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AGEING IN NORTH EAST INDIA

MANIPUR PERSPECTIVE

Edited by

**Sheikhohao Kipgen
Benjamin Nattar**

This book contains articles presented in a seminar organized by the Manipur College, Imphal sponsored by the ICSSR North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong. It highlights all pertinent issues and challenges confront the elders and the various schemes implemented by the state government and also suggest remedial measures to mitigate the magnitude of the problems of the elderly people.

A pioneering micro-level study in the field of Indian gerontology, this book will prove of utmost use to researchers, policy-makers, social activists, NGOs and voluntary organisations.

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CONTENTS

Foreword by <i>C J Thomas</i>	vii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	ix
Keynote Address <i>Ch. Jamuna Devi</i>	xi
Introduction <i>S Kipgen & Benjamin Nattar</i>	1
1. Aged Population in Manipur <i>M. Manimohan Meetei</i>	11
2. Social and Economic Status of Elders: Issues and Challenges <i>H. Dwijasekhar Sharma</i>	37
3. Nuances on the Elderly People Among the Tribes of Manipur <i>Linus Neli</i>	89
4. Care of the Elderly: A Social Concern <i>S. Sarat Kumar Sharma</i>	105

5. Psycho-social Issues of Elderly Persons <i>R.K. Lenin Singh</i>	115
6. The Elderly – Woes and Interventions <i>S. Kunjabihari Singh</i>	125
7. The General Health Condition and Access to Health Care Service of the Old Aged People <i>Th. Achouba Singh</i>	135
<i>Index</i>	139

INTRODUCTION

S. Kipgen & Benjamin Nattar

Manipur, an erstwhile princely state, merged with Indian Union in 1949, lies in the Northeastern corner of the country. An ancient kingdom with over 2000 years of history, a home to a number of tribes and tongues, a proud and highly self-conscious people, vibrant in sports, art, culture, dance, martial arts etc., Manipur is indeed fit to be a 'jewel of India', as described by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. The state has an area of 22,327 sq. km., with a population of 23,88,634 according to 2001 census. It is bounded by other Indian states of Nagaland, Assam, Mizoram and Myanmar (Burma). The topography of Manipur is unique, as one-tenth of the land is plain at the centre surrounded by nine-tenth of hilly land. The valley is predominantly occupied by the Meiteis most of whom are Vaishnavite Hindus, and the Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims). Whereas there are 33 different tribal groups, which include the Naga and Kuki-Chin

people mostly living in the hills and in the Imphal Valley of Manipur. Majority of the tribal people belongs to Christianity.

Though there is a strong racial affinity between the Meiteis and the tribals yet social and cultural divisions are clearly evident among them. The people of Manipur possess good physique and live a rather healthy life in a comparatively less polluted environment. Even though individual Manipuris have made marks in various chosen fields, Manipur today is affected by various social and political ills. Old age problem was never thought to be very serious, but latest trends show that it is time we give some serious thought to this.

In every society the aged people serve as advisors and consultants. In fact, society needs them. They should be considered as social assets, core of human capital and cultural resources rather than treating them as a social liability.

Very little study has been done so far, on the problem of the aged people in Manipur. With a view to study the problem of the aged, in March 2008, a One-Day state level seminar on 'Magnitude of the Problem of the Elderly Persons in the Northeastern Region of India with special Reference to Manipur' was organized by Manipur College, Imphal. The day-long seminar covered wide areas such as the status of the aged population in Manipur, the general health condition and health care services, biological and psychological aspects, socio-economic status, social planning and welfare schemes, policy matters etc. The Seminar was sponsored by

Indian Council of Social Science Research, North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong, Meghalaya and also partly funded by Directorate of University and Higher Education, Government of Manipur. This book is based on revised version of the papers presented at the seminar.

The population of the elders continues to rise all over the world, and so also in India. Various factors have contributed to the growth of the elderly population. There had not been much study done on this field. In Manipur aforesaid seminar was the first of its kind to have discussed the problems of the elderly people. Manipur College provided a platform to those who were actively engaged in the elderly people's welfare to air their views and suggest measures for managing the problems of the elders. There were eight papers read in the seminar. The authors of these papers are experts drawn from different walks of life having full knowledge of the problem of the elderly. Some of the papers have been revised and form the texts of this book. We are grateful to Dr. C.J. Thomas, Director, ICSSR North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong, for his constant reminders without which this volume would not have seen the light of its day.

In the keynote address Ch. Jamuna Devi, highlighted the features and characteristics of the aged people in general, their physical and psychological problems. She has given in a nutshell the peculiar problems being faced by the aged people in the Manipur society. To mitigate the problems of the aged some suggestions are also offered by her.

M. Manimohan Meetei in his paper on the 'Aged Population in Manipur' describes the growth of the aged people in Manipur statistically. Age statistics are very important and play a vital role as most of the analysis of population characteristics is performed according to age and sex. Even though census in Manipur was introduced in 1901, the records up to 1951 formed part of Assam. It's only from 1951, Manipur had separate census. The percentage of aged population was 8.73% in 1951 as against 6.71% in 2001, whereas the aged people in all India level constituted 7.45%. He has explained clearly statistical concepts like single age return, growth of aged population in figures and tables, distribution of aged population in Manipur, district-wise, the marital status of the aged, migration of the aged people, work and employment of aged people, distribution of scheduled castes and tribes among the aged etc. Manipur stands next to Tripura in the Northeast region in terms of elderly people. At the same time, he is of the opinion that the facilities available to aged people here, is very little. The government has not done anything for the well being of the old people.

