

## **CHAPTER II**

# **Framework of Study**

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### Framework of Study

After elaborate conceptualisation as well as contextualisation of concepts and theories in the preceding chapter, this chapter will concentrate on mainstay of research methodology covering some important components viz. statement of the problem, universe of study, objective and hypotheses as well as vital method of data collection employed to delineate how the study can be processed and projected. In course of review of literature, this chapter will enable us to provide some idea of applying a critical theory and approach to the study of Manipuri women and presenting a new dimension of interpretation of women in the micro culture context of Manipuri society.

#### Origin and development of the study

Symbols, gestures, postures, etc. which are the constituents of signs, are always regarded integral parts of human interaction and exchange of ideas, genesis of thought processes and sometimes steer allied human activities. These are both producer and product of culture and they are dialectically related to each other too. Likewise, present world order is optimistic to optimally use symbol and sign to both construct and or deconstruct any specificity given meaning to broaden horizon of knowledge in any given situation in culture; because, of late adequate expansion of knowledge through systematic effort and use of symbol and sign became inevitable as part of culture studies. That is why possibly having anthropo-philosophical route and orientation, these established values being partly independent and inter-dependent stand to design, demystify and deliver appropriating structure and function of interaction. These are well-known and applied in different contexts and conjectures of some social structure - be that macro or micro - to rather meaningfully study and unravel vicissitudes of phenomena relating to complexity of culture, and in some other social structure they are yet to be minimally understood. On the other hand, importance of these well-established institutions have remained beyond notice and

knowledge of many scholars and some social structure, or else unlike time antiquity these values are yet to be implanted or invested adequately to draw and derive appropriate, codified meaning to help solve certain perennial problems relating to a particular social structure and culture and also humankind in general. Hence to understand complexity of culture and to develop a synthesised knowledge-based study of semiotics or semiology in a micro-culture set up becomes unavoidable and accordingly undertaken in the present study.

In yet another notable extent, semiotics or semiology are related with culture and culture study approach and broadly deals with vicissitudes of issues and problems of culture of humankind. Since culture is not monotonous and does not always remain confine within any stipulated boundary or territory; culture area is carved out by Franz Boas, father of American anthropology to demarcate specificity of culture within limitedness space to meaningfully construct other allied activities. Because culture study being extensive its traits are sometimes difficult to understand and to interrelate those covert values with overt structure further become great hardship. Patterns of culture are equally problematique and in such process an intensive study of culture from a micro perspective taking semiotics or semiology into account become vital. Hence any aspect of culture and or cultural pluralism or culture-product are directly associated with certain prescribed and codified values and institutions like sign, out of which semiotics and semiology are regarded important components or organs.

In fact study of semiotics or semiology in culture acquired new dimension as these two aspects endure systematic study of signs in all spheres of human existence and experience. The term 'Semiology' was first used by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, founder of linguistics in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). His study of language was specifically concerned with verbal signs. He offered a dyadic or a two-part model of sign-signifier and signified. He was instrumental in applying the laws of linguistics to the study of semiology.<sup>1</sup> According to him, the sign is completely arbitrary, i.e. there was no necessary connection between the sign and its meaning. This influenced later philosophers and theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard. Later on, by the 1950s-60s, a large intellectual movement, called the French Structuralism picked up the strains initiated by Saussure

and applied it to various fields of study. What Saussure did to Linguistics, cultural anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, did it to analyse such cultural phenomena as myth, kinship relations, totemism and even modes of preparing food. Also, Jacques Lacan applied it to Freudian psychoanalysis and interpreted 'unconscious' is structured 'like a language'.<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes applied structuralist and semiotic method to general field of everyday modern culture in his work *Mythologies* (1957). In his early writings, he described that a literary text primarily uses a first-order semiotic system of language which is then developed as a "second-order semiotic system".<sup>3</sup> So, sign and symbol occupy centre-stage to de-mystify social structure's inner meaning.

