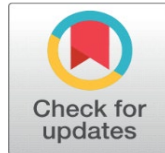
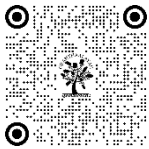


THE ROLE OF MEITEI WOMEN IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN MANIPUR

Mangshatabam Kritibala Devi ¹, Dr. SH. Shantibala Davi ²

¹ Assistant Professor, Biramangol College Sawombung

² Associate Professor, HOD History Department



Corresponding Author

Mangshatabam Kritibala Devi,
mangshatabamkritibaladevi@gmail.com

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4654](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4654)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

Manipur is traditionally a male-dominated society, yet Meitei women have played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's development. They have made significant contributions to both the economic and cultural spheres, showcasing remarkable independence and courage. These qualities remain deeply ingrained in the Meitei women of Manipur, who continue to actively participate in various economic and social activities. Historically, Manipur's economy was agrarian, with the Khwairamband Bazar serving as its economic hub. Beyond their domestic responsibilities, Meitei women have been instrumental in supplementing family income and securing their livelihoods. They can be categorized into three main groups: self-employed workers, wage earners, and unpaid family helpers. Their contributions have been vital to the socio-economic development of the region.

Meitei women have also been at the forefront of several significant movements. These movements highlight the crucial role women have played in shaping Manipur's economic and social landscape. To further their socio-economic agenda, the Macha Leima organization was established as a platform for women to evaluate and advance their programs. Through their resilience and activism, Meitei women have left an indelible mark on the state's history and continue to be a driving force in its progress.

Keywords: Economic, Contribution, Major, Manipur, Meitei, Women

1. INTRODUCTION

Manipur, a state rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty, nestled in the hills and valleys of India's North-Eastern frontier, stands apart as a unique blend of tradition and modernity. Despite being a male-dominated society, the women of Manipur have played a significant role in shaping and stabilizing the region's socio-economic fabric. Over the years, their active participation in economic activities has not only contributed to the state's development but has also empowered them to achieve financial independence. This elevated status of women is considered one of Manipur's greatest prides.

Traditionally, the family has been the fundamental unit of Manipuri society, with the male head holding authority over his wife, sons, and unmarried daughters. A woman's life was marked by transitions in authority—first under her father before marriage and later under her husband after marriage. Despite these societal structures, Meitei women have consistently demonstrated resilience and independence, qualities that remain deeply rooted in their identity.

Meitei women have been instrumental in nation-building, making notable contributions in political, cultural, and economic spheres. Their courage and self-reliance continue to define their character, enabling them to play a vital role in the progress of Manipur. Through their unwavering strength and determination, Meitei women have carved out a distinctive legacy, reflecting their enduring spirit and influence in shaping the state's future.

The Meitei women are still having their major contribution in every part of economic and social activities. The Manipur economy was an agrarian economy. The Khwairamband bazar is the centre of Manipur economics place. Beside domestic role Meitei women are earning to supplement family income as well as for their own living. There are three main group of Meitei women as working self-employed, wage earners an unpaid family helper. Women play important role in the socio-economic development of the country. The most important struggle of women was

- 1) The 1891 Lallup system
- 2) The 1904 movement
- 3) The 1907 Chandon Senkhai
- 4) The 1925 water tax
- 5) The 1939 Nupe Lan.

The women of Manipur have played a pivotal role in shaping the economic and social fabric of the state through their active participation in various movements. These movements marked a turning point, ushering in new political and economic trends while addressing issues like economic exploitation. The Meitei women's involvement in significant movements between 1891 and 1939 provided moral strength and encouragement, laying the foundation for their continued activism. This legacy was further solidified with the establishment of the Manipur Chanura Leishem Marup (Macha Leima) on April 21, 1969. This organization aimed to promote women's development, combat ill-treatment, and uplift the socio-economic and legal status of women in Manipur. It also focused on empowering women to actively participate in nation-building and improving their economic conditions. Macha Leima supported weavers in marketing their products, organized self-reliance camps, and encouraged the use of locally made goods.

From 1973, Macha Leima began observing *Nupigi Numit* (Women's Day) on December 12 to honor Manipuri women who resisted British colonial rule. Another significant initiative was the formation of *Nisha Bandh* in 1980, a local women's organization aimed at curbing the harmful practice of alcohol consumption. Around the same time, the *Meira Paibees* (Torchbearers) emerged as a grassroots movement to protest against the cruel treatment of women, children, and youth by armed forces. Although most Meira Paibees members were illiterate, their impact was profound. They actively participated in local and state-level issues and even represented Manipur at international forums, such as the Beijing Women's Conference. The Meira Paibees also played a crucial role in managing and controlling the Ima Market (Mother's Market), a significant hub for economic activity in Manipur, contributing substantially to the state's economic development.

