

The Role of Women in Manipur: Historical, Socio-Economic Movements

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Abstract: This paper examines the multifaceted role of women in Manipur, highlighting their historical contributions and involvement in socio-economic movements. Throughout history, Manipuri women have played pivotal roles in various spheres, from traditional governance and agriculture to contemporary activism and socio-political advocacy. The study explores key historical events, such as the women's resistance during the anti-colonial struggles and the impact of socio-economic policies on women's empowerment in modern Manipur. Additionally, it analyzes the emergence of women's organizations and movements that have championed rights, gender equality, and social justice, reflecting the resilience and agency of women in a predominantly patriarchal society. By situating these movements within the broader context of regional identity and cultural heritage, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how women in Manipur have navigated challenges and contributed to the socio-economic landscape, ultimately shaping their communities and asserting their identities in a changing political environment.

Key words: Manipuri, Women, Socio-economic movement, Meitei, Tradition, Sanamahi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women play a significant role in human society in its different stages of development. This is also true in the case of Manipur. The role of women, especially Meitei women, is a subject of serious study and deserves research. Women in Manipur have been participating in almost all aspects of life since time immemorial. During the period of the Manipuri rulers, the system of governance and economic activities had been affected and controlled by women. The advent of modern and post-modern socio-economic movements in the 19th century onwards began to change the status and role of women.

Manipur, located in the easternmost corner of India, is one of the unique tribal centers of religion and culture. There are hills inhabited by tribes where half of the population are women, and the remaining valley dwellers belong to the Meiteis. In every stage of life, women have their own significance, and their

participation could be seen in history as given in the chronicles of Manipur. The pattern of life and culture in Manipur is neither matriarchal nor patriarchal, but it is a mixed society characterized by male superiority and relevance. The common people had the opportunity to discuss various issues in the political, social, and economic sectors of the country. The subjects discussed and ratified included, among others, the right of women to participate in any gathering, which shows a significant step forward for elite women of the time, whereas in other countries, in some places in India, women are not even given that privilege.

The women of Manipur, in general, are in a solid position as they have full freedom to select their life partners, the number of children to be produced and controlled, and the freedom to move outside the country. In modern Manipur, the participation of women in every aspect of life is well checked and acknowledged. Women's involvement in politics, economics, health care, education, and various activities is increasing, as seen from the current scenario. In the sphere of health, it is estimated that the number of women depending on hospital services is 51.80% as against men at 48.2%. Apart from the above data, women in Manipur are also involved in almost all spheres of development processes. The women are also engaged in crop production, social work, and many other activities. However, we are yet to understand why the percentage of the working force is lower, and the trend of income and expenditure of women in Manipur ranges from minimum to maximum. In this exploration, we shall find a number of issues that have a direct impact on the welfare of women, and the present status of women can be understood through these.

The status of women in Manipur at its different stages of development needs to be properly investigated, and therefore, this highlights the need for an in-depth outlook on the participation of women at different periods.

1.1. Background of Manipur

The state of Manipur is an ancient and beautiful tiny landlocked hilly territory, imparting abrupt ridges and deep gorges on the northeastern fringe of the Indian Union. It is bounded by Nagaland to the north, Mizoram to the south, upper Myanmar to its east, and Cachar district of Assam and part of the Indian Union to its west. It is known as the gateway to India. Although comprising numerous ethnic groups, it is culturally homogeneous, owning a rich and composite heritage. Manipur has a pure agrarian economy. The literacy rate in the state, after having been entered into the Indian Union, practically from 1941 to 1951, advanced from 28.7% to 60.3% from 1961 to 2001. There has been substantial growth in the field of education.

