INTRODUCTION
Introduction

People are the real wealth of a nation. The basic objective of any nation is to create an enabling environment for the people to lead lives in which they have a say or a voice—meaning where the people are closely involved and participate in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives.

Since participation requires increased influence and control, it also demands increased empowerment—social, economic and political terms. Empowerment helps maximize the use of human capabilities and raise the levels of development. It is also an active, multi-dimensional process that enables people to realize their full identity in all spheres of life (Pillai, J.K. 1995: 35). In a broad context, social empowerment means meaningful participation of all members within the family as well as in the community. Political empowerment means, having collectively and individually a far greater say in national life and decision-making process. It may include several aspects like guarantee of human rights, freedom of expression and people’s participation in all the institutions of civil society, as voters, even as members of a political party or even as pressure groups. All these roles overlap and interact. Empowerment in economic term means, when people can derive full satisfaction from (any work) and are making a valuable contribution to the means of production and distribution (Sahay, S. 1998: 22). Cultural empowerment means being able to follow traditions according to ones values.

In most societies, empowerment of women is still equivalent to emancipation from the drudgery of household chores and having a say in running their lives. Women’s empowerment has become a global issue and discussions on women’s rights are often at the forefront of such debates. Gender inequality is all encompassing, it is reinforced in education also. Even as a workforce, women work for 25 per cent longer hours than men (upto 15 hours more a week in rural areas). But their remuneration is far less because of their lower wage rates and their preponderance in agriculture and the urban informal sector. Majority of women do not find their work counted (household chores); in fact, it is undervalued (UNDP 1990: 31). In many cases it is not even considered as work.
In this thesis, the researcher is studying the women’s empowerment framework with emphasis on two diverse states of India keeping in mind what Longwe has said, that women’s empowerment can be viewed at different levels - welfare, access, conscientisation, participation and control (ibid Sahay, S.: 204). The researcher has divided the area of study into a) family structures, b) development of education, c) political participation, d) economic upliftment. The researcher has chosen two contrasting societies in many ways-geographical distance, economic, cultural, social though both are patriarchal. The state of Haryana, which has a higher per capita income but has poor social indices where women are concerned, and the state of Manipur, economically not so strong but which has seen a strong historical role of women in all aspects of life of the State.

**Methodology:**

*Universe of the study:* The present study, which the investigator will undertake, is on women’s empowerment in two states of India namely, Haryana and Manipur after independence (1947-2001).

*Nature and field of the study:* As the study is on historical development and empowerment of women in society, the aspects to be covered are family structures, education, politics and employment. Also the government interventions for the upliftment of the women in these two states from 1947 to 2001.

*Sources of data:* In the researcher’s work, the sources of information are divided into two groups: a) primary sources and b) secondary sources. Primary sources provide empirical data gathered on a first-hand basis using the tools of classic research. Primary sources will also integrate oral accounts [through guided interviews] and will contain a questionnaire and schedule of questions. The questions are both structured and un-structured. Secondary sources, used in my study, are documents (including books and journals) and field documentation sources.

The data collected will be analyzed and then put in a framework for better comprehension as per the parameters of the study.
Objectives of the Study

I. To study socio-economic, traditional, cultural, family structures, political and educational awareness of women of Manipur and Haryana states.
   a. By making a comparative study of the states and empowerment of women in Manipur and Haryana.
   b. To understand the functioning of the patriarchal system of family in two diverse regions.
   c. To know how it is linked with the society as a whole.
II. To examine the relevance of social political status, economic means and educational attainments for the degree of political participation.
III. To assess the relevance of educational and awareness of women in empowerment.

Hypothesis

Responses to the new familial, educational, economic and political opportunities are influenced by:
1. The Social structure and cultural setting
2. The Educational background
3. The Historical developments
4. The Political involvement

of a particular region. Therefore, the strategies for women’s empowerment tend to vary from region to region.

Conceptual Framework on Women’s Empowerment

The using of concept and idea of empowerment, primarily started in the developed countries, though its roots are global. In both the First and the Third Worlds, the phenomenon is firmly rooted in opposition to oppression. Though aspects of the empowerment movement differ according to the situation of the place.

The term empowerment has different meanings in different social, political and economic contexts. Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes
control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial) and an ideology (beliefs, value and attitudes). It means not only greater extrinsic control, but also growing intrinsic capability, greater self-confidence and the inner transformation of one’s consciousness that enables one to overcome the external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology. Genuine empowerment includes both these aspects and can rarely be sustained without both (Batliwala and Sen 1995: 18-19).

Different definitions have been given to the term by social scientists. According to Stein, empowerment is a strategy designed to redistribute power and resources. It is a group activity dedicated to increasing political and social consciousness, grounded in a belief in the essential need for self-determination, and designed around a continuing cycle of reflection and action (Stein, J. 1994: 1). Warrenstein and Barrenstein delineate three different levels of empowerment i.e. individual, organizational and community. They further define empowerment as follows: “Empowerment is a social action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities in gaining control of their lives in their community and larger society. With this perspective, empowerment is not characterized as achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to effect change” (Nina Wallerstein and Edward Bernstein 1998: 380).”

Andre, Beteille defines empowerment as “a social transformation; and it is about ordinary, common people rather than politicians, experts and other socially and culturally advanced persons.” Most of the definitions of empowerment include concepts like agency, process, self-reliance, ability to make choices, have awareness, power, control, awakening, capability, skill, etc. But, sometimes, structural measures (such as laws, social security system, etc.) are also included in the term empowerment.

As empowerment connotes different meanings in different contexts the process for the achievement of their goal is also varied and has different parameters. For the measurement of empowerment, besides the process and its elements, it is essential to know the ground reality of the applied area. The conditions, times, situation and space are the primary needs to study it. The
concept is related to measuring processes over wide coverage of resources and power.

Empowerment has intrinsic value, and also has instrumental value. It is revealed at the individual and collective level. It can also be used to characterize relations within a household or between the poor people and other actors at global level. Hence there are obviously many possible definitions of empowerment. The researcher is choosing this term ‘empowerment’ to study the changes that have been taking place in women’s lives at all levels, age groups, caste and class groups in Haryana and Manipur and also comparing their lot.

**Women’s History**

Historical writing has more often than not ignored women’s role in the making of the civilization. Women’s history recovered its voice from the voiceless void in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century (Robert Shoemaker & M. Vincent (Ed) 1998: 56). The course of study called Women’s History began with the rise of feminist thinking about women’s role in the past. Historians started studying the women’s perspective and processes of their lives but due to paucity of primary sources it was sketchy. These historians started defining and analyzing history from a women’s viewpoint and also studied gender relations among all ages.

Traditional historiography has excluded women from ‘universal’ or ‘general history’ (Gisela Bock 1989: 7; Gerda Lerner 1981:2). Gerda Lerner writes that, in the face of the time honored neglect, ‘the effort to reconstruct the female past has been called “women’s history”’. The term must be understood not as being descriptive of a past reality but a conceptual model, a strategy by which to focus and isolate that which traditional history has obscured. Women’s history, in order to compensate for the invisibility of women in traditional history calls attention to women, focuses enquiry upon them and asks questions designed to elicit their activities and ideas from the past. The pursuit of ‘restoring women to history’ soon led to that of ‘restoring women’ (Gisela Bock 1988: 24). Women experiences have a history, though not independent from men’s history, it is nonetheless a history of its own, of women as women. To explore it, the hierarchies between the historically important and unimportant had to be overturned. What women have done, should do and want to do is being
scrutinized and reevaluated. Despite the numerous, heterogeneous and sometimes controversial results, there are two common features:

a) On the one hand there is no doubt that the plot of women’s history is no less complex than that of man’s. But we may assume that time as lived by the female part of humanity does not pass according to the same rhythms and is also not perceived in the same way as that of men.

b) On the other hand, women’s history is different from the history of men and it is precisely because of this difference that it deserves to be studied, a difference that may encapsulate not only the contacts of historical experience, but also the experience of time itself (Davis, Natalie Zemon 1976: 16).

The autonomous character of women’s history, is different from the history of men, this does not mean it is less important or just a ‘special’ or specifically “female” problem. Rather we must recognize that, on the one hand, general history has up to now essentially been male-specific, and on the other hand, the history of women must count as just as general as that of the ‘other’ sex.

**The Objective of Women’s History**

Historians have tried to shed light on the present and the future by telling the past. The goal of historians has been to tell an “objective truth”… truth as it might be seen by an objective, or unbiased, observer. Then, what is the objective in women’s history? How will we term the objective of history in women’s history? That’s a question historians have been asking since 1970s.

Historians felt that women’s history should have some distinguishing characteristics in its writings as distinct from general history writing. There is nothing like only women’s history as men are an intrinsic part of their lives. To study about women, the broader framework has to be kept in mind. Women’s history is about their lives but cannot be studied without the general context being kept in mind. In the words of the late anthropologist Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, women must be understood … in terms of relationship--with other women and with men-- (not) of difference and apartness. Rosaldo mentioned that
women’s history be integrated into general history through the study of relations between women and women. Not only must we study the relations between the sexes, but also relations within sexes, not only those of women to women, and of men to women, but also relations among women and among men. That does not mean that women’s history cannot be separately studied. It means that history of women is not only a study of women but also includes all humankind in the historical writing.

**Approaches to Women’s History**

The four approaches of women’s history, organized by J.J. Lewis are detailed. According to her first approach, women who played an important role or who had a real impact on their times were neglected and should have normally been included in history were neglected. Though there were famous and expert women in prominent professions, historians just forgot to write about them, so they should be written about.

The second approach called “discrimination approach” looks into the social dynamics that defined some activities as permissible for women and shut out others. In this theory she tries to find out the causes and consequences of discriminatory treatment, though women and men are basically the same.

The third approach (different spheres approach) looks at women’s work and women’s value, especially why every work that women were doing was treated as lower quality especially with regard to the work, men did.

The fourth approach studies lives of both men and women and what happened to men and what happened to women is viewed as part of a larger picture and “women’s history” was seen as an essential part of “integrated history” (J.J. Lewis: www.womenshistory.com).