H. Dwijasekhar Sharma in his paper on the 'Social and Economic Status of Elders: Issues and Challenges' has mentioned that due to the advent of science and technology and medical advancement, the aged population in Manipur is on the rise. This reflects greater socio-economic potential for economic growth. In a patriarchal and feudal society like Manipur, ancestor worship was a popular tradition. But the onslaught of westernization and democracy had

marginalized and discarded such cultural and traditional values leading the rise of individualism and nuclear families. The foundation of all feudal and social institutions was shaken. As such in the psyche of the elders, they are unloved and uncared for. When the father is not in a position to leave a family fortune as in the case of poor or low middle income group, they consider themselves a burden to their sons. The symbiosis between father and son has also undergone a sea change among the Manipuri society.

According to the author, the material and human relationship between the father and the son has to adjust mutually under 'mutualism symbioses'. They need to gain extra holistic pleasure to make their lives livable. They also need to become positive in approach and look upon each other as real benefactors. The elders should also apply and practice cluster thinking for productive purposes even in their threshold stage of their lives. Being the core of human capital, their expertise, experience and innovation should be incentives so as to adopt the culture of cluster policy thinking. He further says that social solidarity also needs to be integrated and pro activated by both the social fabric and the state apparatus.

Linus Neli's paper on 'The Ageing Scenario among the Tribes of Manipur' is unique in its own way. This paper examines the ageing problems peculiar to more than thirty-three tribes inhabiting in Manipur and comprising about 41% of the State's total population. The people in Manipur are popularly classified into 'valley people' and 'hill people' largely due to

anthropological and topographical reasons. The Meiteis and the Meitei Pangals are the main inhabitants in the valley, while the two generic groups in the hills are the Nagas and Kuki-Chin Mizos who occupy the surrounding hills of the state. Under the Constitution of India, all the Hill people of Manipur fall into the category of the Scheduled Tribes.

The hill tribes have many features quite distinct from their counterparts in the valley, the principal differences being their origin, food habits, customs, polity, religion, and living standards, thus making their social interactions and intermarriages often difficult, if not incompatible. Besides, the attention and efforts of the government do not always percolate adequately through the hills to the people due to the rugged terrain, inadequate infrastructures and social organizations. This paper critically probe into the present problems and status of the old aged people among the tribes of Manipur. This paper was based on a sample survey carried out in the hill areas of Manipur.

Saratkumar Sharma in his paper on 'Care of the Elderly – A Social Concern' highlighted the constitutional provisions for the care of the elderly. As an officer of the Directorate of Social Welfare Department, he has narrated the government's various welfare measures for the elderly, resource utilization under social security programme of state government, like payment of old age pension, funding for old age homes, and other such schemes. He further pointed out some of the measures for easing the problems of the aged in the state of Manipur.

R. K. Lenin Singh, in his paper on 'Psycho-social issues of the elderly persons in the state of Manipur' has given the various causes that may lead to the psycho-social problems of the elders. Generally more attention was paid on physical factors such as exercise, diet, sleep, genetics etc., in dealing with the problems of the elders. But evidence has suggested that psycho-social and social-economic factors also have significant influence on health and ageing. According to the author, Manipur is an elderly friendly place. But of late various problems have come up. Factors such as, retirement, grief and mourning, empty nester, migration, nuclear families, generation gap, lack of recreational facilities, financial problems, elderly abuse, law and order situation, AIDS and HIV problems, physical illness, mental health problems, dementia have aggravated the problems of the elderly people. In Manipur, old age was never seen as a social problem, as respect for the elders and obligation to the old parents always formed a part and parcel of the cultural value system of the society. But urbanization, migration of educated youth to other places have caused immense problem to the aged.

In his paper on 'The Elderly Woes and Interventions', S. Kunjabihari Singh gives his personal encounters of elderly peoples' woes in Manipur and outside. In the three cases given by him, the old people are seen on the receiving end whether they had well groomed their children or not. With advancing age, old people begin to be not liked or even disliked by their children and grandchildren as their priorities in life are different. The sons and daughters-in-law of today, with their high

profile tastes of privacy and personal choice, prefer the elderly to remain shut to their domain; and stubbornly refrain from taking the parents into confidence in family and social matters. In the modern society, the elders get marginalized more than ever before. It is rather fortunate that Manipur society is an open society with a strong social bond. There is less of elderly abuse due to possible social gaze and condemnation. The author, well aware of various government acts and schemes for the elderly, gives some practical suggestions. Two major approaches are proposed; one is institutional where various public packages and schemes could be implemented. The other approach is promoting physical infrastructure like old age homes especially for those who are physically and financially not sound enough. In these ways, the problems of the elderly could be mitigated to a certain extent.

Th. Achouba's paper on 'The general health condition and access to health care service of the old aged people' is a short presentation describing the various health problems of the elders. According to the author, the major health problems of the aged people in Manipur are joint pain/ache, diabetics, cataract, hearing problems, hypertension, tooth-ache, stomach ailments etc. The elderly people have no proper health care services in the state. Besides these, the suffering of the aged people is multiplied due to problems like psycho-social, loneliness, non-availability of health care facilities.