Hinduism embraces rituals, social norms, values, and other indigenous religious beliefs and practices as well. The belief system of the Meiteis is Sanamahi, while the Nagas follow various beliefs including Christianity and Islam. Traditional religious beliefs and practices have played a dominant role in the formation of policies and structures, including social arrangements guiding the affairs of women. Under these premises and practices, Manipuri women have spent several hundred years. The traditional belief system and values constructed the women according to the expectations of their husbands. These practiced values promoted a system that allowed men to treat women as objects of exchange to establish their own alliances. Historically, challenges and concerns of women in Manipuri society have been around and refocused to demand gender justice, holistic development, eco-political empowerment, and religious values and practices that conceive harmony with the environment and nature-centered traditions in Manipur. This worldview links all in a web, a beauty of nature, humanity, and God. The caring and custodianship of natural and divine beauty are feminine in character, performance, and character building in children. Combat and competition with nature to transform and shape it for human ends are provided by men. The women frame the characters and guide the children to develop them based on social and religious values. Manipuri devi of different forms and perspectives determine the faces of Manipuri women right from childhood, adulthood, motherhood, sisterhood, and wifehood. Natural cosmology and eco-theology existed along with a theistic paradigm reinforcing human and non-human character in cultural ethos, located in prehistoric practices and

tribal institutions of Manipur. The runs of the prehistory of these religious practices in folklore are available in traditions that relativized women. Worshipping various deities is believed to wash off all guilt and is associated with women in a particular context of life. A man can use it, and a woman—that is, he hires washerwomen to wash off his guilt of sin and sexual relations. They serve a man in all the purposes of delight: virgin, sister, wife, and cook. The myth supported the man to take random sexual relations. These were the historical practices of women, which stamped the attitude of men to use and wash off all grace with women, making them more subordinate and oppressed. These historical practices are at the subconscious level of women. Women are concerned with taking an oath for a service done during the time of death.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The socio-economic situation of women has evolved historically over millennia. Social structures that shaped Manipur have had a definite role for women. They had their roles laid out as young girls, then housewives and mothers in the married phase, as elders of a family and community when grown old, as well as in the spiritual life where the Meiteis created an autonomous position of Mother/Pisha Ma around Lainingthou rituals. The widow usually played this role more effectively and meaningfully than other women. Their main contribution in these roles was to maintain the family, but also to mediate relations with the outside world, linking family to the socio-political structures of the wider world.

Colonization and policies made serious assaults on the Manipuri economy and its structure. Trade and commerce, earlier the prerogative of women, were victimized as the economy started to penetrate with cotton mills as the destination for imported greased cotton. Sanamahiism resisted domination and conversion, but eventually led to changes in the patriarchal practices and customs that the Meitei women inherited and sustained. Women in Manipur lost a lot—an evolved economic system and also a spiritual one, in the process of embracing another. Restructuring presents opportunities as well as challenges. Manipuri women could now work outside the home, even as individuals, and earn wages, democratizing their roles in the family through new ways of gender relations and also participating in public life. They entered the political space, tackling politics of power, governance, judiciary, etc., but also

politics of culture, which was real politics. Therefore, Manipuri women have made all transitions, internalized them, and also contested them. The contingencies of history have created struggles but also offered opportunities to the Meitei women. They have resisted and negotiated but also contributed to how they would like to shape their present and future. This history of resistance and agency is not 'one' historical moment.

2.1. Early Societal Structure

Traditionally, the society of Manipur had a noticeable hierarchical organization from the smallest social units, family and locality, to the greater social units, the Commonwealth, and the King. Manipuri society followed a patrilineal family and settlement structure. The family is governed by male authority in direct descent lines, and women are described in relation to their brothers or sons. It was a marriage under the appearance of the groom going to live with the in-laws. Women inherited their ancestral property through the brother who belongs to the male line, unlike the Meiteis. The Kuki society was matrilineal and matrifocal. Kukis are divided into two groups: the Khongsai and the Haokip. The Haokip society is fully matrilineal and matrifocal. It encouraged the younger brother to marry the elder brother's wife in case of the early death of the elder.