**Women’s History versus Gender History**

Several scholars in many fields increasingly switched from “sex” to “gender” as the acceptable terminology: “sex roles” became “gender roles”, ‘sex relations became gender relations and so on. Historians interested in this perspective asserted that gender was an appropriate category of analysis when looking at all historical developments, not simply those involving women or the
family (Merry E.W.H. 2001:2). It shows how far women’s history has influenced in building up a gender historical approach (providing that gender history is an emerging phenomenon of women’s history). Alice Kesslen-Harris defined what is (present) gender history as, “Gender history mingles the evolving and specialized social relations of the sexes with other explanatory tropes to produce a fuller and richer comprehension of both the subjective experience that translates ideology into action and the consequences for committees, nations and empires. To achieve this kind of history, we need facts about women and men as men; we need women’s history as well as history of men.” It also supported the importance of women’s history primarily to study gender history. According to the researcher it is the historical approach to women’s participation which is appropriate. This research tries to fill lacunae in gender writing in a historical context about the status of women in the two states.

MANIPUR

The state of Manipur is situated on the eastern borders of India, it is a part of the Himalayan mountain range. It comprises an area of 8500sq miles, the heartland of which is a fertile valley, roughly 36 miles North to South and 18 mile across. It is 20507 sq. km of hill territory (S.N. Parrat and J. Parrat 1997: xi, V. Elwin 1994:9-10, Panchani, C. 1987:1). The hills constitute about 90 per cent of the total area while the valley comprises the remaining portion of the land.

Manipur is flanked by Myanmar to the East, and the states of Nagaland, Assam, and Mizoram in the North, West and South, respectively (S.N. Parrat and J. Parrat 1997: xi). The main hill ranges of this state are Maipithel, Bhangai, Kalam-Uningthou, etc. The important rivers are the Barak, Iril, Imphal, Nambul, Thoubal, Khordak, etc. (Tombi 1987: 45). The state has nine districts, of which five are in the hilly tracts and the remaining four are in the central valley division. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood. Among its main agricultural products are rice, tea, citrus fruits, the morus alba and bamboo. Miscellaneous plants of commercial value also grow here (S.N. Parrat and J. Parrat 1997:1). Weaving is the second common profession which is practiced more out of tradition rather than for profit which is negligible in the present times (Tombi, N. 1987: 47).
Table 0.1(a): Human Development Index: Haryana, Manipur and all India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Al</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>Gender disparity index</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Value</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>HDI 1981</td>
<td>0.440</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.553</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HDI 1991</td>
<td>0.503</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All India</td>
<td>HDI 1981</td>
<td>0.263</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HDI 1991</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.511</td>
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<td>HDI 2001</td>
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Source: UNDP, 2001

Table 4.1a shows that though the gender disparity in Manipur was not totally zero but, according to data analysis of the Planning Commission (2002) from 1981 to 1991 the disparity was too low, amongst the states and union territories it ranked 3rd. Ranking of HDI (Human Development Index) was decreased to 12th rank in urban areas in 2001 against 5th in 1981 and similarly in rural areas also it was down at 7th rank in 2001 against 2nd rank in 1981.

**Origin of the Manipuris**

There are lots of theories on the origins of the Manipuri people and their history. Most of these theories have originated from myths and folklore rather than historical facts. On the objectivity of historical writings, Kamei, G. has mentioned, “the origin of the three main communities the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis is shrouded in mystery, though there are many theories” (Kamei 1988: 3). Initially, habitation in Manipur might have taken place in the hills. The caves and rock shelters were once inhabited by prehistoric people. This is supported by the artifacts collected from the mouth of the caves and nearby streambeds (Sanajaoba, N. 1988).

The present survey on the archaeological remains in Manipur reveals that Manipur was inhabited since Stone Age, which had wide affinity in Asia, particularly with the Stone Age cultures of South-east Asia. During the Paleolithic Age, the prehistoric man lived in the caves, but towards the terminal
Pleistocene Age, when the cold conditions increased probably due to the further upliftment of the hills of Manipur (Singh, O.K. 1986: 5-8), it is apparent that habitation came down towards the lower altitude near the valley. After the Pleistocene epoch the climate became more or less similar to the present day. In Manipur prehistoric man of the Hoabinhian culture again used to live both in the caves and in the open-air sites, while the Neolithic man selected mostly the open-air sites for their settlement. Neolithic man reached the valley at least not later than 2000 B.C. and from the present distribution patterns of Neoliths spots it also appears that Southern part of the valley was occupied earlier and moved northwards. In the Metal Age we have no knowledge of the life in the valley. Thus, the remains of the historical archaeology suggest that Manipur had influences both from South-East Asia and Indian mainland (Singh, O.K. 1988: 69).

Manipuri autochthones of the Paleolithic culture would have been either Austrics or Mongoloids or even hybrid or both, by all accepted accounts, Austrics were the original settlers of India and the early Peking man or Java man-the Mongoloids-settled in South East Asia, of which Manipur is a part. (Sanajaoba, N.1988: V).

The typological details of these antiquities lead to the proof of the existence of human remains. North-East (India) Neolithic culture had inspiration from South China and South East Asia (Wheeler, M. 1959:87; Sankalia, H.D. 1974: 297; Allchin, F.R. 1968: 170-72 and Sharma, T.C. 1976 and 1981; Hodson, T.C. 1989: 7). The habitation patterns in the region must have been a gradual shift from the hills towards the valley because of the gradual shrinking of the Loktak lake (Kamei, G.1988: 4). According to Dr. Brown and Hodson, the origin of Manipories (Manipuri) from the hill tribes took place gradually over time. Most probably, some of the groups among them had started to settle in the cultivable plain area (Hodson 1908: 7).

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1 Pleistocene epoch: First part of the Quaternary period of geological time, beginning 1.64 million years ago and ending 10,000 years ago. The polar ice caps were extensive and glaciers were abundant during the ice age of this period, and humans evolved into modern Homo sapiens, sapiens about 100,000 years ago.

2 Hoabinhian culture: it is an ancient hunter-gatherer culture of Southeast Asia and Sumatra, from about 13,000 - 3000 BC
The earliest recorded history of Manipur shows the region had two millennia old political organization, a stable cultural network, supported by a well developed literary language and several hundreds of scriptures, gold and silver currency which provides a living testimony to its economic organization, inside and outside trade and commerce with the South East Asian countries. Like any other annals of old civilization, its history is full of successful military campaigns against the neighboring countries and defeat in more or less equal measures (Sanajaoba, N.1988: I).

The Aryans came to the region much later, the *Meiteis puyas* (Meitei’s ancient manuscripts) relating to the migration of the Brahmins states that they came and settled in Manipur around the 15th century A.D. The *puyas* also mentions so they came without female members, how they were allowed to settle with Meitei women as wives and how they were given family names by the Meitei kings (Sanajaoba, N.1988: vi).

Manipuris autochthones of the early period should have expanded their cultural base after the intimate mingling of their culture with those of the migrants from the other parts of South East Asia and in the mingling process, the Aryan culture, acquired by the South East Asians through other routes might have been partly transferred to the Manipuris also at a very late stage (since the 15th century).

While tracing the origin of Manipuris, the historians Gangmumei Kabui and N. Khelchandra endorse the view that that the Pongs (Shans) entered Manipur in 698 A.D. The finding of O.K. Sharma shows the origin of Manipuri people. It traces the migration of the South East Asians, ‘it seems highly probable that a group of people from the regions of South China equipped with fully ground and polished stone tools and corded tripod wares entered into Manipur following the course of Iriwady river and its tributaries (Singh, O.K. 1983).’

The early history of Manipur traced and written by J. Johnstone is lost in obscurity. But there is no doubt Manipur existed as an independent kingdom

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1 Archaeological in Manipur, series-I, Napachik: A stone Age Site in the Manipur Valley, 1983
from an early period, the 1st century A.D. (R.K.Dave 1980:6-7). Due to its location as the gateway between South East Asia and India, it played a significant role in the development of human culture from prehistoric times (Sharma and Majhumdar 1980: 36,116). The original people of Manipur belonged to the Tibeto-Mongoloid group, though some non-Mongoloid elements also came in.

The People of Manipur

The three major ethnic groups, which have inhabited Manipur from the pre-historic times, are: the Meiteis of the valley, the Nagas and the Kuki-chins of the surrounding hills (G.Kamei 1991: 15). Manipuri is the lingua franca of the state. There are more than a 100 tribal dialects in Manipur. The latest data on Manipuri Hindus has shown considerable amount of mixed blood among them (R.K. Ranjan 2001: 1-2). At present the state has twenty-nine (29) Schedule Tribes and seven (7) Schedule Castes. The Meiteis, Meitei Pangan and people from different regions of India, all align themselves with one or the other of the basic three ethnic categories the Naga, Kuki, and Mizo (ibid. R.K. Ranjan 2001: 1-2).

The Kukis: They are Mongoloids like the Nagas and the Meiteis (Chandersekhar 1987: 65). Kuki is a generic term representing a large number of tribes in the whole of North-East India and some parts of Myanmar. They are distributed widely in Manipur, occupying the South-Western, Southern and South-Eastern hills. They cover about 4,000 sq. miles of the area, in the districts of Churachandpur, Tengnoupal and Sadar hills in North Manipur (Gaugin 1994:11). The Kuki-Chin tribe has many sub-tribes i.e. Thadou, Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Gangte, Simte, Zou, Biete, and Mizos (Kabui, G. 1998: 23). There have been some attempts made to include these tribes under a new name, the Zomi. The smaller tribes like Kom, Chiru, Anal Aimol etc., are linguistically close to the Kuki-Chin groups (Brara, Vijyalaxmi 1998:111).

Th Kukis inhabit different hilly regions of Manipur, they can be broadly separated into two groups: the Old Kukis and the New Kukis. The Old Kuki clans of Manipur seem to have started their settlement, as early as the 16th
century as per the records (the Cheitharol Kumbaba⁴) have shown.⁵ Old clans are the Chiru, Anal, Tikhup, Purum and Aimol. The origin and settlement of the New Kukis in Manipur started with the Thadous who entered the Manipur hills during the middle of the 18th century (the Royal Chronicle, McCluloch 1859 and Shakespeare 1912, 1983: 90). The New Kukis are the groups comprising many different families merged into the Thadous community.⁶ The four main families of the New Kukis are the Dongel, Shit-hloh, Haukip and Kipgen. The Koms, Aimol, Khonthangs, Thadou, Lusheis, Chins, Pois, Suktes, Paites, Gangtes, etc. are all connected.

