

# **WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE NORTH-EAST: A CASE STUDY OF CHURACHANDPUR DISTRICT, MANIPUR (1990-2014)**

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**MAWI NGAIH LIAN**  
**Enrollment No. 127722960**



**DISCIPLINE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY  
MAIDAN GARHI - 110068**

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## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Regarding empowerment of women, A.P.J Abdul Kalam, former President of India, emphatically wrote: "Empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation." Empowerment of Women has been defined by different scholars in different ways; it is as if there are as many definitions as there are women scholars. But in the main it include the following components.

1. Enabling women to fight their own fears and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority.
2. Making them economically independent and self-reliant at both the individual and the household level.
3. Creating and strengthening women's groups and organisations at the societal level.
4. Establishing gender equality in terms of opportunities for employment and social mobility.
5. Valuing and promoting qualities of nurturing, caring and gentleness, values usually identified with women, in social interactions.
6. Ensure access, control over and benefit of resources like capital, land, property and technology to women.
7. Reducing women's burden of work especially within home.

At this point, we must hasten to add that empowerment of women is *both a process* and a *product*. It is a process in the sense that certain changes in social norms and institutions are fundamental to establish conditions fulfilling the components of empowerment mentioned above. It is a product as well in the sense that fulfilling of the conditions as a result of the changes enables women to perform social roles more meaningfully and effectively.

Manipuri women are playing a very prominent role in the economic development of the state from time immemorial. The activities and achievements of Manipuri women in economy have been impressive because they were able to accumulate not only wealth, but property and titles that reflected their prestige and economic achievements. Women are engaged in different jobs according to their status. In the household, industry or small enterprises women are in *good* position. In most of the industrial work, women are participating more than men. And most of their handloom designs and products fetch good price-tag in the international market.

Economic contribution by women has *direct* as well as *derived* implications. It results in increase in the security and welfare of the entire household. Such contribution can change the lives of women and their families, in raising the overall living standards of the household. Further, the contribution enables women to effect enhanced spending on themselves; this is taken as an improvement of the status within their household. It also reflects an empowered women, giving them a sense of self-worth and self-esteem through a perceived self-interest. *Sen* describes this as a change in women's self-perception, an aspect which is the slowest and hardest things to change, as it involves a process of internal challenges in dealing issues with their subordinate position in the household.

The historical strength of active participation of Manipuri women in society-wide issues still continues. It is as if the understanding of the important role that participation in outside the household economic activities can play in ameliorating living conditions has almost become generic to the women of Manipur, particularly so among the *women vendors*. This predominance of the economic factor can be *both contextual* as determined by the socio-economic situation of the society and *personal* as determined by the household level of wellbeing. A *socio-politically* more significant factor is the commitment of the women in the *market* to involve in organisations for collective cause as evident from the various historical movements for societal causes; this also could be a continuation of the inherent feature of the Manipuri women. This orientation for collective engagement for social responsibility gets reflected in the extra-ordinarily high level of participation in the electoral process. While *more* research is needed for understanding empowerment of the

Manipuri women *within* the household decision-making process, their *political-economic* empowerment at the *macro* level is invariably seen.

In Manipur, the *non-tribal* women in the valley such as the *Meitei* enjoyed the *right to inherit property*, under the *Hindu Succession Act*, but for the *tribal* women it is a far cry, mention of it among the presence of men is abhorrent. Regardless of the Supreme court's verdict on property rights. when women are fighting to assert their rights to which they are entitled; when various laws to sensitise the parliamentarians, planners, policy makers, administrators at the national, regional and state levels have been initiated, they rather ignored the need for a change of societal attitudes towards women; the idea of women inheriting property is anathema for the men folk and hence, although the world is progressing towards the goal of achieving equality, for the women of Kuki-Chin-Zo, until and unless equal access to property has been legally modified in the traditional customary law, equality would remain an elusive subject.

Similarly, when a *chief dies* issueless, the chieftainship goes to the next kin of family. Likewise if the Chief dies leaving behind only daughters, the chiefship will pass to the next kin of family. But if a son is born and is a minor, the wife as a regent can uphold the position of the chief until the son comes of age. Likewise, if the chief dies leaving behind daughters, then as in the former case, the next kin of family will assume the chiefship. This inherently reflects that within a culture values as well as the form those values should take. The powerful group establishes and maintains its dominance by rewarding those values that corresponds to its views and punishing those values that does not. The result is that minority groups and their cultural heritage are marginalised. The resulting discrimination consists of "discrimination and inequality... Built into our literature, art, music, language, morals, customs, beliefs and ideology.. to such a degree that they define a generally agreed-upon way of life".

After conversion to *Christianity* and introduction of *western education, modern employment*, more women have prompted to take interest in their role not *merely* as a wife, but more of that of an equal partner, more and more women have decided to seize

the role of a *Chief* in the name of the son as *regent*. They have become less daunted in grasping the mantle of leadership. Daughters education has also initiated their rights to govern the village. These women have overcome numerous hardship against the tides of opposition from their kinsmen and rivals in the maintenance of the daily administration of the village, and the day to day activities. It would not be an exaggeration to say that their achievements when compared to that of men are far more laudable, their sense of justice, diplomacy and fairness, determination and knowledge of customary laws unparalleled. For a society which has never permitted women in political affairs, administrative and sports, the feats of some of these women are a force to reckon with, they have achieved what a normal man cannot achieve; breaking the age old traditional myths that 'women are unfit to rule or lead'.

### **Emergence of Kuki-Chin-Zo women as Chief of the Village**

The twentieth century has witnessed more and more women taking up the position of a Chief as compared to the nineteenth century. This trend has rapidly been on the rise since the introduction of *education*. In the wake of such developments, taking the daunting task of responsibility as a chief is no small feat. Some notable lady chiefs worth mentioning in Manipur are: *Behiang Haosapi* of *Churachandpur* district, *Saivom Haosapi* of *Saivom* village in *Tengnoupal* district, *Chassad Haosapi* of *Chassad* village in *Ukhrul* district and *Wakan Haosapi* of *Wakan* village in *Sadar Hills*. Among these women this essay would like to include a short profile of lady chief of *Wakan*. *Mrs. Lamkhoneng Haokip* the eldest daughter of Singkhokhai and Damkholhing, of *Maokot Village, Ukhrul* district was married to *Mr. (L) Letsei Haokip, Chief of Wakan, Sadar Hills* studied till 9th standard until she got married in the year 1967. Her husband died at an early age leaving behind three minor sons and two young daughters. After her husband's death, she assumed the Chiefship of *Wakan* village. As she narrated, 'when I first went to *Wakan* village, to assume my position as the head of the village there were only a few houses, the condition of the villagers was pathetic with no jeepable road, I had to journey for 3 to 4 kms on foot to reach the village, the village was so undeveloped that often I despaired, but I took it upon myself to bring changes; I ran from office to office, knocking the doors of every development departments

to implement the necessary measures to transform my husband's village; some looked down upon me; some snubbed me while others jeered behind my back; but I was undeterred. Today, my effort has been rewarded, the number of houses has increased and the condition of the people has improved since my first day'. Added to this, her next kin of family always tried to undermine her position and decision. However she stood stoically and faced the ordeals, proving to her village that though she might be a woman, she was fit to rule as efficiently as men can. Slowly she gained the respect of her village people and established a government Lower Primary School, Anganwadi centre, constructed a jeepable road, community hall. Besides looking after her children's needs and sending them outside the state for schooling, she as a head of the Village performs the duty of a ruler, administrator etc. She is also one of the Women leaders of the *Kuki Baptist Convention* which has worked tirelessly for the widows. In the year 1984-86 she was nominated as the recording Secretary of Women Department of KBC, and later in 1987 she was appointed as the President of the Women Department of KBC for two terms till 2000, she was appointed as the member of the KBC, Finance and property Committee. Through her initiative, KBC Women Fellowship was held from 1988 to 1993. Through her insistence, the *first Widow Camp* was organised in 1991, at *Chassad* in *Ukhrul District*. Since then, annually Widow Camp has been organised to uplift and boost the morale of the widow. Although her son has now taken over the role of Chiefship, much of the work had been carried out through this remarkable woman. Wakan Village has developed today through the efforts of her. Though she has decided to retire, she is still very much present and is a de facto in making sure that the functioning and running of the village is carried out smoothly and fairly.

