

# WOMEN'S MOVEMENT in Manipur

Thokchom Binarani Devi



This book elaborates women's movement in Manipur making an attempt to analyze their contribution related to the socio-economic and political development in a democratic way besides explaining the impact of modernization, industrialization, globalization, science and technology etc. towards women. It also traces role of women pertaining to marginalization, values, rights, liberties, education and other activities apart from empowerment and subordination of women in different societies.

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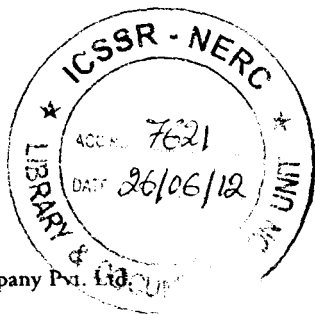
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## Introduction

Modern democratic society is a pluralistic and egalitarian in which the individual has equal status with others. Under a democratic system of government the value and dignity of the human personality is recognized. Every individual is free to live in his own way, think freely, enjoy the company of people he likes and becomes a member of associations and parties of his choice. Not only in the political sphere, but in social and economic fields too the individuals enjoy complete freedom. But the basic doubt in the mind of the people of this society is whether there is a working democracy prevailing in the society or is it bringing about the desired end. This doubt is unfortunately not cleared most of the time which resulted in socio-political dissatisfaction among the people and which further increases the doubt and confusion. This increased confusion made by people with certain common sense, feel the need of a participatory democracy and modern women as very active member of today's society too, shared this feeling. A democratic society is one where the government and the citizens come together to create an open society where there is maximum and effective public participation. Citizen must evince an active interest in the formulation of policies and their execution and thus exercise their democratic rights as important stakeholders in the governance process.<sup>1</sup> Participatory democracy does not mean that all the people will necessarily take part in the decision making process.

Democratic society stands for an egalitarian society in which the individual has equal status with others. Social inequality has been a historical fact. Some people enjoyed the loaves and fishes, luxurious cloths and buildings and cloths, while others could hardly get a square meal a day, staying nights at the roadsides etc. The idea of equality was formulated with an eye of remaining such social injustice. With the development of democracy, it came to be accepted as a matter of principle that as a free legal agent in the scheme of the state, the legal personality of each individual is equal to that of every other. Equality, after all, is a derivative value. It is derived from the supreme value of the development of personality, in each alike and equality, but each along its own different line and of its own separate motion. Different prominent social scientists are giving full emphases on the doctrine of democracy. W. F. Willoughby clearly expressed this idea in his definition, "The word democracy is unfortunately used in popular discussion, and indeed in much political literature in two quite different senses: as designating a society or community in which class distinctions are absent or relatively unimportant, and as designating a distinct form of government."<sup>2</sup> The aim of democracy has everywhere been to eliminate man-made socially fostered, discrimination that has enlarged for some and restricted for others the avenues that lead to education, income and advancement. In a democracy, man or a group of man cannot rule as they please without the consent of the people, but the governmental machinery has to move according to the wishes of the people and for meeting the requirements of the people. Government has to be responsive to public opinion, and in the light of genuine and responsible public criticism it may have to change its course for the benefit of the people. An unpopular and inefficient government, which has lost the confidence of the people, is likely to be overthrown by the pressure of public criticism and through the ballot box. A democratic government is not a tool of

oppression or an arbitrary tool of a few people, but machinery in which the representatives of the people act according to the wishes of the voters. It implies the right of free discussion and criticism to all the people, the right to form various parties and associations for propagating ideas freely, the freedom of the press, a liberal suffrage, periodical elections, absence of privileges, full enjoyment of liberties and equality before the law. In a democratic society non-political associations are allowed their liberty, equality, discussion, opposition and tolerance. In connection with this situation Robert A. Dahl clearly said that, "a democratic society is a social system that not only has democratic political (sub) system but also a number of other sub-systems that operates so as to contribute directly or indirectly to the strength of the democratic political processes".<sup>3</sup> Mainly in a democratic political system input function is performed by the society in the form of demand and support. While the organs of the government remain silent without giving any response to the input function, the society needs to give pressure to the government by highlighting about the issue conditionally. Thus, there can be multifarious pressure groups which organize themselves under efficient leadership. Whether the groups exerting pressure on government are good or bad depends upon the manner in which they functioned. If their activities are purposeful and wholesome, pressure group form a good link between the people the Government and aid in the democratic processes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The existence of the pluralistic type of society in modern time means the presence as well as the relevance of the innumerable variables and their proper representation. The formal structure as well as the party system proved inadequate. On the other hand, a third approach of unofficial power has come into existence. The study of pressure group,

also known as the interest, organized and catalytic groups, within the conceptual framework constitutes an interesting as well as important part of the study of research in the field of democratic modern society may be interpreted in different forms. It highlights those underlying forces and processes through which political power is marshalled and applied in organized societies, preferably in democracies. A pluralistic society, with a democratic order, recognizes the existence of pressure group and ensures widest possible participation to the extent of making them the principal avenues of activity out of the official administration. There is a fact remains in every society, whether democratic or totalitarian, that pressure groups seek to influence public policy in a desired direction without being ready to accept the responsibility of public office as well as by declining to hold direct responsibility for ruling the country.

In this present day socio-economic and political conditions of Manipur, the role of the voluntary organizations or associations as a pressure group is very important. The increasing discontent of the people, repeated failure of crops, the steep devaluation of the rupee, pressure from foreign governments, mounting bribery and corruption, the havoc created by casteism, linguism and regionalism etc. put democracy on a trial in India. In an underdeveloped society like Manipur, where there is a big question on the functional process of democracy and its effectiveness, the immediate needs is of a free society of free man- which is a basic necessity of a functional and effective democracy. Really it is a big hurdle, a fierce and dangerous battle which can only be fought with the culture of peace.