American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, in 1860s, developed his sign theory which he termed as 'semiotic' to notch up things as per his pursuit of understanding and knowledge base. His handy process of enquiry meant to intensively orient or link with logical coherence of development of sign. His observation and analysis was closely related to logic as medium for enquiry and process of scientific discovery. He offered a triadic or a three-part model as his basic sign structure i.e. sign vehicle, object and interpretant. For him, 'every thought is a sign'<sup>4</sup> and action is derivative of sign. To meet such requirement, he rather classified three types of signs, namely, icon, index and symbol<sup>5</sup> and used them in different contexts to substantiate sign adequately.

Later, Charles William Morris in his *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1971), developed a behaviourist semiotics which took in semantics along with the other traditional branches of linguistics, viz. syntactics and pragmatics. Umberto Eco, another trend-follower of Peirce, states that 'semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign' in his *Theory of Semiotics* (1976), i.e. he believed in domain of 'unlimited semiosis'.<sup>6</sup> Carlo Sini, an Italian philosopher also approves of unlimited semiosis of Eco and stresses the idea of gesture as an originary event in indicating, in signifying and in designating. Both Eco and Sini project multiple directions that cultural semiosis can follow.

Writer Julia Kristeva, another follower of Peirce, is of opinion that signification arises out of relation between two elements - semiotic and symbolic. To her, understanding of woman's invisible mediating role and woman's space as unspoken are some issues dealt by cultural semiosis.<sup>7</sup>

Structuralism assumes that any cultural phenomenon, activity or product is made up of many structural networks which carry significance and operate through 'codes' as a system of signs and can be decoded by the structuralist or semiotician. Contemporary social semiotics has transgressed structuralist interest and is otherwise concerned to trace use of signs in specific social structure or situation. It studies signs not in isolation but as a part of a semiotic 'sign system' (such as a medium or genre).

Further, semiotics has become a major approach to cultural studies in late 1960s as a consequence of Roland Barthes' divergent work and multitude writing. Also, the British school of neo-Marxism applied the semiotics of culture to literature and art, especially in work of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart. The latter founded the first institution for cultural studies called the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in 1964. And under directorship of the neo-Marxist sociologist, Stuart Hall, embraced the theory of semiotics in understanding of culture and made it popular in all over Britain.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently neo-Marxian tenets and triggered values spread to other continents across world order.

In the United States indeed cultural studies initially originated and immediately attained a mega momentum as it covered almost all pertinent aspects and phenomena relating to America primarily and due course of time to humankind in general. Diffusion in culture delve out newness to itself and as part of its further expansion, it also began in mode of literary and cultural criticism known as 'the new historicism' in the early 1980s and considered culture as a set of signifying system. For exponents of culture approach of America adopted multi-linear process to enrich base and vitality of culture to a significant extent. And therefore profounder of culture study were post-structuralists Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and many others.<sup>9</sup>

Cultural semiotics as integral part of culture today has become a science using standardised methodological tools to understand production, organisation and transformation of meaning. It employs a critical method deriving from literary analysis and applying to everyday cultural practices and beliefs. Culture stands as mainstay of things always and covers and controls all culture driven factors to specify or attribute meaning.

Pioneer of feminist semiotic studies and semiotic theory, Julia Kristeva, is instrumental in introducing the same into semiosis. That is, she identifies subordinate state of women in society as something cultural. Feminist semioticians contributed to a great extent in developing semiotics as a critical theory and semiosis as social action producing change.<sup>10</sup>

More than early phase, semiosis or cultural semiosis has become an important tool for study of culture nowadays. It is based on notion of unlimited semiosis of Eco and Sini. It accounts for study of everyday culture and practice including understanding of women's role as to why it is one of the invisible signs of visibility and woman's space, unspoken absence in cultural production and discourse and demystifying the semiotic practice. And since the key element in any study of signs is the signifier, so the present work will try to trace cultural signifiers of women of Manipuri society and bring out their significations in that cultural context. Hardly any work undertaken so far dealt with this issue and hence this area is still open and become imperative for sociological study and investigation.