**The Nagas:** It is not clear from where the name ‘Naga’ originated, but there are many theories on their etymology and the 18th and 19th centuries, the Nagas had become quite a popular name (Kamei, G: 1998: 22). The British military and political officers gave the generic name to the present Nagas of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. In Manipur, the people were known by their tribe’s name throughout the 19th and 20th century. Even today, most of the people follow this concept of identification. It is a political term that united similar tribes under one banner, by following the British system. The British for their administrative convenience applied it to mean a group of tribes who, according to their anthropological classification, were Nagas. The Naga tribes of Manipur are the Tangkhul, Zeliangrong, including Puimei, Mao, Maram, Maring, Anal, Moyon, Monsang, Lamgang, Chothe, Thangal, Koireng, Chiru who are all *Tibeto-Burman* speakers.

With the beginning of the twentieth century there was gradual spread of Christianity in the remote hilly areas of Manipur. Most of the people in these

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⁴ *Cheitharol Kumbaba* or Royal Chronicle is the most authentic primary source that keeps the record of the past events in Manipur. Most of the Manipuri scholars accept it as one of the most important historical sources because due to the burning down of many records and literary works of scholars in 1729 by Shanti Das a Hindu priest in the royal court with the permission from the King. Consequently, it presents a long gap in the later history of Manipur.

⁵ *Cheitharol Kumbaba* mentions the Chiru and the Anal are in Manipur since the middle of 16th century, and the Aimol have settled there since 1720s.

⁶ Like the Meiteis, the Thadous also have a belief that their ancestors were from the same family and the other families those have been spreading from one family with due course of time. In the late 18th century after a long and hard work of theirs leader these groups accepted to club themselves in one great family i.e., the Thadous.
areas were converted to Christianity, from their traditional animistic belief. With the embracing of Christianity many changes occurred in the social structure.

The Meiteis: The early history of the Meiteis is shrouded in mystery. According to known inscriptions, old copper plates, manuscripts, and preserved traditions, there is an indication that Pakhangba was the first king ruling Manipur in 33 A.D. He was the first ruler who consolidated the Meitei monarchy called Ningthouja. Tracing the history of Manipur from the primitive tribal state to the feudal state in the 15th century is difficult and the historians face great inadequacies and limitation of sources.

Women’s Status during the Pre-Independence Period

While studying the history of Manipuri women it would be more convenient and clear if we depict each clan separately.

The early centuries offer no traces of women’s history, there is in fact no mention of them. The earliest mention is around the 6th or the 7th century. During the late 7th and the 8th century, in the valley there was no practice of polygamy by the common people, though this system was commonly practiced by the kings and princes (Vidyalaxmi, Brara 1998: 99). According to the traditional rules and customs, persons belonging to the same ‘yek’ (family line) were strictly restricted from marrying within the Yek. Otherwise there was no caste system (Vidyalaxmi, Brara 1998: 99). The custom of matrilocal8 residence however, was prevalent. Even with the advent of Hinduism, around the 12th or 13th centuries, there was no prevalence of caste system and the Hindus of Manipur were remarkably free from it.

The women played decisive roles in the careers of their husbands as well as their daughters and sons (Kabui 1998: 112). From this legendary period up to the 17th century, marriages were taking place among different salai (clan) men with women who were strictly considered outside the matrix of Meitei society (e.g., women from the hills and Mayang or foreigner). One of the wives of

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7 P. Gunindro criticized the genuinity of copper coins and its claim on the exact date of Pakhangba’s reign: i) there is no evidence in any text to prove that; ii) as per material evidences the history of coinage in Manipur begins not later than the 6th century A.D. (in his book Manipur numismatics, Mutua Museum, Imphal, 1983:4).

8 Matrilocal involving living with wife’s family: describes a culture in which young men live with their brides’ families after marriage.
Naothingkhong belonged to the Liangmei (a hill tribe), she was considered so benign that after her death she attained a divine status (Vidyalaxmi, Brara1998: 99). The social system of the late 17th century was marked for the independence enjoyed by the Meitei women and freedom granted to them in society; they had the right to choose their own life partner according to their will.

We learn from Old Meitei manuscripts that in ancient times the Meiteis believed that gods entered the wombs of goddesses and were made into princes (N.N.Acharyal1986: 76 in J.B. Bhattacharya (ed) 1986). In the administration of justice a special council called the *pitra*, was formed which consisted of six women members appointed by the king. They were from no particular class (Brown 1874: 92).

The 12th century proved to be an important time for the Manipuri women. During the time of king Loyamba, handicrafts were developed. Loyamba organized different weaving cells, according to different styles of clothes. Inside his palace compound 30 families were assigned the task of weaving different designs. Loyamba’s era (...1122 A.D.) is called the golden era in Manipur’s weaving history. Women were an integral part of the weaving industry which inculcated the practice of self empowerment among them. It also facilitated the social and economic transformation of Manipuri society.

Manipuri women’s role in the field of politics is found in myths and folk tales. It is written about in the “Ningthourol Lambuba”. The reign of Nigthou Khomba (1432-67) also helped empower women of Manipur. Lingthoingambi, the queen of Ningthou Khomba, took the command of the forces and saved the sovereignty of her husband’s kingdom (in the absence of her king), when the neighboring kings of Tangkhul attacked Manipur (O.B. Singh and W.I. Singh 1967:223).

Kyamba ascended the throne in 1467 and ruled upto 1508. During his reign, there was peace and prosperity and many people from North India came to settle in Manipur. The Brahmins were becoming prominent, they were making a

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7 *Ningthourol Lambuba* is a literary source in the vernacular, written by O. Bhogeshwar (in 1968), and reveals the account of Manipuri kings.
significant impact. However, the changes in society were slow (Yumjao 1935: 20, Kamei 1998: 199-202).

The Cheitharol Kumbaba (Royal Chronicle) gives a true picture of the traditional Meitei society in the second half of the 16th century. Community feasting and drinking were popular. Different social groups had their own festivities for their clans, they had their own priests. Even the king participated in such community feasts. Bride price and marriage within different communities and even across borders was accepted.

Khagemba (1597-1652) was the most illustrious ruler of medieval Manipur, whose long reign was a remarkable epoch in the history of the kingdom. In 1614, the king Khagemba established ten markets in different places of Manipur (Kamei 1998:220). Not only did these markets greatly facilitate and generate surplus, the economy prospered and also helped women participate in the economic growth. The unique feature of the traditional Manipur markets was that women mainly carried the business in these markets.

The reign of Charairongba (1697-1709) was a period of transformation for the traditional Meitei social system. In the first half the king showed his respect and belief in the traditional goddesses and gods. According to the Cheitharol Kumbaba, he regarded Komthoujam Lairembi (one of important goddess) with high respect. After his conversion to Hinduism, the king was deeply involved in a spree of temples building, dedicated to Krishna, Kali and others. Though he became a Hindu devotee, he was not a fanatic believer.

Garbaniwaz (1709-48) is considered to be the most powerful ruler in the history of Manipur. He changed the traditional Manipuri society customs. Vashnavism was adopted in totality. Gangmumei Kamei, mentions that, “With the dawn of the eighteenth-century, Manipur attained the zenith of her power. The period was a landmark in the social, cultural and religious transformation the impact of which has changed the whole social and cultural landscape of Manipur. It was a revolutionary era in which Manipur was converted into Hinduism

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9 From stone inscriptions we know that king Charairongba regarded the goddess Konthoujam Lairenbi with high respect. It was the first phase of transformation so there were a lot of mixed up feelings inside the mind of Manipuri people.
(largely), the echo of controversies that surrounded this significant religious change was heralded in the next two centuries. The political zenith was also marked by the beginning of a powerful process of Sanskritisation of society, culture and history, and even the identity of Manipur,” (Kamei 1998: 233).

This new enforced religion, changed the lives of women of Manipur. The existing freedom and role of women in economy, politics was subjected to curbs. Vaishnavism was declared the state religion. It came to Manipur in a fanatic avtaar. With the advice of Shanti Das over 123 ancient books and manuscripts were burnt.10 The state banned the eating of meat and the worship of the traditional gods and goddess, cremation instead of burial of dead bodies was mandatory. The king tried to destroy past religion through the physical destruction of temples and the statues of Meitei gods and goddesses. Those who did not follow the new faith were punished. Women were worst hit as they had restrictive behavior norms and rituals like fasting imposed on them.11

The descendants of Garbaniwaz were also vaishnavised kings, though not so fanatic. The forcibly imposed religion became popular in the Manipur valley during the later phase. Not only did the Gods change, Hindus festivals began to be followed and the whole culture changed (O.B. Singh 1972: 63-64).

The newly imposed system of casteism (by Vaishnavism) decomposed the cultural systems in Manipur. After the imposition of caste barriers by Vaishnavism, the culture of casteless marriage and even with different countries was partially stopped. Within a short period (1726 –1737), four cases of Sati burning were recorded (Singh, I. L. and Singh, K. N. 1967: 74-83). In Manipur, Sati was performed only by women of the upper strata in society. This gives rise to the suspicion that the performance of Sati by higher class women was a forceful act of male domination to show affinity to the new religious priests.

10 Khumanthem Kaomacha (in his book “Manipur Itnhita”1934:pp39-41) mentions that many manuscripts, royal chronicles, Laws, Rules and Regulations books of the traditional Manipur and their literary works were burnt down by Shanti Das Gosai. King Garbaniwaz supported this evil act to erase everything from the pages of Manipur history. However this disastrous historical event is not mentioned in the Royal chronicle and Manipur Itnhita.

11 Vaishnavism was brought from Bengal. In the Meiteis society, by this newly imposed religion and its norms and rules had given a lot of problems to the normal way of women’s life. The main reason was that the traditional Manipuri society was casteless and a bold society in comparison to the Bengal society.
Although the forceful conversion of religion to Hinduism was slowly absorbed and followed, but they still continued to worship the old Umang lais (deity gods).

During the Bheigyachanra period (1749-98 A.D.), there were many changes in dress and dressing style, as well as food habits, Bengali became the medium of religious performance, the singing of hymns or writings were in Bengali script. Inter-caste tensions and a marked cleavage between the Hindu and non-Hindu subjects emerged during this period (G. Kamei 1989:278). During his time two sati cases, (1776’s Sugnu case and 1784’s Satidah case), were discovered but in both the widows refused to be Sati and ran away at the last moment.