When the people are not satisfied with the decision and policies of the government, which is unsuitable to the public, they formally complain to the government. If the government does not consider or take into account the complaint, then the affected persons along with others can protest or even call strike against the government. Thus the people can curb

the wrongful activities of the government. Protest and strikes may in course of time develop into a form of political movement with the help of the mass media. The degree of political participation of the people increased in the socio-political movement through the activities of pressure group.

Now-a-days the socio-economic and political situation of Manipur is characterized by a great sense of resentment with different demands and pressures. The various prevailing problems made the people of Manipur, especially youth and women more acquainted with socio-economic and political conditions of the society. These problems are sometimes natural and most of the time a creation of man and circumstances which hampered the activities of the government in a big way but Manipur an already under-developed part of North East India needs a government whose activities are quick, clear and effective. For avoiding such situations the role of the civil society is very much important. Due to the gap between the input and output, as well as problems in the feedback in the political system social dissatisfaction bring the people together to form groups and perform the function of pressure groups. When these groups became a formal organization, it is very difficult for the government not to heed their pressure. As a result, different associations and organizations mushroom up in the length and breadth of Manipur and giving pressure to the government according to the time and need of the society. It is right time to study about the role of pressure groups in the development of a society through a democratic process. And again it is also necessary to study about the formation, activities, function, importance etc. of the civil society organizations, especially women in the present social context.

### **Review of the Literature**

The study of pressure group is beset with the task of precise nomenclature and other problems of a procedural and

substantive character. All groups are not the same, though they are distinguished as such, e.g. some represent vested interests or interest of a particular social or economic group having some sort of objective characteristics common to each other, others represent and safeguard the interest of a particular point, regardless of their objective characteristics. Then, these groups are of different types— self seeking and altruistic from the viewpoint of purpose, ephemeral and long term keeping in view the point of tenure, and with formal or informal bureaucratic organizations taking in view the fact of power position. Likewise, these groups are different from each other as regards their concentration of efforts either on the legislative bodies or on the voters as a whole. Differences are also visible when we examine the functional impact of pressure politics upon a particular policy and, that is why, some groups frequently achieve their goals while others do so. On the whole, pressure groups have a very important role in a modern political system where the state is irrevocably wedded to the ideals of representative democracy and social welfare. The term pressure group has come into use to signify and aggregate, organized or unorganized group which applies pressure tactics. It is defined as "any combination of persons, bound together by shared goals and attitudes, who attempt to obtain decisions favourable to their preferred values by all means at their disposal but specially by gaining access to the governmental process." A.de. Grazia in his book. "The Elements of Political Science" defines pressure groups simply as any organized social group that seeks to influence the behaviour or political officers without seeking formal control of the government. H. Zeigler in his book "Interest Groups in American Society" defined a pressure group as "an organized aggregate which seeks to influence the context of governmental decisions without attempting to place its members in formal governmental capacities."<sup>4</sup> People used pressure group as synonymous with interest group. But the scope of pressure group is larger

than that of interest group. Pressure group is employed to describe any collection of persons through political action to influence public policy common objectives, who seek their realization through political action to influence public policy. Still more simply, an interest group is any that wants something from government. Regarding this McIver stated that, "When a number of men united for the defence, maintenance or enhancement of any more or less enduring position or advantage which they possess alike in common, the term 'interest' is applied both to the group so united and the causes which unites them. In the sense, the term is most frequently used in the plural, implying either that various similar groups or advantages combine to form a coherent complex, as in the term vested interests or that the uniting interest is maintained against an opposing one, as in the expressions conflict of interest or balance of interest. Interests so understood usually have an economic-political character."<sup>5</sup> With reference to the activities of pressure group in developed countries, Henry A. Turner stated that, "By definition pressure groups are non-partisan organizations which attempt to influence some phase of public policy. They do not themselves draft party programmes or nominate candidates for public office. Pressure associations do, however, appear before the resolution committees of the political parties to urge the endorsement of their programme as planks in the party platforms. They often attempt to secure the endorsement of both major parties and thus remove their programme from the arena of partisan controversy. Many groups are also active in the nomination and election of party members to public offices."<sup>6</sup> For having a clear knowledge of pressure group activities it is necessary to review the existence and articulation of pressure groups in various countries of the world which are having different types of political system. First, we can take up the case of a country having Presidential system of government like the United States, where the legislature and executive are separated from

each other, for this reason, the pressure groups have to exercise their influence upon two organs of the government separately. They have their eyes fixed mostly on the President, who is the virtual ruler of the country and when they fear some frustrations, they apply their potential articulations through the legislative bodies with the result that there is pressure and cross-pressure to bear upon the government.<sup>7</sup> Second, the same degree of freedom of action for the interplay of pressure group is not allowed in a parliamentary system of the British model where political parties on the basis of their numerical strength form either the Government or the Opposition and run their organization on the basis of strict discipline. Besides, the party commanding majority in the popular chamber forms the government and thereby implements its policy and programme as given in the party manifesto or announced at the platform.<sup>8</sup> Third, the multi-party system of government in France with traditions of violent revolution is responsible for making the position of institutional and anomic groups more important than that is obtaining in Britain; and in India, also there are pressure groups but these pale into insignificance when compared to their American counterparts. Some of the groups and lobbies are sympathetic towards certain parties and interests. The Forum of Free Enterprise and the American Lobby in India which are strongly in favour of private enterprise go hand in hand with the Swatantra Party.<sup>9</sup> In France the Communist Party has its groups in the trade Union organizations and certain institutional groups (like the Catholic Church) have their colonies in the political parties and pressure groups interpenetrate each other.<sup>10</sup> Fourth, a dominant non-authoritarian party systems are usually to be found where nationalist movements have been instrumental in attaining emancipation in a totalitarian model. Exceptionally a reference should be made to the developing societies where pressure groups do exist though in a rudimentary and poorly

organized form. The techniques they often adopt are of a very crude type. When a serious crisis comes, the military supervenes to finish the obtaining order and establish its dictatorship by virtue of its coherent organization, similarly of outlook and the capacity to organize the coup. In such a society other interest may be powerless to move because of their lack of organization and discipline; they will have to come to terms with the colonels, but will retain some strength since the colonels cannot run state without at least some co-operation from them.<sup>11</sup>