### **Statement of Problem**

In contradistinction to feminist studies, sociology of literature and symbolic interactionism, semiosis and semiotic in culture study transgressed their stipulated, so-called traditional boundary to become more empirical base as empiricism is directly associated with human life and quality control mechanism. Women in any selected micro culture set-up are serious object of concern and study, because, much relating to women is either ignored, distorted, degenerated or relegated to extinction. Women's contribution, role and sacrifice are many a time deemed unwanted or deliberately left out as a subordinate section by patriarchal hegemony. In totality, women are marginalised, excluded and deprived in all walks of their important contribution and life career process.

In such an alarming situation of well-planned exercise, a Manipuri woman, who is otherwise least known to outside world and even within India, is an embodiment of some determining elements of nature and being that truly distinguishes her as a separate entity in the very structure of the Manipuri society per se. Her female identity, her appearance, her conduct and manner, her role and activities in family and

societal sphere can be assumed as sign-vehicles that convey a social meaning. These signs are culturally organised into sign system that are subject to historical modes of sign production. In short, she is a producer of signs, a sender of messages, more than her male counterpart, influencing a significant resultant representation of the cultural ethos of the Manipuri society. So her natural being and her distinctive role in social, economic, political, cultural and literary fields, both in traditional and modern aspects, can be regarded as a sign process where codes at work represent values of culture and the signification emanates out of the deep-rooted cultural context.

In wide spectrum of patriarchal culture, where rules and codes are set by and for men, she is basically the object indicated by those signs, the signified, for male 'other'. She is connoted as the biologically marginalised yet socially idealised for her spirited roles in the society. In her transgression from the deeply traditional Manipuri woman to the Manipuri 'new' woman, which is a cohesive blending of the two divergent aspects of tradition and modernity, we notice a chain of signifiers, where the signification is often rooted in the signifying chain. The object of the signifier or the 'other' is always inscribed in the signifying chain in one way or another.

As for instance, we can take up the case of her name and identity. A typical Manipuri name will consist of a surname (i.e. father's family name), a name, followed by a title (generally 'Singh' for all Manipuris). In the case of a Manipuri unmarried girl, the use of '*Chanu*' after a maiden's name as a post-positional term, is indicative of her unmarried status. Again the word, 'Devi' to her first name also signifies a Manipuri woman, either married or unmarried. Furthermore, writing a name in the style of husband's surname followed by '*Ongbi*' (which means 'married to'), her maiden surname just immediately before her name and then adding 'Devi' as a post-position term specifically indicates a Manipuri married woman's complete name. To cite an example, a Manipuri unmarried girl can write her name as 'Yumnam Anita Chanu' or 'Yumnam Anita Devi'. After her marriage, her name will be written as 'Konsam Ongbi Yumnam Anita Devi'. Her identity is always presented in this manner. Through these signifiers, object signified is the Manipuri woman with signification and interpretation that she is the male 'other' who can be only identified through her father's or / and her husband's name.

Thus, these codified cultural signs and signifiers of the Manipuri women which are woven in the very fabric of the cultural matrix and practices of the Manipuri society can be effectively studied and investigated critically and theoretically. To attain so the study adopts the research question – **Can we not aptly use the tool semiosis to study and investigate the producing of cultural signs and signifiers that relate to the signified women in Manipuri society?**

### **Review of Literature**

In the review of literature component, books and journals have been studied relating to the wide range of aspects and also chapters designed for the study.

There are a good many books on semiotics and semiology among which those by Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Umberto Eco, Julia Kristeva, etc. and also on these thinkers and their works are worth-mentioning and need no reiteration as a brief account on each of them has already been given. Books on cultural studies by prominent culturologists and thinkers like Roland Barthes, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, etc. have also been mentioned earlier. Besides these, in recent years a good many books and research papers are available breaking new grounds for investigation and exploration. However, there are limited and few number of books on subject dealing with women studies against cultural background of a specific society.

