

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH IN MANIPUR

***DR. SH. SHANTIBALA DEVI**

**Associate Professor, Dept. of History, N.G. College, Imphal*

INTRODUCTION:

The progress of any society depends on empowerment of women and women's education is the sole key to women empowerment. Besides, education is the only essential important measure that can be taken to ensure on fuller integration of women's development. Women's empowerment means women gaining more power and control over their own lives.(Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development:nd). This entails the idea of women's continued disadvantage compound to men which is appeared in different economic, socio-cultural and political spheres.

(Ibid) The concept of Women Empowerment was introduced in the International Women Conference at NAIROBI in 1985.(Gupta:20142.33) We cannot neglect the importance of women with reference to women empowerment as Education is the only key to women empowerment because it enables them to respond challenges to confront their traditional role and change their role.(ibid) Education has direct and indirect impact on society. By an Act of Parliament in 1990, the National commission of women was set up to safeguard the right and legal entitlements of women.(ibid) The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and municipalities for women.

The Beijing Declaration of Action provides that the advancement and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society.(Joanna:n:d). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development agreed to by Member States in the post 2015 Development Submits which took place in New York in September, 2015 also acknowledges throughout the preamble and the Declaration that achieving Women's empowerment, gender, equality and Women's human rights are a prerequisite for sustainable development.(ibid)

My humble paper attempts to highlight and explore the role of education particularly the modern education for empowering the Meitei Women of Manipur and also to analyse the impact of imparting education to the women on different aspects of the state.

The present study is taken up through historical perspectives and is mainly based on books, journals, seminar papers, related government documents etc.

DISCUSSION:

Historical Background of Women Education in India: In the annals of Indian history, during the Vedic periods, women enjoyed equal status with men in all spheres of life. Besides, women of this period were the epitome of intellectual and spiritual attainments as they had accessed to education. But in later years they had gradually been deprived of this right due to a number of factors. Yet, there was the wave of revivalism in women's education in India during the British period and their emerged variety of socio-religious movements under the able guidance and leadership of eminent social reformers, nationalists and intellectuals such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar who emphasized the need for imparting education on womenfolk of India. Besides, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Baba Saheb Ambedkar (B.R. Ambedkar), etc. were leaders of the lower caste in India who took keen interest in the introduction and development of education among the women of India.(Gupta:op.cit:232) However, female education was neglected for a long time even in the British period and before 1854, the attitude towards women's education had been that of utter non-involvement. The company was not ready to initiate any program for female education. In this contest, J.A. Rickey observes, "Prior to the Dispatch of 1854 from the court of Directors, female education was not recognised as a branch of the state system of education in India... It would seem that the authorities both in England and in India were of the opinion that any attempt to introduce female education when there was no demand for it, might be regarded by the people as an interference with their social custom"(Gupta:1999:111-112). Thus, it was only in 1854 that Government partially recognised women's education as a branch of state system of education in India.

In this hilly region of the easternmost corner of India, viz, Manipur also, unlike the other South East Asian societies, a women's role is different aspects such as culture, literature, economy and religion is very unique. Besides, there was undoubtedly elements of feminism (Cambridge:2008:280) in the traditional Manipuri society which had favoured women to be economically self-reliant and in building up social and political collective energy.(Sudhir:2012:155) Besides, like the Indian women of the Vedic Period, the State has a long historical tradition of female education since the earlier historical times. But it was in the form of non-literary and

traditional system of education. Modern education, also known as western education started in Manipur with the opening of the office of British Political agency in the State and the pace of western education accelerated more particularly from 1891 when Manipur was brought within the colonial framework of British administration.(Lokendra:1989:209) Another interesting feature of western education was the introduction of a system in which learning was imparted to all irrespective of caste, creed and gender. This in turn, led to the growth of female education in the State. Though female education could hardly achieve success and encouragement in the pre-independence period, it took a new shape in the post-colonial period under the government's special attention to its development as Manipur became independent from the British colonial rule in 1947(Devi:2001:191).

After getting independence, the constitution of India provides for free and compulsory education to all children irrespective of cast, creed and sex which provided a remarkable impact on the development of the progress of women's education in Manipur as elsewhere in India (Jamini:2006:103).The Setting up of National Committee for Girl's Education in 1959 under the Chairmanship of Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh gave a tremendous impact on the progress of women's education in Manipur. As recommended by the committee on women's education the government of Manipur set up the State Council for Women's Education in 1967 which was reconstituted in 1972(ibid). In the year 1970-71, out of the population of 10,72,753 the total percentage of literacy was 32.9 while the percentage of male literacy was 46.4 and that of female only 19.53(Devi:op.cit.:115). In 1981 out of the total population of 14,20,953, the total number of literate male population was 3,84,231 and literate female population 2,03,387 and the total percentage of literacy being 41.5 while percentage of male literates was 53.29 and that of female being 29.06.(ibid).

