

Chapter – XVI

GENDER ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENT IN MANIPUR

16.1 Introduction

Women in the Northeast and Manipur, in particular, enjoy a unique status in society. Like most women, they perform the triple tasks of housework, agricultural and livestock labour and meet socio-cultural obligations of the family. Yet, they are socially visible outside the home front. Indeed, in the fields of education, health and work, they are known to have done far better than their counterparts elsewhere.

Historically, women in this region played a major role in the affairs of governance, the economy and in civil society. There was an exclusive court for women called the *pacha* court, where the queen conducted the trials. Even in the king's court, where he was the ultimate authority, only a woman could convert his order of death penalty to life sentence.

Later the spate of invasions and conquests compelled the male members to leave their homes due to their involvement in the war. The void caused by their departure and the uncertainty of their return led the women to take upon themselves the task of bringing up children, taking care of their economy and ensuring that the social order was maintained. The Burmese occupation (from 1819 to 1826) saw a huge demographic shift, marked by a sharp decline in the population of able-bodied men and the proliferation of women-headed households.

In 1904, the women of Manipur rose against the British political agent Lt. Col. Maxwell, who ordered the people of Imphal to supply teak wood from Kabaw valley for reconstructing the house of a British official. They forced their entry into the Residency, thus compelling the British to withdraw their order. Again, in 1939, in protest against the British decision to export rice in connivance with the local traders, leading to acute shortage of foodgrain, the women gheraoed the British Residency. This was the second 'Nupilan', a women's movement directed against the British.

In recent times, their activism has been demonstrated in social movements to combat drug abuse, alcoholism, child marriage, etc. The blatant forms of sexual discrimination that prevail in many other parts of the country are not found in Manipur. The discriminating practices are subtler in nature, though needless to say this does not make them any less serious. As a backdrop to this analysis some relevant demographic indicators are presented below.

According to the 2001 Census the Northeast as a whole has a sex ratio of 921, which though higher than the national average, reflects discrimination. Manipur, has a sex ratio of 978. Regionwise the hilly districts (combined) have a sex ratio of 921, which is far lower than the state average. Ukhrul has a very low sex ratio of 920. The valley districts have a much higher sex ratio than the state average with Bishnupur recording the highest (1004), according to the Census (See Chapter-III). The death rates are lower in the rural areas (which includes the hill region) than in the urban area (valley region), the figures for the same being 5.4 and 5.7 respectively. The infant mortality rate is also lower in the rural area compared to the urban areas. Manipur has a lower CBR (child birth rate) than the all India level; 19 in the rural areas and 15.9 in the urban areas for the year 2001. Looking at the figure for the Northeast we see a wide variation of CBR across the literates and the non-literates. The CBR is found to be the lowest in families in which only females are literate (11 per thousand of population), while it is highest in those in which only males are literate (43 per thousand of population). The

position is the same in respect of the total fertility rate. Thus, in families where the male members are educated the impact of family planning is minimal, while it is highest in those where only the females are literate¹. Generally, life expectancy of females in Manipur is higher than that of their male counterparts. Regionwise, the female population in the urban areas has a higher life expectancy than their counterparts in the hilly districts. This is due to greater accessibility to the healthcare system in the urban areas, and poorer nutritional status of women in the hilly districts.

16.2 Sectoral Analysis

(i). Education

The literacy rate of a community indicates the level of basic education facility available to the population (See Table 14.9, Chapter-XIV). According to the 2001 figures, the male literacy rate increased to 77.87 per cent and that of female to 59.7 per cent while the overall rate remained at 68.87 per cent. Senapati and Tamenglong districts are traditional under performers in this respect. There is been a marked disparity between the male and female literacy rates, especially in the lower income groups. This needs to be addressed by the State government if it aims to achieve hundred per cent literacy in future.

The achievements at the primary education level are almost diluted by the high rates of dropouts in the secondary and higher secondary levels. Manipur has the lowest dropout rate (43 per cent), though there is a wide gap between girl and boy dropout rates. This is mainly attributed to household responsibilities and the high cost of education, which has barred girls from attending schools. By and large the educational status of girls (in terms of their enrolment) is far from satisfactory.