The monograph on *Cultural semiosis in Mexican and Chicano feminine literature: Analysis of signs, language and popular myths within the narrative of Mexican and Mexican-American women writers* by Melgarejo, Maria Teresa, Purdue University, Indiana US (2001) is a good example. It aims to analyse the writings of two Mexican and Mexican-American women writers in the context of their contemporary culture. The relevance of semiosis in this literary analysis serves as the basis to present how women writers perceive and express the politics of their culture through different concerns and ideas about the place of women within two countries – Mexico and America. Issues like gender, race, class and the political roles for women in each country are signs that have similar or very different signification for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.

Another notable work *Fathoming Hidden Strategies of two Indian Government Print Advertisements through Semiotic and Critical Discourse Analysis* by Piar Chand,



Shivani Chaudhury and I.D. Sharma addresses problem of use of culture of consumers to manipulate them by propagating ideologies and analyses two print adverts issued by Indian government which appeared on occasion of National Girl Child's day but in different years. It studies power relationship between media and consumers through the way media dominates the mind with use of ideology. Semiotic and critical discourse analysis has been used as methodological tools of difference in their valuable work.

In Sarjoo Shah's monograph *The Semiotic Significance of 'Mandala' in Girish Karnad's 'Naga-Mandala'*, the critic analyses Mandala as a symbol in the play. Mandala is shown to represent wholeness and can be seen as a model for organisational structure of life itself. Mandala is otherwise surrounded by many factors and also becomes metaphor for life of an Indian woman. The paper titled *Native American women in Film: A semiotic analysis of Skinwalker and Coyotes Waits* focuses on analysing representation of Native American women in the two mentioned films.

Semiotics studies on women have been done worldwide. Carolyn M. Byerly's *Women as Sign* (2008) deals with ways women's status in patriarchal society is understood and communicated through institutional practices. Iris M. Zavala Utrecht's *Women, Feminist Identity and Society* (1985) is a paper that tries to present and discuss different modes of existence of women's text and feminine identity in political and poetic space and discourse. Jennifer Mc Neil Bertrand in her *Semiotic Theory and Women in the News* (2010) tries to explore exclusion or marginalisation of women in news as a mute presenter as well as the subject of the news itself. Risto Heiskala's *Society as Semiosis: Neo-Structuralist Theory of Culture and Society* (2003) seeks to study relevance of cultural studies in development of culture-interested sociology, wherein cultural paramountcy is vividly observable in domain of sociology.

Web sources on *Partial Women – Synecdoche, Semiosis and the Fantastic of the Whole* by Helena Michie, English and American Literature, Brandeis deals with the female body as a cultural icon infested with several meanings. The editorial on *Feminism and Semiotics* by Barbara Godard which appeared in Vol.13(2) of *The semiotic Review of Books* tries to review feminist stance in semiotics as explained by Umberto Eco, Julia Kristeva, Simone de Beauvoir, Helene Cixous and many others.

*The Feminist Theory Website: Julia Kristeva* also deals with various views on the same theme of feminism and Kristeva which provide a better insight of Kristeva's interpretation.

Semiotic studies in context of India date back only very recently and acquired somewhat a little space during post-colonial era only. Hence most studies mainly concentrate on post-colonial themes against backdrop of various societal conditions of the subcontinent. Works of Ampat Varghese' UGC paper on *Post-Feminism* deals with feminist freedom and struggle of Indian women from different classes of society. She tries to search for some post-feminist practices in the present contemporary India. Another notable piece of work of Vasanthi Raman's *Identity Formation, Nationhood and Women: An overview of issues* delineates problems of women's identity and their signification from varied communities as the Kashmiri Muslims, the Dalits and the region of the Northeast. Lakshmi Subramanyam's edited book on *Muffled Voices – Women in Modern Indian Theatre* (2002) having numerous articles present different aspects of women characters in present day Indian theatre.

When one turns to Northeast India, particularly to Assam and Manipur, one finds relatively a few or negligible work centring round semiotic studies. Most studies are dispersed not systematically organised and therefore concentrate on reflecting socio, political and economic problematics of societies they belong to. A volume of work written by Anuradha Dutta and Ratna Bhuyan (2008), highlights sporadic and transitory role of women in bringing peace and harmony in insurgency-hit regions of Northeast India.

