CHAPTER - VII

CONCLUSIONS
In this concluding chapter, I draw the main findings. The Structural Adjustment Programme implemented in India in early nineties focussing on globalisation, liberalisation and modernisation has an adverse effect on the IS. The handloom sector has also been affected. The successive textile policies have been discriminatory to the handloom sector. It has been a big blow to some weavers (like in South India) and thus leading them to commit suicide. In the case of Manipur, the government service sector (formal sector) became saturated and there were no industries where the unemployed could be absorbed. There is no large scale private manufacturing or service sector existing in the state in which the youth could get jobs. So the unemployment was and is increasing. The handloom sector being a traditional feminine occupation many women, be they educated or illiterate, got jobs in the handloom sector. Therefore with suitable public policies for this sector, large employment opportunities can be created for the women of the state. This will give immense opportunity for raising the socio-economic status of the Manipuri women.

In addition to the economic role, the handloom sector plays an important role in the social structure of the society. Thus, in the olden days the Meitei households were classified according to the types of clothes and dyeing colour they produced. In some tribes marriages were conducted only with persons living in those villages who had weaving skills.
In the ritual ceremony of the Meiteis, there was a sequence of dance that depicted the weaving process. Thus, weaving was transmitted from one generation to another through culture. Within the family, girls helped their mother in pre-weaving works and in this process they learnt the art of weaving. So by the time they reached marriageable age they would be able to weave. Girls with weaving skill were preferred for marriage. Besides this, among the tribes, girls expressed their love and care for their boyfriends by giving weaving products, the more the design the more it indicated love. Among the Meiteis, the place called ‘Sinnaipham kaba’ served both for romance and working activities. But this system exists no more. The weaving occupation has become open to every family and to every woman.

The handloom sector, in the process of production brought integration and co-existence among different ethnic groups. In the past, cotton which was produced in the hill region was also exported to the weavers in the valley. While the Lois manufactured looms and loom accessories, the finished products of the Meitei weavers were sold to other tribes and Lois. Thus it maintained a co-existence amongst the different ethnic groups in Manipur.

As the handloom sector is an important socio-economic sector, there is need to examine the condition of the weavers. In Northern and Southern Indian weaving society, women largely played pre-weaving roles while men were weavers. Women weavers doing only the pre-weaving work could not claim the position of the weaver. This prohibited them from getting the benefits of WCS and applying for loans to other financial institutions. In this matter, the position of weavers in Manipur was better as they exclusively dominated the handloom sector. But when the occupation was in the hands of women as in the case of Manipur, the findings of the present study show that there were no male helpers in the
weaving occupation. Thus, we could clearly see the gender determination in the status of work. When males did the work it was considered ‘high’ therefore, females helped them but when the same work was done by females it was considered ‘low’ hence, males did not help them. Further, women weavers in Manipur faced problems when they entered the market where males largely dominated it.

From the data collected, the condition of the women weavers in Manipur has been analysed at two levels. Firstly, through an analysis of the socio-economic conditions, production, marketing strategy, and health, we notice that different weavers faced different problems and hardships. Secondly, despite hardships, the weavers had gained a certain degree of freedom and autonomy in the family and at the community level. This is a form of empowerment and it has been examined, as it helps the weavers to survive in the vicious world.

7.1: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE WEAVERS

The poor socio-economic condition of the weavers made them more vulnerable. As found in the study amongst all the weavers, MW was the most marginalised group. They were mostly unmarried, belonged to lower and lower middle class and resided in rural areas.

In general, most of the weavers belonged to the age group of 18 to 40. Weavers at their young age worked for merchants but after they gained experience and marriage, they preferred to work as SEW. A majority of the weavers had low educational attainment. However, there were still a quarter of them who had completed higher studies. For such kind of weavers probably, the non availability of work in formal sector and the need to earn money were the driving forces that put them to work.
in weaving occupation. Looking from another perspective, the increase in educational attainment of the weavers shows that there had been some educational mobility among the weavers.