Women's participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the governance in any country. In *most* parties, the women members are by and large *thin* on the ground, if not invisible in the actual decision making bodies and rarely influence the more significant party politics. Most often, indeed they are relegated to the *women's wing* of the party, and made to concentrate on what are seen as specifically *women* issues such as dowry and rape cases, and occasionally, on more general concerns like *price rise* which are seen to affect especially housewives. Despite all this, only the foolhardy would suggest

that women are unimportant in Indian politics today. *Loni Lovenduski* opines that "as social patterns have changed, it has become easier to agree that women have rights as citizens that entitles them to participate in government, where those interests can be defended and advanced."

Kuki-Chin-Mizo women's participation in politics is quite a *paradox*. In fact when compared to other *Non-Kuki* tribes in Manipur such as the Nagas, they are *more politically* represented. *All* through the political history of the Kukis since 1960s, Kuki-Chin-Mizo women have *entered* the arena of politics and contested elections. but this does *not* imply that they are not underrepresented. The pattern of underrepresentation persisted despite women's growing achievements in education, work and other areas of public life and despite growing numbers of qualified women seeking political office. When a woman contests election, she has less chance of winning since a number of factors act as a hindrance. One main factor is the *general* tendency to view women as inefficient and incapable to handle the intricacies of politics. Due to such factors most women are less inclined to enter politics.

*Kazuki Iwanaga* argues that in the *absence* of *facilitators*, the progress of women's achievement in politics will not take place or be slow, uneven or incremental at best. Facilitators can remove or reduce barriers that hinder women's political participation. They can broadly be grouped into three major categories; institutional, contextual and individually oriented facilitators. *Mrs. Lhingjaneng Gangte* was the *first* to be *nominated* in the *Legislative Assembly* and *Ms. Kim Gangte* became the *first* women to be *elected* as *Member of Parliament* for Hill district, while *Mrs. Nemcha Kipgen* became the first woman to contest elections and won the seat as an MLA.

### **Mrs. Lhingjaneng Sitlhou-Gangte**

Born on 18th December, 1938, at Tamenglong Head Quarter of *Manipur West District*, is the daughter of Jamkithang Sitlhou and Tingjahat belonging to the *royal* family of Thongdut state of Burma, presently the granddaughter of Maharaja of Thongdut state of Burma. Coming from a highly reputed family; she was one of the *earliest* Kuki-Chin-Zomi girls to be

educated. She passed her matriculation examination from Tamphasana Girls High School in Imphal in 1955. In the year 1957 she completed her Intermediaries of Arts from Dhanamajuri College, and also Bachelors of Arts from the same college in 1965. She is married to T.S.Gangte, *Director of Education* in Manipur. Her interest and specialisation is in *Social Work*. She became the *first* woman to be appointed as a member of the *Manipur Legislative Assembly* for two terms from 1962-69. She was appointed as the President of the Tribal Advisory Committee by the Government of Manipur, Founder member of the Board of the Women's Bank(Imphal). She was also the Vice-president of All Manipur Tribal women's association. She is the *only tribal* woman to receive the *Padmashri* Award in 1975 by the government of India in the field of social welfare during the Prime Ministership of Indira Gandhi. She has also been selected as the woman of the year in 1997 by ABI,USA. Her accolades and achievements are far ranging and wide, yet for all her achievement she has remained a *silent* figure among the Kuki society today.

#### **Ms. Kim Gangte**

She is *not* only the first Kuki-Chin-Zo woman to have triumphed in the field of politics as a member of Rajya Sabha (MP), but a model who successfully represented the tribal women of Manipur. Her achievement in politics is a boost for women, as politics has always been regarded as a monopoly of men. Her passion to work for the upliftment and empowerment of women and Human Rights issues motivated her to resign her job as a *lecturer* in Manipur University. She first contested the elections in 1996 as an Independent candidate. However, the fact that she was a woman was one of the reasons that acted as a hurdle to her winning the election. Undeterred, she continued her social work on Human Rights issues and finally, her hard work and determination led her to win the election of 1998 as a *CPI* candidate. Although she contested again in the subsequent elections of 1999 and 2004, she was unable to come out victorious. Presently she is the President of the *Trinamool Congress Party* in Manipur.



### **Mrs. Nemcha Kipgen**

Her father died in the early years of her childhood and she and her two brothers were singlehandedly brought up by their widowed mother. Despite being a widow, her mother insisted that her *only* daughter should get access to *education* as par with her two brothers. This decision was objected to by her uncle whose belief was that a girl need not get any form of schooling. This was because of the *patriarchal* mentality among the *Kuki-Chin-Zo people* that it was rather a waste of money and time to spend money on girls' education. Instead it would be much more profitable if a girl is taught the skill of weaving, cooking and helping in the household chores as one day she would get married in another family, or tribe. Despite the criticism, the mother believed that education would uplift her daughter from living a life of hardship and poverty. To enable her children to access schooling, she worked hard by toiling in the fields, her farm land and during the offseason, sold rice pancakes in the bazaar. Due to her widowed mother's efforts, she completed her matriculate in Shillong and was immediately sent for a nursing training at Tripura Mission Nursing Institute in 1983 and have completed her GNMS (General Nursing of Medical Science) training. She got a job at JNIMS (Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Science, Porompat) but as she was not satisfied with the nature of work, she quit her job and for a year opened a pharmacy centre at Kangpokpi. Eventually she landed a position in AIIMS , which was a remarkable feat in those days. She got married in the year 1996. Though married, she juggled her family life and her career efficiently from Delhi and sired a daughter and recently, she adopted a son. From there on, her career spiral led upwards and she was appointed as a superintendent before she decided to venture into the field of politics. In the General Assembly Elections of 2012, she contested the election amidst much competition and furore against three male competitors from Trinamool and Congress I.

### **Rani Gaidinliu - The Freedom Fighter**

Rani Gaidinliu was an illustrious daughter of Manipur. She was a freedom fighter who revolted against British rule in India. She worked for the betterment of her Zeliangrong people. Rani Gaidinliu was born in a Rongmei village of Nungkao in the Tamenglong district

of Manipur on 26th January, 1915. Her father was LothonangPamei. her mother was Korotlienliu of Kammei lineage. Her parents named their daughter Gaidinliu which means *bearer of good acts*. She grew in a village hamlet and brought up among the Kabui (Rongmei) people. She took keen interest in Lengmi Folk songs. She herself sang those folk songs with her sweet voice. When she grew up, she composed many folk songs and religious hymns and patriotic songs which are sung on various occasions festivals, marriage, death ceremonies.