(ii). Health and Nutrition

Manipur has a three-tier healthcare system consisting of PHCs, CHCs, and the sub-Centers in the rural areas, all of which suffer from poor doctor-patient ratio, dearth of medicines, etc. The number of paramedical personnel attending patients is also low. In 1991 there were 681 doctors and 611 nurses in these areas.

Another problem is that of drug abuse and AIDS, as discussed in Chapter-XV. Addicts comprising males and females, mostly in the 15-35 age group, use IDUs and share needles. Female IDUs constituted about 15-18 per cent in 1999. Females constitute about 3.6 per cent of the total drug addicts, almost 90 per cent of whom are in the age group 15-35 years. The number of HIV-infected males is higher than females, across the age groups covered, but in the age group, 11-20, the number of HIV-infected females is higher than that of males (8 males, as against 23 females). This exposes the vulnerability of teenage girls in Manipur. It may be added that the cases of women infected in the sample would have been less had they not get the virus through their husbands.

Of the total number of addicts, 2.4 per cent are widowed or divorced, 29.3 per cent are married and 40 per cent of IDUs have sexual partners. HIV has spread rapidly among IDUs and through them their partners and children are infected. Presently, Manipur has 2.37 per cent HIV positive antenatal mothers. Socio-economic problems contribute to drug abuse and high-risk sexual behaviour. To counter this the government has undertaken special programmes targeted to the addicts, which includes setting up of de-addiction Centers, launching community-based de-addiction programmes and organizing workshops, in

¹ East India HDR, NCAER

collaboration with NGOs and SHGs. The government has set a target for reducing seroprevalance by 10 per cent among IDUs in high endemic areas and by 20 per cent in low endemic areas.

Nutrition: Like women of other underdeveloped states of India, some women in Manipur suffer from malnutrition and related diseases, giving rise to the high incidence of underweight and weak children, anemic mothers and various other complex diseases. The incidence of mild anemia is quite high (about 21 per cent) in Manipur. Moreover, there is a lack of potable water, which is the main reason behind the incidence of water borne diseases, mainly diarrhoea.

(iii) The Economy

Manipuri women contribute substantially to the economic development of the state. A notable example of such an activity is the Ima-Keithel or an exclusive women's market. The only one of its kind, it consists mainly of women vegetable vendors and cloth merchants, who mostly sell their own products. The vendors are backed by strong organizations, which protect them from any harassment by the police authorities. Historically, it has played an important role in serving as a launching pad for the women's movement against colonial rule.

The period 1971-1991 saw a significant increase in the participation of women agricultural workers in the total workforce —rising from 1.31 per cent to 3.98 per cent. In respect of the other services their share raised from 0.79 per cent in 1971 to 2.47 per cent in 1999. By and large women are confined to lowly paid labour intensive jobs like paddy sowing, while more skilled jobs like ploughing is handled by men. Ploughing by tradition is a male job, women participate in all other activities. One characteristic of women's agricultural work is the system of reciprocal labour. No explicit wage is paid. A woman works in a field in return for work rendered on her field.

In the farming sector, teams of women workers undertake transplantations, weeding and reaping, and work as collective labour in rotation for each member's field. In Manipur, very few women participate in industrial activities, except for Imphal where the participation of women in non-household activities was the highest. The participation rate in these activities increased from 4.27 per cent in 1971 to 8.88 per cent in 1991, while that in household sector correspondingly declined from 13.19 per cent to 10.01 per cent. In all other districts it was almost negligible.

(iv) Social and Political Life

We have discussed the role played by women in the fight against colonialism earlier in the chapter.

In the valley, 'Meirapaibis' are involved in initiating various measures like banning the sale of alcohol, drugs, etc. Meirapaibis is not one homogeneous organization. Every locality has a group of women who keep watch on the locality in the night. They characteristically move with torches lit by kerosene. Meirapaibi literally means torch bearer. It demonstrated its potential for achieving social and political objectives, following the vehement protest against the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) in Manipur.

