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## ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF MEITEI WOMEN IN MANIPUR

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**ABSTRACT:** Manipur is one of the states in northeast India which preserves a rich religion, mythology, various rituals, and traditions. The state has a different name according to the old tradition the state was known as Kangleipak, Meitrabak, and Poreipak. Manipur has three major ethnic groups the Meiteis, the Nagas, and the Kukis. They predominantly belong to the Mongoloid race. Meitei women are known for their unique roles and their status in history. Women in Manipur are known for their active economic participation as well as their contribution towards political reforms in Manipur. Despite the patriarchal society women, they enjoy freedom and equal rights with men. Women of Manipur play a very significant role in the economic development of Manipur which includes agricultural production, fisheries, and handlooms industry, and their contribution to the market economy is undeniable. This paper is an attempt to focus on the role and economic activity carried out by Meitei Women in Manipur. To carry out the research the exploration empirical and descriptive method was used. The study is grounded on both primary and secondary data.

**KEYWORDS:** Women, Economics, Market, Agriculture, Position, and Society.

### INTRODUCTION:

Manipur is one of the states in northeast India, situated in the extreme east with Imphal as its capital, preserves a rich religion, mythology, various rituals and traditions. The state is bordered by Myanmar former Burma to its East and South-East, Nagaland to the North, Assam to the west, and while in the South-West it borders by Mizoram. The old name of the state was known as Kangleipak, Meitrabak, and Poireipak<sup>1</sup>. The land was known by different names by her neighbors with whom she had political and cultural contacts. It was known to the shans as Ka-se, and to Burmese as Ka-the, the Ahom called it Mekhali and the Kachari Magli, while the old Assamese name for it is Moglou.<sup>2</sup> Geographically, Manipur is divided into two parts the plains and the hilly surroundings with nine districts. Manipur has three major ethnic groups the Meiteis of the valley, the Nagas, and Kukis of the surrounding hill tribes. They predominantly belong to the Mongoloid race. Moreover, two-thirds of the population comprise the Meiteis, which are the majority ethnic group of Manipur. Meitei women are known for their unique roles and their status in history. Women in Manipur are known for their active economic participation as well as their

<sup>1</sup> Kangleipak, land of the Kanglei, : Poireipak, land of the Poirei, and Meitrabak, land of the Meitei. Kanglei, Poirei, Meitei are loosely used to mean the Meiteis of the Kingdoms.

<sup>2</sup> Gait, Edward., "A History Of Assam", EBH Publishers India, reprint2018 p.321.

contribution towards political reforms in Manipur are which popularly known as 'Nupilal' or women's war or uprisings against British rule as well as they were also known for their activism against liquor consumption which later evolved into the powerful women group called 'Meira Paibis' meaning women torchbearers. The main aim of this group is social reforms for justice and they fight for human rights.

Women comprise half of humanity. The advancement of society can be measured through the status of women in the field of social and economic development. Women in Manipur experience a completely unique reputation in society. The high status of women in Meitei society was frequently remarked upon by the British colonial officials. Despite the patriarchal society women, they enjoy freedom and equal rights with men. Moreover, Manipuri women are responsible for food supplies and the markets, they play the dominant economic force. Their active participation in the process of the economy can be seen in the 'Ema Keithel', a market exclusively run by women. They enjoy a better position in society as compared to the women in the rest of India. In fact, there is no record of female infanticide, no dowry-related harassment, bride burning, etc.

In the field of agriculture, women are regarded as the backbone of Manipur. Manipur has a total population of 2570390 and the female population constitutes 49.81% of the total population. The average female workforce's contribution in Manipur is 43.35%. The average percentage of female cultivators in Manipur is 44.43%. Women are also actively participated in forest-based handicrafts and the cottage industry. About 15.49% of the total female population is involved in forest-based livelihoods system. Women are also taking part in the fishery more than 90% of women take care of the fish market.<sup>3</sup> Women of Manipur play a very significant role in the economic development of Manipur which includes agricultural production, fisheries, and handlooms industry, and their contribution to the market economy is undeniable. This paper tries to analyze the contribution of women of Manipur in the field of the economy at the present time. To carry out the research secondary data based is used.

### **CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN IN THE FIELD OF ECONOMY:**

Women contribute a productive workforce to the economy of Manipur. They play an important role in the agricultural development of the state. A distinct feature of Manipuri women is their predominance in economic activity. In spite of their moral duties, women actively participated in other's work for example maintaining the home garden, producing textile cloths, assisting in crop and animal production, etc. In the street, lanes, and roads women are often seen working selling fruits, cloths fish, fruits, vegetables, etc. in Manipur the work participation rate of women is quite high as compared to the rest of India. One of the best examples of this is the women's market in Imphal popularly known as 'Ema Keithel' (Mothers market) in Manipuri, which is the main preserve of women, humming with trade and selling activities. They actively participate in trade, as also as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction activities. Women are the backbone of agricultural activities in Manipur. They were involved extensively in agricultural activities. Female participation in the agricultural system varies with the status of land ownership. Women's roles involved from managers to landless laborers. Manipur is essentially an agricultural state 22% of the population engaged in agriculture. Most of the forest-based livelihoods are confined to the hilly areas of Manipur. Women have been major contributors to the poor families' income in rural areas are generated by collecting fuelwood and non-timber, honey, fiber, and vegetables from the forest and provide valuable income for many families. Women play a key role in the gathering of such valuable products from the forest. In Manipur, ladies play a prime function in the field of fisheries. They are involved in the rearing of fish to the post-harvest activities of the fish. More than 90% of the marketing of fish is taken care of by women. The fisheries sector in Manipur is an important source of livelihood for many peoples.