So, simply pressure group signifies the existence of a group life. It is an attempt not of particular individual or a group attempt, a concerted effort. This group may be an elite or teacher or student or youth or like other categories. The most common denominator for all interest articulation is the sharing of attitude. Beyond their individual peculiarities men are conditioned by their group loyalties. The common motivations of different sections or classes are in fact the building blocks of the group shaped by the interaction within the group, the experiences of its members etc. Pressure groups cannot operate without formal organizations, without which an average citizen is an innocent by standard and also a bewildered one. Organization represents concentrated power which can exercise a dominating influence in the political process. In a real sense the pressure groups are not law making agencies at the same time they attempt to help the legislature to pass laws in their favour. It implies external inducement to control the behaviour of the legislators.

Dr. Karam Manimohan Sing, in his book 'Nupilal', clearly mentioned about the importance of movement of the masses against the ruling authority when they were the suppressed and forbidden class in their own society. In the society where rights and equality were senseless words printed in the books; and the British and their nominated Rulers in many of the Native states of India were the strong and the mighty people, they were the Paramount Hunters and the people

the Hunted. In such situations mass movements or civil war had to occur. It was very natural and nobody could suppress it before it broke out. The agitation was the hopeless resort for the poor people to ventilate their old desires and genuine grievances but with a far hope of attaining a culturally and socially higher and more acceptable activity. The disturbances known as the Nupilal, which took place in Imphal during the winter of 1939, brought to a head the question of introducing reforms into the Manipur state as November 1938, when the Maharaja received a petition signed by 356 members of the public asking for the setting up of a Legislative Council. Next year in November 1939, Irabot as the President of the Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha again submitted an outline of the Legislature to His Highness the Maharaja for necessary actions so that the legitimate rights of the people may be secured and the grievances redressed.<sup>12</sup>

## Methodology

Controlled experiment in social science research is a difficult one, but fruitful observation is feasible as mentioned by Bryce and A.L. Lowell. So, observation method is used by the author for writing this book. Data are gathered, analyzed and classified after coming in contact with and observing and studying the activities of different women organizations related and involved with them at a close range. This volumn work is not depending on hearsay or second hand information only. The author visited directly to the areas of pressure group's performed their activities and make careful observation about all happenings and prepared notes of what is happenings with minute details. For achieving a thorough objective and scientific generalization, I seek interviews and have recorded voices and photographs of the events. And, again, for further information, I collect questionnaire reports from the related persons. So both the types of observations :

- (1) Participant observation

## (2) Non-participant observation

are employed for collection of primary data. Observation is carried out with the help of the eye, and the purpose and aim of observation is to discover significant mutual relations between spontaneously occurring events and thereby pinpoint significant facts of a situation. It is quite plain from these remarks that observation is not random perception, but in the sense of a deliberate effort to pinpoint significant facts, that observation is considered to be a scientific method. Here the definition of Mrs. P.V. Young is quite applicable, "Observation is a systematic and deliberate study, through the eye of spontaneous occurrences at the time they occur. The purpose of observation is to perceive the nature and extent of significant interrelated elements within complex social phenomena, culture, pattern, or human conduct."<sup>13</sup>

All the three prerequisite conditions of observation mentioned by B.N. Ghosh in his book, *Scientific and Social Research*, i.e. intellectual, physical and moral<sup>14</sup> are strictly followed. The reason and explanation of phenomenon came from intellectual faculty and introspection. Perfect physical capability and sound sense organs are used for proper observation in all the field visits and events from time to time. The required moral conditions related to unbiasedness and impartiality is strictly kept in mind as the research work is covering all the delicate issues of different communities. Subjective inclination, conservatism, superstitions, habits etc. are entirely given up while making observations. There is no pre-conceived notion or bias about that which is being observed for finding out the truth.

## Objectives

The main objectives of the publication of this book are as follows—

1. To discuss about the growth and relevance of women organization in the society, especially in Manipur.
2. To analyze the value of women organization in a democratic system of government.
3. To discuss about the problems faced by the people due to the failure of the application of the democratic norms.
4. To study about the relationship between the women organizations and other pressure groups.
5. To study the action and reaction of women organization as a pressure group in the democratic process of Manipur.
6. To find out the necessary consequential steps for strengthening democratic values with the proper activities of the women organization as a pressure group.

### **Women Organisations and Pressure Groups in Manipur**

Women play a very important role in the social life of Manipur. In the developmental activities the involvement of women should be prerequisite for proper and speedy development. A long lasting peace cannot be established without the participation of women and girls and the inclusion of gender perspectives in the formal and informal peace processes. Women have long been active in lobbying and organizing for peace and disarmament. Grassroots women's groups have organized across party and ethnic lines, advocating for peace and carrying out reconciliation efforts. They have called for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, campaigned against small arms, participated in weapon collection programmes, disseminated information on landmines etc. Mothers have organized to learn the fate of their "disappeared" children, or to prevent them from being conscripted or sent to war or to any illegal