There is a substantial increase in the number of educated women in the state. It is a fact that after 1961 onwards the progress of women's education in Manipur is higher than that of all India. From a mere 0.04 female literacy rate in 1901, it rose to 47.60 in 1991. According to 2011 census, the female literacy is 70.20 percent. The female literacy rate of Manipur & All India during 1901 to 2011 are presented in Table below¹⁸.(Directorate of Economics & Statics: 2014-15:182)

Table: Female Literacy rate of Manipur vis-à-vis All India

Census Year	Manipur		All-India	
	Persons	Female	Persons	Female
1	2	3	4	5
1901	0.93	0.04	5.30	0.60
1911	2.05	0.12	5.90	1.10
1921	3.82	0.15	7.20	1.80
1931	3.25	0.30	9.50	2.90
1941	5.06	0.61	16.10	7.30
1951	11.41	2.38	18.33*	8.86*
1961	30.42	15.93	28.31	15.34
1971	32.91	19.53	34.45	21.97
1981	41.35	29.06	43.57	29.75
1991	59.89	47.60	52.21	39.29
2001	70.50	60.50	64.80	53.70
2011	76.94	70.26	72.97	64.64

*Excludes Jammu & Kashmir

Women empowerment through education Experience around the world shows that educating women and empowering them will enhance the equality of not merely their own lives but also contributes a lot in a number of respects. As education is a vehicle of change and progress,(Kabui:2015:172) the introduction of female education in Manipur in the colonial period served as a major factor in bringing changes in a number of social fabrics like literature, economy, culture, social norms and values.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION:

Modern western education brought significant changes in the outlook, lifestyle, concept, thoughts and beliefs of Manipuri women as new liberal and scientific outlook and approach are experienced through education. Education provides liberation to them to act independently in taking decisions regarding their personal, professional as well as family matters independently. Instead of residing within the four walls of their home, educated women started gradually taking active part in social, culture, economic and political activities with new liberal, rational, scientific approach and views.

Changes in Society:

A significant change brought by modern education is in the family and marriage institution of society. Educated women, unlike their traditional predecessors, prefer love marriages or at least marriage with their prior consent. Arranged marriage becomes one of the respectable form of marriage in the modern days but a significant

change in this norm from the traditional pattern is that knowing one's life partner before the Nupilal knot. The normative practice of seeing one's husband only after has given way to seeing him before marriage (Sangeeta: 2008:103-104). Another changing feature is late marriage among the educated girls. Besides, the educated women, after marriage has less desire to live within large joint family as she has already imbibed values of her own and socializing a mature girl into the ethos of the new family is more difficult thereby resulting in the emergence of nuclear families in Manipuri Society (ibid). Educated women always tend to promote family welfare programmes like population control, education of their girl child, reduction of infant mortality rate, and plans for peaceful and healthy living.

Economic Changes:

Education and economic empowerment of women have significant potential to reduce poverty as the benefits of education passes to the next generation. According to the International planned parenthood Federation, an average woman reinvests upto 90 percent of their incomes back into their own households, compared to 30-40 percent by men. Currently, women's unpaid labour is estimated to constitute upto 50 percent of GOP in some countries (ibid). Modern education brings profound impact on the economic status of Manipuri women. Educated women particularly in the post-independence period by changing their mode of work performance start working in many private, semi-government and government sectors. As number of educated women is increasing in the post-colonial periods, most of them cannot get proper white colour jobs thereby seeking works in private sectors like food producing industries, private hospitals, private schools and colleges, as clerical staff, nurses, doctors, teachers, lecturers etc. by getting less salary as compare with those who are serving in government sectors. Besides, a number of educated women are also serving in semi-government institutions, offices, schools and colleges in Manipur such as Handloom co-operatives societies, MANIDCO, MANITRON, aided schools and colleges. Few educated lucky women are working in the govt. sectors as clerical and account staff and so on (Khuman:2010:154). Some of the educated women are getting honourable and high posts like Doctors, Civil Service Officers, Sports Officers etc. One of the leading women doctors of Manipur was Dr. Chonjonbi Devi. In the field of active service, the number of Manipuri women serving as Police Officers, Constable, Traffic Police etc. is increasing as women's attitude towards male dominated occupations have also changed. In case of unemployed educated women, several self-employment programs are undertaken under the projects sponsored by the state and central govt. as well as N.G.Os. Several and numerous women Self Help Groups (SHGs) are scattered in every nook and corner of the state (ibid).