From her childhood, Gaidinliu was intelligent, courageous. She had mystical, occult and spiritual powers. Her parents sent her with some relatives to *Puilon* in *Kambiron* village to seek spiritual guidance from *Haipou Jadonang*, the religious and spiritual master. Gaidinliu became one of the trusted disciples of Jadonang who lovingly called her *Dina*. She was made a leader of the women wing at the age of 16 years to impart religious activities, discipline and traditional mannerisms to her people. Later on, she became a propagator of a New Religion *Heraka* which is the worship of *Tingkao Raguang*. This form of worship is devotional, sacrificial and involves singing of hymns. She became the preacher of *Heraka* and she launched many religious reforms.

She grew up in a patriarchal society. The unequal treatment between male and females practiced in the traditional Rongmei society was not acceptable to her. She possessed many qualities and capabilities. Since her childhood, she exhibited the outlook of gender equality. She had a strong sense of freedom. She opposed the payment of house tax, imposition of forced labour and compulsory porter subscription imposed on the *Nagas* by the *British* rulers. She opposed the oppressive rule of the British. She came into contact with a large number of people through her association with *Haipou Jadonang*. she visited villages of Tamenglong, parts of Nagas and North Cachar hills and trained the youth. They attacked the Britishers at *Hangrum* with *daosand spears*. In retaliation, the British burnt down several villages and there were many casualties on both sides.

Gaidinliu took leadership of the rebellion against the British and her people opposed the British rule. The rebellion became serious and the British authority considered her

movement as a grave danger to administration. She was arrested and put in jail for a period of 16 years (1932-1948). She spent her girlhood period in prison cells. One year in Gauhati, six years in Shillong, 3 years in Aizawl and four years at Tura Garo Hills jails. All her followers were arrested and imprisoned too.

Jawaharlal Nehru, President of Indian National Congress came to know about Jadonang and Gaidinliu's involvement against British rulers during his tour to Assam in 1937 and he heard about Jadonang's execution and Gaidinliu's life imprisonment. Nehru went to Shillong and met Gaidinliu in jail. He was emotionally moved and praised her courage to fight against British colonialism. Nehru described Gaidinliu the daughter of the Hills "Rani". He wrote in *Hindustan Times* (Dec 18, 1937) an article *Child of Hill now in Prison Cell*. In his own words, she dreamed freedom of her people and raised the banner of independence.

Rani Gaidinliu was released after India became free in 1947. Her role in freedom struggle against British had become known widely. She was awarded a *Tamraptra* in 1972 for her role in the freedom struggle. She was further awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1981 for her selfless service to the society. Many organisations also conferred a number of awards.

Government of India released one Rupee, 5 Rupees and 100 Rupees postage stamp of Rani Gaidinliu in honour of her. NDA Government instituted an award called *Shree Sakti Puruskar* in honour of Rani Gaidinliu along with other *four* eminent women in *Indian history* viz. Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar, Rani Lakshmibai, Mata Jijabai and Kamnang. The award carries Rupees 3 lakhs and a citation given every year on 8th March to veteran women social workers in recognition of their sacrifice for the society since 2000.

The Indian coast guard launched its fourth Shore Patrol Vessel (IPV) christened Rani Gaidinliu at Vishakhapatnam Shipyard on 6th November, 2010 in paying tribute to Rani Gaidinliu.

As a leader of Zeliangrong people, she tried to unify her people settling in Manipur, Assam, Nagaland and Cachar districts. She submitted memorandum to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi demanding a separate homeland. her dream could not be fulfilled. However Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi took up many welfare programmes for the betterment of her

people for which she suffered in jail losing her precious days of childhood. She had a strong belief in political freedom of people.

Even though she fought for the freedom of her people, India Government recognised her as a freedom fighter of India. The recognition was based on her fight against British Government which coincided with the Indian freedom struggle under Gandhiji's leadership. Though she fought for the freedom of her people, her struggle was accepted as good as that of Indian Freedom Fighters when viewed in terms of her contribution in the freedom struggle. *Romila Thapar*, writing in the *first* edition of *Indian Women*, makes the point that participation of women in the Independence movement led to greater participation of women in the post-independence era than their *Western* counterparts. She says, 'Participation in the politics of the national movement was an act of patriotism and political life became a respectable vocation for a woman'.

In her old age she spent her life in her native village *Nungkao* with her relatives and friends. She passed away on 17th February, 1994.

The nation remembers her as a freedom fighter who hails from *Manipur*. Today, we need many daughters of Manipur like Rani Gaidinliu to combat against atrocities and exploitation of women and many evils in the present day society.

### **Emergence of Woman as Ordained Minister**

Religion is a powerful agency in society and performs many important social functions. Religious institutions have until recently, been the most powerful agents and agencies of justice and injustice. They are arbiter of right and wrong, when they demonstrate prejudice of any kind, they give unstated acquiescence for everyone else to do it. Women who challenged the religious status quo had to cope, only with culture and tradition, 'but with the will of God'. Women of today who have a vision and vocation of ministry as women in religious leadership strongly wish a place at the table where the decisions are made for the future of *women* in the *Church*. One such woman who has strongly advocated equality of men and women in the religious institution's is *Mrs (Rev) Dr. Kim Vaiphei*, who has strongly voiced her opinion against prejudice and discrimination meted out to women in the

Church. She is the foremost women among the *Kuki-Chin-Zo* women to have been ordained. She was ordained on 13th February 1997 by the *Kuki Baptist Convention Assembly* at *United Sapermeina Baptist Convention*. Prior to her ordination, she was appointed as *Women Secretary* for seven to ten years respectively. She was then appointed as the first woman Pastor at KBC Centre Church, Imphal West on 1st Feb, 2001. Later, she was appointed as a Parish pastor supervising over 23 local churches in Saparmeina area having 9 local churches and One fellowship Church. She is one of the pioneering women to have declared openly in the Church congregation, decrying the low position and injustices that women have been forced to occupy. Prior to her being ordained, women were debarred from occupying the Pulpit and preach the gospel. A woman can only preach in the women's department which is a separate department created solely for women's religious growth and development.

### **Kuki Women as a Social Activist**

Across the social sciences as well as in history, women's contribution has been ignored, underestimated, or marginalised. Where women appear in history of the disciplines if at all, they typically are featured as followers rather than leaders, their work is associated with the practice rather than theory; their ideas are devalued simply because they are ideas propounded by women. *Rarely* are women portrayed as *original* thinkers. This section has chosen *two* women, *Ms. Hevah* and *Ms. Lalam* respectively, whose activities at a time when women's intellectual leadership was pervasive among Kuki-Chin-Zo society. *Ms. Hevah Haokip*, Founder member of *Kuki Women's Organisation* was actively involved in the inception of the *Kuki Women's Union*, in the wake of the *Naga-Kuki* ethnic conflict, 1992-1993. The need for a women's union body to help not merely in relief work, but to be an organisation that would do something substantial for the helpless widows, women and children and the community in times of crisis was felt by a group of women. However no concrete idea could take place. It was under the initiative of women such as Hevah Haokip of Motbung, a law student, *Mrs. Kimkhoneng*, sister of *Chief of Motbung* and *Mrs. Neikim* and many others that the Kuki Women's Union first materialised under a *banyan tree* at Motbung. According to Hevah Haokip, "since I was the only educated woman, I was

nominated as the Secretary, and hence the task of making a letter head, seals, typing memorandum fell on me. When we realised the *pathetic* attitude adopted by the *State* government, the *Kuki MLAs*, the *political leaders* of different associations in the wake of this ethnic-conflict, these few women unanimously decided to take matters in their own hands, they resolved that they should set out to the capital state of India to redress the sufferings of our people to the Prime Minister'. On 6th October, 1993, they reached Delhi and finally met the *Prime Minister Narasimha Rao*, on 15th October. They submitted a memorandum along with the pictures of the *Joupi massacre* (Joupi is the name of the village in which many Kukis were killed during the Kuki-Naga clash in the 1990s). It was here that *Mrs. Neikim* gave a heart rendering soulful cry pounding her chest and wailing against the injustices, negligence and indifferent attitude towards the Kukis of Manipur by the State and the centre, which made a tremendous impact. Hearing the heinous crime committed and the pathetic condition of the state government's failure to bring out a lasting solution, the PM underlined the memorandum submitted and immediately, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the 57th Brigade Mountain was dispatched to take stock of the matters at Motbung. So in December 1993, the Kuki Women's Union was *formally* established, with Neikim as executive member and formally nominated as the President from the period 1993-2008. The formation of KWU (Kuki Women's Union) was acknowledged by Kuki Innpi Manipur (KIM) in all areas of the Kukis from village to village. The head quarters of Kuki Women Union was later *shifted* from Motbung to *Churachandpur* district.