There was some correlation between the class and other indicators of class like type of house, items and land owned by the weavers’ family. When correlating the class and physical structure of the house the analysis of data shows that a majority of the lower class and more than half of lower middle class weavers lived in kachha houses. More than half of the upper middle and the upper class lived in semi-pucca houses. However, there were also cases of upper middle class and upper class staying in kachha houses. So, the assumption that physical structure of house is indicator of class status might not be applicable for everyone. Amongst the weavers, more of CW lived in kachha houses.

A majority of the upper middle and upper class weavers owned items like bicycle, motorbike, radio or tape recorder, T.V, fan and cooking gas. But nearly half of the lower class did not possess any of the above mentioned items. Among the lower and lower middle class they generally owned items like bicycle and radio or tape recorder. Among the types of weavers the SEW had the highest proportion of respondents, who owned items while MW were the least in this matter.

In regard to land owned by the weavers, only one third of the weavers had cultivable land. Among this, more than half of the upper class and nearly half of the upper middle class had land but lower class weavers did not have any land. Concerning the types of weavers, MW, even though did not have a better standard of living condition compared to SEW and CW, they possessed a larger amount of land. Yet the nature of cultivation of the land differed among the different types of weavers. The MW cultivated their land by themselves while the SEW hired
labourers to cultivate their land. Thus, the MW were burdened with agricultural work besides their weaving activity.

In terms of the residential area, half of the respondents lived in rural area. Those who belonged to rural area predominantly worked as MW while weavers in the urban area worked as SEW. The MW, even though having land, but owing to the residential area lacked proper transportation and adequate marketing facilities. Hence they worked for the merchants despite low wages and long working hours.

In terms of the marital status, half of the weavers in the study were unmarried, very few amongst them were divorced or widowed. Compared to the married more unmarried weavers worked as MW.

The weavers lived either in joint or nuclear families. More than half of them had a big family size (6 to 10 members). Regarding economic background of the family members of the weavers, it was found that SEW had highest proportion of members who were economically independent. On the other hand, MW had highest economic dependency. The weavers with one third of the household members not contributing any income to the family, it became a compulsion to support the family.

7.2: REASONS FOR CHOOSING WEAVING AS THEIR OCCUPATION

As a part of tradition in Manipur, women had been working as weavers. The finished products were used for household consumption as well as for selling in the market. In the study different weavers stated several reasons for joining the weaving occupation. Amongst this, the most important reason cited by a large proportion of the weavers was related to economic matters. They mentioned that weaving was an easy way to earn money because firstly, Manipur being not an industrialised state, job opportunities were limited. In addition to this, the formal sector (State
service) was also saturated. Therefore, women who were both educated and uneducated had to fall back on the handloom as their last resort for occupation. Secondly, the Meitei women were traditionally active in the economic sphere; but owing to the process of sanskritisation and also with the increase in educational level, the notion of status attached to women’s work has changed. The ‘type’ and ‘place of work’ performed by the women became a matter of enhancing or degrading the position not only for the women but also for the family. In this regard, women working in the IS outside the home premises was considered low in status for the women and the family. Yet women wanted to contribute economically to the family rather than sitting idle at home. Combining all these factors weaving fitted the criteria and it was a better way to earn money. Some of the other reasons given by the weavers for choosing weaving as their occupation were weaving did not require formal training and weaving being a traditional job it was more acceptable than working outside the house.