However, despite these initiatives the position of women in regard to social and political rights is far from satisfactory. Unlike sons in a family they are not allowed to inherit property and can exercise property rights over their father's land, only till the time of their marriage. A

widow can exercise her right over her husband's land till her death and if she remarries she ceases to have such a right (especially among the Naga tribes). However, women have full ownership right on their wealth, which is even returned to them after divorce. A woman who is widowed or divorced is given landed property by her parents so that she retains her links with her parents' home.

There are very few women representatives in the Assembly. In 2000, only one woman candidate out of the nine candidates put up by the political parties was elected.² However, at the local government level, women are well represented, sometimes crossing the one-third mark. Their capacity to exercise political influence is restricted because their husbands act on their behalf. In the hilly districts women are not allowed to have any representation in any political institution.

(v). Domestic Life

Recent years have seen an increase in domestic violence and instances of wife beating/battering in Manipur homes. Though there are practically no cases of dowry harassment nor of bride burning, there are some cases of girls being taunted and humiliated in the event of their not meeting the expectation of the boys. Polygamy is still practiced and women are sometimes forced to suffer abuse for fear of their husbands taking another wife.

A recent study conducted by a local English daily in Manipur has revealed a dramatic rise in divorce rates over the years. According to a survey, "infidelity, enlightenment of women folk and unsound economic conditions are some of the important issues responsible for the steady increase in divorce rates..." The number of cases filed at the family courts relating to the demand for maintenance increased from 133 in 2001 to 203 in 2003. (Table 16.6)

16.3 Recommendations

(i). Politics

Initiatives should be taken by government and non-government agencies to establish vibrant women-represented local bodies in all districts.

(ii). Education

Special scholarships and other incentives should be extended to the girl students at all levels. In particular, the poorer sections could be offered incentives to send their wards to school rather than make them work as child labourers.

- Incentives should be provided to the tribal students keeping in mind their special needs.
- To counter the high dropouts in the secondary levels, non-formal educational Centers should be opened up to provide condensed courses to enable the dropouts to rejoin educational institutions at appropriate stages of formal education. A case in point is the degeneration of the National Open School system in Manipur. The examination system of the NOS is so corrupt that students parking out of this system are barred from joining any educational institute in Manipur. The government should see that NOS is in order because it has an important role.
- Adult literacy programmes should be immediately undertaken

² Ksh Bimola Devi. *Role of Women in Manipur politics*

(iii). Health and Nutrition

The growing incidence of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS should be tackled on a war footing.

Awareness should be generated about the cause and incidence of HIV/AIDS and their ill effects on society, and the urgent need to tackle this and other problems like malnutrition, drug abuse, etc. Health infrastructure in terms of the number of doctors, paramedical persons and also the number of hospitals, PHCs and CHCs, must be improved and supplemented by a community-based health care system.

(iv). Land Rights

Legal and administrative steps must be undertaken so that women can inherit their father's land.

(v). Making Laws More Egalitarians and Gender Sensitive

Customs and laws sanctioned by tradition and enforced over generations have helped to maintain the identity of different ethnic groups. However, they need to be democratized. As a first step, experts and women activists and scholars should be consulted on making the existing law relating to women's basic rights more egalitarian and gender sensitive.

(vi). Women's groups

Women's groups such as Meira Paibis in the socio-political sphere and the Ima-Keithel in the economic sphere must play a pro-active role in (i) challenging the accepted social customs and norms that are loaded with gender bias, and (ii) bringing about an egalitarian social and economic order that is gender-sensitive.

Some Gender Related Statistics:³

Table 16: Health

	1997	2000	2002
Rural	21	23	17
Urban	28	25	21
Combined	30	23	17

	Person	Male	Female
Rural	58.50	56.70	60.40
Urban	61.30	60.60	62.30
Combined	59.60	58.00	61.50

	1997	2000	2003
Rural	20.50	19.10	16.10
Urban	17.60	16.20	14.10
Combined	19.70	18.30	15.50

	1997	2000	2003
Rural	5.80	5.40	8.10
Urban	6.20	6.00	3.40
Combined	5.90	5.60	7.40

³ All the statistics unless specially mentioned are from the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Manipur.

