only statistical record available in Manipur and it gave a comprehensive picture of the status of handloom weavers in the late eighties. It may not reflect today’s situation yet, it does give some idea on the status of weavers. Much of it may be true presently. The Handloom Census 1998 did not focus specifically on the weavers but on the households of the weavers. However, in Manipur considering the fact that the job of weaving is in the hands of women, the number of women weavers was 3.39 lakhs producing 86.40 lakh linear metre of handloom cloth per month. Out of the total weavers 70% were working as full time in the valley as against 40% in the hill areas (http://investinmanipur.nic.in/handloom.htm).

Regarding the number of looms possessed by the weavers’ household, it was found that a majority of them had their own looms. While comparing the valley and hill dwellers, almost all the valley weavers had only one loom while a significant percentage of hill dwellers possessed two looms. This is presented in Table 4.1. Even though a quarter of the hill weavers had two looms it did not make any significant difference in the wages while compared to the plain weavers who had only one loom. This may be because of two reasons: Firstly, except Chandel, the number of domestic looms in hill districts was higher than commercial looms while the contrary was found among the valley districts. Secondly, the percentage of weavers who worked for more than 200 days in a year were higher in valley districts while the weavers in hill
districts mostly worked for 100 days or below 200 days in a year (see Table 4.2 and 4.4).

Table 4.1: Proportion of weavers’ household by number of looms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>No loom (%)</th>
<th>1 loom (%)</th>
<th>2 looms (%)</th>
<th>3&amp;above looms (%)</th>
<th>Total weaving households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senapati</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>26533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamenglong</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchandpur</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandel</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>12607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukhrul</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>12443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>56196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>20926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>30376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>192138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: - Nil
Source- Handloom Census 1988:27-28

Table 4.2: Percentage of weavers’ household by number of working days in a year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Upto 100 days</th>
<th>101-150 days</th>
<th>151-200 days</th>
<th>Above200 days</th>
<th>Total weaving households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senapati</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>26533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamenglong</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>9812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchandpur</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>23245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandel</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukhrul</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>56196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>20926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>30376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>192138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source- Handloom Census 1988: 101-102
From the same census mentioned above, half of the weavers' household in Manipur derived about 20 per cent of the income from weaving activity. A quarter of them also derived 40 per cent of the income from weaving activity. The percentage of income derived from the weaving activity is presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Proportion of weavers’ household by monthly earning from handloom (in Rs.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Upto 100 (%)</th>
<th>101-200 (%)</th>
<th>201-300 (%)</th>
<th>Above 300 (%)</th>
<th>Total weaving households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senapati</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>26533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamenglong</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>9812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchandpur</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>23245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandel</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>12607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukhrul</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>12443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>56196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>20926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>30376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>192138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4.4: Number of working commercial and domestic looms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Commercial loom</th>
<th>Domestic loom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senapati</td>
<td>21621</td>
<td>51687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamenglong</td>
<td>3923</td>
<td>9855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchandpur</td>
<td>6183</td>
<td>29821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandel</td>
<td>7727</td>
<td>11810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukhrul</td>
<td>11189</td>
<td>4252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal</td>
<td>50318</td>
<td>7225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>20118</td>
<td>2083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>16494</td>
<td>12609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>137573</td>
<td>129342</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source- Handloom Census 1988:41
A general pattern among the weavers in Manipur was that work for earning income was done along with household chores. This included taking care of children, cleaning, cooking, collecting water, shopping etc. The weaver could devote time to weaving only when she was free from household chores. So they worked on looms as a part time job. As mention above, as per the Handloom census 1988, in the valley districts around 40 percent of weavers are not working fully during the whole year and 70 percent in the case of hill districts (http://investinmanipur.nic.in/handloom.htm). Since weaving activity was confined at home weavers could combine household work and weaving activity. Not all weavers were skilled weavers in Manipur. Even though it was a traditional occupation for the Meitei women, now in the 1990's only those women who belong to economically weaker section of the society work as weavers (Devi 1995:28).

On the basis of the nature of the working condition, weavers are broadly divided into three. They are - (1) self employed weavers or independent weavers, (2) weavers working under merchant and (3) weavers working in weavers' cooperative society. However, this distribution of weavers was not always clear because a weaver at one time worked as a cooperative weaver and at another time she worked for the merchant. This depended upon the availability of work. The informality or the existence of the unprotected labour in the labour market affected the smooth functioning of the handloom sector in the state.