From 1819 to 1826 Manipur was under the control of Burmese rulers. In these seven years all the subjects of the valley were evacuated from their homeland and had to flee to hilly areas and Cachar (now a part of Assam) to save themselves from the genocide of the Burmese army. This period was known as “Seven Years Devastation”. When the refugees returned a lot of changes had happened.\(^{12}\) The major impact which came (in the 18\(^{th}\) and first half of 19\(^{th}\) century) was i) Sati system was imposed ii) dress code changed, iii) decrease of the importance of local gods and goddesses, iii) increasing the skill of weaving culture, iv) restricting inter caste marriages, v) decrease in the popularity of bride price and its transformation to dowry system, vi) more restriction on women’s movement, vii) increasing the workload of women in housework and \textit{puja} (worship) etc., viii) increasing do’s and don’ts for women , and ix) decreasing importance of and participation of women in decision-making process.

Manipur remained in isolation from the rest of India except for her immediate neighbors. It established treaty relations with the British in 1762 (I.K. 1988:6-7) from the time of Gambhir Singh, until 1891, Manipur was an independent kingdom, with the British hardly interfering with the administration of the Maharajas. At this time, the kingdom suffered from internal revolution and rebellion especially during the reign of Surchandra Maharaja. The British

\(^{12}\) Cachar was a Hindu dominated area; the people of this area were totally absorbed in this religion. So the people who were exiled from Manipur came to adopt this culture and brought it in Manipur after they came back from the Seven Years Devastation.
took advantage of this chaos and defeated the Manipuris and annexed Manipur to their Empire, in 1891. It became a protectorate with the future kings becoming (more or less) puppet rulers (Kirti 1997:1). Respect for women was internalized in society to such an extent that in 1891 when the British garrison came to arrest the prince in ensuing clash, some women and children were killed. The people held the four British officers who were responsible for killing women and children. Agitators speared one officer to death and the other officers were handed over to the royal Durbar. Death sentence was given by the Criminal Court of Manipur for their inhuman and unprovoked murder of sleeping women, children and men.\(^{13}\)

In Manipur, the women’s social movement emerged in well-organized way. The women’s movements in Manipur (1904 and 1939) was mainly of the “norm-oriented”\(^{14}\) that is in connection with reformation and also involved the “value-oriented”, since a social movement is mostly multi-dimensional by nature.

After the annexation by the British, the women’s movements occurred in Manipur in two different times *Nupi-lal-I* (1904) and *Nupi-lal-II* (1939). The origin of the first *Nupi-lal* aimed to revive the traditional *Lallup* system\(^{15}\), which had become invalid and the second movement (*Nup-lal-1939*) was against the British Raj and the Raja for sharing of political ruling rights in Manipur.

The immediate cause of the First *Nupi-lal* was that in 1903-1904 the residence of the British Political Agent at Imphal was completely destroyed by fire. To rebuild it, the Assistant Political Agent, ordered that the people of Imphal

\(^{13}\) The British Residency in Manipur was waiting for a chance to colonizing this zone also. When they got this chance to interfere, they supported a weak group of princes who were involved in the royal palace rebellion. They tried to capture prince Tikendrajit, who had an independent thinking and aware the sense of sovereignty. They know that if they can capture him, half of the problem of their dominancy over this country would be solved in a peaceful way without war. To get this result they organized some arrogant and inhuman nature of war maneuver. Subsequently they failed their plots and needed to a physical fight that we called civil war.

\(^{14}\) The radicalism of movements depends on the degree of discrepancy between civil society and social order. If the discrepancy is small enough, social, movements will try only to reform social structures and will not try to destroy them and to exchange them for others because in this case social structures partly satisfy movements and their interests. This is the case of a norm-oriented movement. If the discrepancy between civil society and social order is large enough, social movements will try to destroy social structures and to change them for others. This type of movement considered as value-oriented movement.

\(^{15}\) It is a local feudal system, which was abolished by King Garbaniwaz.
area should bring teakwood from the Kabaw valley. While, the men were willing to follow the order, the women agitated and started action against the order of the British officers. As a consequence the government imposed a law that not more than five people would be allowed to assemble at a place (Bimola in M.N. Karna 1998: 68). All the women came out to join the agitation and the bazaars were completely closed. This demonstration of women continued for several days. Army troops were called from outside to restore peace. Many women were injured. The movement was fruitful one and remains as genuine example for the future women’s movement in Manipur.

The origin of the Second Nupi-lal in 1939 was also due to two main reasons: i) there was scarcity of rice, as most of it was being exported and ii) the local markets which were normally run by women in the rice business were taken over by the Marwari community. The Second Nupi-lal (1939) agitation was against the export of rice. In 1939, excessive rain had seriously damaged the crops and consequently affected the export of rice. Even during this scarcity the Marwari traders continued the export of rice. More than fifteen thousand women demonstrated before the Durbar hall and shouted slogans for banning the export of rice. The women traders at the local Khwairamban bazaar\(^\text{16}\) mobilized the public for agitation against the activities of the Marwari traders. Subsequently, from 12 December, 1939, the women started the boycott of bazaar as a spontaneous protest against the outside merchants. Thousands of women demanded an immediate stop to rice export. The agitators entered the office of the Durbar and rounded up the President of the Durbar. The situation became so tense that the army tried to clear the women agitators from the durbar compound. The women did not still leave the compound. On December 14, with the advice of the Maharaja, the Political Agent ordered the banning of rice export. It was after repeated assurances by the Maharaja that the situation in the market returned to normal.

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\(^{16}\) Women mainly controlled this Khwairamban bazaar. The market and business is totally monopolized by women and no other business run by men folk or business within the category of modern trade (like selling of company products and run the business by keeping extra helpers) were hardly allowed to have a share in this market.
In these two movements Manipuri women fought strategically for their rights. According to, Dr. Bimola, “the nature of women’s movement of 1939 was quite democratic at first. Women filed a petition to the durbar to stop rice export in order to solve the scarcity of rice in Manipur. Thousands of women demonstrated before the Durbar Hall when their petition was being discussed. The movement became forceful, when women insisted that the order to stop the rice export should be announced immediately. It became strong and violent resulting in the closure of rice mills by the concerned authority. Thus, the above two movements were against the British authority and were creative in nature,” (Bimola in Karna 1998: 77).

In Manipuri history women’s role in every aspect of life is no less than that of the men. The revival of their native political system and anti-Christian force was started by Jadonang in the hill states, and continued by Ms. Rani Gaidinliu (Pamei, 2001).

The Naga Women’s Status in Traditional Society

The position of women in traditional Naga society was not inferior to men. The domestic affairs were in the hands of women who enjoyed considerable freedom. She participated freely in singing and dancing during festivals and entertained the guests. She was never made to feel she belonged to the lesser or inferior sex. Most marriages are love marriages. The young choose their partners and marriage negotiations are conducted through an elderly lady (Horam 1986: 32).

In the marriage arrangement of the Mao Naga community, bride price is fixed by negotiations, it is initiated from the bridegroom’s side by sending an old woman with two pots of Yu (local beer) to the bride’s family and to fix the marriage date. There is a mutual exchange of gifts from both sides, but no demand for dowry is made from the bridegroom’s side.

In the Zeliangrong Naga group, marriage arrangements and negotiations of bride price are finalized and are paid before the marriage ceremony takes place. Bride price is a gift of money which is spent in the marriage ceremony.
Women are almost always free to make their own decisions. They entertain more freedom than the Meitei women (Lucy 1999: 23). In the Zeliangrong community divorce is permissible but elders have to approve it. In the Mao Naga community, a widow can remarry but has to abandon her claims to her late husband’s property. To inherit her deceased husband’s property and for the safety of her child they rarely re-marry.

Like all other Nagas, the Tangkhul women are as independent in their field of activity as the men. In the family, like the father, the mother plays an equally important role. Apart from growing vegetables and educating children (particularly the daughter in weaving and handicrafts), the mothers perform all household chores such as feeding the children as well as the domestic animals (Simrayl985: 167). Like the Tangkhul women, the Mao and Zeliangrong women also perform almost all the household work from rearing the children, to pounding paddy to weaving to nourishing, and feeding the household animals. In addition to this, they work with men to produce rice, cotton, and several kinds of vegetables. The Zeliangrong women have full rights to sell or buy handicrafts, shawls and domestic animals (except cattle) without consulting their husbands.

In the general administration of the village, when there is lack of leadership from men, women take over. Women have the right to fight cases in the village Chief Council Court and can be witnesses for or against cases. Customary laws prevail over the modern written form of constitutional laws.

In the traditional Naga society, there was a culture of head hunting. The most intriguing and rare feature in that culture was, women were assigned as peacemaker in this fearful game of war. When a party went too far by killing a warrior neutral people were brought in to mediate. They belonged to the neighboring villages or the neutral women “Pukhrieba”.17 The Pukhrieba could not be harmed as a rule. She was highly respected for her neutrality, and was regarded as an ambassador of peace. The same was followed in the Mao community also, their women peacemakers were called Nulo.

17 In some villages of Tangkhul community instead of Pukhreiba term, they used to call Pukhriela.
The commune of women, in the form of a ‘girls’ dormitory’ was housed by a respectable family in the village community. In this dormitory, the girls were given rigorous training in many different fields that were needed to help them become ideal wives. This system afforded the natural growth of leadership amongst women in the village.

Haimendrof (Haimendrof 1939:101) notes “........many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills their high status and their free and happy life; and if you measure the cultural level of the people by the social position and personnel freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as savage.”

The Nagas are patrilineal and hence the male holds, for all practical purposes, a more decisive position in the society (Lucy 1999: 21). In customary laws of the Tangkhul and the Zeliangrong Naga societies, men do not only enjoy the authority but also the inheritance of the property. The following of patriarchal systems, norms and attitudes, affect the status of women. In the traditional Naga society, the status of women was usually in relation to her family, as a daughter, wife, sister and mother. Thus in the politics and the inheritance of property they have no rights. Much superstition and taboos were imposed upon them, women were prohibited from having any say in both family and social affairs for the simple reason that the Kabui Nagas (Zeliangrong) believe that the presence of women in such affairs is a bad omen for the entire society. It is taboo for a warrior to sleep with his wife or even touch her inner clothes before going to war or for hunting (Rongmei 1999: 43). After the adoption of Christianity (in the first half of the twentieth century) and spread of education they have gradually changed the situation among the Naga women of Manipur.

Kuki Women’s Status in Traditional Society

Most traditional folk tales of Kukis depict that they came out from a dark hole and settled on the earth. They also mention the importance of the two sex groups in an equal way. The Thadous Kukis recognize one all-powerful god, Pathen and he has a wife, Nongjai; she was an equally powerful being, sharing with Pathen18 (Steward 1855).