Table 16.1e:

Number of Death by Causes	1998-99	2000-01	2001-02
Cholera	Nil	Nil	Nil
Small Pox	Nil	Nil	Nil
Fever (All types of fever)	75	3	3
Dysentery	Nil	1	Nil
Diarrhea	16	21	64
Respiratory disease	59	10	64
Injuries	31	25	18
Others	733	1100	947
All causes	914	1160	1032

Table 16.1f:

Prevalence of Anemia (in p.c.)	1999-2000
Mild	21.70
Moderate	6.30
Severe	0.80

16.1g Age – Sex Proportion Of HIV Positive Cases (Sero-Surveillance)

Age Group	2000(Jan. – Dec.)			2005		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
0 –10	38	32	70	23	20	43
11 – 20	22	34	56	6	2	8
21 – 30	381	205	586	82	80	162
31 – 40	318	104	422	182	67	249
41 & above	82	26	108	39	14	53
Total	841	401	1242	332	183	515

Table 16.1h: Percentage Effective Couple Protection Rate Due To All Methods.

State	1980	1985	1988	1989	1990
Manipur	10.10	18.10	23.10	25.70	26.70

Table 16.1i: Number of Acceptors of Family Planning, 2001-03

Vasectomy/Tubectomy	-	1712
Oral Pill	-	1348
IUD	-	7173

16.2a Percentage of Gross Enrolment In The Schools/College By Standard, 2000 – 2001.

Class I to XII	% of enrolment to the population	% of boys enrolment to the population of that category	% of girls enrolment to population of that category
I-V	110.79	112.47	109.03
VI-VIII	85.64	88.92	82.22
IX-X	61.51	63.91	59.06
XI-XII	18.39	20.79	16.03
Total	82.64	85.27	79.93

16.2b Percentage of Boys and Girls in Different Branches of General Education

General Education	Percentage of subjects in General Education	% of girls in different branches of General Education	% of boys in different branches of General Education	% of girls in different branches to General Education	% of boys in different branches to General Education
Arts	56.58	49.68	50.32	28.11	28.47
Science	38.08	40.54	59.46	15.44	22.64
Commerce	5.34	33.29	66.71	1.78	3.56

16.2c Percentage of Boys and Girls in Different Branches of Professional Education

Professional Education	% of professional education	% of girls in different branches of Professional Education	% of boys in different branches of Professional Education	% of girls in different branches to General Education	% of boys in different branches to General Education
Education	16.22	62.74	37.26	10.18	6.05
Engineering/ Technical	24.57	20.16	79.84	4.95	19.62
Medical	5.54	30.28	69.72	1.68	3.86
Agriculture	8.27	42.92	57.08	3.55	4.72
Veterinary Science	3.12	33.75	66.25	1.05	2.07
Law	36.27	29.89	70.11	10.84	25.43
Others	6.01	24.03	75.97	1.44	4.56

Table 16.2d: Reasons For Children Not Attending School In Manipur, 1999 - 2000

Main reasons for never attending school (in p.c.)		Male	Female
1.	School too far away	11.70	4.90
2.	Transport not available	0.00	1.00
3.	Education not considered necessary	12.00	7.10
4.	Required for household work	0.00	14.80
5.	Required for work on farm/family business	0.00	1.00
6.	Required for outside work for payment in cash or kind	2.00	1.00
7.	Cost too much	4.00	14.00
8.	No proper school facilities for girls	0.00	0.00
9.	Required for care siblings	4.00	5.10
10.	Not interested on studies	10.10	6.00
11.	Other	56.20	40.10
12.	Don't know/missing	0.00	4.90
13.	Total per cent	100.00	100.00
14.	Number of children	50.00	101.00

Table 16.3: Household Decision-making

Table 16.3a: Per cent Distribution Of Every Married Woman By Person Who Make Specific Household Decision In Manipur 1999 – 2000.