Literary Changes:

As an impact of western education in Manipur, significant changes are witnessed in the scenario of Manipuri literature as well. With the recognition of Manipuri language as one of the vernaculars for the Matriculate examination in 1927-28, gradual developments are visible in the progress of Manipuri language & literature (A demonstration Report:1927-28:29). Thus by the early parts of the 20th century, Manipuri literary became a persuasive force and the real literary merit bloomed for the first time in the artistic works of Kabi Chaoba, Kamal and Anganghal which was followed by a host of eminent intellectuals and scholars (Shantibala:2007:80). Such spouting activities of literary features also result in the foundation of the Manipuri Sahitya Parishad which now acts as the guardian of Manipuri language and literature. From the above facts, Prof. E. Nilakanta (an eminent scholar of Manipur), rightly called the beginning of the 20th century as the renaissance of Manipuri literature (Singh:1985:4).

A number of female intellectuals began to emerge in the post-colonial period and made remarkable contributions in this respect. Princes M.K. Binodini Devi, T. Thoibi Devi and Kh. Pramodini Devi, occupy formidable place amongst the gigantic figures in the literary scene of Manipur. M.K. Binodini Devi, educated at St. Mary College, Shillong had made enormous role in the field of Manipuri literature art, culture and social work. In her literary creations, inclusive of Bor Saheb Ongbi Sanatombi (Sanatombi, who married with Borsahab), a masterpiece and a historical novel in which she got Sahitya Academy Award, life itself with its tragedies and comedies is the theme. (Manipur Sahitya Parishad:1970:30) In her literary genres, T. Thoibi Devi speaks much of soul (ibid) developing her theme in the traditional pattern and her generous romantic way. Kh. Pramodini Devi, in her creative works reflect a strong and forceful expression of feminism against the current male dominated society. These three female trios of Manipuri literary trend are followed by a number of female writers like Borkeinya, Subadani, Mema, Satyabati, Shantibala, Aruna, Ni Devi, Sorojini, Maya Nepram, Jamini, Sunita. In their writings several colourful facets of Manipuri society like poverty, unemployment, corruption, chaos, disorder, and anarchy which are developed as an impact of the changing socio-political features and living amidst the conflict situation are clearly and vividly portrayed. Besides, the modern female authors never fail in reflecting the never-ending struggles of women against the harsh realities of life amidst this male dominated society in their artistic creations. Thus, the changing aspects of Manipuri Society in the post-colonial period are clearly focused in their literary works.

In this trend, educated Manipuri women also plays significant role. When Anouba Jug (1947) a new weekly edited by Irabot was published in 1947, T. Thoibi Devi, was on the editorial Board. In 1963, one

Manipuri journal known as “YaiphaYumbaldaNupi” (Role of women in family planning) was published. In ChanuraMarup’s (women’s association), “Macha Leima”, another journal, all the writes, editors are women and the themes of the articles are directly or indirectly related to women issues (Devi:op.cit:176).

WOMEN AND SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS:

The British post-colonial period witnesses a continued legacy of recorded women’s movements not only in terms of counteracting the social issues concerned but also safeguarding the larger public interest. The Nisha Band and MeiraPaibi (Women Torch bearers) movement became a forceful social crusade since the mid 70’s. The main objective of these movements is checking male person from alcoholic abuse(Sudhir:2012:160). Other Voluntary Women’s Organisation like NupiChaokhatKhongthangLup, are also trying hard to defend human rights and social issues. In this way, they are trying to save and guide our youths and male members of the society in the right way. The role of Naga Mothers’ Association and Kuki Women’s Association in maintaining peace and prosperity in the hill areas are also worth mentioning. Thus, these movements symbolize group identity, solidarity, courage, self-sacrifice and a source of inspiration for a challenging task of fighting against alcoholism, drug problem, gambling and other anti-social elements and safeguarding human rights and endeavouring peace initiative in the state(ibid).

REVIEW OF RESEARCH:

Very few literary works based on this issue of women’s education, its impact on social developments and changes in Manipur are available in the state written in English and Manipuri. Some are in the form of articles published in the journals, magazine etc. and other are found as unpublished, Thesis (Ph.D.), Seminar papers (published and unpublished), M.Phil. Dissertation etc. In few research works, the scope of studies confined only to a limited area and time frame. In the article written by D. Nilachandra Khuman entitled ‘Socio-economic Development in Manipur despite umpteen atrocities’, roles of Manipuri women in the society like working sectors, family and health, hygiene issues, etc. are focused. The place of women in Manipuri history in the realm of society, economy and politics are clearly highlighted in ‘Manipuri women-A Study’ of Dr.Ksh. Bimola Devi. H. Sudhir gives an assessment on the role status relation of Manipuri women with suggestion for empowering women for the progress of society in his articles ‘Gender and Society in Manipur’.