activities or even any type of work that is not felt by their age. Women, generally in a developing country like India and particularly in an underdeveloped, remote, boarder state like Manipur, take a great role in the process for the development of the society, by resolving almost all the conflicting situations, which are happening from time to time. For Manipur without them the progress and development of the society is impossible. Theoretically, women in North East India, and especially in Manipur, enjoy a high social status because their societies are egalitarian. There is no restriction on women's movements, food habits, attire, widow remarriage etc. In Manipur, cultural and social factors not operate vigorously and exclusively in favour of any sex. There is hardly any dowry problem, hardly any problem of sex preference, etc. Historical evidences can be traced in the state where females took major roles in the state, regional and national issues. Mention may be made of the two different famous women's movements of Manipur-Nupilal of 1904; and Nupilal of 1939, where Manipuri women resisted the Imperial to denigrate the Manipuri's by the Political Agent of British Government, the then Maharaja and Marwari Monopolists etc. The living example that Manipur society is not a female discriminating society is the existence of "Nupi Keithel" (a market where vendors are exclusively run by women) at the heart of Imphal, the capital city of Manipur.<sup>15</sup> Although the status of women is said to be higher but men in their own societies do not treat the women as their equal. The customary laws of the various tribes in this region are in favour of man who continues to superiority *vis-à-vis* women in their respective societies. Except the Khasis of Meghalaya which matrilineal system, other tribal communities of North East India have Patriarchal family structure. Women in the patriarchal families usually do not enjoy equal status with their husband or male members in their families. Women may be said to enjoy more freedom in their families and social activities. But when we talk of gender equality, women are

dominated by their family or clans. Major decisions in their families are taken by their husbands and other male members of the family. The economy of the states in North East India is mainly based on agriculture. The type of agriculture in the states of North East region; particularly in tribal areas is jhum or shifting cultivation. This type of cultivation is associated with high female work participation. It is also called female farming system, characterized by few wage labourers and large female participation. Women have performed a clear, significant and approved role in the field of production and marketing. Women of the country, India, are fully protected by laws and they are better placed than women in the Western countries. It means, both men and women are equal in law and any discrimination on the basis of sex alone is illegal and unlawful in India. In the West there is social equality, denied voting rights, they were not treated even as citizens in the West in the case of election. It is their fight for legal equality and citizenship that prompted the formation of feminism in the West. But there in India, the women have legal equality, and legal rights along with men. There is no discrimination on the basis of sex alone. But social equality is not there. Because India's social system and the reason for this social system is due to historical circumstances. Historical circumstances cannot be changed, society can be changed, everybody says. But those who preached social change forgot the fact that these preachers themselves should change first, as unless individuals themselves are not changed, the society which is constituted by individuals cannot be changed. Changed in social system is not that much easy.<sup>16</sup> Law itself cannot change society wholly. Yet unfortunately, the various laws of the countries, provisions of the U.N., the various Women's Commissions and Human Rights Commission staffed by the elite groups of the society have been unable to do anything for the protection and upliftment of the suffering and exploited poor women section.

The number of crimes against women is increasing day-

by-day. Maximum headlines of the daily papers and journals are focusing on women issues and crimes. Immoral activities, sex mafia, drug menace, violence, and communal friction cases in the courts are the common issues. Partially of the police in investigation and manipulating crucial evidence at the instigation of politicians and other vested interests also contributed for the increase. Women and girls are not only victims in armed conflict, they are also active agents, and even they become wife conditionally and bear children of those armed groups. This situation was exhibited on the first day of the operation 'Summer Storm' at Loktak of Bishnupur District in Manipur, during the second week of April 2009. They may choose to participate in the conflict or to provide non-military support; or they may be manipulated or forced into various roles. Women and girls may be forced into sexual slavery or coerced to work as domestic servants for fighting groups. Many women organize for conflict resolution, peacemaking and disarmament. They are involved in rebuilding the social, cultural, economic and political fabric of their societies. It appears that Indian society has been almost criminalized and crimes have been increased considerably. No statistic will reveal the whole truth. The motive behind all these crimes is greed for money, position, and for luxuries of life, sexual urge, personal hatred, enmity and envy. But even where women have been involved in informal peace processes, they are normally pushed into the background when formal peace process begins.

Often women themselves do not recognize their activities as part of peace building efforts, because these are in areas for which women are already responsible, such as ensuring the safety of themselves and their families and accessing and providing social services. Because women lack formal political platforms, they often draw credibility and strength from a wider social base and promote their agenda at the grassroots level. As a result, women's contributions tend to be undervalued and not readily incorporated or sought by many practitioners of peace building.

Peace processes themselves have been described as including informal activities and formal activities. Informal activities include peace marches, intergroup dialogue, and the promotion of inter-cultural tolerance and understanding. As an informal peace process of Assam Rifles, they organized cultural programmes with the local people, involved in the local programme, held interaction with the women groups etc. During February-March 2009, Assame Rifles arranged a national tour programme of the Meira Paibis. Before and after the programme they have interacted with the women groups. Formal activities generally involve a range of UN entities, regional/national/local institutions, and grassroots organizations. Formal activities are conducted by political leaders, the military, international and regional/sub-regional institutions, and a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations.<sup>17</sup> A number of peace-keeping operations have taken steps to address violence against women and girls and trafficking. Activities include public awareness campaigns, training of the local police, supporting local organizations and developing special mechanisms within local law enforcement structures. Peace-keeping missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and East Timor have worked to promote gender balance in the local police force and trained new or restructured police forces on domestic violence and trafficking in women and girls. The missions in Kosovo and East Timor also supported the increased participation of women in the governmental and administrative structures through training and capacity building. Peace-keeping missions can benefit from contact with civil society, including women's organizations and networks, to understand the specific impact of armed conflict and the effects of peace-keeping operations on women and girls.

While women's involvement in informal activities is well documented, they are seldom included in formal activities, reflecting the fact that they are usually not represented among

decision makers and military leaders. This should be cause for concern since issues affecting women will not be expressed if women are not consulted by fact finding missions or involved in peace negotiations: "political structures, economic institutions and security sectors negotiated in peace talks will not facilitate greater equality between women and men if gender dimensions are not considered in these discussions".

Women, being perceived as 'not political', are more able to access information and pressure authorities to provide services to minimize the impact of conflict on the civilian population. They are also able to occupy spaces to develop community level initiatives for peace across ethnic and national identities. On the other hand, women as symbols of community and/or ethnic identity may become the targets of extensive sexual violence. In this case, the public space becomes similar to the private space of the home in which women often experience daily violence.

