PREFACE

"A nation may do without its millionaires and without its capitalists but a nation cannot do without its labour".

Mahatma Gandhi

In India, during the last three decades, the gender discrimination prevailing in the society has become a major concern to us. The gender discrimination inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedom on a basis of equality with men. The report on the women’s status in the early seventies by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), pointed out that equality of women is necessary, not merely on the grounds of social justice, but as a basic condition for social, economic and political development of the nation. As a matter of fact, much action has been taken to improve the women’s status. There has been advancement of women in India since the seventies in terms of life expectancy, literacy, participation in work force, mean age at marriage, total fertility rate, death rate and infant mortality rate. Despite these improvements women have not achieved equality with men in several respects. For instance, the profile of women’s economic status shows that women workers in relation to men are significantly lower on the following parameters: in terms of proportion to total workers; women workers segregated in jobs; women being confined at lower ends also getting low wages, lack of access to adequate facilities to acquire new skills; and lack of access to modern technology. Further owing to lack of accurate and authentic data, women’s contribution continues to be undervalued and under-recorded. Besides this, the economic status of women make them suffer from many disabilities. The overall employment scenario, particularly of women in the informal sector
deserves attention of the state to implement proper policies for their
development. Several labour laws have been amended for giving labour
protection for the informal sector workers, some of them exclusively for
women, like the Equal Remuneration Act 1976. But such kind of labour
protection laws in the informal sector is not always effective on account
of problems of implementation of these laws.

The present study attempts to examine the condition of women
working in the handloom sector in Manipur. The handloom sector in
Manipur is dominated by women. However empirical research on gender
dimensions of employment in informal sector in Manipur is scanty. To
fill this gap an attempt has been made here by exploring the working
conditions of the women weavers. For this, data were collected from both
primary and secondary sources. From secondary data, the status of
women working in the informal sector, particularly in handloom sector
had been analysed from a macro perspective.

The elements of the society viz. values, beliefs, religion, custom and
culture, influence the women's role in the family as well in society.
Therefore, to understand this the social structure of Manipuri society is
presented. The primary data were collected by using interview schedule
and case studies. This data had been analysed to study their working
condition and problems faced by them. Further, an attempt has also been
made to examine the weavers' aspirations, decision making, participation
and expectations in respect to community programmes and in voluntary
organisations. These are signs of realising their responsibilities. This
directly and indirectly affect their empowerment. Although the analysis in
the study relates to a single state, Manipur, the findings are relevant to the
problems faced by the women weavers in the handloom sector.