Another woman who has endeavoured to set up a non-governmental organisation (NGO) regarded as a *man's domain* among the Kuki-Chin-Zo society is *Ms. Helam Haokip*, eldest daughter of Holjam and Lamkhongai Haokip of Urangpat, Saikul Division of Manipur is the *founder* and *CEO* of IRMA (Integrated Rural Management Association) established in 2005. She completed her Master's of Science at Manipur University and after working part-time in different NGOs of Manipur, she decided to set up her own NGO. She commented, "Since coming from a poor family my parents did not have the resources or the means to pay rupees fifty-thousand in those days for the post of supervisor, I decided to strike out on my

own. As a young girl I had been actively involved in the society and had taken a keen interest in uplifting the status of women". In her effort to set up an NGO office, she was assisted by her colleagues who contributed book shelves, tables and chairs and a sum of rupees two thousand. Though her financial resources were limited, she was not disheartened. Being socially inclined towards improving the lot of the underprivileged people among the Kuki-Chin-Zo community, especially women, she linked up with the Nehru Yuva Kendra and initiated the formation of SHG in her village. The women were imparted capacity building and skill development. These women were trained in the art of producing soaps and dish washing liquid based on environmentally safe components. Her training and workshop was met with success and later the DRDA financially supported her. She ventured towards pocket mobilisation and formed another organisation called *Women in Governance* among likeminded NGOs in different districts of Manipur in the hill areas, to ensure political empowerment. Her main aim and objective are ensuring participation of women in decision making such as Village Assembly, to stop violence against women, impart awareness among both men and women towards gender equality. She has participated in quite a number of international and cultural exchanges in foreign countries like Philippines, Bangkok, Uganda, Geneva and New York.

### **Emerging trends of Entrepreneurship**

The number of Kuki-Chin-Zo women entering *small scale* entrepreneur work has increased significantly. They play a crucial role in the economic growth and development of local, regional and national economies. Yet despite their increasing numbers, they have received little attention from academics about their experiences. In terms of business ownership, there appears to be a great deal of consensus around the barriers that women face around the globe. Poor access to finance, home/ work conflict, role overload, lack of business experience, lack of relevant skills and exclusion from men's business networks are consistently cited as barriers to business ownership. Despite this, women continue to be successful perhaps because for many businesses ownership is viewed as a survival strategy that provides them with a personal and economic freedom they cannot gain through traditional forms of work.

*Ms. Zoumuan Thangjom* is another woman in the field of *fashion* who has paved a way for infusing new trends in clothing. She was one of the earliest and lone Kuki-Chin-Zo women whose love for fashion has today made a trend setting impact amongst the youth of Kuki-Chin-Zo society. She completed her Fashion designing Course from the International Women's Polytechnic, Delhi in 1998. She won numerous awards in the National Kut Competition for best designing. She not only designs, but trains young girls. She has a number of employees working in her shop. She is the first among the Kuki-Chin-Zo women to have formally undergone a designing course and thus, decided opening her own shop. She not only employs a number of girls, but also impart training in stitching and tailoring. Through her many unemployed girls had been able to acquire the skill of tailoring, thereby enabling them to earn their livelihood and support their families. Because of her success many parents who once looked down upon fashion designing with disdain regarded it as economically beneficial form of financial stability.

Though the society may not have acknowledged their contribution, these women were the harbingers of change. Their initial hardship in overcoming the numerous hurdles was no less worth mentioning. Consequently despite the fact that women constitute half of the electorates, Kuki-Chin-Women are grossly under presented in the state policy making. Presently, only one Scheduled Tribe woman representing as opposition party is the Legislative Assembly. Men refused to acknowledge them as much as possible suppressed them politically, socially and religiously. The obstacles to women's empowerment in the socio-economic, religious and political fields are varied and it may be structural, institutional, political and cultural factors. Cultural including traditional attitudes towards women leaders, has a significant influence as it works as a *control mechanism* for social, political and economic institutions. In a society where the public are of the opinion that men make better leaders than women, relatively low proportion of women are forthcoming to contest for elections, where women have not been inducted in the village councils as members, it remains a difficult task for women to break the age old traditional attitude that women are best suited for household work and if seeking government jobs, the teaching profession or white collar jobs are the best options.



The tribal women have always been active economically in contributing some income to their families. They are hard working, tough and enthusiastic about earning their own livelihood and being independent in their own right. One usually does *not* see a woman sitting idle at her home. There is a zeal to be economically independent and this can be seen through their lived experiences and daily struggles.

Even in small villages women form groups of their own and whatever little money they are able to earn in a day are put together as a part of *Sumlom* (Marup). The term *Sumlom* (Marup) is a Manipuri word which means a village socio-economic organization. It is a type of a *co-operative* saving and credit institution. It originated as one of the most important institutions for mutual help at the time of death, marriage, child birth and other personal crises. It stands as an institution for socio-economic security in every stage of one's life. However, people usually view the system broadly as social, whose main purpose is to strengthen social solidarity. But overtime, it has expanded its activity much more than the social sphere and covers most of the economic sphere of the individual.

The operational part of *Sumlom* (Marup) is that collection is done on a *weekly, bi-weekly or monthly* basis. Each member of the organisation contributes a fixed amount which they have agreed to pay. The sum collected each time is given to a member on a *rotation* basis. Usually a draw of lots takes place to ascertain the winner. Unlike the *lottery* system, the best part of the Marup is that each member gets the money. Once a member receives her money, she has to continue giving the fixed amount for the others too.

The *Meitei women vendors* of Manipur have different street vending associations which are led by well informed and empowered persons. These street vending associations are also part of the National Alliance of Street Vendors in India (NASVI). This has helped the Meitei vendors to be more aware and come together to fight for their causes.

The picture is unfortunately different for the *tribal women* vendors and *Muslim women* vendors. These women are hardly aware of what is happening and majority of them have no knowledge of street vending associations working for vendors in Manipur. The women vendors belonging to these communities are usually those who vend at the *peripheries* of

main markets, roadsides, pavements and make shifts markets constructed by the government. They face more discrimination for being tribal women and one cannot blame them for their ignorance about how to go about with application of licenses and other important documents because it is obvious that the street vending associations have *not* reached them till today.

It is *difficult* to precisely define the *nature* of *women movements* operating amongst the Kukis. In many villages falling within the *Sadar Hills* region of Manipur, there are *two* types of women leadership operational. One is the *religious* grouping within the church called the Women Society or Women Fellowship and the other is the more *secular* yet (socio-political) welfare related association called the Women Union. They are *not* consciously making an effort at liberating the status of women in society, but it is an important beginning to challenge the age-old status quo of power relationships in both rural and urban settings of the Kuki society. In a village *Tujang Vaichong*, in Sadar Hills region, the role of the women union includes maintaining peace and solving issues related to insurgency problems and negotiating with the army personnel. They are able to solve problems which imply danger if men are involved. Within the village, they deal with deviance that obstruct normalcy like disputes and disturbances caused by vices like drinking and gambling.