The married weavers chose weaving because it was confined to home hence they could combine both the dual role of weaving and doing the household chores. Thus, the traditional attitude that women were responsible for their domestic chores and child caring affected their choice of occupation. But for some weavers there were constraints on women’s mobility, which was extended even to their sphere of work. They tended to follow the norms of the upper caste women who did not involve in manual work outside the house. So, some of the weavers who had joined other occupations before becoming a weaver stated that a woman working outside her house lowers her status. Thus, homebased work was considered as ‘ideal’ for women. By performing weaving which was the traditional occupation and accepted by all communities weavers considered themselves as a ‘complete woman’.
7.3: NATURE OF PROBLEMS AND DISCRIMINATION FACED BY WEAVERS

The nature of problems faced by the women weavers are examined from their production process and health aspects. In the production process the number of working years in weaving, the wage received by the weavers, technology used in the looms, design and training of the weavers are analysed. The findings of the study are presented below:

7.3.1: Number Of Working Years

The weavers faced discrimination at every stage of the production process. But the nature of working condition and social background of the weaver played an important role in the kind of problem and discrimination they faced. More than one third of the MW in the study worked for less than five years. But there were also MW, SEW and CW who had worked for more than 15 years.

7.3.2: Low Technology

Although all the weavers had their own looms, they lagged behind in acquiring latest weaving technology. They used fly shuttle looms, throw shuttle looms and loin looms. All these were manually operated. Very few WCS mentioned of having semi-automatic looms. None of them had mentioned of having power looms. Since they used handlooms, quantity of production was low, time consuming and laborious. However, the traditional method of weaving was linked with cultural identity of the community whether it was Meitei or tribes. The products of the loin looms and throw shuttle looms had high social value and also maintained the cultural identity of the community. Some of the common reasons for
not using semi-automatic and power looms were lack of adequate power supply, capital and skill. Both the government and the weavers were responsible for this situation. On the part of the government, they did not make arrangements for acquiring latest technology. On the other hand, weavers, on account of poverty, learnt to survive by using old technology. They developed certain arrangements which enable them to feel self-sufficient. It was an effort to cope with their hopelessness and despair. Children who socialised in this environment felt insecure to use any new technology in a new situation.

7.3.3: Design And Training

Regarding the design which plays an important role in fixing the price of the cloth, the weavers in the study constantly mentioned of lacking new designs. They borrowed design from other weavers or copied from any existing design. Though there were catalogues available in the market most of the weavers could not afford it. In addition to this, owing to lack of training weavers faced difficulties in producing design. On the other hand, the WCS supplied complicated designs so when weavers could not produce it they were treated as inefficient workers. Even those who got training could not use their knowledge to make new design owing to lack of adequate infrastructure. However, weavers claimed that after the training programme they increased their weaving skill. They also mentioned an increase in the management skills as well as marketing skills. Such opportunities to undergo training were not available to a majority of the weavers as the political leaders, to get votes, left out those weavers who needed training.
7.3.4: Wage Earned From Weaving

Wages were given on piece rate basis. It was difficult to calculate the wages because the weavers did not regular income. However, for the convenient, the wages were calculated on monthly basis. Weavers who belonged to the rural area, working as MW, followers of Sanamahism and who were below 25 years, had lower wages than weavers who were urban, Hindu, SEW and above 25 years group. More than half of weavers (58%) received below Rs. 600 per month while nearly one third (30%) got between Rs. 600-1000 per month.

With regard to working hours spent on weaving, it was found that more than half of weavers (54%) worked between 8-12 hours a day and more than one third (38%) worked below 8 hours per day. Amongst these, MW worked for longer hours but got the least wages. So wages was not determined by the hours spent on work by a weaver. It also shows that MW were paid inadequate wages not because they were working less number of hours in a day or less number of days in a year than the SEW, but due to the tight grip of the merchants over these workers. These employers did not give legal wages to these weavers which made them suffer. Another condition which made the weavers work for low wages was that labour was in abundance. The owner of the labour i.e. the weaver was always under pressure to sell her labour at very low rate, as she knew that if she did not sell her labour at low price dictated by the merchant, she would lose even that money. So, the continuous sale of her labour for low wages, does not help her to lead a dignified human existence.