E.W. Dun in the "Gazetteer of Manipur" writes the women of Manipur married or unmarried, are not confined in Zenanas, as they are in Bengal or Hindustan; all classes are alike in this respect; neither do they cover their faces before strangers. They are very industrious in their respect the opposite of the men, who are lazy and indolent.

<sup>3</sup> Devi,S Roma, Singh, L Kanta., "Women's Role In Agriculture and Allies Fields in Manipur", India Journal Of Hill Farming, Dec 2015, vol28, P.154.

Most of the work in the country, except the heaviest, is performed by them and they are consequently the mainstay of the family circle. All the marketing is done by women, all the work of buying and selling in public, and the carrying to and fro articles to be sold, while at home they are busily employed in weaving and spinning. It would be difficult to find more in industrious women in India than in Manipur.<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Grimwood also spoke of Manipuri women in her book "My Three Years in Manipur", "the Manipuris do not shut up their women, as is the custom in most parts of India, and they are much more enlightened and intelligent in consequence."<sup>5</sup> Meitei women performed an essential position in the productive technique of the country and they have emerged as constantly the subject of admiration from foreigners and sociologists.

From time immemorial handloom manufacturing has been playing a vital part in the frugality of North-Eastern India and especially in Manipur, the traditional skill of handloom weaving is not only a status symbol for the women-folk but is also a necessary aspect of socio-economic life. Handloom weaving is by far the largest and most important manufacturing industry in the state. From the employment point of view, it has enthralled a position furnishing employment to a great number of people. The employment eventuality of handlooms was both direct and circular. The handloom industry, by virtue of its being the largest manufacturing industry, was handed means of livelihood to about 10 million persons, particularly in the townlets. Further, the industry has also provided handed circular employment to impend manufacturers, dyestuffs, twistors, sizers, traders, cloth printers, knitters, fabric designers, others, and so on. Again it has handed employment to tens of thousands of salaried employees who worked in various sales, managerial, executive, technical, supervisory, various developmental schemes in the handlooms sector worked in Central and State Government Department, Government Sponsored agencies or enterprises, weaver's co-operatives, etc. weaving is another source of income of women both in rural and urban areas; Wangkhei an area in Imphal, women are famous for their special knowledge in Moirangphi. From the earlier times, Meitei women are very active in internal trade and commerce. Exchange of product in the country are carried out by the women. It is a common to see a small market run by the women by the roadside of the state.

One significant observation that we find the moment in Manipur is the rise in the number of women entrepreneurs and women's self-help groups. The number of working women in different sectors is adding. Marup or Cooperative movement is another movement commanded by women for generating income. From the early days, the Manipuri society has had an inbuilt system of socio-economic cooperation known as Marup which continues now successfully throughout the state. Marup, a type of self-help group, is a group or association with common profitable requirements that undertake an activity by participating directly in decision-making and sharing the benefits on an equitable basis. It strengthens the living income-generating exertion of members and also helps the members to start a new exertion of members. This not only makes them economically independent but also helps their families with their fiscal benefactions and acts as the fiscal interposers. Among Manipuri women, Marups are the best vehicle for empowerment. They are the major force for the economic development of the state.<sup>6</sup>

Utmost of the agrarian products are retailed by women in Manipur. Most of the markets in Manipur are dominated by women. Women deals with different trade network with the bordering state. Some products are fish, vegetables, handloom products, etc.

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<sup>4</sup> Dune, E.W., "Gazetteer of Manipur", Delhi, Vivek Publishing House, 1975, p.17.

<sup>5</sup> Grimwood, E.St.C., "My Three Years in Manipur", Delhi, Vivek Publishing House, 1975, pp.58-59.

<sup>6</sup> Lakshmibai, Thokchom, Bidyalakshmi, Thokchom, "Empowering of Women through Economic Independence Participation of Manipuri Women In Various Income Generating Activities For The Upliftment of State's Economy", International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention, P.69.

## CONCLUSION:

Manipur has witnessed the successful role of collaborative women's power in history and also in the present day. From the early period, women held a very high status in Manipur. There was equality between men and women the latter even enjoying higher status than men. Women were the head of families. The society was matriarchal as evidenced by the fact that the worshipping of Goddesses started in the ancient period in Manipur.<sup>7</sup> The position of women in Manipur declined with the coming of Vaishnavism in Manipur. Still, despite their major benefactions to the socio-economic and political life of the state, they are not given their due position in society. Therefore, there is a mismatch between women's places and status. Manipuri women's part in the socio-economic and artistic life of Manipur is significant. They do not stay behind the veil. They also do all the buying and selling of goods in the market. The market in rural and urban areas is dominated by women. Their unique role in the market will be known if one visits Khwairamband Bazar or 'Ema Keithel' at the heart of Imphal. They are greatly involved in agrarian-related activities. They are artistic and creative which they prove in the field of handlooms, handicrafts, and dance. Their dominance in the field of sports not only at the national level but also at the international level is remarkable.

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<sup>7</sup> Oinam Bhogeswar Singh (ed.), Ningthourol Lambuba", Imphal, 1967, p. 92