Before the independence of India, the handloom sector was not fully unorganised. Weavers independently ran the business with the help of the household members. But from the second half of the fifties, the state government began to improve the infrastructure of handloom sector by creating cooperative structure. Out of the 20 cooperative societies in
Manipur, the WCS had the highest number. In 1998-1999 it had 1292 WCS (see Table 4.5) with a total membership of 1,51,259. It also have a total working capital of Rs. 565.52 lakhs and a share capital of Rs. 166.71 lakhs (Government of Manipur 1998-1999:14).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senapati</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamenglong</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchandpur</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandel</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukhrul</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal East</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal West</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>1292</td>
<td>1307</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Out of the total number of societies in 1998-1999, Imphal districts had 688 WCS. The number increased slightly in the year between 1999-2000 in five districts of Manipur. The women weavers managed all the weaving societies. Usually those weavers who were educated, wealthy, and skilled were the leaders of the society. Fly shuttle looms or loin looms or combination of both were used in almost all the societies. Very few societies had the privilege of using semi-automatic looms. Till now no power loom has existed in Manipur. The reasons as given by Singha (1992:203) were technical, financial and power shortage. In Manipur, weaving was manually done, so the weavers could not produce in bulk quantity. It also consumed time and labour.
The Manipur weaving cooperative society got financial assistance from the Central government and other organisations like National Cooperative Development Cooperation, NABARD, LIC, HUDCO, and other commercial banks. Unfortunately, from the last five years, the cooperatives have been facing many problems, which has restricted the smooth pace of development. Some of the causes for the failure stated by Devi (1995:30) were non-availability of yarn, lack of modernisation of loom, lack of finance, lack of marketing facilities, illiteracy and ignorance of weavers, part time weavers, lack of good leadership, negative loan repayment behaviour among members and non-availability of dyeing and processing facilities. Besides this, lack of awareness of new fashion and consumers’ preference were stated by Singha (1992:206).

These studies mostly analysed the handloom sector as an organisation and the bottlenecks in the growth the handloom sector. It did not study about the weavers' life, the social customs and beliefs that bound them. The weavers who also contributed to the economy of the family could not consider themselves as the sole economic provider in the family. This could be a consequence of patriarchy system. Until and unless the women weavers are treated as professional they will remain as part time weavers. This will hamper their self-esteem and performance.

Looking from the management point of view, Singha’s study of one hundred WCS in Manipur, found that only 10 per cent of the societies had capital above Rs. 32,000. Only 24 per cent of them fulfilled the Shivaraman Committee report criterion (i.e. 100 looms and 100 members and Rs. 5000 as share capital from the weavers) (Singha 1992:204). The weavers depended upon the private traders who generally compelled the weavers to produce cheaper quality of substandard cloth at low cost and sold them at a high rate.
One way of handling the WCS, which led to the doom of the society, was the autocratic manner of the leaders. Despite the societies objective of being democratic and mutually cooperating, the observations of those knowledgeable are that leaders managed the society in an autocratic manner, manipulated and misutilised finances. They thought that if higher profits were revealed then it would make member weavers demand greater benefits for themselves (Singha 1992:192). Therefore, there were always suspicious and misunderstanding among the leaders and the member weavers.

The monthly journal published by the Manipur Cooperative Society regularly stated the conditions and problems of the societies. The downfall of the society had given a chance to the master weavers to control the trade. For those poor weavers, getting low wages with regular work was better than becoming a member without regular work and wages. To avoid the social stigma attached with women working outside the home, weavers turned to merchants for work. There are two ways of hiring the weavers. Firstly, the big traders, especially the Marwaries yarn traders, supply yarn to the weavers through a middleperson. Such kinds of weavers get low wages as the middleman takes their share. There is no direct contact between the weaver and the trader. In the second kind of hiring, there is a direct contact between the merchant and the weaver. In such cases, usually the local merchant hires the local weavers. In the latter case sometime they supply loom accessories to the weavers. The different systems of hiring the weavers are presented in Figure 4.7.
Figure 4.7: System of hiring women weavers

A: Hiring weavers by male yarn traders who are also cloth merchants

B: Direct hiring by cloth merchants
4.5: INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL HANDLOOM ORGANISATION

Manipur being an economically backward state and having a high unemployment rate, it is necessary to promote and protect the workers of the IS. The handloom commercial organisations namely, Manipur Development Society (MDS now onwards) and Manipur Handloom and Handicraft Development Corporation (MHHDC now onwards) assisted the individual weavers who did not belong to any WCS. According to Mr. Nilamani, Director of MMDC, ‘the living standard of weavers have been improved as far as Manipur is concerned’12. The organisation received demands from foreign and domestic bulk buyers in the following items—cotton, sari, cotton chuni, double bedcover and moirangphi. Weavers producing these items received more wages than those weavers who produced items like phanek, shawl, and mosquito net. The marketing system in MHHDC was implemented in two ways. The institution dispatched the final products either to the whole sale markets or bulk buyers. These whole sales or the bulk buyers again sell the handloom products to other selling agents which is presented in the Figure 4.8. Thus the MHHDC assisted the weavers in marketing their handloom products.