In order to understand Kuki women's participation in issues confronting the society, their involvement in the demand for a separate district in Manipur can be examined. The state of Manipur has nine districts, namely *Bishnupur, Chandel, Churachandpur, Imphal East, Imphal West, Senapati, Tamenglong, Thoubal and Ukhrul*, based on the hill district's *reorganisation* after *Independence*. The demand for the Sadar Hills as a separate district started back in 1974. *Tengnoupalas Chandel* district was the first to undergo *bifurcation*. This was followed by Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West and Thoubal in 1997. The *first* leaders to lead a separatist movement were the leaders of the organisation called the *Kuki National Assembly*.

Though they made a very late appearance, their cooperation to the effectiveness of the movement was gigantic as well as historic. The tactics adopted by them in the protest were *initially* non-violent protests, agitation, and negotiation with the government. Not satisfied with the response from the state and central government, the Kuki women adopted more violent ways of protest by blocking the roads, preventing vehicle movement during the protest and heightening their protest with burning trucks, tempos, light vehicles who defied their strike and bandh. when the women folk joined the movement, other avenues of domestic life in the Sadar hills region came to a standstill.

The *Sadar Hills Women Union* also negotiated with the Government on many issues. One of them was on the allegation of two majors of the Assam rifles who molested and abused some women protestors who were enforcing the highway blockade at *Gam-giphai* on August 31,2011. The Sadar Hills Women Union forwarded a petition to the Union *forwarded a petition to the Union* Defence Minister seeking an Army Court of Inquiry against the two Majors of the unit. In the petition forwarded to the Defence Minister, the women's body alleged that Major Bhavish of forty-three Assam Rifles and Major Ashish Dubey of Kangpokpi post of the same unit abused and molested the chastity of the womenfolk and rained blows on them. Infuriated over the rude behaviour of the Assam Rifles troops, the womenfolk retaliated and managed to overpower them. they were then asked to explain their action. The womenfolk of Sadar Hills viewed the incident seriously.

In showing solidarity with the Peoples' (SHDDC), demand and concern over the fate of the Kuki women, the Kukis' residing in Delhi submitted a letter to the Union Home Minister, Government of India for rendering equal justice to the people of Sadar Hills and befitting action against the Assam Rifles. A copy was also sent to National Commission for Women, National Commission for Human Rights, and Commission for Minority Affairs. (Kuki Student Organisation (Delhi) Official File record). The memorandum was submitted to the Union Home Minister, Government of India under the header, 'Press Statement against Atrocities committed by Assam Rifles personnel upon peaceful women agitators in Manipur, dated 12th September of the year 2011'.

Though the demand for a full-fledged Sadar Hills district is still *not* met today, it can be said that the Sadar Hills Women Union played a crucial role in the whole process

The Burmese military regime in Myanmar dealt with the democratic uprising of 8th August, 1988 in a brutal massacre of protesters and civilians. The regime's responses to these demonstrations became increasingly violent, escalating from curfews and closing of universities, to opening fire on protestors and rape. This brutality of the junta upon civilians forced many of them to take refuge in neighbouring countries such as Thailand, India and Bangladesh where they continue to carry out activities aimed at ending military rule and restoring democracy in the country. One of the peoples *severely* affected by military rule are the *Kukis*, who inhabit the Indo- Burma border area, along the *Upper Chindwin*, in *Sagaing* division. Kuki civilians have, thus, suffered intolerable harassment under the military junta. Their men have been forcibly conscripted, and their women sexually abused by the military. These abuses have forced many Kukis to take refuge in India, where they have gained active support for the cause of democracy. realizing the need for an organised efforts towards these goals, and to promote awareness and activism among *Kuki women*, a meeting of Kuki women leaders was held first at Moreh, and later at Imphal to establish a Forum. The Kuki Women's Human Rights Organisation (KWHROs) was formed on the 1st of January, 2000.

The KWHROs has the following aims:

- 1) To bring to the world's attention the rampant violation of the basic human rights of the Kukis of Myanmar by the Military junta and to seek an end to it
- 2) To work towards the dissolution of the military regime and the restoration of democracy in Myanmar
- 3) To enhance the participation of women in all areas of socio-political activity and to promote human rights awareness among the masses. The main head quarter is at *Moreh* district in *Manipur* state of India. KWHRO have their own organisational structure in which the central committee has the highest authority and power and the president is the head of the entire organisation. A general conference and election is held every *two* years.

Ever since its inception, the organisation has been involved both in empowering and engaging women to come to the forefront and join the men as equal partners in handling the issues confronting the Kuki society. During 2001-2002, KWHRO organised a *basic and advanced vocational tailoring training course at Moreh* town on the Indian side of the Indo-Burma border. KWHRO has taken part in various political activities with other pre-democratic organisations to restore human rights and democracy in Myanmar, especially in Manipur and New Delhi. they have organised the Kukis in Myanmar to unite and fight the military government to establish democracy in Myanmar.

On 8th December, 2011, they organised a peace protest rally at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi over the issue of the *Tamanthi* dam. The Tamanthi dam is a hydroelectric project on the Chindwin River in Myanmar's Sagaing division. It is a hydroelectric project undertaken by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation in India. They wanted the project to be stopped. In its press release, the Moreh based Kuki Women Human Rights Organisation (KWHRO) stated that the said Tamanthi dam had displaced over 2400 villagers and will further displace 45,000 more people in future if the construction continues. The displaced Kuki communities were forcefully bulldozed by the Burmese Army. The KWHRO said "our demand is for the villagers to be repatriated back to their original villages". They further informed that the villagers who were relocated in the new site were not given any basic amenities and were facing hardships. The women spokespersons asserted that such mega hydro projects benefit will definitely go elsewhere and not to poor villagers.

KWHRO has been working to promote social, educational and health rights of women, and gender equality among Kuki society and other communities both inside and outside Myanmar. They have often organised the Kukis in Myanmar to unite and fight the military government to establish democracy in Myanmar. The organisation has been working for not only women, but also for the entire Kuki community to get equal rights and status within a future federal democracy in Myanmar.

The movement looks to the Myanmar leader *Aung San Sukyi* as a role model for the Kuki Women. The Kuki Women's Human Rights Organisations (KWHRO) believes that the role of

Kuki women should be improved within Kuki society as stated under: "History and tradition might have denied us (women) any positive role in society and women might have been confined within the four walls of the kitchen, but with the changing times and the progress of civilisation, the time has come where women have to play an important role in society and politics that is equal to that played by men. In fact, there are areas where women even excel men. Therefore, KWHRO appeals to all Kuki women to shake off their shackles and emerge out of the kitchen to play an active and positive role in shaping the future of the Kuki nation. It is time we realise that unless we go forth and play the roles expected of us during the times we are in, the struggle of the Kuki nation will be that much weaker".

*Both the Kuki Women Organisations, Sadar Hills Women Union and Kuki Human Rights Organisations* were started in a condition of unrest and dissatisfaction with the current social systems as also unequal distribution of power in society. The people had no other means to get the attention of the government for justice other than to resort to protest. It started a collective anguish against a system that treated them unjustly. Different villages in Sadar Hills Region as also all Kuki women from different parts of Manipur and even outside joined in solidarity with the SadarHills Women Union during the demand for a separate Sadar Hills District for the Kukis in Manipur. The agitation of the women roused the sentiment and interest of people. They resort to tactics like fast unto death, negotiations and violent protest when necessary. According to *M.S.A.Rao*, the social movements are based on challenge, protest, confrontation, aggression and revolt as opposed to acquiescence, request, obedience and loyalty. It perpetuates the established order and changes the traditional balance of power.