In the book “Women of Manipur, and Alternative perspective”, the writer retrieves women’s position in Manipur History and also mainly focusses on the contradictions inherent in the popular belief that women in Manipur enjoy a high status. M. Shanti Devi (2001) gives an assessment on the history of education in the state

and also explored its problems and impact on the social development progress in Manipur in her book, “Development of education in Manipur”. Th. Mangoljao Singh’s “western education in Manipur” (1967) and Dr. Ch. Jamini’s “Education in Manipur”, the two books make an exploration on the nature and extent of education system in Manipur. All the above-mentioned literatures and research works lack in emphasising and analysing the role of women education in bringing development and changes in Manipuri Society. So, there is an urgent need of an elaborate study of the impact of women education in the realm of social change in Manipur.

STRATEGIES:

(1) Education is the only key to women empowerment. To make them socially mobilized, self-reliant and economically independent, imparting education to women particularly in the remote hill and rural areas of Manipur is the need of the hour.

(2) Introduction of new trends and disciplines of education concerning disaster management, martial arts, carrier orientation courses, human rights and women rights in the school curriculum.

(3) Equal treatment should be provided to children of both sexes from the very beginning by their parents to feel the idea of equal human beings among the children.

(4) Mass awareness programmes, orientation courses, etc. should be organized about women rights, status, women and HIV issue health and sanitation problem etc. particularly in the slum and rural areas once or twice in a month by the state level authorities or NGOs.

(5) Frequent Investigations and checking programme should be conducted by the state machineries or relevant NGOs etc. to check whether the real benefits (monitory or legal) of the welfare schemes undertaken by these authorities for the destitute are available by the real Sufferers or victims in timely or not.

CONCLUSION:

From the above accounts, it is highlighted that since the earliest historical times, Manipuri women took prominent roles in every Spheres of the state like social, cultural, economic, political and other activities. Besides, traditional education in non-literary form was also imparted to them. However, with the introduction of British Colonial rule in 1891, female education in the modern line was started under the patron and zealous efforts of the then ruler King Churachand Singh British political agents and Christian missionaries in the plain and hill areas of Manipur.

Female Education plays a very important role in the overall development of the state in the Post-Independence period. Education has revolutionised the life of women. As a result, many changes are developed in

their outlook, attitude, thoughts and beliefs etc. and concepts of women empowerment and feminism are started to emphasize in the state. Such developments in the educated women herself have profound impact on the family, marriage institutions, health, sanitation and other social norms and values of the state. Thus, educated women brought overall development of the state and also assumed a prominent role in bringing the trends of modernization and westernization in Manipuri Society.

Despite the above facts, women in Manipur enjoy a humble status in Society. Social evils still continue against women in this male dominated patrilineal society and they were usually suppressed by their male partners with the view that women are always inferior to men.

REFERENCES:

1. Administration Report of the British Political Agency, Manipur for the year,1927-1928 p.29
2. Devi, M. Shanti, Development of Education in Manipur, Rajesh Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p.191
3. Dr. Sh. Shantibala, Manipur Society as Reflected in its Literature, 1891-1947, unpublished Thesis, M.U.,p.80
4. Dr.Jamini, Education in Manipur, Rai Praveena Brothers, Second Edition, 2006, Imphal, p.103
5. Economic Survey Manipur, 2014-15, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Manipur, Imphal, p.182.
6. Feminism – The belief that women should that same economic, social and political rights as men vide: Cambridge School Dictionary, Cambridge University Press, Reprinted, 2008, p.280
7. Glimpses of Manipuri Languages and Literature, Manipuri SahityaParishad, Imphal, 1970, p.30
8. Gupta Nirmala, Educational Development, A Historical Perspective, Anamika publisher and Distributors, New Delhi, 1999, p. 111-112.
9. Gupta, Dr. Vibha, Women Empowerment Through Education; in International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences, Vol. 3, No. 12, Dec. 2014, p.233, www.garph.co.uk. Assessed on 16/12/2017
10. Joanna Manganara, The Empowerment of Women and Sustainable Development, Women alliance.org, retrieved on 15/12/2017
11. KabuiGangmumei, A History of Modern Manipur (1826-2000), Vol.III, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 1st Publication, 2015, p. 172.
12. Khuman, L.Nilachandra, Socio-Economic Development in Manipur Women activism despite umpteen atrocities, in SKWC journal of Social Science, Teachers' Forum SKWC, Nambol, 2010, p.154.

13. Lokendra, M, Social Change in Manipur (1891-1972), Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, M.U. 1989, p.209.
14. Sustainable Development is development that meets... Own needs, Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/...> Accessed on 17/12/2017.