Armed conflict and its aftermath affect women's lives in ways that differ from the impact on men. In most conflicts, the traditional division of civilian space—private as women's space and public as men's space—collapses. Men in communities under attack tend to abandon public spaces to avoid being conscripted, attacked, or taken hostage. In this vacuum, women increasingly become the ones to manouver through existing institutions (from market to government departments) and to provide for family welfare and security, including taking on roles traditionally assigned to men

Women experience inequality in power relative to men from the household level to the national level where they are universally underrepresented in legislative bodies, organs of government and local political structures. Women belonging to poor, lower class category experience more problems than the women of rich and higher class families. Women, especially those with low incomes, tend to have less control over their time. These factors are closely linked to

their nutritional status, the quality of care they receive and the nutritional status of their children. The health consequences for women and girls during conflict are enormous. Women and girls are highly vulnerable, due to their sexual and reproductive roles. Gender discrimination can lead to inequitable distribution of food to women and girls, causing malnutrition and other health problems. Women's daily tasks as providers and caregivers become increasingly difficult and dangerous, especially as public services and household goods become less and less available. Armed conflict forces women to take on more responsibilities for family security and livelihoods. But lack of land and property rights constrains their efforts. Women and girls take on new or non-traditional occupations. Forced out of the formal sector and with increasing competition in the informal sector, they may be pushed into dangerous illegal activities. Experiencing or witnessing death, separation, rape, torture, destruction, loss of livelihood and material deprivation can cause severe mental and social stress. Armed conflict also changes social structures and relations. Women as well as men are victims of detention and 'disappearance'. The 'disappearance' of male relatives particularly affects women in societies where their status is directly linked to their relationships with men. Women are traumatized and cannot find closer as long as they still hope for the return of their relatives.

Gender is one of the world's strongest markers for disadvantage. This is specially the case in South Asia. The large number of missing women in the region bears testimony to the scale of the problem. Disadvantage starts at birth. In India, the death rate for children of ages 1-5 is 15 per cent higher for girls than boys. Expressed differently 1,30,000 young lives are lost every year because of the disadvantage associated with being born with two x chromosomes (HDR 2005). The Constitution of India

guarantees equal rights for women with men and equal treatment before law. The pertinent question is how these can, need of social bonding, harmony and equity, be fulfilled. Through new awakening, new ideas, actions, movements, persuasive and consciousness raise conversation, legislation and policy planning no doubt, which may be socio-politically engineered. In most cases, all these are expressed in the ethic of justice which stressed the importance of the dignity of the individual and personal liberty. If the appalling condition of women caused by long entrenched inequity of the sexes is to be eradicated, men and women must jointly wage a war against a system—a system of power relationship by which women are subordinated.

To strive for equality with men (modernity) is also disastrous for the women in the contemporary world in several ways. For women who is more active, clever and successful with high status, the mounting fear is that she may be judged by men as less sexually attractive, loss of a real woman and definitely more threatening than other woman. There is a kind of gender power reflected in tactics of impression management both in real and imaginary world. Several of them would be taboo for women in comparison with men. Women are private and men are public. The role of women in the family is becoming more and more important. Women are seen as inseparable from the family, and most functions assigned to the family are allocated to women within it. Women are usually the careers, the nurturers, the educators, the source of stability, and increasingly they are major cash contributors. For the most part, women meet their responsibilities to their children, their men and older or infirm relatives with generosity, self-sacrifice and unstinting labour. The family affects every aspect of women's lives their socialization and education, their sexuality, the way in which they are expected to behave as women, wives, mothers and cares. The outcomes of the twenty-four hour multitasking of women are not counted.

The family places immense obligations on women's shoulders and shapes their places and role in the community and in local, national and international affairs.

A major face of gender discrimination is the unequal distribution of property rights between men and women. In developing countries, women's rights of ownership over economic assets and legal structures that support these are weak. In most conditions, women's property rights over land are either insecure or virtually non-existent. Retention of such rights is also poor, in the absence of adequate statutory protection. Insecurity in women's property rights over primary resources is the principal issue of gender inequalities within agrarian households. Perpetuation of unequal property structures stems from the need for patriarchal institutions to exercise power over land as a productive resource and as a generator of wealth. Most literature on property rights, however, leaves the gender characteristics of property rights undefined, thus failing to recognize the inter-household consequences of rights inequalities on the distribution of rights and responsibilities within and without the household.

While writing on the subjection of women in early industrial societies, J.S. Mill had anticipated some of the current feminist arguments while stating that political equality of women would be the combined outcome of personal freedom from patriarchal control as well as equal educational and economic opportunities, equal political rights and equal property rights. On such egalitarian principles, liberal feminist theories have thus advocated gender parity between men and women. Radical feminist theories however disagree with the egalitarian conceptualization of gender justice, on the ground that it merely focuses on surface economic issues, leaving the structural inequalities that affect women untouched.

Another important discourse informing current perceptions about gender roles and rights has arisen within

development economics. Several gender adaptations have consequently been made to development practice. Women are now being seen as autonomous economic agents who need to be independently reached by gender equity and poverty alleviation programmes that leverage their household functions in order to create an economic and social security net around rural families and simultaneously improve their participation in economic activities by raising their command over productive resources. Among the primary constituents of women's autonomy, are women's property rights.