Despite these problems, there were advantages and disadvantages of weavers depending upon the nature of their working condition. The MW (74%) and CW (61%) considered that the advantage for working as SEW was that they could earn more income but only one third of SEW
(34%) subscribed to this. For the SEW (54%) it was the ‘freedom to work’ which was rated as being more advantageous. Weavers wanted to produce clothes according to their taste and they did not appreciate external control over their production. Thus, the SEW enjoyed their work and had full autonomy over their production. They got more profit than other weavers. But as the MW and CW were under control of another person, they did not get satisfaction from their work. Hence, this made them feel alienated from the weaving activity.

For the MW there were distinct evidence of marginalisation and subordination. Their occupational grievances were manifold: low wages, deduction of wages for damages while weaving, deduction of wages for less weightage, long working hours and absence of unity and trade union support. Among the CW, it was low wages, irregular supply of raw materials, lack of management skill and wastage of time while going to the workshed. Despite the disadvantages of CW, weavers continued to persist because of the expectation of getting some facilities from the cooperatives. They also developed unity among the weavers. Since weavers belonging to MW category did not have enough money to invest in their business, it was considered good to work for merchants. Thus, the MW sold out their labour to the merchants and received wages for it.

The SEW faced marketing problems and this has been the disadvantage of working as SEW. The problems faced by them were in the form of selling clothes on credit system and lack of adequate sale depots in the market. The lack of quality control during the process of production also led them to sell clothes at low prices. The prevailing credit system resulted in the weavers getting irregular payment. They could not collect the money from their customers in one visit and whatever amount recovered was spent on household needs. They could not invest in the weaving activity and hence this affected the continuity of
work. The marketing system which was done on small scale credit, placed the weavers at a disadvantage. The weavers in the study did not join any form of self-help groups or occupational organisations. The credit institutions were also not in a position to invest money for the weavers because SEW and MW were not registered workers. And even if they allowed to apply for loan, the weavers were reluctant to apply for the loan, as they did not have a secure income.

7.3.5: Health Problems

The health ailments owing to nature of work were related with the working conditions, posture required at work and exposure to proper light. The weavers in the study generally suffered from back and shoulder pain and eyestrain. Half of the weavers in the study complained of having such problems. The pain became worse on cloudy days. Compared to all the weavers more CW suffered from occupational health problems.

Among those who had ailment, half of them took treatment from medical doctors. If those who did not take treatment the reasons stated were lack of money and lack of health awareness. The only treatment for their pain was to lay down for few hours till pain wore off and then they would resume working. They considered that it was usual for a worker to suffer from pain and eyestrain. According to the weavers, the problem got accentuated when they reached the menopause stage. Among the married weavers, there were cases of ailments owing to malnutrition, anemia and frequent pregnancies. This made them weak resulting in breathing problems. In the hilly region the condition of the weavers' health was worse. Owing to lack of proper transportation and adequate medical facilities, weavers could not take proper treatment. On the other hand, the
concerned authorities made no medical provisions for the weavers in these areas.

7.4: CHANGES IN THE MARKET STRUCTURE AND HOW IT AFFECTS THE WEAVERS

Changes in the economic structure brought about changes in the handloom sector. The weaving activity, which was once done for home consumption had changed into a market commodity. Several primary WCS were established to organise and safeguard the weavers from the exploitation of merchants. Yet such societies deteriorated due to lack of funds. Now certain NGOs started organising the weavers but it could cover only a few of them. In this case also, low productivity, low quality and high production cost could not compete against cheaper polyester and nylon goods imported from neighbouring states and nearby countries.

Even though women exclusively dominated the handloom sector, the male traders, especially the Marwaries handled the yarn market. Yet the yarn traders also worked as cloth merchants. They hired weavers through a middle person. Thus, the middle person deducted the wages as her share. On the other hand, the middle person being the mediator for the weavers, resulted in a situation where weavers did not come in contact with each other. Such a mechanism acted as an obstacle to organise the weavers. Without bringing the weavers on a common platform it would be difficult to ask for a ‘decent’ working condition. So to address the immediate needs of the weavers, they should be mobilised to participate in occupational organisations.