The movement interestingly had more *active* participation from *village* women with *urban educated* women taking the *leadership* though in *minority*. The various *Women Society* groups of the Church and *Women Union* groups in many villages became the meeting points where discussions were held on what could be done for the success of the movement. These meetings enabled the development of *Esprit de Corps* or the organisation of feeling on behalf of the movement. This helped to develop a condition of rapport, feelings of intimacy and closeness and the sense of sharing a common experience.

The esprit de corps developed in a *social movement* in *three* ways: the development of an in-group and out-group relation, the formation of an informal fellowship association and the participation in formal ceremonial behaviour.

*Culture* also plays a *central* role in explaining protest movements and their development. The beliefs, values, mentalities, social representations, habitus, specific norms of behaviour, attitudes and ideologies that influenced social movements are often determined by the culture of the society. Cultural factors are *central* elements in shaping trajectories of organisational forms, recruitment, protest strategies and ideologies of social movements. The Sadar Hills Women Union and Kuki Women Human Rights Organisations were movements that were both *bounded* and *directed* by the *culture* of society. They are *both* movements against an *external* force, the *Indian government* in the case of the *former* and the *Burmese militant group* in case of the latter. The Sadar Hills Women Union started with a peaceful means of agitation, but became *violent* due to the oppressive attitude of some state representatives. The Kuki Women Rights Organisation is more deep seated in its attempt. It not only tries to protect the interest of the Kuki community, but also aims at an overall empowerment of the Kuki women.

The advent of *Christianity* and *modernity* has enabled Kuki women to evolve into a stronger personality. In the *present* decade, there is a *paradigm* shift from women's *subordination* to tremendous *involvement* in socio-political welfare of the Kuki society. The Bijang Kuki women's welfare association was formed on 3rd June 2013 to check the use and selling of *drugs* in the *Bijang* area of *Churachandpur* district of Manipur. This added another feather to the multifaceted role of women in the Kuki society. Since, the inception of the association, it has dismantled *eighteen houses* of drugs peddlers. The opening of a branch for Kuki Women Human Rights Organisation (KWHRO) in Churachandpur on 15th August 2013 and the seminars organised on issues like Human Rights and current political Issues on 6th September 2013 at Churachandpur district envisaged new initiatives by Kuki women to create awareness and empowerment to fight for themselves and for the cause of society.

Girls and women are entering schools and colleges in ever-larger numbers almost all over the world, although access to education remains a challenge in many countries. There are hopeful signs of change according to the *World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education* (UNESCO, 2012). The National Education Policy, 1986, highlighted the role of education in promoting equality for women in the educational system as well as in empowering them. It recognised the fact that women needed special supports and programmes in order to bridge the gap between the participation and representation of women and men in the higher educational system. This programme is a very critical initiative in empowering women to claim due space for themselves and also move to the top.

Woman is the central point of the family, whether nuclear or joint. She takes care of her husband, children and in-laws. A family or society can flourish when each woman takes great care for the upliftment of the family and society. Socio-economic conditions can be shaped by women. Women's education helps socio-economic empowerment also. Socio-economic empowerment gives special status to them which empowers them physically, mentally, financially.

In a country like India, there is diversity and plurality in almost all spheres like caste, class, language, dialects, religion, gender-biasness, superstition and even climate. Hence, the country is justified to call itself a *Unity in Diversity*. Yet, women are not given equal status along with the men though the Constitution of India provides for 'equality before law' (Article 14) and 'Prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15). The women of India attained voting rights and right to contest in election even before independence. Rural women contributed for socio-economic development with cottage industries, hand woven cloths, fisheries, poultry, vegetable gardening, flower business etc. In NorthEast India, especially in *Meghalaya*, there is a matriarchal society. Women are the owners of properties. In *Meghalaya* and *Manipur*, market systems are dominated by women. In Assam also, among the tribes like Missing, most of the works are done by the women. Nowadays, women co-share all the activities along with men, some of which were traditionally thought to be only for men. Doctors,



engineers, scientists, astronauts, teachers, entrepreneurs, actors, directors, models, artists, musicians are some professions with women also accepted at par with men.

The presence of *scheduled tribe* population has a *variable* effect on *female literacy*. The districts with tribal population, that is largely *Christian*, have very high literacy levels, as in the case of most Northeastern states. The present status of women in the church includes leadership roles, theological education and women's organisations. *Exclusion from decision-making body, forfeiting from leadership roles and gender discriminators* are the present trend for which women called forth for justice and equality. The Baptists of Manipur have had two pioneer women leaders who made significant impact towards the overall development of women and enhanced the status of women. they were the architects of women's foundation and we remember them with profound gratitude, respect and affection. They are *Ms. Ngahkhokim Kuki* and *Miss VS. Ningmasai Tangkhul*. Ms. Ngahkhokim became the national emancipator of women's education and the cornerstone of women's growth and development among the *tribal* women in Manipur. She also established the *first Orphanage Home* at *Kanglatongbi IB* at *Motbung Sadar Hills*, which is also the *first 'Orphanage'* in the state of Manipur. *Ms. LK Miriam*, another *Tangkhul* lady who worked wholeheartedly until retirement at the *MBCWD Girls' Boarding* as Matron, later *assisted* both Ms. Ngahkhokim and Ms. VS Ningmasai. She was the builder of the present day Women Girls' Boarding attached in MBC Campus.

Women's Societies are the *backbone* not only for *Local Churches* but also for Associations and Conventions. The women societies displayed their gifts and talents to the maximum and became the most organised and the fastest growing among all departments such as Men and Youth groups. They sent out missionaries and evangelists through self-willed contributions and donations and create great impact on mission adventures. They support the church through faithful prayers, various contributions and untiring co-operations towards various church programs. They play a vital role in the setting up of a local church through attendance. Without them all the churches would be either thinly attended or no more in existence at all or that it will be considered a sleeping church. Thus they brought in life and vitality to the very existence of the church.

The women's movement in the history of Manipur known as '*Nupi-Lan*' or women's agitation broke out on 12th December 1939. However, the nature and character of the movement were entirely *different* from the other movements in other areas. The basic objective of most of the women's movements was for the upliftment of their status in society. They felt they were badly treated by society under the existing social laws. Therefore, they demanded for political rights and for the eradication of social evils. The nature of the movement in Manipur emphasized the upliftment of the economic condition of the state and thus, the leaders of the movement challenged the colonial economic policy of the British. Therefore, this movement had the implication of certain *political* character which did *not* exist in other women's movements.

It was a movement launched by the women of Manipur who always played a vital role in the economic life of the state. It would be better understood, if we have a clear picture about the involvement and role of women in the economic and social life of Manipur. The women of Manipur take a major part in the economic life of the state in which they enjoy *maximum* independence. This high status accorded to the womenfolk is regarded as one of the 'greatest prides of Manipur'. But they were seldom given political and administrative responsibilities. The internal and external trade of the state was managed by them. This centre of activities was at Sana Keithel, a major *market* place, located in the heart of the Imphal town. The whole market was managed by them only. Besides this, the market place always served an important venue for social and political interaction.