While it has been argued that the obliteration of gender inequalities within households and societies through the realization of private property rights by women would also eliminate many insecurities relating to the livelihood and well-being of women, it is nevertheless also necessary for women to secure gender based usufructuary rights that are often crucial to their survival as productive agents in subsistence economies. Gender disparities within common property rights are known to have significantly affected the outcomes of policies for natural resource management in terms of efficiency, environmental sustainability, equity and empowerment of resource users. Other than customary land inheritance and the right to hold personal property in other forms, the traditional property rights held by women have mainly comprised usufruct rights on properties belonging collectively to the family or community. Such usufruct rights have also been vital to the performance of paid and unpaid women's work, they relate closely to the social positioning and status of women in rural communities

In India, for centuries, women have been pushed aside from the path of development in the name of custom, tradition and religion. As a result, they have been denied opportunities for social, economic and political development. This has driven them to lower status in the society. Eradication of poverty was one of the priorities of India's

national reconstruction. "Garibi Hatao" (remove poverty) was in the air for some time. But that slogan failed as it was more of a political tone than a whole-hearted, participatory programme sponsored by the common men and women in the country. Out of 850 million people about 700 million live in the villages. Half of these are women and a sizeable portion of children, old and invalid persons who are dependent on the earning members of the family. These rural folks are still in the grip of illiteracy, ignorance and superstitions. The rate of illiterate women in Manipur is 4,14,341 out of total 11,31,944 female population according to 2001 census. Several factors are responsible for the widespread illiteracy of women in some states of North East India. Looking after the younger brothers and sisters at home, household works, bringing water and firewood from outside, working in other's houses, working in the fields etc. to earn livelihood are considered to be the main duties of the girls and women in rural and hill areas. Drop-out rate in most of the hill areas in North East India is also very high. It is not a matter of discrimination against girls but mainly due to economic factors, non-availability of school, colleges etc. in nearby areas are also seemed to be important factors. Even though agriculture and cattle breeding, small scale industries, craft and other handicrafts are the main openings for employments for rural population, these do not generate enough income to meet the subsistence of these people. Employment is only for a few while under-employment and non-employment rules the rostrum. In majority of village families it is the women who are the breadwinners and they maintain the family while the majority of men idle away their time by playing dices, enjoying *hukka* and killed the time.<sup>17</sup> Poverty and unemployment have the worst effect on women leading to the phenomenon of feminization of poverty. Poverty is a part of our social culture from time immemorial. It emanates from the philosophy of self-denial. It is customary in Indian families to serve best part of the food to the male members

of the family, especially the earning members of the family so that they maintain their health for hard work. The balance is distributed to the children and the old. If anything is left in the earthen pot, then the women in the family share it.<sup>18</sup> This, of course, has been changed now thanks to the improvement made by the various Five Year Plans and other schemes sponsored by Government and voluntary organizations, such as banks, cooperative societies etc. Yet it is not possible to eradicate poverty from our land completely in spite of our earnest effort. Much has yet to be done and here the women's organizations and autonomous groups can purposefully play their role. In fact, women's organizations and research wings have done valuable studies on the reason for persisting poverty in Indian rural areas.<sup>19</sup> The march of Indian women from orthodoxy to equality is quite fascinating and spontaneous. General education and innumerable enactments of British Indian Government facilitated a fresh air of freedom to Indian women. The Indian women attempted to fly out of the cage like free birds, and soar in the western horizon of independence and equality. British India is a witness to testify that from the very enactment of prohibiting *Sati*, infanticide and early marriage of the girl child to the present day law of equal share of the parental property to both the son and the daughter is an apparent example of road to freedom for the Indian women. Even now highlighting female rights and priorities are containing in independent India by democratic enactment and procedures and a stage has come that Indian women has reached to the level of Indian men in all aspects of life in this country. To further improve their position and status, many commissions and projects have been launched in the past fifty eight years. The latest being National Women Commission, they have been given equal rights with men as per Constitution and as per every law of the country<sup>20</sup>. Women can do many a thing if they are united. After all it is well said, union is strength. The unity of women can help very much to reduce

their hardships. Every nation has its own problems. Yet the women's forum will accelerate welfare measures among women in the respective countries. Women's union in villages, panchayats, taluks, districts and state levels can handle women's problems very successfully.<sup>21</sup> Women's unions can top and utilize the funds allotted by governments, quasi-governments and charitable organizations and private parties interested decide the mode of action to be taken by them in that particular area. When the state is full of such "active women's union" all women's problems will get due attention and that can be solved early by concerned authorities. The local women's union can also organize agitation against all the problems like environmental problems, e.g. Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement) of Medha Patker. Human rights issues, e.g., Remove Armed Forces Special Power Act, 1958 from Manipur of Sharmila Chanu. They can even unleash agitation against liquor shops, ration shop manipulation and black-marketing and price rise etc. Such concrete and practical works on the women's part will go a long way to relieve the poor and downtrodden women in the country. Women's peace movements often focus on shared experiences and produce solidarity across lines of division, which make it hard to cast the enemy as 'the other'. The concerns these groups have about their children and other family members give them a social legitimacy and a linkage with women from different sides of the conflict. As a result, women have sometimes fewer difficulties than men in expressing concerns about a conflict.

The greatest obstacles to women's unity and solidarity in India are religious, caste and language. While these were the part and parcel of Indian culture and civilization, spurious and superfluous customs and conventions silently crept into the society in course of time. While what is best is to be retained the rest has to be discarded. Resurrecting the past will not serve us in future. At the same time human values

and virtues must be nourished and nurtured and made the part of life for both man and woman. As women comprise nearly half of the total population of the country this denial has contributed in no small measures to India's continuing development.