The Meitei women also played important roles in various socio-economic activities at the family and community levels. Women engaged in produce-oriented economic activities included agricultural cultivation, collection of forest products, animal husbandry, basket making, and weaving; as well as reproductive activities of sustenance, such as rearing children and house management, among which agricultural cultivation is the most prevalent and important occupation. However, they were also responsible for taking care of the children while working in the rice fields. Women participated in this productivity cycle with the male members of the family, as agricultural cultivation was highly gendered. But are they only treated as "wageless workers"? This dialect demarcation opens up my understanding of this incipient stage of detail related to women in early Manipur society. For early women in Manipur, usual life was patri-centric and patriarchal. The women's importance was to provide offspring as their main duty, and the girl child was treated in preference to male offspring. For maiden rites, some customary laws were available, and many

rituals were followed. After marriages, many changes were observed regarding rites, customs, economic, and social status.

2.2. Colonial Influence

The colonial rule had significantly changed various dimensions of Manipuri society. The post-Anglo-Manipuri war period saw factional conflicts and confrontations among the loyalists, the Meitei elite of Manipuri society, based on the British policy of divide and rule. Such unending conflicts, bloodshed, and treachery led to the Anglo-Burmese political stage. To address the disorder prevailing in the region after the war, the British administration had laid a secret policy. As a consequence of the political and administrative changes brought to the region, the socio-cultural life of the people had been greatly influenced and modified. The new administration imposed on the people a system of new policies and practices under various administrative heads. This is the root of all ills in the socio-political life of the Meitei, who later became marginalized. This is reflected through the few individuals who have taken action on behalf of the popular wishes and aspirations of the people as a whole.

There were various factors that broadened the visible participation of women in the holistic Manipuri society from the late 19th century under colonial domination. The introduction of a new religion, Christianity, under the British administration provided many avenues for exposure to Western culture and tradition, as well as to Western education for Meitei women, along with men, who converted to Christianity. The Western practices were rooted, and various social intermediaries, especially men with their high social status, had been sacrificed for the propagation of Western education and Christianity by the British administration. The socio-economic policy imposed on the Meitei by the British administration also altered the existing gender relations. The British imposed a semi-land revenue system, which placed assets, especially landed property, in the hands of men for revenue collection. The British also established the Manipur State Military Police. To recruit members for the state military police, many men were recruited, especially from different areas, as they entered into the competition to be selected as recruits for the military police.

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC MOVEMENTS

The socio-economic movements have brought significant changes in the societies, and the forefront of such development was the struggle for equitable rights by the subalterns. In this struggle, women greatly benefit as they are positioned below men and are exploited on all fronts. Some of the major movements that have played a crucial role in bettering women are Sewa, Chipko, and feminist movements. Sewa in Hindi means service, and Sewa in Gujarat refers to economic activities or labor. The society is based on the principle of equality and shares the economic growth of the workers. Sewa is also a movement and struggle by poor women for socio-economic and human rights or dignity. Sewa means self-employment and a good plan for life. This inspiration led the women in the trades march of 1981 to the streets of Ahmedabad. The call was very successful; more than 8,000 women attended the rally, and 45 women police stood guard. There was no incident of hooliganism, no injury to any of the workers, and no damage to any property.

Every evening, as the women sit in one another's houses to do the day's purchasing, they pour their pent-up rage at the indifference about working and the delivery of girls, at pimps who lure them into a life of luxury, and at men who, after having children with them, run away. They discuss fresh ways of getting society to open its eyes to the pitiable conditions under which they lead their trades. From the very inception, this organizing intervention was perceived as and continues to be a larger, sustained, democratic, and widespread drive of women themselves and not just a trade union to obtain comprehensive development for a majority of laboring poor women in this sector, who need, from their creativity and meager investment, the various means of a nationally accepted and supported base of production. Efforts are being made to ensure that this proposed Women's Development drive for the construction period's foundation, as the measurement unit of women's wages per day, the profit of a trader, etc., is utilitarian. We are compelled to do this because, in order to take even the first preliminary steps, the reality of their conditions has to be revealed in hard figures that are universally accepted.