As we know that any fluctuation in the price of the yarn leads to a change in the price of the cloth. The big merchants or the yarn traders got yarn at the whole sale price and so they could sell the products at a
cheaper rate than those local merchants and SEW who bought yarn at the retail market rate. In this condition, the local merchants and the SEW who lacked big capital to invest in the business, faced problems in marketing. Moreover, the cultural restriction on women’s mobility also forced them to a deprived position in the market. While the yarn traders exported the finished products to places like Assam, Delhi and Rajasthan, exhibiting a broad marketing strategy, the local weavers struggled in the local market.

To negotiate the changing market strategy the SEW organised themselves or directly contacted the local merchants and sold their products. They organised customers for some fixed items and supplied the finished products through the system called ‘phi-marups’. In this process the weavers played the role of a producer, organiser and distributor. This entrepreneurial spirit is a new development among the weavers. With such a kind of marketing system, women weavers felt secure as they could get regular income. Besides this, for the unmarried weavers such a kind of marketing system enabled them to conceal their identity of being a wage earner and to be called a weaver. The customers were also benefited from this system, because they could buy bulk of clothes on installment basis. Clothes got from such phi-marups were usually used in daily wear or as a dowry during the time of marriage. Thus, unmarried girls and mothers who had daughters were the main customers. The phi-marup marketing has its own social significance by supplying clothes to the people. It also benefited the weavers for the present moment. But in the long run the merchants may control the phi-marups because they have more marketing skill and capital than the weavers.
7.5: WEAVING AND INCREASE IN THE STATUS OF WOMEN WEAVERS

Although the weavers faced many problems they also to a certain degree gained autonomy in family and in the public domain. This empowerment had made them survive in the vicious world. Even though compared to the salaried jobs weaving was considered low in status, a majority of the weavers stated that their status had increased after becoming a weaver. The reasons cited were as follows: the weavers felt that by involving in economic activity rather than sitting idle at home, they increased their status. They contributed to the family either in cash or in kind which was again considered by the weavers as a matter which increased their status. Lastly, weaving being a traditional feminine job it was considered worth knowing it. Yet few weavers mentioned that weaving did not increase their status. They felt that weaving was low in status and a low income occupation. Weavers being caught in the process of sanskritization, considered that by working in manual work their position would be degraded. So among those unmarried weavers combining weaving activity and studying was considered as shameful. Compared to SEW and CW, MW showed the highest proportion of respondents who had contributed above 30 percent of the total income of the family. Some of the weavers acted as the sole economic provider to the family.

Some amount of the income earned by the weavers was saved by joining chit funds. The chit funds being held in the locality, weavers preferred such kind of saving rather than going to the banks. They felt insecure about the system of operation of the bank. They also mentioned of wastage of time in the transaction of paper work and meeting bank personnel. A majority of the weavers at least saved some proportion of their earning by joining the chit funds. Among the married weavers the
savings were utilised in children’s education or marriage and household consumption like buying food grains and repairing the house. The unmarried weavers mostly used their income for making gold jewellery and buying clothes which were used later on for dowry. Thus, it reduced the burden upon the parents at the time of marriage. The study indicated that the female labour is thus an indispensable part of the household. Though the amount contributed by the women was low, it covered the range of needs that was not covered by men’s salaries. Both incomes were equally important because together they contributed for the family’s survival.

7.5.1: Participation In Decision Making

Decision making in the family was determined by the power structure in the family. Besides economic contribution, participation in decision making had been found to be significant to empower women. Almost all the weavers decided alone (90.3%) whether they should work in paid jobs or not. Among the married respondents, again a majority of them (78.2%) decided alone to work in feminine work like kitchen work. This signaled that large number of educated women participated in decision making. But in major decisions like children’s education, 54 percent of them took decision with husbands. In the case of giving gifts to relatives only one third of them took a joint decision. Thus, weavers had some autonomy but it was extended more in the areas of ‘self’ and feminine work.