In India, different writings, epics, novels etc. reveal that women have been given very high status. But it is necessary to examine whether the women are giving the value of the real position or not, or in what way they are interpreting. In the Ramayana, Ram though an Avatar of Vishnu was helpless in killing the demon Ravana. Ram had to worship goddess Durga in order to obtain supernatural power. Ultimately he did that and was able to kill the demon. Instances are legion where feminine power has been rated very high, nay, even superior to masculine power. Further Ram could not perform any religious function in the absence of Sita; therefore, he would keep a statue of Sita made of gold by his side and would perform the religious rites. Even the earth has been visualized as the mother for it is this mother earth which gives us shelter in her lap at the time of birth and death. Even the rivers like Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswati have been elevated to the status of mother. Insult, injury or any kind of humiliation to mother has been cursed as *Matri Haran Dosa* (unpardonable sin against womenfolk by men). All these instances and scriptural testimonies show that at least in the textual and ideational level Indian women were accorded very high position. Even in some oral traditions of a section of Nagas the highest Being is a female called 'emonopfii' or 'ukepenopfii'. In the Hindu oral tradition it is said that a house where women are respected Gods are pleased there. This theme has been vividly and colourfully described in a 15<sup>th</sup> century literary work by Balaram Das in *Laxmi Purana*. Lord Jagannath who is known to be an Avatar of Vishnu along with his elder brother Balaram had to suffer from abject poverty and humiliation because he disrespected his wife Laxmi (the Goddess of wealth). Only when Laxmi

was propitiated Jagannath and Balaram got back their lost glory and status.<sup>22</sup> Now it is quite clear that women were being used by their male counterparts to serve/fulfil their own vested interests or purposes. In a real sense, women are givers and males are receivers. Women are exploited and males are exploiters.

The emergence of the rudiments of a women's movement in India can be seen in the formation of and growth of women's association over a period of 50 years, from roughly 1880 to 1930. The rudiments were the aggregate of local, provincial and national associations oriented towards improving the position of women and aiding national development.

Women play a very important role in the social life of Manipur. A study of social life and social change of Manipur will be uncompleted without a study on women. Women participate in multifarious activities of socio-economic and political matters. Women who are facing a number of problems in connection with the socio-economic and political condition form different organizations. The main concern of these organizations are not only women's issues, but raised all other social issues such as discrimination of the minorities, negligence to culture, language, marginalization due to the developmental process leading to displacement, loss of work, loss of identity and impoverishment in a massive scale, violation of human rights etc. social movements are an effort to change institutions and practices. They are usually for the purpose of furthering the rights of one or more groups within a system either through reform or more radical changes. Social movements labour to alter fundamentally existing social relationship and institutional structures.<sup>23</sup> The area of work covered by the activities of women's group and network is not confining to a limited area of state and national level. Internationally, women's groups and networks have begun to work at regional and sub-regional levels. For example, the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development, launched in 1999, focuses on promoting

conflict resolution in a number of African countries. The Mano River Women's Peace Network brings together women from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.<sup>24</sup> Consultations with women's groups and networks can provide insights on conflict situations. Understanding gender norms and customs in a society may provide important informations for early warning. But international organizations have not always recognized and utilized women's knowledge, experience and informal involvement in peace processes. Assessment missions focus almost exclusively on political parties and other formal political actors. The then UN Secretary General, Kofi Anan made an action propose during the formation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).<sup>25</sup>

1. Integrate gender perspectives into the terms of reference of Security Council visits and missions to countries and regions in conflicts; request briefings on the situation of women and girls in conflicts; include gender specialists wherever possible; and ensure consultation with women's groups and networks.
2. Ensure that all peace accords address the consequences of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, their contributions to the peace process and their needs and priorities in the aftermath of a conflict.
3. Ensure full involvement of women in negotiations of peace agreement at national and international levels, including through provision of training for women and women's organizations on formal peace processes.

In Manipur, the role of women in social movements can be traced back to the Pre British period when Manipur was under monarchical system, when the policies and activities

of the king affected the social norms, structure etc., of the society, women in an organized form represented before the king and expressed their viewpoints. In most of these cases the king very often changed the policies as requested by the society. Raja Paikhomba (1666-1697), could not appoint Ingallei as Rani because people of Manipur refused to accept her as their Rani. The voices of the masses came so to think that Maharani was not merely the wife of the King but also the queen of the people and, therefore, acceptable to them. Above all she must be an example to them. The Maharani should be a model woman so that women in the kingdom might copy her.<sup>26</sup>

Women's social movement emerged in a more organized manner with a creative ideology from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Women's movement in Manipur is norm oriented type and connected with reformations. Social movements came into being as a reaction to the discontent, dissatisfaction and contradiction in the then society of Manipur.

The first Nupilal (women's movement) of 1904 was a reaction to the contemporary social problems. The immediate cause of the movement was the revival of Lallup. The Political Agent ordered the villagers to collect bamboos, thatch, reeds and other materials for the construction of the Bangalow. Again, all the people of Imphal (at least one male member of the family) were ordered to extract teak wood from Kabow for the construction of the House of the Assistant Superintendent which the people protested and assembled at Bazar. The Meitei women took main part in the protest. From the side of the government all sorts of means were used for controlling the movement, using army, lathi charged, even more than five persons were not allowed to assemble etc. But the women did not stop their movement; they disobeyed the orders, entered into the residence of the Political Agent and Superintendent. They were injured but their relentless activities were unable to control by the British

Officers. So the system of Lallup was stopped and peace restored in the country.

Another important and remarkable women's movement during the British period was the movement of 1939, i.e. Second Nupilal. The immediate cause for the outburst of the women's movement of 1939 was the economic important arising out of the scarcity of rice in Manipur. The rice export was exclusively controlled by the Marwari traders during that time. They exported rice to other parts of British India. The Marwari traders who were permanently settled in Manipur held the top position in the economic structure of Manipur. They had the monopoly of purchasing of rice and paddy from the cultivators and local traders. As a result, the local people suffered a lot. The nature of the movement was quite democratic, but the authority tried to control the movement by using forces. The women were not ready to stop but became more serious which leads to the closer of rice mills by the concerned authority. This was a clear example of the spirit of women's movement touching the economic aspect of the society before independence, even though the whole responsibility of the family was in the hands of the male head of the family as a patriarchal society.