3.1. Women's Participation in Agriculture

3. Women's Participation in Agriculture Women contribute around 85% of the total agricultural labor activities in Manipur. They are completely involved in cultivating paddy and other varieties of crops. Apart

from these, they also engage in the collection of fuel, fodder, and local food items. Field surveys show that the percentage of women farmers who own agricultural fields grew from 25% in 1981-82 to 60% in 2004-05. This implies that women hold half of the land in the state. Women are also part of the household who cope with the agricultural sector. As a result, they are the pillars of household food security. The produce is used to meet the greater part of the consumption of their households. Women who were disadvantaged in the traditional system are taking wider participation in the modern agriculture sector with the coming of new policies and programs. The increase in female-headed households shows that women are taking part in important decision-making in respect of both agriculture and society. There is no direct or indirect antagonism between managing domestic responsibilities in terms of household food and social as well as economic life at the time, but it is an ideal venture of what is hidden elements of time force that was used for men's advantage rather than women. Women have no voice whatsoever in the decisions regarding agriculture and its related components, including the market. They are even beaten up in the family and society where they hardly know what is happening in their lives. The traditional notion of job-role differentiation may be accountable for women's non-participation in the village council meetings. Though the existing committees exist in the village, hardly any women could find representation in these committees. Women's participation in agriculture is viewed from the conservation of resources, economic growth, modernity, cultural specificity, and integrative perspective. But whether it is aimed at achieving decision-making power or cooperation and coordination, local organization members are making efforts to increase women's participation. Some of the orthodox practices involve denying equal opportunities to women to achieve economic and social prosperity, rights, as well as the opportunities to have a legal share of ancestral assets from their parents. The traditional structures, based on a set of anti-women ethics and values of male dominance, have resulted in the rest of the women being in the backstage of social hierarchy as well as women's professional success. However, new policy frameworks and organizations, as well as democratic practices, give a certain degree of protective cover to women, due to which some transformations could be made for women's empowerment. Women act as lawbreakers; if the existing administrative law itself could not serve the purpose of their desired

expectations, they would initiate local and civil organizations. Though formal sector organizations were adopting a set of policies and programs, these could hardly penetrate to the poor sections. So, the changes came about through the efforts of grassroots-level organizations.

4. POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

The issue of political empowerment of women in Manipur has come to occupy a respectable space in the whole discourse of women's movements. Several factors such as the abolition of forced labor, partitioning of India, spread of educational facilities, missionary schools for women, and other social activities contributed to the decline of women's participation in social and political activities. Long before the visit of colonialists, women contributed their remarkable roles in the form of the Nupi Lan in 1939. Keeping in view the history and their recent valuable contributions, more and more women began to be represented in the governance structure and became visible in the politics of the country. The 1980s and the 1990s were significant in the sense that various laws and acts had empowering elements for women, and thus a new chapter of transformation was chalked out. Indeed, today there are numerous political structures that have, both consciously and unconsciously, contributed to different social movements. The governmental administrative bodies, social organizations, and women have seen many ups and downs in the political economy over time. In Manipur, owing to the demand for Scheduled Tribe status, town-based movements have been relatively weak and have not necessarily been articulated through formal or informal associations or mass-based movements. Nonetheless, town-based movements have become increasingly more visible since 2005, and a new politics has emerged, giving space to women. However, such movements or associations do not represent the whole women constituencies. Prior to 1947, women were not at all participating in mainstream politics. But thereafter, marked changes began to surface in hitherto male-dominated areas. Various forces such as Western education, communication, the importance of Western broadcasting systems, enthusiasm, awareness, and expectation for the freedom of India attracted women and led to the first phase of women leaders. It highlights the difficulties and obstacles that the women leaders have to go through from within their own social constituency or circle, governmental bureaucratic machineries, laws of the land, and so on.