Alongside case of Manipur state cannot be treated in isolation because books and journals published by government of Manipur provide fairly a good deal of data and information about the state of Manipur. Also there are various other sources like books written by T.C. Hodson, Captain E.W. Dun, G.K. Ghosh, J.K. Chopra, J. Shakespeare, W. McCulloch, Kabui Gangmumei, L. Ibungohal Singh etc. that give a proper introduction of the tiny state of Manipur. From all these books, the following information has been gathered. According to the topographical features of the state, 90 per cent of its total area is covered by hills and the remaining 10 per cent is the plain central valley. Imphal, its capital, lies in the valley. The hill area comprises of five districts, namely, Senapati, Tamenglong, Churachandpur, Chandel and Ukhrul,

while the valley consists of four districts, namely Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur and Thoubal. In true sense the state represents and synthesis of simple and complex character in terms of its landscape and culture boundary too.

Population of the state, as per 2001 census, was 22.9 lakhs which reached 28.5 lakhs in the year 2011. There are mainly three major ethnic groups in Manipur, i.e., the Meitei (Manipuri) who live mainly in the valley, Naga tribes and Kuki-Chin tribes who are generally concentrated to inhabit the hills. There are not less than 33 scheduled tribes in Manipur. The Naga tribes are closely associated with the tribes of Nagaland while the Kuki-Chin tribes with the Chins of Burma and the Mizos of Mizoram. It has been noted that among these large variety of ethnic groups, some tribes exhibit close affinity among themselves in terms of cultural tradition and practices. With advent vis-à-vis establishment of the missionaries of Christianity, most of these tribes accepted new religion which brought forth a certain uniform life style among them. Besides these ethnic groups, there are also some major social groups of Manipur like the Meitei Brahmin, Bishnupriya, Loi and Pangan (Manipuri Muslim).

The primary ethnic community who are numerically preponderant, unified and do adhere to same and similar things, the Meiteis are said to belong to the Kuki-Chin section of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. Hence racially they are of the Mongoloid stock. Although they bear close affinity to the other Kuki-Chin groups, save for their religion they practise, they manifest their own distinctive cultural practices, folks, myths and legends. Exogamous clans and sub-clans exist among the Meiteis. There are seven clans namely, *Ningthouja*, *Angom*, *Luwang*, *Khuman*, *Moirang*, *Khaba-Nganba* and *Chenglei* which were gradually brought under the social confederacy of the Meiteis led by the *Ningthouja*. Under these seven clans there exist several family lineage names which keep their identity and socio-cultural status relatively uncompromised.

Several books, journals, seminar papers are available dealing with Manipuri society and women written by both authors of Manipur as well as outsiders and visitors to Manipur. Some of the important works that are worth mentioning are as follows – G.K. Ghosh and Shukla Ghosh's *Women in Manipur*, deals with women in particular including Meitei as well as tribal women and their socio, economic, political,

religious, cultural and educational role and activities in the society. It also provides an insight into the social setup of Manipur that subordinates as well as idolises the women community as a whole. One aspect that the book highlights is the fact that women's representation in active politics is almost nil owing to perhaps the dregs of the feudal society structure. Though the writers conclude that if compared, condition and position of women in Manipur is far better than that in any other State of India.

Manjusri Chaki-Sircar's (1984) also deals with more or less the same themes but with greater detail as she happens to be a participant observer of the womenfolk of Manipur, particularly the Meitei women of a small sample area. Her first-hand knowledge and experience of the social, economic, political and religious aspects of the Meitei women with special emphasis on the cultural aspect of the dance of *Lai Haraoba* and the *Maibis* (priestesses) gives a detached objective picture of the community as a whole. She also reflects on some revealing aspects of sex roles and social relationships in a changing society. Like women's age group bonding is still vital in Meitei society, as symbolised in *Lai Haraoba*. Their self-sufficiency and social bonding provide a degree of autonomy for women. Meitei women can conceive of a life without a husband. A woman's self-image is also very much influenced by her role as a mother, which provides her a superior status and stable security compared to her role as a wife. Meitei husbands perceive their own dominance, but female defiance of male dominance is a profound feature of their culture.