Every sovereign state and its subdivisions has at its disposal an armory of measures to preserve, maintain, and restore law and order and to protect the lives and property of its citizens in times of unrest when there is a high likelihood of violence or when violence erupts against the government itself or between large segments of the population. Among such measures are the imposition of martial laws, restrictions on the rights of *habeas corpus*, declaration of emergency, that provide the government with extraordinary powers, and the imposition of curfew.<sup>27</sup> When the Britishers left Manipur and she became a part of the Indian Union in 1949, she was hoping of protection internally and externally. The earlier hopes of the people of Manipur were shattered as in the name of protection and maintenance of law and order, their basic

rights have been robbed constantly. The people of that time believe for a developed and welfare society under the different constitutional provisions. But in the name of the maintenance of law and order of the state, different military forces arrived in the state along with different Acts and Bills, which hampered the rights of the people, even including all human rights. The role of women in the civil society of North East India generally, and Manipur especially has a significant record. Women organizations have come forward for peace in Manipur and organize resistance against police excesses, bad governance, shortage of basic needs etc.

By the late 1970s and with the beginning of 1980s the entire state of Manipur was under heavy combing operation by the army in order to flush out the extremists. During the operation a number of innocent people suffered a lot, including women. During that time women, who were directly affected by actions of the Police and Paramilitary forces, along with other local women started to guard their family members. This movement of women came to be known as Meira Paibi movement. If there are any serious problems which are likely to affect peaceful social atmosphere of the locality, it is made compulsory for every house to join this movement, ever since the women in different parts of the state have been organizing themselves against the activities of armed personals, and other related issues. In different occasions, women in different sections gathered in front of the Chief Minister's or Governor's Bangalow and sougheed anti-combing slogan or excesses of armed personals, which are followed by big demonstrations, hartals, bands etc. This has some amount of desire effect.

While the women are facing a number of problems in connection with the socio-economic and political development of the country, the existing government do not protect even the prestige of the women and the society altogether. As a recent trend, suicide of the newly married women, killing of innocent people, kidnapping etc., are

becoming the common problems of Manipur. In the armed conflict situations, many Manipuri's have lost their lives. In such situations the weaker and backwards are the worst sufferers. In case of Manipur also women and rural backward people are the worst sufferers. Women have fallen victims to the carnal desires of the armed personnels, both, state and non-state forces. Many rape cases by the army goes unreported due to the fear of social stigma and the futility of taking up embarrassing death battle against the might of the Army Personnels in the name of the maintenance of law and order in the State is becoming unbearable to the women. So some women, under the leadership of All Manipur Social Reformer and Development Samaj protested against the Assam Rifles in a nude position against the custodial rape and killing of Thangjam Manorama, on 11 July 2004 at Bamon Kampu in Imphal East District of Manipur. They have done this by thinking that upon their bodies, women carry the honours of their community. The rape and abduction of women constitute dishonouring of the male members of the community and of the community as a whole. In many societies women are also seen as more traditional, conservative, and religious than their men and thereby as upholders of the fundamental values of the community.<sup>28</sup> Women are simultaneously critical and incidental. Through women, men multiply their race, increase their members. They are, in this way critical. But they are also incidental. They may be captured and put to good use, unlike men of the other community, who represent a physical danger and, even when converted, are distrusted and not fully accepted.<sup>29</sup>

The pressure and movements of Manipuri women in all the conflict situations tend therefore to be treated with certain derision or simply set aside as irrelevant. To counteract this, many women movements became more aggressive, rude and more violent like radical who feel they must blow up everything to set things right. But it should not create any negative impression upon the mind of the general public.

Violence is a political issue and it is relevant to all, both

men and women are victims of violence in Manipur. In the name of the maintenance of law and order, the different acts and bills are using by the authority. With these acts and bills a number of innocent people have lost their life. Different women voluntary organizations like the All Manipur Nupi Marup, All Manipur Social Reformer and Development Samaj, The Kuki Women Human Rights Network, Kuki Mother's Association etc. are involving in all such issues in Manipur and tried to protect the basic minimum rights of the people, i.e. the right to life. In different occasions like the killing of innocent people, raping of women and looting of the properties by the C.R.P.F at Patsoi, killing of innocent people at the volley ball ground of Heirangoithong, killing of 18 innocent people in June 2001 in connection with the extension of Indo-Naga Cease-fire in Manipur, killing of 11 persons by the security personnel from 26 February to 10 March 2004 from different places of Imphal, kidnapping and killing of the innocent persons like Manoj Kumar Sethi, Luiningla Elizabeth etc., these women groups launched different movements and the government also could not remain silent.

Manipur created a new history of women's movement when Irom Chanu Sharmila launched hunger strike since November 3, 2000 in protest against killing of ten civilians at Malom by the Assam Rifles personnel following a bomb attack by the underground outfits on the armed personnel on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2000. Even she shifted her hunger strike base to New Delhi for six months (October 2006 to March 2007). The national leaders did not pay heed to her demand for removal of Armed Forces Special Power Act- 1958. Sharmila was frustrated and came back to Imphal on 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2007. Another reason for her return to Imphal was the promises made by almost all the political parties in Manipur during the assembly poll (2007) campaign to lobby for repeal of the Act. Shri O. Ibobi Singh, The Chief Minister of Manipur<sup>2</sup> commented in front of the AICC leaders at New

Delhi during March in connection with Sharmila's protest, the Act had already been lifted from seven assembly segments of Imphal Municipal areas and the law and order situation in the state is permitting, the Act could be repealed from the entire state. But Sharmila is still continuing her hunger strike because the people of Imphal East and West are not only the worst sufferers but the remaining population are also sufferers.<sup>30</sup> In the name of maintenance of law and order in the State and for bringing welfare to the society, a number of draconian laws have been enforced in the State causing untold suffering of the masses.

### Significance of the Study (Conclusion)

Now it is necessary to understand that women are taking a large role in the socio-economic and political movement of Manipur. But an extraordinary situation is that all the women's movements in some societies like, Manipuri Society, were not concerned with the women's issues which have mentioned by different feminists. Women organizations have contributed, in no small measures, to women's development and social development. The area of present study is only on a small border State of India, i.e., Manipur, but it will contribute to the understanding of the continuity and changes in connection with the formation of women's group and their movement in every part of the whole world. It will be very helpful in understanding about the role of women in the democratic set up.

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