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18 Shakespeare argues that according to his field experience with the Thadous and their information about Pathen’s wife, none could say whether Nonjai was Pathen’s wife or simply another name for Pathen.
Among the Old Kukis, the young women also had a separate commune, in which they gathered during festivals but they do not sleep there. Both sexes enjoy jokes, often vulgar, and are always ready for a laugh. In the Kuki tribe, parents generally arrange marriages. The negotiations for marriage are started from the groom’s side. The groom’s mother visits the parents of her future daughter-in-law, taking an offering of *yu* (local beer), and is accompanied by other male relatives, and on the last visit, they fix the bride price and the ceremony date. The process of marriage is conducted in a simple way. The New Kuki tribes follow almost the same process but new it has become more elaborate. There are four kinds of marriages among the Thadous viz:- i) *Chongmu*; where the groom’s side goes to the bride family and decides what the bride price is, a day before the marriage, the bride-groom will go to the bride’s home with strong young men and both parties will wrestle and on the next day bring back bride; ii) *Sahapsat*; the wrestling and other festivities are not indulged in and they will take their bride, iii) *Jol-lha*; there is no previous arrangement and they will take the bride solemnized legally, when a girl becomes pregnant from her lover, iv) *Kijam Mang*; this is when a young man and a girl elope and live together without or against the wishes of the parents of either or both parties (William Shaw 1929:58).

Although the bride’s family takes this mode of price, they spent or invest most of it for the marriage ceremony. Even after marriage, on her death (spouse), and the death of each of her sons, her marital family is to pay a further sum called “*Longman*” to her nearest male relatives. In the early 20th century, eligible brides are carried off and married against the wishes of their parents, by ardent lovers belonging to powerful families.

In the Kuki community, divorce is easily approved, if both sides agree to separate from each other. In some communities like the Anal, a woman cannot be separated or divorced from her spouse even though she knows of his extra marital affairs until he agrees. When an unwanted child is born, it was either

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19 The term Old Kukis has long been applied to the clan which suddenly appeared in Cachar (now it is part of Assam) about the 1800s. The Old Kukis of Manipur seem to have been in the first to move, as records of their appearance are found in the Manipur chronicle as early as the sixteenth century.
allowed to die after birth by not feeding it or handed over to the old women of the village to dispose off it some way or other.

Among the Kukis in traditional village administration, the chief is not only the owner of the land but everything else as well. According to Lt. Steward (Notes on Northern Cachar, written in 1855), “the raja is the sole and supreme authority in the village or village under him, no one else being competent to give orders or inflict punishment except through him. To assist him in carrying on the affairs of the government the raja has a minister………..”. “All the women in the village, married or single, are perfectly at the pleasure of the rajah, and no voice is raised against him for cohabiting with any of them, the only prevention being a sense of immorality and an understanding among the royal families of the whole tribe generally that such conduct is *infra dig*; indeed there is little temptation, for the Rajah may have as many wives as he likes or can keep, both polygamy and concubinage being in common practice, female slaves are living in good condition with respect of their master” (Steward 1885:45-48). Polygamy is, as a rule, permitted. Between the Anal and Lamgang, the first wife is entitled to the company of her husband for five nights, the second for four, and the third for three.

Though cases of heinous crime rarely happen, the punishment awarded for murder among the Kukis was confiscation of all goods and property and perpetual bondage for the murderer, his wife, and family, who would became slaves of the raja and did his work (J.Shakepeare1912 and 1983:195). The Kuki women were not as free as the Meities even though they had freedom of movement, no food restriction, freedom of employment and in religious matters. They were traditionally, however, under male domination. They bore most of the burden of life.

**The Meitei Women’s Status in Traditional Society**

The traditional women’s society can be discussed in many different ways viz., i) involvement level of women in religion, and ii) their life style.

Maibaism: The term *Maibaism* is very difficult to define in English word because it has no appropriate phrase or word that can be used in its place.
However *Maibism* is related to animistic faith. We can take it as an organization of rites performers of traditional animistic faith. Hodson describes *Maibaism* thus that ‘there exist the priest and priestesses of the animistic faith, who are called *Maiba, and Maibis*, a word which also connotes nowadays the practice of healing art because, as the language of the people clearly tells a man is said to be ill, when he is posed a ‘nat’ (Hodson, T.C.:35).

In this *loishang* (organization) there is two section: i) one is for Maibas (priests), and ii) the second one is for Maibis. The Maiba (priest) and Maibis (priestess) are the traditional priest and priestess of the Meitei religion. These two groups, at most level, they are not interfering each other except in the discourse of religion rites and conduct of religious festivals. The Maibas (priests) have no right to interfere the *Maibi loisang*. These *loisangs* are not only the organization of them but also they teach the students what about the thoughts and rules of religious conduct. Maibi plays a more important part in the festivals and, according to Shakespeare (1913: 429, 1910 a: 354); the *Lais* are thought to take more pleasure in the women than in men.

The Maibis were highly regarded in the society. They must be consulted for advice in various matters. The Maibis plays a vital role in performance of rituals in temple and in the society, in the traditional god and goddess festivals. Parrat expresses how far the important of Maibi in the festival of *lai haraoba* (pleasing of god and goddess) thus that “when a Maiba (priest) does become possess by the lai he traditionally wore the women’s apparel of the Maibi, and was spoken as a ‘male Maibi”.

Maibi have been taking a main role in the preservation of oral traditions and folklores of Meitei society (Parrat 1997: 32-35.). Generally Lai possesses the female Maibi and while she is under the control of Lai she speaks the messages and command of Lai.

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1 It is believed that a ‘LAI’ possesses the female Maibi. A goddess may also possess her as well. Maibis laitongba (god possess), is a unique form of hystericism and abnormal behavior and expressed the word not by her but by god or goddess with her help, when this people believe her words as the message and command of god. The Maibi commonly says that gods come in the night in some special days to have sex with her, on that if she is married she will sleep separately from her husband or children. They also say that traditional wants them to live without marriage. The important thing here is that the spouse of her give freedom and respect to her to follow it without having restriction or keeping aside it is true or not.
Even though the invasion of Hinduism had affected to already exist Meiteism, it could not totally wipe out the belief people in the Maibi. Those believers in the Hindu religion asked the help of Maibis when there is happening some unnatural things in her family, without thinking that she is belonging in which religion. The traditional and the changed Hindus accept her as the social doctor of super natural problems (Ch. Sekhar 1974: 28).

In Lai Haraoba, Maibi (priestess) takes main role and the ritual starts in a small pond where she starts chanting hymns by stirring the water of pond then leads to a procession followed young men and women. The Maibi stays throughout the *Lai haraoba* chanting hymns and giving astrological predictions to guide people for the future course of action.

In the *Lai haraoba* festivals usually at night time the Maiba and Maibi will play different types of religious drama. In it they strictly follow the rules and chanting the rituals. In this drama they will sing and dance with hymns. To please god they use a very different and unique process that the Maibis will cry many obscene slogans related to creation of universe and made of mankind, even they pull up their lower attire to see their children comes out or not. To do this, society never treat them as an indiscipline woman, instead of it they welcome it thus that Maibis are performing their duty to please god and if she make merry the god consequently the local or village would be prosperous.

In the traditional laws of Meitei widow’s can remarry, but not with their deceased husband’s brother. There is no ceremony for the remarriage of a widow. They were practiced the negotiated marriages as well as love marriages with elopement. During festive occasions like *Lai Haraoba, Holi, Thabal Chongba, Likon Sanaba*, the boys and girls had their full freedom of meeting in grouping form and sometimes they went picnic spots and arrange a grant feast in the locality. Under the control of king, there was a controller called *Ningol-lakpa* ⁵ to look after the matter of women. Till the late 1950s, boys could meet their fiancée or their crush girl directly within the boundary of girl’s home and its

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⁵ Ningol-Lakpa (controller of women) is an administrator, who have the right to look after the local girls problems and arrange the entertainment programmes or games in favor of them. Rulers to solve the problems of women in a quick way created this post. He will send the report of the women in his administrative boundary to the king.
garden. By that time everything was fair and well discipline and most of the conversation were in front of her family members.

In any society where the women contribute in economic development or her family’s earning, automatically her position in the society as well as freedom of self will increase. In Meitei society, the women hold a high and free position since all the internal trade and exchange of the production of the country being made by them. The habit of the country is to have bazaar at the convenient spot of the road sides where the mainly covered by the community women. The women weave all their clothes. Almost all the girls including those belonging to rich households were expert weavers.

During the pre-Hindu era there was a culture of taking the bride price but it was transformed towards the dowry after the adoption of Hinduism. In case of divorce often women has to pay in lieu of slavery.

The most important pre-Hindu Meitei festival is the Lai Haraoba. However, in the valley the practice of women priestess was considered as a normal profession for women, in respect of tribes of all two groups e.g. the Nagas and Kukis (New Kukis too) it is absent. Unlike the Meiteis, they considered the kind of job is for male group only. But it is not totally absent, in some rare occasions women practicing sorcery are noticed who are considered as priests practicing black magic.

The position of women in Manipuri society was traditionally better than elsewhere in Indian subcontinent. It started deteriorating due to influence of various religions like the Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, came into Manipur during the various phases of history, which brought in their own taboos and beliefs. Taking the advantage of this situation kings, princes, and nobles often could acquire a number of wives and concubines. King Debendro (brother of Nara Singh) who ruled less than a year could acquire more than 100 wives during his short tenure.

However, Bimola argues that, ‘on an average their status is not so much high as compared with their role. Most of them are not allowed to take part in the decision-making process of the family, of the leikais and in social problems. Women generally accept what male has already decided. Decision-making, it is
believed, is the sole right of the men. In short, in spite of the varied activities and
great role in social fields, the women in Manipur are not enjoying a level equal
status in society’ (Bimola, Ksh. 1998:162).