The above mentioned writers also wrote extensively on the role of women in the society, their indispensability in running the family and household affairs. Women as providers are still an integral part of the family. There are two major realms of activity which depend solely on women. One is weaving and craft which has been a vital part of their lives irrespective of the status of her family. Every girl or woman is rather bound to be acquainted with the skill of weaving as it is considered as one of her necessary qualification or prerequisites. Hence in almost every marriage till today, the bride is given a loom as a gift or dowry by her guardians, which act as a symbol of an occupation she might take up later on. Over and above, the persistent adherence of the Manipuri women to their handloom products as their best attire in ceremonies; and the unwaning respectability of the tradition of weaving, is the secret of its sustenance in spite of the great onslaught of mill cloths.

The other economic aspect is trade, commerce and marketing. Women sell any produce from her vegetable garden in the nearby native market. They also sell their handloom products. The internal trade and commerce of the state is basically controlled and managed by women. The *Nupi Keithel* or *Ima Keithel* is the unique market where business is exclusively transacted by women or mothers. The merchandise includes almost anything that a main market sells.

The market place is also a place of congregation for Manipuri women where they meet and share among themselves their views and opinions on almost everything. Besides business management and trade speculations, they discuss issues relating to various aspects of their lives and hence suitable decisions on general consensus are made to that effect. It may be noted that seeds of revolt and women power were first sown at this *Nupi Keithel* which later gave birth to the great women movements of Manipur under different women leaders.

On the religion of Manipur, where we notice co-existence of two distinct religious cults, i.e., one pre-Hindu Meitei religion and another advent of Hindu religion, there are various books written. Among them, the most notable ones are those written by S.K. Chatterjee (1974), M. Kirti Singh (1980), Saroj Nalini Parratt (1980), R.K. Jhalajit (1992), K.B. Singh (1964), J.C. Higgins etc. In all these books, mention is made of how and when ancient traditional Meitei religion came into being with settlement of Meiteis in the valley. R.K. Jhalajit is of the view that the early people of Manipur worshipped natural phenomenon/objects like Fire, Sun, God of the homestead, etc. which characterises naturalism. T.C. Hodson believes animism to be the ancient beliefs of the Meiteis as they worship supernatural elements like soul, demons, etc. and states that the Meiteis are still animists. Then again the worship of ancestors was and is still prevalent among the Meiteis. All these phenomena can be noticed in traditional Meitei religion or *Meiteism*.

With the coming of visitors from Bengal and other parts of India from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the idea of Hinduism in Manipur was manifested. And from the early part of 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, when the reigning King, Garib Niwaz himself converted into Vaishnavism, people of Manipur too followed suit and embraced new religion with all its beliefs, customs and value-systems completely. Even then, people continued their practice of traditional Meitei religion as well. Social values like respect for husband

by wife and of parents by children relate to custom and tradition of both cults which are invariably observed by people of the Manipur valley. The womenfolk try to inculcate moral and socio-cultural values and virtues of both the religious faiths to the next generation as well. Their role in imbibing values both the religions in harmonious synchronisation in their day-to-day lives is worth mentioning.

These two religions have a direct impact on social and cultural milieu of the Manipuri society. Festivals and performing arts of Manipur are based on these two religions. For example, the *Lai Haraoba* festival, *Khamba-Thoibi* dance, *Thang-Ta* (Martial Arts) follows from the traditional cult of *Meiteism*. Dr. Kh. Ratan Kumar (2001) and Ch. Jamini Devi (2010) made a detailed study of this festival in their books. The classical form of dances like *Rasleela*, *Nat Sankirtan*, *Pung Cholom*, etc. is attributed to the *Vaisnavite* faith. The *Rasleela* is said to have originated from vision of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra way back in later part of 18<sup>th</sup> century. One peculiar aspect of this dance is that performers are all women or girls, even the one who plays the part of Lord Krishna. For Manipuri *Nat Sankirtan*, music and singing, women are allowed singing devotional songs in temple premises also. Mention of these performing arts can be found in books written by E. Nilkanta Singh, N. Khelchandra, Louise Lightfoot, etc. also.