In the case of MDS, the organisation employed as well as imparted training to the weavers. In the annual plan period 1998-99 the MDS, in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi, launched a training programme for weavers in 16 gram panchayats. It benefited 600 weavers.
Figure 4.8: Marketing system in Manipur Handloom and Handicraft Development Corporation (MHHDC), Imphal
The total turnover of the handloom products of MDS in different units in the district is presented in Table 4.6. In all the districts, MDS had 32 production units and each unit had a minimum of 50 weavers. Thus, calculating in this manner, MDS provided employment to around 1600 weavers annually. Comparing the handloom production from 1997 to 2000 it was found that in 2000 the organisation reduced the production to more than half of the previous year.

Table 4.6: Performance of Manipur Development Society (Rs. in lakh)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prodtn</td>
<td>Wage</td>
<td>Prodtn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal East I</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal East II</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal West I</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal West II</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Prodtn—Production

The case study of MDS performance by D. Singh (1997:37) found that lack of fund, poor management, lack of coordination between the workers and management, delay or untimely payment of wages and yarn to weavers was attributed to the poor performance of MDS.

Since individual weavers were not allowed to take up schemes, commercial groups acted as agents to implement the schemes sanctioned by the state government. Expert weavers also established weaving industries. Mention can be made here of the Rani Industries, Wangkei, Imphal where the weaver, Rani was imparting training known as
'Learning cum Earning Scheme'. Under this scheme learners were provided with weaving materials including cotton, silk thread and designs (traditional and modern). Weavers were taught to weave the extra weft designs in their own homes. There were around 200 girls undergoing such training under her. She mentioned that the scheme was financially risky because firstly, the finished products became unmarketable owing to defects in weaving and secondly, since the weavers belonged to the farmers' families they sold the finished products when they need money.

An analysis of the state government’s IXth Five Year Plan shows that the industry sector received only 5.21 per cent of the total investment in Manipur. In this, the handloom sector was allocated Rs. 295 lakhs for the 9th and Rs. 132 lakhs for the Annual Plan of 1999-2000 (Planning Department Manipur 1999:VI-51). Further, the Planning Department wanted the entire target to be achieved, but the achievement of the year 1998-99 was very poor (see Table 4.7). Thus, all the plans and schemes seemed only to be on paper. It lacked proper implementation and therefore no adequate results were received.

In 1997, Manipur had the highest unemployment rate in the Northeastern region (15.55 per cent in 1998) with a low per capita income of Rs. 7941 (Directorate of Economics and Statistics 2001b:32). The unemployment problem was also responsible for social tensions – ethnic clashes, urban unrest and secessionism. On the other hand, the hand, the employment in the formal sector had also reached a point of over saturation as 97 percent of all employment in Manipur is in public sector.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Village &amp; small industries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Handloom industries</td>
<td>No. Trainees</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B Incentives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Follow up programme</td>
<td>No. Trainees</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Project Package scheme</td>
<td>No. Weavers societies</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Composite VSI &amp; Coop.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Contributory thrift fund</td>
<td>No. Weavers</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Group insurance scheme</td>
<td>No. Weavers</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>H/L Dev. Centre &amp; quality unit (Interest subsidy)</td>
<td>No. Weavers</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Integrated H/L Vill. Dev. Project</td>
<td>No. Project</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Other village industries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Modernisation of handloom</td>
<td>No. Weavers</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Workshed for individual weaver</td>
<td>No. Weaver</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: 1) Ach : Achievement  
2) H/L Dev. Center : H/L Development Centre  
3) Integrated H/L Vill. Dev. Project : Integrated H/L Village Development Project  
Source – Planning Department Government of Manipur 1997:721,381,1999
So the government of Manipur needs a directional change in the planning to expand in the industrial sector. A proper planning was required to develop and protect the workers in the IS because there was and is no scope for industries being established in Manipur in a short period of time. Thus, the IS was one of the ways to absorb the unemployed youths. This was also another way to restore the law and order of the state. The handloom industry was and is one such industry. If properly planned with appropriate investment, women in Manipur could get employment which would empower them. Even though economic independence is not only the factor for empowering women but it can still be seen as a step towards women's empowerment and gender equality. Handloom being a traditional occupation for the Manipuri women it does not require great efforts to get training. Further, by working in female dominated occupation, women may accept lower status and remuneration. Because in such a situation, women view such jobs as more socially acceptable and more compatible with their feminine gender roles. This provides opportunities to women to combine work and family life (Korabik 1999:15).