Meitei women have skillfully balanced dual roles as wives, mothers, and economic contributors within their families. Unmarried women often play a major part in family development and management, including supporting the education of their siblings. Married working women also contribute significantly to their family's economic well-being. A unique traditional practice among Meitei women is the *Marup* system, a collective savings scheme where both married and unmarried women contribute money weekly or monthly. This system reflects their financial prudence and collaborative spirit, further underscoring their vital role in Manipur's socio-economic landscape. Through their resilience, activism, and economic contributions, Meitei women have left an indelible mark on the state's progress and continue to be a driving force in its development.

Mr. T.C. Hodson, a political agent in Manipur, highlighted in his book *The Meitei* that women in Manipur hold a high and independent position, managing the internal trade and exchange of goods within the state. Both Hodson and E.W. Dun, in their respective records, noted that Manipuri women were highly skilled and industrious, excelling in weaving, spinning, and other tasks, except for the heaviest labor. Women also played a significant role in activities like fishing, further underscoring their economic contributions.

The objective of this discussion is to explore and emphasize the role of Meitei women in the socio-economic development of Manipur, drawing insights from historical records, mythology, religion, and the contemporary social structure. Mythology and religious texts have accorded women a position equal to that of men, reflecting their respected status in society. Over time, the role of women in Manipur's socio-economic development has evolved, adapting to changing circumstances and new socio-economic dynamics.

Meitei women have historically enjoyed considerable economic freedom, independently managing both internal and external trade. They have been central to the economic life of the society, with a large number of women vendors traveling from distant places to engage in daily market activities from morning until late evening. These women are involved in various trades, including jewelry dealing in gold and silver, and play a crucial role in the smooth functioning of private enterprises. The contributions of Meitei women to the socio-economic, political, and cultural spheres have been immense and noteworthy from early times to the present day. Their roles in socio-economic movements and development have continuously evolved, reflecting the changing dynamics of Manipuri society in areas such as administration, politics, and education. As Manipur society progresses, the role of women remains integral, adapting to new challenges and opportunities while continuing to shape the state's future.

1.1. OBJECTIVE

To study the role and status of Meitei women in Manipuri society.

To highlight the nature and extent of modern economic activities among Meitei women.

To analyze the role of Meitei women in the socio-economic development of Manipur, both in the past and present.

To discuss the impact of modern society on Meitei women.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study on the role of Meitei women in the socio-economic development of Manipur draws upon a diverse range of scholarly works, historical records, and government reports to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Dr. Jameni Devi's seminar paper on the status of women in Manipuri society offers a foundational perspective, examining the historical and cultural positioning of Meitei women and their contributions to societal development. Complementing this, Prof. Ksh. Bimola's work, *The Changing Domestic Role of Women in Manipur Society*, delves into the evolving roles of Meitei women, highlighting how their responsibilities and influence have shifted over time in response to changing social and economic conditions. L. Manao Singh's paper, *Women's Participation in Economic and Financial Management*, further enriches this discussion by focusing on the active involvement of Meitei women in economic activities, employment, and income generation, underscoring their critical role in the financial stability of their families and communities.

Historical context is provided by Prof. N. Joykumar Singh's book, *Social Movements in Manipur*, which discusses the *Nupi Lan* movement, a landmark event in Manipuri history where women played a pivotal role in resisting colonial exploitation and asserting their rights. This historical perspective is further expanded by R.K. Jhalajit Singh's *A Short History of Manipur*, which outlines the formation and structure of Meitei society, offering insights into the traditional roles and status of women. T.C. Hodson's *The Meitei* adds another layer of understanding by describing the polygamous nature of Meitei society and the complex dynamics of women's roles within it, particularly in the context of marriage and family structures.

The educational progress of Meitei women is explored in Th. Mangoljao Singh's *Western Education in Manipur*, which documents the introduction and expansion of education for women, highlighting their gradual but significant strides in this field. L. Umarani Chanu's seminar paper, *Manipur Women: Contemporary Situation*, brings the discussion into the present day, addressing the challenges faced by women in a conflict-ridden society and their resilience in navigating these hardships. Her work emphasizes the dual roles of Meitei women as both caregivers and active participants in socio-economic activities, even in the face of adversity.

Government reports, such as the administrative reports of the Government of Manipur, provide valuable data on the establishment of girls' schools and the introduction of education in the mother tongue, as well as the transition to Bengali medium instruction. These reports highlight the state's efforts to promote female education and the increasing participation of Meitei women in schools, colleges, and universities. The *Statistical Handbook of Manipur*, published by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Manipur, offers quantitative insights into the educational and economic participation of Meitei women, providing a statistical foundation for understanding their contributions to the state's development.

Collectively, these sources paint a vivid picture of the historical and contemporary roles of Meitei women in Manipur's socio-economic development. From their active participation in trade and economic activities to their leadership in social movements and their growing presence in education, Meitei women have consistently demonstrated

resilience, adaptability, and strength. This literature review not only contextualizes their contributions but also highlights the evolving nature of their roles in response to changing societal, economic, and political landscapes.