Household decision	Respondent only	Husband only	Respondent with Husband	Others in household only	Respondent with others in household	Missing	Total percentage
What items to cook	69.9	4.60	6.90	8.00	10.60	0.00	100.00
Obtaining health care for herself	10.00	48.40	15.80	8.30	17.30	0.00	100.00
Purchasing jewelry or other major household items	8.60	27.60	40.40	6.20	17.30	0.00	100.00
Going and staying with her parents or siblings	8.30	29.20	37.00	7.60	17.90	0.00	100.00
How the money she earns will be used	59.00	7.90	29.00	1.30	2.60	0.30	100.00

Table 16.3b: Women's Autonomy, 1999 - 2000

Background characteristic	Percentage not involved in any decision making	Percentage involved in decision making on :				Percentage who do not Need permission to:			
		What to cook	Own Health care	Purchasing Jewellery, etc.	Staying With her parents /siblings	Go to the market	Visit Friends/relatives	Percentage with access to money	Number of women
Residence									
Urban	4.30	85.30	44.50	64.90	59.00	30.40	23.30	75.50	484.00
Rural	27.00	88.50	42.70	67.00	65.30	27.60	30.90	77.40	951.00
Education									
Illiterate	2.10	88.20	42.40	68.00	62.30	27.30	28.70	77.20	615.00
Literate<Middle School	4.10	90.20	37.00	62.20	62.70	33.50	31.90	74.60	243.00
Middle school complete	3.30	85.30	48.00	66.30	64.80	23.00	26.30	75.10	245.00
High School complete and above	4.80	85.60	46.00	66.00	64.10	31.40	26.50	78.80	332.00
Standard of living index :	2.40	90.90	37.50	64.20	59.20	30.20	31.50	76.50	461.00
	3.90	84.50	45.20	67.300	64.70	26.60	26.70	76.40	765.00
	2.80	90.90	50.80	66.70	64.70	30.80	24.90	78.30	176.00
	3.30	87.40	43.30	66.30	63.20	28.60	28.30	76.80	1435.00

Table 16.4: Economic Profile

Table 16.4a: Workforce Participation Rate, 2001

Total/Male/Female	Rural	Urban	Combined
Male	50.07	45.17	48.91
Female	43.20	32.28	40.51
Total	46.72	38.71	44.79

Table 16.4b: Workers (Main & Marginal) in Manipur 1981, 1991 & 2001.

		1981	1991	2001(Provisional)
		Main Workers	P	573339
	M	331242	414812	484240
	F	242097	296471	272280
Marginal Workers	P	40469	66621	313058
	M	6200	9958	110402
	F	34269	56663	202656
Total	P	613808	774904	1069578
	M	337442	424770	594642
	F	276366	350134	474936

Table 16.4c: Main Workers of Manipur by Industries

Industries	1981		1991	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Cultivator	211862	152759	243267	194232
Agriculture Labourer	10961	17652	19151	28199
Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting and Plantation, Orchards and Allie activities	4809	768	8695	2036
Trade & Commerce	10402	8934	17325	9831
Transport storage & communication	5076	72	8191	345
Other Services	63425	98290	90884	17511
Total	331242	242097	414812	293471

Sources: SHM 2002(pp. 29-32), ER 1994-95(pp.56-57)

Table: 16.4d: Main Workers of Manipur by Industries, 2001

Industries	2001	
	Male	Female
Cultivator	174869	110940
Agriculture Labourer	25387	16432
Household Industry	14337	28826
Other Services	215634	72939
Total	430227	229137

Source: Census 2001.

Table 16.4e: Women Employment In Organized Public And Private Sector In Manipur, 1971, 1981, 1991, 1998 & 2001 ('000)

Year	Public Sector	Private Sector
1971	1.60	0.10
1981	3.80	0.10
1991	8.60	0.80
1998	16.78	0.80
2001	18.00	1.00

Table 1.4f: No. of all enterprise engaged in Agricultural & non-Agricultural Activities & employment in 1998.