It discusses the contributions of women leaders and other related matters during their leadership. In the process, it discusses the importance of political education, secular education, and friendly association, and the role of women in evolutionary changes. It shows how women's participation in the political process can be rational, logical, and convincing. A woman politician (leader) has to possess strong determination, broad-mindedness, and must be far-sighted. She must be smart and diplomatic in the formulation of decisions and handling of public policies. Corrupt practices, non-belief in the divine law, and the arrogance that some women politicians exhibit might block the sincerity and integrity of good citizens in Manipur. It is, therefore, recommended without any hesitation that the presence of women in the normative thinking of human institutions in Manipur is of paramount importance. Let the women politicians be skillful in the style of diplomacy in dealing with public problems and procedures in political practices. If so, the practice of political power in a democratic society can be a responsive structure for achieving social justice and peace for all in the politics of Manipur.

4.1. Women in Governance

Women in Manipur participate in political institutions. At the local level, women are members of the village committee, customary courts, and administrators. The women of Nupi Lan participated in the Council of Elders to settle issues related to civic life. The village chief, male, and village committee are assisted by the village women's committee to organize social festivals and rituals, and the members of the women's organization have taken part in official functions like sports competitions, and so on. One of the major obstacles when our women are part of governance is that they are used as handmaidens. The hidden powers use women in two ways.

The policy of the government and the decision of customary law on the participation and involvement of women in the productive management of natural resources are possible only when customary law is liberalized and radicalized for justice involving women. Radicalism is another attempt to adopt laws that can transform the traditional gender regime of a society; hence, customary laws can also be another tool to establish the rights of women in public policy decisions. In today's confrontation of patriarchal practices and institutions, women hold both elected and non-elected political positions, from ward

commissioners to Cabinet Ministers, and from Members of Parliament to the office of the President of India and the Governor in the State of Manipur. Women's reservation is only a small step toward women's leadership for partnership in economic and political leadership, but it is not the end in itself. Only the presence of women in political institutions does not give them voice and dignity unless every elected woman and man possess their own voice in the assembly. It is understood that the presence of women dictates and influences governance. Such influence on governance is mainly rooted in power reduction via leadership. The perception from the policy-making gender determines leadership, and leadership reduces poverty. Women are a subject matter on poverty, and they are the right persons to reflect on women's issues and work on their confidentiality, trust, and integrity. Hence, the research question arises: how do women in political power increase everyday governance? This research seeks to understand the experiences of elected women in multi-level governance, aiming to demonstrate good governance institutions. The study replicates that this study includes women's perspectives on governance and redesigns the critical issues within societies. At the same time, it mentions leadership, negotiation, identity, life, kinship, art, and socio-economic practices, including land reform. The study was conducted in 2011. The criteria for selecting these multiple methods were ease of use in the field and the ability to provide complementary data rather than replicating findings. This political process is more integrative than most forms of traditional measurement. It needs to be sensitively addressed and is generally missing from traditional models of governance.

5. CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Cultural Contributions: Manipuri women are known in diverse fields for their high creativity, talent, and cultural wealth. In the field of fine arts and crafts, women have demonstrated their capacities in basket making, spinning, weaving, as well as in the toy-making industry. In performing arts, the role of women in the repertoire of the Khubak Ishei and Thang-Ta performances has been given to male artists, though women have been found to be experts in Thang Ta during the historic royal period. The Thang Ta of women has become popular in Manipur. The preservation and promotion of cultural values are other areas in which women have been playing pivotal roles.

In the case of "Lai Haraoba," women are called Emas/Lairembis of the events, which are equally participated in by men, except for the first phase of the dance event. However, women are given the pivotal role in the preparation of the events using their traditional composition and artistic skill. The dance movements, etro, kellil, la, la-appanba, etc., are contributed by women. In the area of music, women are innovators in the 'Nata-Sangeet,' which originated in the early 1950s. In solo presentations of Pung, drums are also played by women. In the field of cultural festivals and artistic innovation, various women's organizations bring inclusions of newly designed forms of events during the celebration of the annual 'Kut' festival. It has commonly been recognized that women are storehouses of traditional knowledge and practices from the past. As professional artists, the concept of bringing innovative performances linked with rituals and cultural practices is, in itself, a part of the teachings learned, drawn, and perpetuated among both men and women from the past. The role of women in making up successful cultural artists can dramatically change the role of women as narrators of culture. A newly innovative contribution is the "Lai Pakhangba Performing Arts Award."

