Preface

Power is the most contested issue in the society. Many theories of power seek to explain in different ways, the operation of less visible or internalized forms of power in the society. Pierre Bourdieu, a prominent French social anthropologist, attempts to explore the conceptions of power which start from the perspectives of structure or which explore the interplay of agency and structure, or which seek to transcend this divide altogether.

Unlike Foucault who sees power as ubiquitous and beyond agency and structure, he sees power as culturally and symbolically constructed and constantly re-legitimized through an interplay of agency and structure. This construction of power is made possible through habitus, socialized norms or tendencies that guide behavior and thinking, capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) which can be transformed one form to another, fields, the various social and institutional arenas in which people express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital; also explain the differential power in the society.

Doxa, his concept of understanding power, is the combination of both orthodox and heterodox norms of and beliefs-unstated, taken for granted assumptions or common sense behind the distinction we make. It happens when one forgets the limits that have given rise to unequal division in the society: it is an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident. He also uses the term misrecognition, which is akin to Marxian ideas of falseconsciousness. However, misrecognition is more of a cultural than an ideological phenomenon, because it embodies a set of active social processes that anchor taken-for-granted assumptions into the realm of social life and they are culturally created. Crucially all forms of power need legitimacy and culture is the battleground where this conformity is disputed and eventually materialises amongst agents thereby creating social differences and unequal structures in the society.

In the light of Bourdieu’s social theory of power, the present study attempts to explore the gender and power structure which is reflected in the food and food culture of the Kabuisof Manipur. This thesis
consists of six chapters including concluding remarks. The first chapter deals with the methodology and the theoretical background of the study.

In the second chapter, it discusses about the people under study. The third chapter narrates Gian Ngai, the grand most and most significant festival of the people. This festival is taken as typical cultural performance in which the gender habitus is translated into action. Through festivals gender habitus is inscribed and reproduced in the society. Among the Kabuis, like other societies, festivals are organized to enforce their social themes and to inscribe the social habitus in the individual’s lives.

The status of Women in Kabui society fundamentally deals in the fourth chapter. In patriarchal societies like Kabui, women are often defined as a weaker section (need to be protected), capital bearing objects, whose value accrues to the primary groups to which they belong (for him, the family), rather than as capital accumulating subjects in social space. It is not because of their biology but of their historical, cultural, economic and political situations.

The chapter fifth analyzes power, culture and gender reflected in food and food culture among the Kabuis of Manipur. In normal everyday life, it seems that there is almost no gender disparity (food habit) and no differential power relations among themselves. However, a strict normative order or rules and power relations, when intrinsically dissected, are revealed which channelized in the logic of meat distribution among the elders or village functionaries. Starting from the killing of a pig till the eating of the same, this normative order or rules are strictly adhered to.

Finally, the chapter sixth concludes the entire study. Among the Kabuis, food is a marker of one’s status and identity in the society. The mythology also subscribes patriarchal ideology which is deeply embedded in the habitus of eating food in the society. Since women stood outside the age set system of the men, they have no say in local politics. Men not only take major decisions in the families but also in the local Pei. This androcentric social structure denies women both authority and possibility of their participation in the Pei. Rather it (re)produces the patriarchal ideology or patriarchalism that a man is what he eats and how he has to and a woman is how she serves her husband in the society.