While in the case of those women who were heading the households, women were forced into leadership position and thus they took decisions regarding the family. Further, the case studies showed that though in terms of attitude the women weavers may be traditional, many women became the economic contributor owing to drunkenness or ill
health or unemployment of the husband or the head of the family. Such women were empowered. Though in fact these women may not always control the resources (in the sense of having decision making power over them) they have always had to manage the resources like money, food etc. This dichotomy between decision making and management forced women to learn to influence decision making indirectly or exercised some control over the decision making in the family.

7.6: WEAVERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS SMALL FAMILY

Regarding the attitude towards having a small family, a majority of the weavers agreed on the need for a small family. But for them following a small family norm was having three children. This is still considered large because in some instances, the number of children per couple has been reduced to one. However, compared to the first generation, the mean of the actual number of children born to married weavers was found to be closer to three. This indicated that compared to the natal family, weavers had reduced the number of children they had. They realised that if the income was low then, the family size should be small, so that they could fulfill their desires for their children like good education and less hardships. They also believed that if parents could not give adequate input for their children, then later on such children are prone to become delinquents.

Among those who did not agree to the need of a small family, they stated the socio-political problem in the state as a factor for it. Owing to the insurgency problem people disappeared with no reasons known to the relatives, or sometime the innocent people were detained in the custody by the security forces. As a consequence, parents felt an intense
insecurity regarding the future of their children. Hence, they preferred to have large family to compensate if they lose any of their loved one. Another reason popularly stated was the preference for male children. In a patriarchal society the man inherited family’s name and wealth, so women felt economically secure after giving birth to the number of male children that they desired. They ‘produced’ children until they had at least two male children.

In the study, weavers showed a strong preference for a male child. This can be seen in the case studies. Since the income of the family was low every child could not get the same opportunity. In terms of education, the first priority was given in educating the male child. They expected their male child to be qualified and financially support the family. To achieve this, the girl child dropped out of the school and got involved in economic activities to support the family. Thus even though women are economically active, they were bound by the ideology of the patriarchal society. Another reason for giving priority to male child was that polygyny being widely accepted, barren woman or woman without a son feared losing their wealth and position because only male child could inherit the family property and name. Thus, the women’s reproductive roles form an important part for explaining male dominance.

7.7: JOB ASPIRATIONS FOR WEAVERS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THEIR DAUGHTERS

The weavers had dreams of their own which were hidden and not achieved. Given an opportunity they wanted to work in some secure jobs where they could get regular income with less physical labour. The weavers’ work appeal depended upon three factors. They wanted to join jobs which would earn them regularly a high amount and the job should
require less physical labour unlike weaving. They also preferred work related to their skill like being cloth merchants or something related with their knowledge gained from training like embroidery. Yet few weavers wanted to join a work which they found personally interesting like being a singer or being a social worker.

As far as their daughters were concerned, weavers expected their daughters not to follow their steps. Compared to MW and CW, SEW and those weavers who had high educational attainment had higher job aspirations for their daughters. They wanted their daughters to get white collar jobs or even become professionals like doctor, lawyer, lady police and teacher, nurse etc. Some of them did not clarify the type of the job but they wanted their daughters to work in any government service. Some of the MW being poor and not well educated they had low aspiration or no plans for their daughters. However, all those who had plans for their daughters wanted their daughters to improve their status, earn regular income and have life long security. The weavers considered that the system of giving pension to retired employees by the government could at least lead their daughter to a secure life.