Overall, women are creatively contributing the following performances in and through the cultural scenario in Manipur:

- Dance forms and theatre.
- Musical presentations with religious value and ethics.
- Poetry in dance composition, song, and instrumentation.
- Artistic sculptures.
- Paintings.
- Storytelling.
- Performance of rituals.
- Accompaniment of rituals and ceremonies.
- Composition of a song relating to the legends of gods and goddesses.

In this process of promoting cultural items, there has been a reflection among the artistic communities on the support of either the traditional or the creativity of women and the genuineness of the inputs and performances. There are also retrospective statements of elation and confusion, as the organizers still assume and criticize that it is very hard to protect and preserve women's capability depicted in their performances and cultural traditions. The role of creative women, personalities, and culture bearers of Manipur has not been given the recognition they deserve. It is essential to break the cordon of the cultural scenario of Manipur as part of guarding it within the parameters of 'Manipuriyee Shani.'

5.1. Traditional Arts and Crafts

Women are the artisans of Manipur, who are involved in practicing various art forms. The 'watchi' community of weavers is mainly composed of Meitei women, and both the weaving and embroidery work are done by the women; Meitei Pangi and Tangkhul women of Ukhrul do not require any additional assistance from men. There are other art forms that are practiced by women, such as pottery in a district of Imphal West. When the traditional lifestyles of the indigenous community rely heavily on their regional diversity, customs, traditions, etc., these arts – both performing and fine – become the practical socio-cultural narrative. Meitei women weave their rich ecological and socio-cultural narratives into multifarious garments that they make, while Kabui women villagers interpret the value of the month, among which June is the 'Agri or sponsorship month', through the form and content of their songs. Again, creating traditional marketplaces and 'fortune-telling' skills, women artisans stand as active agents.

The arts and crafts are also practiced by the younger generations, who are oriented by the elders of the family. What needs to be highlighted here is that it is the women among the Lesser and other tribes who are the caretakers, sustainers, and perpetuators of this traditional knowledge and practices. None of these arts and crafts, including oral history, literature, religion, etc., are considered part of patents, diagrams, symbols, or graphical representations in the legal sense in the international community of researchers because they are not included in any of the customary laws and practices of knowledge and biodiversity of the indigenous territory. What is thus apparent is that if these traditional practices and coping strategies and their knowledge contents are well-preserved and perpetuated, having come directly from their forefathers, then it must have a tremendous and positive return to the community and its members. However, the social and economic support for such women is still absent or inadequate in the present socio-political and economic situation of the mid-21st century.

6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

It is well known that the women in Manipur confront a complicated matrix of repressive norms of patriarchy based on socio-culturally restricted mobility. The contemporary structural setting is also rife with economic hardships caused by decades of

militarization, the trauma engendered by AFSPA, the drug trade, unemployment, and landlessness. The economy is largely dependent on official income deployed from outside and is not driven, like in the past, in a significant way by local production. The society is characterized by poor purchasing power of the people, a collapsing public health system, lack of higher professional and technical education, a significant gender-based wage gap, poor accountability of the elected leaders, and a growing criminal-politician nexus. This structured mosaic of deprivation has been reinforced by the reduction of access to formal political institutions. The political class virtually looks down upon anything that is non-formal and non-political, causing the marginalization of large populations of the hills and the valley. The women are doubly excluded.