(i)	No. of enterprises	-	80489
(ii)	Employment :		
	Female	-	65827
	Total	-	200726

Table 16.4g: Average daily Wage Rate by Occupation (July 1999 to June, 2000)

S. No.	Item	Male	Female
1.	Ploughing	58.85	52.50
2.	Sowing	53.42	52.00
3.	Weeding	48.75	40.00
4.	Transplanting	57.72	49.82
5.	Harvesting	53.49	47.22
6.	Winnowing	NA	50.00
7.	Threshing	45.00	45.00
8.	Picking	NA	NA
9.	Herd Man	53.83	NA
10.	Welding	40.00	NA
11.	Cane crushing	NA	NA
12.	Carpenter	71.91	NA
13.	Blacksmith	53.23	NA
14.	Cobbler	46.03	NA
16.	Tractor Driver	91.25	NA
17.	Sweeper	40.00	NA
18.	Unskilled	45.06	42.11

Table 16.5: Gender and The Formal Political Spheres:

Table 16.5a: Number Of Electors:

1) Vidhan Sabha Election:			
Year	Male	Female	Total
1990	613266	614651	1227917
1995	631368	638378	1415825
2000	N.A.	N.S.	N.A.
2) Lok Sabha Election			
Year	Male	Female	Total 1991
1999	672650	699689	1372339

Table 16.5b: Number Of Elected Representatives In Manipur

Level	No. of Elected representative		
	Male	Female	Total
Gram Panchayat	1085	622	1707
Zilla Parishad	39	22	61

Table 16.6: Divorce Rate

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 Jan-March
Divorce	31	38	59	45	12
Maintenance	121	133	179	203	56
Judicial separation	1	NA	1	NA	NA
Restitution of conjugate rights	2	3	9	3	2

Source: The Sangai Express, dated Sept. 16, 2004

Table 16.7: District Wise Dependency Ratio In Manipur, (2001)

District/State	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Senapati *	49.79	55.68		
Tamenglong	53.40	51.12		
Churachandpur	51.59	58.05		
Bishnupur	50.92	59.52	53.67	65.30
Thoubal	48.32	51.65	50.12	56.87
Imphal U	51.10	61.51	57.16	73.14
Ukhrul	51.17	49.91		
Chandel	50.45	53.24	55.68	72.12
Manipur *	50.75	56.51	55.06	68.37

Note: * Excluding 3 Sub-Divisions

Source: Census 2001

Table 16.8: Percentage Of Female Main Workers

State/Districts	Agricultural Workers						Non-Agricultural Workers					
	Cultivators			Agricultural Laborers			Other Services			Household Industry		
	1971	1991	2001	1971	1991	2001	1971	1991	2001	1971	1991	2001
Senapati	45.85	44.76	75.97	0.08	1.16	6.99	0.36	1.00	12.25	0.53	0.58	4.79
Tamenglong	49.43	46.49	89.51	0.02	0.44	0.97	0.28	0.99	7.52	0.25	0.18	2.00
Churachandpur	36.84	36.35	67.25	0.39	1.39	8.70	0.55	1.68	17.67	0.73	1.43	6.38
Chandel	37.67	36.97	75.02	0.48	2.52	4.40	0.71	1.30	15.60	0.26	0.76	4.98
Imphal (U)	5.27	12.86	16.01	2.14	4.77	6.44	1.04	4.82	55.52	13.19	8.88	22.04
Bishnupur	NA	20.3	25.98	NA	6.86	8.80	NA	1.50	48.51	NA	9.76	16.70
Thoubal	NA	23.67	43.00	NA	8.25	14.83	NA	1.18	26.74	NA	5.34	15.43
Ukhrul	51.35	41.32	83.92	0.11	0.67	1.73	0.45	2.03	11.44	0.07	0.36	2.91
Manipur	21.96	27.42	48.42	1.31	3.98	7.17	0.79	2.47	31.83	7.75	4.95	12.58

Sources: SHM 1980(pp.17-19), 2002(pp. 29-32) ER 1994-95(pp.56-57) and Census of India 2001, series 15, paper 3.