Since the weavers in the study used only handlooms it was exhausting. It became a hurdle when someone got sick or became old. So, weavers were asked about their future plans. Half of them (50%) decided to become economically independent. They wanted to become a vendor or open a shop or become money lender or cloth merchant or embroidery worker. This shows the tendency among the weavers to be economically active in their old age. Yet when they became old, few of them decided to depend on their children; while some of them still did not have any future plan.
Weavers in the study did not lead a secluded life. A majority of them participated in community programmes (CP). Here the CP included festivals, sports, ritual ceremonies held for the community and other ceremonies held at the household levels like marriage, death or birth ceremonies. The participation in CP helped more than one third of the weavers to interact and cooperate with the community people. It also helped to give (and get) social, economic and psychological support. The system of giving gift either in cash or in kind during the ceremonies like marriage or death ceremonies, made the weavers think that they would also get the same support when their time came, hence they participated. A quarter of them said that participation in CP exposed them to new people and new situation. It was through such programmes that weavers could free themselves from work and from other mundane activities. Moreover, handloom products being not well publicized by media it was during such occasion that weavers got exposed to new design and fashion. A small number of weavers considered it was compulsory to participate or attend as substitutes of male members of the family. But few of them strongly held the view that women have the right to participate in CP.

For those weavers who did not participate, it was the owing to lack of time, feeling of shyness, being not interested and not getting a chance that forbade them from participation. In CP the eldest of the family was expected to participate, so young women in the family had lesser chance to interact with the community people.

As regards VO the participation of the weavers in the voluntary organisation was low. Only a quarter of them became members in
women's voluntary organisation. However, compared to unmarried weavers almost half of the married weavers became members in women's voluntary organisations. In terms of educational attainment of the weavers, the more the education the less they joined the organisation. The organisations were not related with the weaving activity. In fact, apart from the WCS, in the study, SEW and MW did not join in any other work related organisation. Since they could not be united they lack 'visibility' and 'recognition' as workers. This will ultimately affect the development plans and policies for the weavers.

Some of the reasons why the women weavers join the organisation were as follows: weavers considered that it was their obligation to safeguard the local youth. The women organisation launched a movement against the social problems like drug abuse and consumption of liquor. Further, owing to insurgency problems in Manipur, organisation protested against the indiscriminate arrest of the innocent people by the security forces. Because this was considered by the women organisation a violation of human rights. The organisation being formed at the local level, it was considered that it needed to be supported. Sometime the organisation required efficient people that was why women participated in the organisation. Since women from the locality come and met in such gatherings, few of them joined as they enjoyed being in the group. Lastly, a few weavers participated because of compulsion. Even though the organisation was a voluntary organisation the members made it 'compulsory' for one woman from each family to be a member.

The women's organisation was more of a reformist nature. They deal and dealt with issues related with social problems and women's issues. But they were not anti-male or bring change to the existing structure. They cooperated with the males and provided supportive system to make an integrated society. Participation in the organisation
helped the weavers to become more confident, competitive and become aware of current affairs. They enjoyed being in the group and relaxed by sharing their experience and problems with other women. So, participation in such voluntary organisations also acted as a ‘safety net’ to recharge their energy.

A majority of the weavers who had once joined the organisation, wanted to continue their participation even if there were restrictions from the males. On the other hand, some males did not support women’s participation as it made them autonomous, confident and extrovert. These traits were not considered as ‘feminine nature’. However the weavers after participating in the organisation challenged the cultural values and beliefs that reinforce stereotypes regarding women.

7.9: EMERGING ISSUES FROM THE STUDY

Quite a large number of studies of the problems of the women workers in the IS have been conducted in India. But the sociological significance of the study of women workers in Manipur has somehow escaped the attention of scholars. The present study is just an initial step to discover ideas and insights in this sector. From the results of the study in this section, I attempt to discuss some of the emerging issues or trends in the IS. Some of these issues are addressed mainly to be aware of the condition of the women weavers. These are very tentative and may give ideas for further research.