**HARYANA**

Haryana is a land with an ancient past, a past of riches and plenty, a past of
heroic struggles by its people where legend and history meet and come alive
temporaneously. It is known as the cradle of the ancient Indian civilization.
Today, Haryana is one of the most progressive states of India. It has managed to
make a mark for itself in all fields of human endeavour, blending the aspirations
of its people with the traditions of the past. Whether it is agriculture or industry,
rural water supply or rural electrification, transport or tourism, the progress of the
state has been phenomenal and its contribution to the nation stupendous (Singhal,

Haryana as the state is known now was formed in 1966, before that it was
part of Punjab. During the pre-independence period, the region was demarcated
into many small princely kingdoms and ruled by different, foreign, despotic
rulers. It was at that time the most barren and neglected part of Punjab. Gulshan
Rai, Yadav and J.N.S.,\(^{20}\) and many others have criticized the imbalances and
mistreatment of the people of this region prior to its to becoming a separate state.
After a protracted struggle for re-organisation of states, Haryana was cast out of
Punjab. It is a land locked state, the proximity to Delhi is its advantage (Chopra
& Malik 1992: 4). The state is surrounded by Punjab on the West, Himachal
Pradesh in the North, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi in the East and Rajasthan in the
South and South-West. The area of the state is 44,212 km. which is just 1.34 per
cent of the total area of the country. The state administration is divided into four
divisions namely, Hisar, Ambala, Rohtak and Gurgaon. There are 19 districts,\(^{21}\)
47 sub-divisions, 67 tehsils and 114 blocks in the state (Singhal, R.P. 2004:2).

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\(^{20}\) When the reorganization Haryana was remained predominantly rural, industrialization,
urbanisation and modernization had also not been satisfactory. The region was very low in literacy,
and another factor is the state was suffered from the evils of parochial caste loyalties, which
dominated the socio-political realm as against loyalty to a broader political community. Other reasons
were Haryana region herself suffered from the ill-treatment and demarcation of EIC as revenge of
their main involvement in 1858 revolts and World War I.

\(^{21}\) Haryana state has 19 districts, namely: Panchkula, Ambala, Yamunanagar, Kurukshetra, Kaithal,
Karnal, Panipat, Sonipat, Jind, Fatehabad, Sirsa, Hisar, Bhiwani, Rohtak, Jhajjar, Mahendragrah,
Rewari, Gurgaon and Faridabad (Census of India 2001).
In Haryana a majority of the population is Hindu by religion. Sikhs, Jains, Christians and Buddhists also live here. In 2001 the population of Hindus was 88.23 per cent while communities following were i.e. Sikhs (5.53 per cent); Muslims (5.78 per cent); Christians (0.13 per cent), Buddhists (0.03 per cent), etc. Hindi is spoken by 89.42 per cent of the state population. (Singhal, R.P. 2004: 5).

The people of the state constitute a virile race of sturdy fighters and indefatigable cultivators. Jats, Ahirs, Brahmins, Banias, Gujjars, Meos and Harijans are its major communities (Singhal, R.P. 2004: 4).

**Jats:** The origin of the Jats is shrouded in mystery. In the first half of the 19th century the two researchers, James Todd and Alexander Cunningham, cited that the Jats came to India from outside and also agree on their probable place of origin and the time of their probable migration to India. On the other hand some mythologies mention that the Jats were living in Sind long before the Scythians invaded the country. All these hypotheses and legends still await thorough scientific research or investigation (Singh, Yadav1976:96). The Jats are Hindus. They are scattered throughout Haryana. But they are mainly concentrated in the districts of Rohtak, Sonipat, Jind, Karnal, Panipat, Bhiwani and Hisar. The Jats are divided into twelve chief clans (gotras) and about 137 minor gotras. The main gotras are Maliks, Dahiya, Ahlawat, Rathee, Dalal, Sahrawat, Kadian, Jakhar, Golia and Deswal (Singh, S. ed. 2001: 500).

**Ahirs:** They are mainly settled in the districts of Mahendergarh, Rewari, Gurgaon, Faridabad and Rohtak (Singh, S. ed. 2001: 498). Though Ahirs religiously claimed that they are descendants of Lord Krishna, V.V. Mirashi has suggested that probably the original habitat of the *abhiras* (Ahirs) was the region between the Sutlej and the Yamuna (Singh, S. ed. 2001: 499).

**Rajputs:** In Haryana, Rajputs are scattered all over Haryana. They are migrated from different places of India but mostly migrated from Rajasthan to

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22 James Todd opined that they were brought to Indian in the wake of the Scythians invasion of central Asia at the beginning of the Christian era and Alexander Cunningham attempted to find references to the Jats in the works of Greek and roman authors.
settle in Haryana. Some of the Rajput clans settled in Haryana are Chauhans, Panwars, Jatus, Mandhars and Budgujars. Mostly, they are settled in the districts of Karnal, Ambala, Rohtak, Gurgaon, Bhiwani (Singh, S. ed. 2001: 507-508).

**Brahmans:** They are an important section of the people of Haryana. Though their number is small but still their social status is high. As per the historians’ view, Haryana was the home of the Vedic Aryans, who settled along the Sarasvati River and its surrounding areas. The Brahmans formed the apex of the Aryans’ hierarchy, and were in fact its most prestigious class entirely dominating its social and religious life then. Brahmans are divided into four main groups, the Gaurs, Saraswats, Khandelwals, and Dhima.

**Gujjars:** As they were once the rulers of northern region of India this country, after the dissolution of Harsha’s empire, they settled in what is now Haryana. Like the Ahirs and the Jats, the Gujjras are brave persons. Being a pastoral tribe their settlements were mostly found in the riverine low lands along the hills in the South - Gurgaon and Faridabad areas, and Shivaliks in the North. Their main concentration is near Narnaul, Palwal, Ballabgarh Tehsils, Naraingarh and Jagadhri tehsil, around Kaithal and in Hisar district (Singh, S. ed. 2001: 12).

**Meos:** They are ancient people, probably descendants of the Medas-Meda Meos. It is said about the Meos that they are a happy blend of Islam and Hinduism. In any case, in spite of being converted to Islam they have followed the customs and cultural practices of both Hinduism and Islam (Singh, S. ed. 2001: 514). Although the Meos were converted from Hinduism to Islam about four centuries back, their adoption of Islamic cultural practices, even the religious injunctions prescribed in the Koran remained until 1947 at best nominal and did not advance beyond male circumcision and burial of death (Pratap, C. Aggrawal 1971: 1). But a few years back the Meos turned to orthodox Islam. Their main concentration is in Ferozepur Jhirka, Nuh and Hathin areas forming what has been recently called the Mewat district.

According to 2001 Census, Haryana has 36 Schedule Castes. The total strength of the Schedule Castes was 32,10,917 (males 17,17,071 and females 14,93,846) accounting for 19.35 per cent of the total population of the state.
While Fatehabad district had the highest number of Schedule Castes population (27.43 per cent), Gurgaon had the smallest population of SCs i.e. 11.32 per cent.

Table 0.1(b): Total Population of Haryana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Female per 1000 males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>35,27,746</td>
<td>40,62,797</td>
<td>75,90,543</td>
<td>868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>46,59,550</td>
<td>53,77,258</td>
<td>1,00,36,808</td>
<td>867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>60,12,680</td>
<td>69,09,938</td>
<td>1,29,22,618</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>76,36,174</td>
<td>88,27,474</td>
<td>1,64,63,648</td>
<td>865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>97,80,611</td>
<td>1,13,63,953</td>
<td>2,11,44,564</td>
<td>861</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India

As per 1971 Census, the population of Haryana was 1,00,36,808 (males 53,77,258 and 46,59,550 females), whereas in 2001 it rose to 2,11,44,564 (males 1,13,63,953 and 97,80,611 females). The population rose during 1991-2001 by 28.43 percent against 21.54 per cent of India.

Haryana is a region with a marked deficiency of females. This fact is supported by the latest Census results. The State sex ratio as a whole was 861 females per 1000 males in 2001 Census and among the district Mahendragarh district (919) and the lowest in Panchkula district (823). In Haryana, the rural sex ratio was 866 while it was 846 for urban areas. It is notable that sex ratio of Haryana has declined continuously since 1981 and is at lowest since Independence (i.e. 869 in 1941; 871 in 1951; 868 in 1961; 870 in 1981; 865 in 1991 and 861 in 2001).

Table 0.2: Literacy Rates of India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>27.16</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>15.34</td>
<td>40.40</td>
<td>28.31</td>
<td>25.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>21.97</td>
<td>45.95</td>
<td>34.45</td>
<td>23.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>29.85</td>
<td>56.50</td>
<td>43.67</td>
<td>26.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>39.19</td>
<td>64.20</td>
<td>52.19</td>
<td>25.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>54.16</td>
<td>75.85</td>
<td>65.38</td>
<td>21.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India
Table 0.3: Literacy Rates of Haryana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>9.21</td>
<td>29.22</td>
<td>19.93</td>
<td>20.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>37.29</td>
<td>26.89</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>26.93</td>
<td>58.51</td>
<td>43.88</td>
<td>31.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>40.47</td>
<td>69.10</td>
<td>55.85</td>
<td>28.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>56.31</td>
<td>79.25</td>
<td>68.59</td>
<td>22.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India.

Note: The sex wise literacy rates (percentage) relate to the population aged five (5) years and above for 1951, 1961 and 1971. The rates for the years of 1981, 1991, 2001 relate to the population aged seven years and above as per the Census.

As per 2001 Census, the literacy for the whole state was 68.59 per cent, while male literacy rate was 79.25 per cent and female was 56.31 per cent respectively. Female literacy is highest in Panchkula district (68.98 percent), while it was lowest in Fatehabad district (46.40 per cent). The literacy rates in Haryana, both for males and females are comparatively higher than the national average for males (75.85 per cent) and females (54.16 per cent), so naturally Haryana recorded a relatively higher literacy rate than the national average (65.38 per cent), during 1991-2001.

Though the birth rate in Haryana decline from 37.2 in 1984 to 34.8 in 1989, it was higher than the corresponding All India average. The death and infant mortality rates being below the National Average, expectancy of life at birth was above the national average during the period.
Table 0.4: **Human Development Index: Haryana, Manipur and all India**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/AI</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Gender disparity index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>HDI 1981</td>
<td>0.332</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.360</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HDI 1991</td>
<td>0.409</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.562</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.443</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HDI 2001</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All India</td>
<td>HDI 1981</td>
<td>0.263</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.3.2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HDI 1991</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.511</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.381</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HDI 2001</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.472</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNDP, 2001

Table 0.4.1 indicates the changes of Human Development Index for Haryana and all India average during the last three decades. As per data provided in Table 4.1a, in the rural areas of Haryana, the HDI was growing in comparison to the all India figures. In 1981 Haryana ranked 13\(^{th}\) (0.332) and it increased upto 15\(^{th}\) rank (0.409) in 1991. Nevertheless, in urban areas, the HDI was at a stable position of rank, i.e. 17 in 1981 and 1991 respectively, whereas the value was increasing from 0.462 (1981) to 0.562 (1991). The gender disparity index depicts a quiet improvement in women’s condition, while it was at the 24\(^{th}\) rank (0.536) in 1981, within the two decades it had improved and rose to the ranked 5\(^{th}\) (0.509) in 2001.