The women's agitation of Manipur was of a *peculiar* character. Unlike other women movements which broke out in India and other countries of the world, it *never* asked for the upliftment of their status in society. Due to this peculiar character, the women's movement of Manipur *cannot* be treated as identical with other women movements of Manipur. But if we make further analysis, particularly in the context of some elements of the nature of the movement, the activities of the women who actively participated in the *French* revolution. the women participants in the French revolution, particularly to the *Versailles* episodes were from the *markets* and most of them came from the lower middle class *people*. Their involvement in the political movement was directly related to their

economic position which they received from the hands of the feudal lords. Like them, the participants in the women's agitation of Manipur constituted by the market's women. As we know that the women play a great role in economic activities of Manipur. So, any type of economic activities that occurred were directly related to the women, particularly market women. The elements of the market women of Manipur were also composed mainly by the *peasant* and *working class* people. Due to this, they were the direct sufferers from any type of economic hardship and ultimately, the *first* reaction against the authorities always came from them. Therefore, like other women's movements, the women's movement of 1939 was *not* for the upliftment of their condition and so their character was totally *different* from other movements.

The outbreak of the political movement like the demand for the establishment of a responsible government in the state was a common feature of every colonial and feudal state. So, the political movement in Manipur has got no peculiar character different from other movements in the colonial countries of the world. It is the same in the case of the armed revolutionary movements also. Therefore, with regard to the character of the political movement and armed revolutionary movement in Manipur, they take no peculiar features from other political revolutionary movements.

The women's movement in Manipur was also launched under the system of *collective leadership*. But the leadership of this movement occurred according to the *prevailing* situations. The situation means the *set* of *values* and *attitudes* with which the individual or the group has to deal in a process of activity and with regard to which this activity is planned and its result appreciated. The women's agitation in Manipur was a *spontaneous* mass movement launched by the womenfolk against the economic policy of the British. So the question of *leadership* always depended on the structure of *interpersonal relationship* within the group, the *characteristics* of the group and the characteristics of the *large culture* in which the group existed. In the case of this movement also, the leadership was the same to the women who received the first direct suffering from the colonial economic policy of the British. Infact the nature of the leadership of the women's movement in Manipur had the characteristic of the group rather than of individuals or individual act.

Thus, the women's movement in Manipur was carried on under the collective leadership system and they acted as a group function.

A major step needed to facilitate women's participation, *both in formal and informal* political processes is provision of *support services*. In all kinds of public participation as well as in seeking opportunities for self-development, the primary responsibilities of women for looking after home and children always come in the way. Unless arrangements are made for child care and other domestic responsibilities, sustained participation of women in the public sphere is *not possible without* the integration of *men* in the *private sphere*. This not only means that men share the familial responsibilities, but a new value needs to be given to this joint sharing both in public and private spheres which would ultimately lead to a better quality of life.

In a democracy, political parties have a very significant role to play. The parties should take such measures which would facilitate participation of women. All political parties must be urged to ensure that at least 30 per cent of the candidates fielded for election are women till such time as women can stake their claim to nomination as equals. It should be examined if the Election Commission can be empowered to enforce this.

Women members of the political groups should be vigilant about their rights and contributions. whenever sexist attitudes are exhibited or sex discrimination is practiced, women members should build up solidarity and oppose such practices. They should also press for implementing whatever has been promised to women; whether the question is of allocation of seats or of providing a creche or taking a stand in Parliament.

In generating a *participatory* political system, the role of *voluntary* organisations or *non-governmental* organisations is very crucial. There is evidence that when NGOs are active and play the role of pressure groups, the representatives also become alert. Through raising the awareness of the community, NGOs can help in fielding candidates who are responsible to the people. They can focus the attention of the people on crucial issues facing women and elect members who understand these issues and are working towards it. Organisations and grassroots women's groups have, in fact, effectively drawn the attention

of the government to atrocities perpetrated on women, to custodial rape, to harassments for dowry, to plight of the women in the unorganised sector, and so on. NGOs can also provide training for future women leaders. They can organise legal literacy programmes and study circles for political education as well as develop participatory methods of working, and thus serve as a practical training centre for effective political participation by women. They should not adopt a beneficiary or 'welfare' approach while working with their target groups. Even if a few NGOs play their role adequately and with courage, a new climate of commitment and responsibility could be generated.

NGOs should work as *pressure groups* or *political action groups* to press for the fulfillment of promises. They should also provide support to the elected women representatives, when they are presenting women's cases in the deliberative bodies. In short, there should be a very *strong* link between women representatives and organisations working with the community.

*Media* should play a productive role in enhancing women's participation. It should give wider coverage to various activities and measures taken by women, and should highlight the problems of women. In order to project women's achievements, perhaps *mainstream media* may *not* be adequate and, therefore, it is necessary to develop an *alternate media system* that could portray women's struggles and experiences, help generate values which encourage gender equality and justice, and build up a positive image of women participating in public life.

It is generally recognised today that the *education* of girls and women is one of the wisest and most profitable *investments* in *social* and *economic* terms. The benefits are numerous. The first person to benefit from education is the woman or girl herself, as an individual and as a member of society. But the positive effects are also felt by her family (husband, children, and parents), the community, society and the whole country. Education leads to greater self-esteem and self-confidence which opens up new horizons for girls, enabling them to discover their own potential, to develop themselves fully and increase their resistance to gender discrimination. Education helps girls and women to have a positive

impact on their families, better childcare, better nutrition, decrease in child mortality, better communication with the children and other family members. An educated woman is better equipped to increase family income and resolve family problems satisfactorily. Education heightens women's awareness of the important role they can play in the community and society to find solutions to problems that delay development and social stability. With the awareness of her roles as a citizen, an educated woman can play a more dynamic role in addressing the economic challenges faced by her country, in the areas of agricultural production, food self-sufficiency, the fight against environmental degradation, the use and conservation of water and energy. Education alone is obviously not enough to solve the world's problems, but it remains an *essential* factor in any development activity. An educated girl understands her duties well. She is support to her husband in times of trouble.

Female education is highly necessary for society, because mother is the first teacher of future citizens of the country. If the mothers are ignorant, they cannot take proper care of the children. They cannot infuse good qualities in them. Hence, the very foundation of our people will remain weak. If the females will be ignorant, the society will lose the services of a powerful section. So, female education is quite necessary for girls. Women are in no way inferior to men. In western countries and in India also, the women are writing books, driving cars and aircrafts, running banks and big business firms and doing research in the laboratory. There are women scientists, women officers and women writers.. Education for women is the best way to improve the health, nutrition and economic status of a household that constitutes a micro unit of a nation's economy. In India women receive far *less* education than that of men. As per the Census Report 2011, the literacy rate of women is 65.46 per cent and that of men is 82.14 per cent. There has been a sincere efforts both by the government of India and voluntary organisations to improve and attained education for the women. Changes in the policies and infrastructural supports for primary, secondary and higher education reflects the initiatives of the Government of India towards women's education. There have been a number of social and economic factors determining women's education. Most of the factors are highly *interdependent* in nature and hence, it is difficult

to single out the effects of individual factors on women's education. *Three* variables such as *rural poverty*, *urbanisation* and *drop-out* rate are chosen as explanatory variables and female literacy rates as dependent variable.

In a developing country like India, the participation of women in rural areas is seen in activities like agriculture, handicraft and household domestic services. It is seen that a large number of women *are* now entering into *new* occupations and profession, mainly in *urban* and *semi-urban* areas. This is mainly due to increased literacy level, exposure to mass media, urbanisation and social reforms. In rural areas, *educated* women preferred to participate in various economic activities, particularly in the field of *business establishment*. The introduction of different extension services in rural areas has provided the necessary initiative to join in productive activities. In this regard, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Self Help Groups (SHGs), newspapers & magazines, government, radio and TV also play an important role in creating awareness among women.