- Even though in Manipur weaving is in the hands of the women, they are also vulnerable like other weavers in India. The kinds of problems differ from weavers to weavers according to their regional, class, caste, marital status and nature of working conditions. Inspite of freedom and autonomy in economic activity, participation in
community programmes and local level women's organisation, women weavers of Manipur lack awareness about workers' rights. They lack occupational organisations which is very much required to bring the weavers on a common platform for their upliftment.

❖ The Manipuri women especially the Meitei women, are in a dilemma. They face 'conflict' and 'compromise' operated upon by two diametrically opposing forces- the process of sanskritisation and resistance to it by Meitei traditional culture. The Meiteis have a mix of egalitarian tribal culture with the hierarchical Hindu culture which resulted in the unusual role for women in Meitei society. The traditional roles of Meitei women are too deep-rooted in the society to be subverted by the Hindu influence. So there is an expression of feminism in the Meitei patrilineal culture which encourage women to be self-reliant, economically active and collectively powerful. Yet within the family level women ensure a 'superior' status and 'authority' to males in taking care of the family and in decision making regarding priorities.

❖ Within the family, stereotypical attitude towards women still exist viz. that the sole responsibility for household chore is that of women. So women consider homesbased production as ideal, as in this way they can combine both paid work and household work. In this way, they are not only exploited but are also doubly exploited because neither of them are recognised nor do they get assistance for housework. So there is a need to contest the romanticizing of homebased production in Manipuri culture as the 'ideal' type of production.

❖ Changes in the social attitudes and institutions cannot be brought about very rapidly. It is, however, necessary to accelerate this process of change by framing a policy for women to protect their rights. Yet all approaches that acknowledge the gender differences are not
favourable but sometime discriminatory to women. It is revealed in
the study that the women weavers were not allowed by their husbands
and family members to work at night or outside the house because of
protection from unseen dangers. No doubt, the matter of status is also
a concern but, such protectionist approach do not challenge the gender
discrimination but reproduce it in the grab of protecting women. It
reproduces the myths that women are less safe at night-time and
violence against women happen outside the house.

Other than the weaving cooperative society weavers did not join any
self-help groups or occupational organisation. The extent of
membership of the cooperative society was also limited. Without
organising the weavers it will be difficult to proceed further for their
social protection. And as it was found in the study, weavers being
active in participating in local women's organisation it won't be
difficult to organise them. In this regard, the role of media and the
pressure groups can help in changing the perception of women about
their work and status. The organising strategy has to go beyond the
economic needs, political needs, autonomy and social security of the
weavers. The successful experiments of SEWA (Self Employed
Worker's Association, Ahmedabad) and WWF (Working Women's
Forum, Madras) can be referred in this context.

Despite the emergence of weaver entrepreneurs in Manipur, which is a
good sign, many of the weavers face the problem of keen competition
for a limited market as well as problems of low returns. The cultural
restrictions of women's mobility also force them to small scale
operation and thus thrust them into a position of deprivation in the
market. In such a situation a new method of marketing by using
Internet can be fruitful, as it can reach a wide area of market. To
benefit from liberalisation and globalisation, efforts should be made to
improve women’s understanding of the market place. The role of the state in regulating the market in the form of supplying finance and implementation of a new plan for global market is also considered a necessity in this context. How do we go about building international standards and under what type of strategy would this global structure be set up, requires further research.

❖ For creating a wider market and for making profits, weavers should be motivated to come out from the old concept of self-sufficiency and using of old loom technology. However, the technology policy (if it is made) must be carefully monitored from the point of view of women’s employment. Because as mentioned in Chapter I, studies revealed that with the introduction of modern technology, women tend to get displaced.

❖ More research can be undertaken in the areas of worker’s health and safe condition of work that currently has very little protection.

At present what is needed is the development of a new policy towards the handloom sector which can act as an important source for providing employment to women. Such development will solve partially some of the problems of unemployment in Manipur. Taking this into account, we also need to acknowledge the significance and openness to new concepts to bring a more positive understanding of the women’s participation in the economic activities because for many of these women, working in the handloom sector is a matter of survival.