**History of Haryana**

No one is sure how Haryana acquired its name. Historians tried to explain its origin by different theories and methods. To some, the name originated from the green forests (*Haryalaban*). Others refer to the God’s *Indra* (Har), chariot (*Aryana*) (*Quraishi, S.Y. 1985: 10*). Probably the earliest and most explicit reference to Haryana occurs in the *Palam Baoli* inscription of 16 August 1276, found in a step well at Palam, which refers to the land of Hariyanka (*Singh, K.S. Ed. 1994: xiii*). However, a consensus is yet to emerge on the origins of the name of Haryana.
The beginning of the history of Haryana region is associated with Sothi culture. The next period in the history of Haryana region is marked with the arrival of the Harappan civilization. This civilization spread in this region towards the close of the 3rd millennium B.C. (Chopra, P.N. & Malik, M. 1992: 19-51). Through the efforts of Cunningham, Rodgers and B.B. Lal, has been uncovered the archaeological evidence of pre-historic Painted Gray Ware (PGW) Pottery, dated the first half of millennium B.C. These artifacts were found in Kurukshetra, Pehowa, Amin, Panipat, etc. In the 1960s proper excavations was carried out by U.V. Singh and Suraj Bhan, they discovered many Pre-Harappan, Harappan and Late-Harappan sites, PGW historical and also medieval sites (Bhan. S. Shaffer, J.G. 1978). These excavations not only give factual proof of having an established human society in Haryana but also it was the center of vigorous cultural and political activity. Excavations work continues on excavations in Haryana and more and more material sites are being discovered even of the Sarasvati and Sothi culture. The first Harappan culture (c.2000 B.C.-1700 B.C.) has been excavated in different regions of Haryana. The next phase is called the late Harappan culture (C. 1700 B.C.-1500 B.C.) representing the decadent phase of the Harappan civilization. The causes of disappearance of the Harappan culture from this region, according to Suraj Bhan was the “Yamuna which flowed to the South-West along Mitathal and Tosham, perhaps forming a part of Swarsavati system in the Pre-Harappan and Harappan time and it drifted eastwards to join the Ganga at Allahabad, about 100B.C. (Suraj Bhan: 1979: 112). So we have the appearance of Harappan sites along the westerly course of the Yamuna River.

With the advent of the PGW culture, there was a new dawn for Haryana, PGW (1000 B.C.) has been traced from a large number of sites in Haryana, especially in Kurukshetra region (Bhagwanpur site), this provides a clear bridge between the Harappan and the Aryan culture. It has been traced from several sites mentioned in the Vedic literature and associated with the *Mahabharata* period (Singh, U.V.1979: 114).

During the Vedic period, the state was the home of the legendary Bharata dynasty, which became the name of India. It has been a land of profound mythological and historical significance when the Hindu civilization flowered
through the ages (Grover, V. & Arora, R. 1996). The advent of the Bharatas, the most powerful Aryan tribe of the Rig Vedic period, makes the history of the region coherent and meaningful. The Bharatas were the earliest inhabitants of the region of whom there are written records (Mujumdar, R.C. & Pusalkar 1957: 245 & Singh, S. (Ed) 2001: 172).

In the first half of the 4th century, Chandragupta I and Samudragupta reconstituted and consolidated the Magadha Empire. It was under Chandragupta Maurya that Haryana became an important part of the Magadha Empire (op.cit Chopra, P.N. & Malik, M. 1992: 19-51).

In the early years of the 6th century A.D., Pushpbhuti established a kingdom at Thaneswar and Harsavardhan (606-1647) was the most prominent ruler of Thaneshwar. The Ancient Hindu period, especially the 7th century, may perhaps be described as the golden age of Haryana. Bana went into ecstasies when describing the physical, charms of Thaneshwar city’s male and female inhabitants. He called the city as a “lovers’ nest” and praised its women for their exquisite tastes and manners (Lai, M. 1974).

About 510 AD the Huns led by Tomarana swooped from the North-West and sacked the city and the religious establishments from Sangol in Ludhiana to Kaushambi near Allahabad. The Palam Baoli inscription cites this territory as Hariyankas and states that it was first ruled by the Tomaras. In 1014 A.D., Mohammad Ghazanvi attacked Thaneswar, Bisaldev or Vighrey Raj VI conquered Delhi and Hansi from Tomars and the Chauhans established their rule over Haryana in the 12th century.

The prosperity of the area attracted the attention of the Turks and the Afghans in the 12th and 13th centuries (Quraishi, S.Y. 1985: 11). Haryana faced many invasions and many rulers but with the fall of the Chauhan dynasty, the Haryana region fell into the hands of the Turks (Malik, M. op.cit 19-51). During the entire Turko-Afghan rule (1206-1526), the center of activities shifted to Delhi. Babur founded the Mughal dynasty in April 1526 and Haryana came under their yoke. Akbar joined Haryana region in the Subah of Delhi. During the first two centuries of the Mughal rule, political tranquility was restored and there was economic stability also (ibid, Quraishi 1985: 12). After Aurangazeb, there was a visible decline as Haryana was the most affected tract where the maximum
chaos and confusion followed. The invasion of Nadir Shah and Ahmed Shah Abdali added to the confusion.

It was with the treaty of *Surji Arjan Gaon* on December 30, 1803 that the territories lying between the Yamuna and the Ganga River came under the authority of British. The administration of Haryana was handed over to the Presidency of Bengal with a Resident posted at Delhi. The Meos, Gujars and Ahirs of Gurgaon, Jats of Hissar, and Sikhs of Karnal, all opposed the new regime (Chopra, P.N. & Malik, M. 1992: 19-51).

Haryana functioned as an adjunct to Delhi and practically remained anonymous until the 1857 Mutiny. The people of Haryana took part in a big way in the revolt of 1857. Many of its sons fought alongside the rebels against the British army and they gave their lives in the cause of freedom (Bhatt, SC: 59). They were revolted. The British East India Company had a difficult time taming them. History is replete with stories of the Jats, the Ahirs and the Mewatis who made it their common cause to overthrow the British (Mittal, S.C. 1986: 54-63).

The British defeated the rebellions and their administration was re-established in this region. Some portions of territories of Haryana the region were merged with those of the British ruler and remaining was hand over to the rulers of Patiala, Nabha and Jind. Haryana, thus, became a part of the Panjab province (Grover, V. & Arora, R. 1996). This region continued to one of the most neglected parts of the greater Punjab.

**Women’s Status in the History of Haryana**

The material culture of the Painted Gray Ware (PGW) people and their life style can be learnt from the excavations of the Hastinapuram archaeological site. Moral, religious and spiritual values developed in Haryana can be discovered from literary sources. It was here in Haryana that the foundations of the Aryan religion and culture were laid (Lal, B.B. 1954-55: 1-51; Singh, S. (Ed.) 2001: 691). Life led by ancient Aryans was partly pastoral and partly agricultural. They lived in the villages and followed the custom of polyandry.

Entire families live and dine together. The daughter-in-law, though living in a separate quarters, attends to domestic duties. She takes care of the little brothers and sisters-in-law, supervised the work of servants and looked after the
domestic animals. Housewives were always present during ceremonies and sang hymns. There was no *purdah* system. Women attended public functions bedecked with fine clothes and various ornaments.

During the Vedic period, women were composing hymns and chants and in some cases they even attained the rank of *rishis* (Yadav, J.N. 1976). Some of the famous learned women named and honored in the Vedas are Saci, Gargi, Mamta, Visvavara, Apala, Ghosa, Surya and Vak. Most outstandingly, Saraswati is the goddess of all Vedic learning (Kapoor, K.:36).

In the Vedic age, women were supposed to marry before puberty and to some extent, the bride had the right to choose her life partner. When a husband died without an issue, the widow was allowed to raise an issue by *nyoga*. Most of women preferred a married life though some of them preferred to lead a life of celibacy. Women were not granted any independent status, although they were assigned a very high status in their homes. As a daughter, she would be the responsibility of her father; as a wife, of her husband, and as a widow, of her son.

During that time, no family ritual or ceremony was completed without the wife. According to their philosophy, all the riches of the spirit (*Daivi Sampada*) that are conducive to liberation from suffering are feminine while the demonic properties (*Asuri*) masculine (ibid, 36).

During the post-Vedic period, the position of women gradually underwent deterioration in many respects. They were required to obtain the knowledge of duty and morality by studying the *Puranas* only. The old Aryan system was being restructured through marriage with the indigenous people. According to Manu “the two sexes are unequal in strength, stamina and psychology” (Ramaswamy, K.V.: 162; Singh, S. (Ed.) 2001: 645). Such a view helped in the decline of women’s enrolment in education. However, there were some *Smriti* writers, who protested against this low view of women. Though Manu mentioned, ‘women should be honored”, he did not give the required space for women in their society. Manu did not cherish the idea of divorce. However, he did not object to a woman abandoning her husband if he is insane, impotent or suffering from an incurable or contagious disease (Singh, S. (Ed.) 2001: 645-46).

Property rights of women were hardly recognized in ancient patriarchal civilizations of the world. The *Taitiriya Samhit* holds that the wife was the
mistress of the household. A daughter did not have a legal right to inherit her father’s property. She had a privilege of her maintenance only if she remained unmarried (ibid Singh, S. (Ed.) 2001: 647-648).

However A.V. Singh advocated the post feminist concept that, ‘the Indian treatment of women was confined to the Smritis, particularly Manusmriti and Parasara Smriti among others’. The ill-treatment of women particularly in the post Samhita period may well be true yet it is undeniable that in the Vedic Samhita period women’s position was better than what is often painted to be, though the society may have been patriarchal in that period. A woman (nari) was Ardhanghini (one-half of the being of man) but is no way subordinate to man. She was Sahdharmini (co-traveller on the path of dharma), fully capable of taking her own decisions (Singh, A.V.: 59-60).