Efforts have, however, been made and are being made to improve the socio-economic infrastructure of women in urban and rural areas alike. The educational facilities available for Anganwadi children seem to be above standard. More girls and women are educated now than before. Education is an important investment that starts a virtuous cycle, improving every domain of a person's life, reducing gender inequality, and enhancing human security. Some examples to illustrate how training or increased human capital brings rewards for underprivileged women in difficult circumstances are explained in the following subsections.

6.1. Empowerment Programs

The various empowerment programs that have been initiated in the state of Manipur to uplift and enhance the standing of girls and women have been carried out since 1985 through government or non-governmental organizations. Significantly, there are some vivid distinctions between the programs run by the government, which include adult education, self-employment, vocational training, non-formal education, proper education, income generation, status improvement, and those initiated by non-governmental organizations focused on protection against drugs, dowries, alcohol, corruption, and domestic violence. Likewise, the types of organizations running the programs in various parts of the state are different, including government and semi-government bodies, autonomous organizations, and even voluntary societies that have implemented empowering programs. Programs have also been

driven by community modifications based on their needs.

The impact observed from several case studies and empowerment projects implemented in Manipur touches on the fields of social, economic, and personal empowerment of women. The results also show that, given a chance, women are equipped to make their decisions in the family and society. After acquiring skills through education and training, women have also obtained economic and practical independence in their domains. Even greater results and impacts have been seen through more income-earning programs where women can expand and reinvest their surpluses, enabling them to achieve a higher level of social and economic status. Feedback from various women's and mothers' societies, as well as students from tribal and valley districts, also expressed support for the initiatives, stating that they would be better off, as indicated by some of the former high and medium students.

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

The roles of women in Manipur cannot be confined to simple terms. We can therefore state that the role of women in this place has not only been restricted to household activities or within the four walls of the houses but extends to every possible sphere of socio-economic, political, and cultural activities. It is historically known that apart from their active roles in every possible front that concerns them, there have been certain kinds of difficulties and challenges they have been facing. However, in the recent past, there have been some openings from the colonial as well as post-colonial periods which have challenged a good number of taboos, and the rights and privileges of men and women are gradually coming to be on par with each other. Given the chances and the willpower in these sectors, women may not lag far behind at this moment as projected. The complex roles of women in Manipur speak about the multifaceted issues involved in the understanding of the role and status of women in the region. We have to take into account the historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural perspectives of the people and the region. Based on the above, we may therefore conclude that the people in Manipur go hand in hand within and without family activities as well as social, political, and economic strata. Therefore, the role of women in this state has been rather different from that of other socio-cultural communities. It is now a continuous process to give considerable lessons from the roles and experiences of

women in Manipur. By presenting a comprehensive account of the role of women in this region and demonstrating that historical socio-economic and cultural experiences shape the visions and missions for demonstrating the rights of women in Manipur, several practical implications follow. It is a continuous theory construction which is, as every day another, for we need to address the questions and assert the agenda in different spheres of life—both within and outside the family—the social, the economic, and the political. Notwithstanding the challenges they have been confronting, there has been no dearth of opportunities for women's face-saving, advances, empowerment, and leadership in different styles and in different ways all over the world. In the context of Manipur, some official and non-governmental agencies operating in different sectors have been self-employing and conducting various activities and programs to embolden, edify, and provide income-generating activities for the concerned women. But such efforts, it cannot be denied, are haphazard and scattered. We need comprehensive as well as integrated and collective programs on all fronts if we are to be serious when we are talking about rights, equity, and parity in true spirit and vision. It is also the need of the hour for further research and findings in terms of identifying, confronting, and challenging varieties of emerging issues and volumes that have cropped up in contemporary society. We have to help propose and form collaborative initiatives from stakeholders at different levels, including the state, who are dealing with social dynamics at different levels. Therefore, let us continue to affirm and assert not only the rights of women but also the dignity and agency that are theirs by right and which are constitutionally guaranteed to them within democratic ideals. In essence, we want to see some programs that could address the question of the role and status of women in their socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts if we are thinking about the real upliftment of them in the true sense. The earlier these are materialized through commitment and action, the better.

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