In *Assam* women are consulted in the decision making of important family matters such as negotiating a marriage, purchases and sale of land, improvement and construction of a house, matters related to children's education and health care etc. Most of the rural women in Assam are engaged in home based crafts mainly weaving, knitting, embroidery, preparing jam-jelly and pickle making etc.

In recent years due to various reasons including the efforts made by the government, more and more women are coming forward and taking part in economic activities. Majority of women entrepreneurs appear to be engaged in tailoring, embroidery, handlooms, handicrafts works, flower nursery, pickle & fruit processing, beauty parlour, dairy, duckery, weaving etc. Numerous micros, small and medium enterprises are plying a vital role in providing self employment to rural women.

The **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)** was launched in June 2011 by the Ministry of Rural Development. NRLM has been designed on the basis of lessons learnt from the past programs of the ministry (such as IRDP and SGSY) and large-scale rural livelihoods programs undertaken in different states. NRLM has a mandate of reaching out to all poor

households in the country and link them to sustainable livelihoods opportunities and nurture them till they come out of poverty.

The **Manipur State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM)** is a registered society promoted by the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Manipur for implementation of Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-NRLM (DAY-NRLM), a flagship program of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

### **Social Mobilization**

The first and foremost activities in any block are mobilizing the poor women by the block staff with the help of PRI members.

Social Mobilization (SM) team called Community Facilitators consisting of community members is formed to mobilize the community for 100 percent saturation of each village. This team includes members of SHGs, VLFs. They ensure that there is representation from vulnerable section such as PwD, elderly, widows etc in course of time.

Further, they also form a team to carry out the PIP process in the village/locality. The PIP team members are drawn from the Social Mobilization team.

The Social Mobilization teams are trained on the conceptual framework of the project at regular intervals, as per the needs of the project at the village level.

### **Awareness and Concept Seeding**

Awareness and concept seeding programs are organized at the village level. House to house awareness and concept seedings were also conducted by the block team and the community facilitators. During awareness and concept seeding program, the following mandatory norms called *Panchsutra* are taught.

- i. Regular Meeting (weekly)
- ii. Regular Saving (weekly)
- iii. Regular Loaning



iv. Regular Loan Repayment

v. Regular & Proper Records of books

### **SHG Formation**

1. Self Help Groups are formed with the voluntary homogenous/affinity groups in a particular area targeting all vulnerable households from amongst the community consisting of 10-15 members.

2. Right after formation of the group, Group seals are ordered and opening of saving bank account followed.

3. Intensive follow up and nurturing was done by the block staff. They attend every meeting of the SHG during the period concerned.

### **BoA Training**

After 3-4 meetings of the SHGs, Books of Account training was given to the bookkeepers of each SHG for 3 days.

Mandatory Books of Account under MSRLM includes:

i) Meeting Minutes

ii) Cashbook

iii) Member Saving Passbook

iv). Loan ledger

### **Membership Training**

1. After completing 12 weekly meetings, each SHG members are given Membership Training for 2 days on various topics with practical sessions.

## **Revolving Fund**

1. After completion of 12 meetings or 3 months, SHGs are graded as per NABARD grading format.
2. One day SHG level training were given to SHG on management of Revolving Fund.
3. If SHG secure A or B grade, a Revolving Fund of Rs 15000 are given to them through a systematic disbursement process through the bank.
  - i. After completion of 5 or 6 months, each SHG were oriented on the concept of Primary Level Federation or Village Level Federation (VLF).
  - ii. Village level SHG federations were formed consisting of 10-30 SHGs.

## **Cash Credit Linkage**

Only after the SHGs graduated from Panchsutra and Fund Management, the best SHGs are selected for initial bank linkage. All SHGs are supposed to use one common format for applying loan to the bank as approved by IBA as well as SLBC, Manipur. Therefore, bankers need not worry about nonrepayment of loan by the SHG.

Every SHG will be provided Establishment Cost of Rs 2500 after its formation and after opening of bank account. A sum of Rs 15000 as Revolving Fund (RF) is being provided to each SHG by the 3<sup>rd</sup> month from their formation. Only if they secure A or B grade. A sum of Rs 1,10,000 is provided to each SHG through their Village Level Federation as Community Investment Fund (CIF) after 2nd grading only if they secure A and B grade. Rs 60,000 is provided to each VLF as Establishment Cost. After attaining 1 year, each SHG is link to Bank for Credit linkage.

Each SHG mandatorily followed Panchasutra (5 golden rule)

Regular Meeting

Regular Saving

Regular internal lending

## Regular Repayment

### Regular and Proper Documentation

Economic development of a country can be in the proper way if the *women perspectives* will be included in designing and implementing macro-economic and social policies by institutionalizing their participation in such processes. Their contribution to the society as *formal* and *informal* sectors should be recognised and appropriate policies relating to employment and to her working conditions should be drawn. For this recognition of woman as an essential human resource, there must be a strong commitment to equip a woman with necessary range of managerial skills. moreover strict enforcement and measures to prevent sexual harassment at the place of work and special designed legal literacy programmes and right to information should be widespread. Different forms of mass media to communicate social messages relating to provide physical facilities and infrastructure. Above all, there should be a review of curriculum and educational materials to include gender education and human rights issues. even when government is providing free food, books and even uniforms, still the parents are not sending their wards to school in a hope of earning some bucks for the family because our education does not guarantee employment.

Even after decades of independence, India is still facing acute problems entangling the process of development. India's contribution to the global women's debate has been rich, diverse and unique in many ways. But even after decades of independence India, is still facing acute problems entangling women in the process of development. The fact lies in human development and the fact also remains that women participation is exceeding *low* in the entire dynamics of the development process. It was thought that if women enter in the field of decision making with a high career then a country like India can developed for more than as it is today. For individuals and nations aspiration for a faster economic progress with social justice, it is the key to creating the environment by applying and spreading knowledge. Education as a catalyst can be used for the development of individual as well for the nation. The social, economical, political and cultural development

of a country depends on women's empowerment and their active participation. Empowerment of women is a *multi dimensional* process. It involves equality, personal rights and so on. Gender equality is an important issue of human rights and social justice not only in India, but almost throughout the world.

The position and status of Manipuri women when compared with that of women of other states in India is comparatively high. S.K. Bhuyan, 'Manipuri women have been enjoying a freedom which their sisters in India failed to attain. They were not confined to the four walls of their domestic life, they go out freely for purposes of petty trades mainly in the sale of products of their own hands. They weave fine durable textures where colours are assembled in the most attractive manner. At the same time Manipuri women have shown their gallantry velour in desperate and critical situations.' Mrs. Grimwood also expressed her view that 'The Manipuris do not shut up their women as is the custom in most part of India and they are much more enlightened and intelligent in consequence.'

From the study we can summaries that there are some changes in the socio-economic status of the tribal women. The younger generations are getting better opportunity for education and are receptive to modern technology like mobile phones. The tribal women are slowly getting some *shares* of the *immovable* property of the parents depending on the condition of the parents though it will take some years to bring changes in the customary law. Reforms in Customary law to make it more women friendly and inclusion of women at grass root decision-making bodies and in a non-secular setup institution like the *church* would *pace* up the empowerment process. A benevolent and holistic approach towards tribal women empowerment in terms of distributive and recognitive justice is the need of the hour towards addressing the issue of tribal women empowerment. To bring a change in the status of tribal women in Manipur needs time and it is a gradual process.