There are many mistaken concept opposite to what the texts revealed on the fidelity of women to her husband, right to divorce, right to property, right to remarriage and right to perform rites and rituals. Some Dharmasastras explicitly grant women the right to divorce, as also the right to remarry under certain conditions. There were certain restrictions about ceremonies or rites applied only to the grhastha women and not to the class known as Brahmavadini, or women who devoted themselves to the realization of Brahma, the ultimate personal reality. No one was debarred from the study of secret texts; what was restricted was only the right to recite those texts, an activity that needed years of training and is required to be performed with great precision (Kapoor, K.: 38).

 Customs and the practices like Sati, bride burning, aborting the girl child, taking on the husband’s family name, and not being able to be known by one’s mother- we find that there are misconceptions about what the dharmas lay down about these matters and also that there are competing practices and point of view. No text prescribes Sati as a desirable practice; and the first Sati, was committed when the husband was in fact alive (Kapoor, K.: 39). The Dharmasastras are not just prescriptive texts; they are also a record of widely varying practices and costumes. In Jainism and Budhism, marriage was not compulsory for women; rather it was regarded as a fetter which women were advised to avoid.

The worship of Sakti was also prevalent in Ancient India, though the conception of the Sakti-cult reaches its perfection during the Gupta period.
Among the consorts of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, Durga rose to the status of an all powerful mother goddess. The conception of the great goddess here is almost similar to that found in the *Devi Mahatamaya*. The Mother had a great role to play in shaping the conception of the *Sakti-cult*. Since the period of spreading *Saktism*, the people of Haryana have been worshipping *Sitla Mata*, goddess *Masani*. There is a temple of Sitla Mata in almost every village and town. The goddess is believed to have the power to ward off small pox (ibid Singh, S. (Ed.) 2001: 736). In one form or the other *Mata Vaishno Devi* is worshiped in every temple of the state.

During the Sultanate period changes appeared due to the political control of foreign invaders and their impact on the social, cultural life. With the changing of traditions and customs, position of women in society further weakened. With the invasion of the Mughals, the position of women seriously degenerated after the fusion with the newly imposed Muslim culture.

The followers of Islam imposed the *Purdah* (veil) on women to avoid the display of feminine beauty which was likely to arouse the passions of men (Nand, L.C. 1989: 35). During the Sultanate period, seclusion of women was complete. Besides the *purdah system* *Sati* was also imposed by the Hindu society to keep the sanctity of their women and their own identity in the face of multiple invasions. The movement of women in palaces was restricted probably to preserve their integrity and chastity. Sultan Sikandar Lodi forbade women from visiting tombs.

The seclusion of women led to certain disadvantages, their education was hampered. Among the Hindu women the custom of self-immolation or *Sati*, continued to be popular during the Sultanate period.

Dowry system brought an orthodox atmosphere to Hindu society and consequently the birth of a girl came to be regarded as an inauspicious event. They had no property rights.

Consequently, infanticide spread, it was a measure adopted by the Hindus so that their virgins might not run the risk of loosing their chastity. Child marriage was established and the proper age of marriage for girls was seven, and a marriage after eleven or twelve years was shameful. The increased rigidity of
the caste system and new regulations produced far-reaching consequences for the Hindu society.

The condition of women reached its lowest ebb during the 19th century in North Western India. Ideologically, women were considered inferior to men having no significance and no empowerment. During the 19th century, the birth of a daughter was generally cause for sorrow. The birth of a son there was announced with sounding of the conch, dancing and singing by women in the family; visitations from dancing eunuchs; feasts to the Brahmins; and waves of gifts and congratulations from friends and relatives on various events. The birth of a daughter in the 1920s was considered a financial burden. Her death was considered fortunate (Darling, M.L.1925: 8). Punjab–Haryana together had the lowest female to male ratio in the colonial period.23

It is not surprising that even educated men and women in Haryana have not raised their voice against the observance of purdah (Chowdhry 1994: 285). The Haryana region during the colonial period remained one of the most backward and underdeveloped regions of Punjab and it hampered the productive and reproductive role of women. The fusion of traditional male dominant culture and the new eco-classification system imposed by Britishers made a wider difference among the peasants and consequently the main group suffering from that system were the women. Haryana from a pastoral and predominantly subsistence level rural economy began suffering from chronic and periodic famines (ibid, Chowdhry, P. 1994: 134-136).

Dowry was the norm. The girl’s right to share her parent’s property was unheard of as in an agricultural society, where fragmentation of land leads to unproductive holdings. The traditional solution to this problem was in the form of stridhan- a share in the form of gold and silver. It is not surprising that giving the girl her due share in some form or the other is still the most widespread practice and has often taken odious forms’ (Kapoor, K.: 38).

**Traditional Society of Haryana and Women’s Position**

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23 Ratio of females per 1000 males in different provinces of British India in 1931: Punjab (including Haryana): 831; North West Frontier Province: 843; United Provinces: 906; Bihar and Orissa: 909; Bengal: 924; Madras: 1025; Bombay: 909; Central Provinces: 1,000; Central Indian Agency: 948; Rajputna: 908.
In Haryana purdah or ghunghat has not prevented the rural women, despite their veiled faces, from working alongside the men in the fields, nor has it obliged them to observe any kind of seclusion. The form which ghunghat has had to adapt is known as dhhattha in which the face and head are wrapped up in a way as to leave the eyes unveiled. The extreme opinion is that purdah no longer exists, but even now, in rural areas, a woman who does not observe purdah is called nangi (naked) or be-sharam and even badmash.

In Haryana if a male baby was born, a thali was drummed to appraise the neighbors, instead of that, if a female baby was born, an earthen vessel was broken. In the traditional Haryana women observed ‘Hoee ki Izzat’, whereas the parents (especially family seniors and men) have been trying to destroy their infant girl by using different means, i.e. dhhood pilao (fed with poisoned milk to kill infant girl child), abortion with the help of dais, sex determination test, etc. Unmarried girls, even small girls observe Karva Chauth the fast along with the married women of the family for the purpose of giving offerings for the long life of the husband. Such chronic social ills and dilemmas have brought about an enormous difference in the male, female sex ratio, in present day Haryana. The new daughter-in-law has the lowest status in the household. The seclusion and restrictions imposed on newly married women both in rural and urban areas might be different to some extent but they were both subjected to suffering from physical or mental tortures. The caste groups who did not encourage their women to work outside the home were the Bania, Khatri, and Rajput among the Hindus, and the Pathan, Biloch, Sayyad, Sheik and Ranghat or Rajput among the Muslims.

Haryana is a patriarchal society where men dominate in every aspect of life. There is clear separation between male and female domains. The women in this society are completely absorbed in routine domestic life (like cooking, looking after the children and the domestic animals (Chana, S.M. 1997: 24), looking upon men as the bread winners, on whom they depended for everything, as their protectors and hence devoted themselves, heart and souls to their service and welfare. Economically, women were entirely dependent on men, the earning
members of the family. Due to the conservative outlook of the people, they have remained most neglected in the spheres of education.

**Customs and Practices Connected with Birth, Marriage and Death**

**Marriage custom:** Among the Ahir, Brahmin, Taga, Jat (Hindu or Muslim), Hindu Gaurwa, Agri and probably the Mallah tribes, as well as some Muslim Guara, a man may not marry a woman belonging to any of the following gotra. 1) his own, 2) his mother’s, 3) his father’s mother’s, 4) mother’s mother’s (Singh, S. (Ed.) 2001: 570). Among Bhedkuts, bride price was reported to exist.

The marriage ceremony is comprehensive and comprises several sub-ceremonies. The first step for marriage was *sagai* (betrothal). In this preliminary negotiation majority of castes, except some communities like Bhedkuts, usually the party from the girl’s side takes the initiative. After the marriage is fixed the *sagai* takes place at the boy’s house. The next ceremony is *batna* ceremony (applying local made ayurvedic cosmetic items for the beautification of women) is applied over the bodies of the boy and the girl by their respective women relatives. The other ceremonies which are conducted before the main ceremony i.e. *phere* (promised or solemnation of marriage by the priests with hymns in front of Agnideva, the fire god) ceremony are *Kangna and Ganaa* ceremony, *Maanda, Shaanth* ceremony, *Sehra* ceremony and *Berothi* (threshold crossing) ceremony. The ‘*phere*’ ceremony is the most important ceremony which made the marriage binding on both the parties. Following the marriage ceremony is the *khatt* ceremony. In this ceremony the bride’s family exhibits the dowry to the bridegroom’s family and hands it over to the bridegroom’s father. *Vida* ceremony is the send off ceremony in the last function to be performed at the bride’s natal home (Singh, S. (Ed.) 2001: 552).

Among the Muslims the *mirasi* are doing the matchmaking and finding of matches and after finalization of everything about the date of marriage and religious matters by both parties *nikah* is to be performed with all the formalities of the Muslim Law by a *kazi* or his deputy. The union was, in fact, outcome after another important ceremony of *Muklawa*, the final arrival of the bride in bridegroom’s home, which took place after many years of marriage (Singh, Ch. 194).
Widows are allowed to remarry among all castes except Tagu Brahmins. Among Jhinwars the custom of junior liberate prevails that is to say, on the death of a man, his younger brother has the first claim to the widow than his elder brother. Bhedakut, Bawarias and Sansis, the practice of junior as well as senior liberate prevails. Widows over 35 years of age, who may not wish to remarry, live on the property left by their husband. Widower marriage is a simple sort of marriage, the bridegroom throwing a red wrap over woman’s head and putting wristlets (chura) on her arms in the presence of male and female members of the brotherhood. Karewa ceremony brings the widow once again under male protection; her being given ‘his shelter’ or ‘roof’ and with it receiving a new life. The custom represented social consent for cohabitation. The popular acceptance of widow remarriage was signified in the local proverbs and old folk songs and sayings.

The main reasons for making the marriage arrangements within the family was to transfer control of the deceased husband’s land from the widow (who succeeded to a life estate in the absence of the male lineal descendants) to his brother or to a patrialineal family member, because a widow who remarried lost all her rights to property, even if she married her husband’s brother.

Although the widow could not be compelled to remarry, she was not free to marry without their consent. If a widow married a stranger against the will of her former husband’s family, a caste Panchayat would either compel him to give her or pay the former husband’s family a reasonable price for the woman to underline their ownership (J. Wilkinson, J. 1879: 65). So, men were completely in control over the women and the question of her remarriage that it was freely admitted that in practice she was often forced and made to yield to their wishes (Maconanchi, R.: 280.).

From the above mentioned facts we can gauge that the history and culture of women in Haryana and Manipur were not similar. Thus the researcher will study the difference in these two societies in following chapters.