4.6: CONCLUSION

Manipur comprises different ethnic groups each one following their own religion, dialect, and customs. But in all the ethnic groups women practice the job of weaving. Plate No.4.9 presents the women weavers who belong to different ethnic communities. It is deeply related with their social life and religious practices. The weaving occupation is symbolised by a goddess hence people consider it as a feminine occupation. An ideal woman is one who knows weaving; and so through family socialisation, weaving was taught and learnt. The handloom products, textile and
Plate No. 4.9: Weavers belonging to different ethnic communities.
clothes worn on occasions and daily life were indigenous and maintained the cultural identity of the group. It also signified the status of a group or that of the individual within the community.

Traditionally among the Meiteis, different household was assigned to produce particular clothes. There was also specialisation of work related to dyeing. The production of yarn from cotton which was done by the weavers, are now replaced by the readymade yarn. With the change of time the handloom sector which was once produced for household consumption, got commercialised. Techniques used in weaving differed from the Tribes to other communities yet there was inter-trade relation among the Lois, Tribes and Meiteis. The Tribes produced cotton and the Lois produced silk yarn, which were bought by the Meiteis and they sold the finished products to them. So, the handloom sector was not only an economic sector but also a social sector in Manipur. Brahmin women who wove did not degrade their position.

The establishment of the WCS helped the weavers to organise themselves, but it did not function successfully. Besides this, the cooperate bodies, NGO's and small scale industries employed those weavers who were not members in the WCS. Yet their performance was also found unsatisfactory. Many reasons ranging from marketing, finance, technical and management blocked the growth of the handloom industry in Manipur. Further the government service sector (formal sector) became saturated and there are no large scale private manufacturing and service sector in the state to absorb the educated and the uneducated unemployed persons. The development of the handloom sector would give employment opportunity to the women of Manipur. Because expansion of jobs for women in the area where they were already trained would be easily accepted by the society. Further, women being socialised in
weaving, enhancing their knowledge in the same field, by imparting training, would increase the weavers' social status in Manipur.
## NOTES TO CHAPTER- IV

1. **Lai Haraoba**
   - The Meiteis worship their ancestors. The Lai Haraoba is the celebration held only once in a year to worship their ancestors.

2. **Jhum cultivation**
   - It is the method of cultivation by chopping off trees and burning of soil in the hilly terrace. It is also called shifting cultivation because after cultivating one or two years the cultivators move into a new jhum plot. The cultivators do not acquire any permanent right of land except the right to use and occupy during the cultivation period.

3. **Kubbo**
   - A Loi place which was in the territory of Manipur but now in Burma.

4. **Lallup**
   - The duty of appearing at the king’s office ten days and doing the work to which the person was assigned. The person liable to duty under the lallup system were the Meiteis, the Brahmins and the Muslims.

5. **Lamthang khullak, moirangphi**
   - A kind of shawl used by the Meitei women to cover their upper part of the body. It is made of fine cotton (length-1.5 metre).

6. **Phanek mapanneiba**
   - A cloth of strip design used by the Meitei women to warp around the body. It is worn at the waist and extends up to knee (length-1.5 metre, width-1 metre).

7. **Sinnaibham kaba**
   - A sort of school at the house of a senior woman to learn pre-weaving and weaving works, embroidery and the art of running home.
8. Kuptring, Kapon, Huitri, Taot, Tem

- Different accessories of looms.

9. Phanek

- A kind of lungi used by the Meitei women to warp around the waist and extend up to knee (length 1.5 metre, width 1 metre).

10. Khudeimatak

- A cotton shawl used by Meitei women at home.

11. Kumchingbi hijam mayek, kuhi kum,
langhou phanek,
kumchingbi, kuman,
loirang phanek

- These are different types of phanek mapanneibas. It is differentiated according to the different colour of yarn used in it.

12. Interview with Mr. Nilamani, Director of Manipur Handloom and Handicraft Development Corporation dated 05-07-2001.


14. The insurgency problem in the North-east, perhaps its location and failure of the government leaders has not resulted in the emergence of manufacturing industries and other service sector in Manipur.