3. METHODOLOGY

The proposed study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining historical perspectives with analytical methods to arrive at a scientifically grounded conclusion. A wide range of sources will be utilized, including primary sources such as the Annual Administration Report of the British Political Agency, ancient texts, books, journals, seminar papers, unpublished theses, and local newspapers. Both descriptive and analytical research methods will be employed to examine the data comprehensively. The descriptive method will help in systematically presenting the historical and contemporary roles of Meitei women, while the analytical method will facilitate a deeper understanding of their socio-economic contributions and the evolving dynamics of their status in Manipuri society. This dual approach ensures a thorough and nuanced exploration of the subject matter.

4. SUGGESTIONS

The study reveals that women in Manipur continue to face numerous challenges across social, economic, and political spheres. To address these issues and promote their welfare and socio-economic development, the following measures are recommended:

- 1) **Family Support and Encouragement:** Family members, particularly husbands, should adopt a more supportive and selfless attitude. They must encourage and appreciate women's contributions both within the household and in external activities, fostering a more equitable environment.
- 2) **Focus on Girls' Education:** Parents should prioritize the education of girls, ensuring they have equal access to educational opportunities. This will empower them to achieve greater independence and contribute meaningfully to society.
- 3) **Collaboration with Civil Society Organizations:** Civil society organizations should actively support and collaborate with women's organizations to ensure their effective functioning. Such partnerships can drive holistic development for women and society as a whole.
- 4) **Promotion of Self-Help Groups and Self-Employment Schemes:** Greater encouragement should be given to the formation and functioning of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and other self-employment initiatives for women. These programs can enhance financial independence and entrepreneurial skills among women.
- 5) **Timely Financial Assistance from the State Government:** The state government should ensure timely financial assistance to the Manipur State Commission for Women. This support will strengthen the Commission's ability to advocate for women's rights and implement programs aimed at their empowerment.

By implementing these measures, the socio-economic status of women in Manipur can be significantly improved, enabling them to overcome existing challenges and contribute more effectively to the development of their families and society.

5. CONCLUSION

Manipur, a state rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty, lies in the northeastern frontier of India. The Meitei women have played a pivotal role in the socio-economic development of Manipuri society, demonstrating resilience, independence, and leadership. Historical movements, such as those of 1904 and 1939, underscore their active participation in addressing critical state issues and advocating for their rights. Over time, numerous organizations have been established to empower women and amplify their voices in various spheres.

Economically, Meitei women have enjoyed a significant degree of freedom, contributing substantially to their families and communities. Both married and unmarried women have played crucial roles in supporting their households, showcasing their ability to balance traditional responsibilities with economic activities. Their contributions have not only strengthened family structures but have also driven the broader socio-economic progress of the state.

In conclusion, the Meitei women of Manipur have been instrumental in shaping the state's socio-economic landscape. Their enduring spirit, coupled with their active participation in movements and economic activities, highlights

their indispensable role in the development of Manipur. As the state continues to evolve, the empowerment and recognition of Meitei women remain vital for achieving sustainable growth and equality in society.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None .

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Hodson, T. C. (1908). *The Meiteis*. David Nutt.
- Pemberton, R. B. (1835). *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press.
- Manipuri Chanura Leishem Marup. (1981). *Lamdamsida Nupige Thou*. Imphal: Manipuri Chanura Leishem Marup.
- Singh, Th. Mangoljao. (1995). *Western Education in Manipur: A Historical Perspective*. Unpublished M.Phil dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University.
- Bimola, Ksh. (1998). "The Changing Domestic Role of Women in Manipur Society." *Manipur Today*, 12(3), 22–30.
- Devi, Jameni. (2001). "Status of Women in Manipur Society." Paper presented at the National Seminar on Women's Empowerment, Imphal.
- Singh, N. Joykumar. (2002). *Social Movements in Manipur (1917–1952)*. Mittal Publications.
- Devi, L. Kunjeswori. (2003). *Archaeology in Manipur*. Rajesh Publications.
- Kamei, Gangmumei. (2004). *History of Manipur: Pre-Colonial Period*. National Publishing House.
- Singh, L. Manao. (2005). "Women's Participation in Economic and Financial Management in Manipur." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(22), 2345–2350.
- Parratt, John. (2005). *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*. Routledge.
- Devi, Takhellambam Rita. (2010). "Socio-Economic Role of Women in Manipur." *Journal of North East India Studies*, 5(2), 45–58.
- Devi, A. Romita. (2012). *Role of Women in the Socio-Economic Development of Manipur*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Manipur University.
- Chanu, L. Umarani. (2015). "Manipur Women: Contemporary Situation." Seminar paper presented at the International Conference on Gender Studies, Delhi.
- Government of Manipur. (2018). *Annual Administration Report*. Department of Social Welfare.
- Government of Manipur. (2020). *Statistical Handbook of Manipur*. Directorate of Economics and Statistics