Books and journals like those published by Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, Manipuri State Kala Akademi, Imphal, R.K. Jhalajit Singh, Ch. Manihar Singh, etc. present the language and literature aspect of Manipur with its many writers and authors, both male and female, that give an in depth study into the said areas.

From the above review of literature, a general idea of the concept of semiosis and also on the Manipuri community and society can be gathered and studied. These studies and yet some more will assist in bringing into focus the signs and signifiers of the Manipuri women that are embedded in the cultural spectrum of the society.

### **Universe of Study**

The study concentrates on plethora of activities (both organised and unorganised) of the Manipuri women living in Manipur state only. Though large concentrations of Manipuris dwell in other states like Assam, Tripura and other neighbouring areas, and even in countries of Bangladesh and Myanmar, the selection of the universe as state

of Manipur is mainly because of its representative aspect of mainstream culture and tradition of Manipuri society. Out of nine districts of Manipur, four districts which exhibit maximum Manipuri concentration are selected as delimitation of the study. The study also seeks to confine to activities of the Manipuri (Meitei) women in particular of the society. To investigate the cultural signifiers at the traditional level, the rural Manipur is felt to be the perfect as most rural women still maintain their age-old customary traditions and cultural practices. While to focus on image of 'new woman' at the post-traditional level, the best area of study and selection of universe is regarded to be the urban Manipur where one may observe and find maximum of educated, employed and emancipated lot of the Manipuri women.

### **Objective of Study**

1. To study semiosis or process of sign production of the Manipuri women in societal, economic, political, cultural and literary framework of the Manipuri society.
2. To trace signifiers both at initial traditional level as well as at secondary post-traditional level of signifiers.
3. To investigate problem of signification arising out of clash of two-level signifiers.

### **Hypothesis of Study**

1. Semiosis of the Manipuri women can be approached from the works of the Manipuri women within social codes and framework as signifiers.
2. Semiosis of the Manipuri women is an interpolation of the two signifiers at traditional and post-traditional levels.
3. The secondary level of signifiers is what the Manipuri 'new' women are.

### **Method of data collection**

The work is primarily synthesis of primary and secondary data and nature of study is based on descriptive, qualitative and explorative type. Since both primary and secondary data constitute major component of the work process, every rigorous effort was made to collect all data using suitable fitting tools, strategy and techniques to develop qualitative study having admixture of some quantitative component also.



For secondary data, census and books, journals and periodicals along with existing published materials are used. In this regard library located in Manipur, Assam and Meghalaya (NEHU, Shillong) are visited. Some recent published books, not yet available in libraries are purchased and referred in this work too. Different government offices in Manipur where some rare piece of data found are also covered with all keenness in course of data collection process. Further with help of these data a systematic study of cultural practices and rather all inclusive societal, economic and political aspects of the Manipuri society became easy and set background foundation for studying of Manipuri women in text and context.

Primary data collection process was cumbersome, difficult and nonetheless challenging. Because before approaching the Manipuri women directly for primary data, certain serious tools and techniques were followed to minimise biasness in study (since I belong to Manipuri community and that too, a woman). Keeping objectives in mind, it is felt imperative that only application of limited tools and techniques may not help to obtain all data. That is why interview schedule, unstructured interview, interview guide, participant observation, case study and diary research techniques and methods have been employed to collect data to develop an in-depth knowledge about social structure, economy, polity and cultural tradition and customary practices of the Manipuri society.

Informal interaction or interview with selected intellectuals, senior women of repute, women from several walks of life and women in market-place are conducted to focus on live experiences, views and opinions of respondents on multitude practices prevalent in the Manipuri society. Besides interview schedule, interview guide are used which are open-ended and flexible according to demand of the situation while interacting to know personal likes and dislikes of respondents. Moreover, pertinent queries relating to family background, occupation, income, education, role and participation in socio-cultural milieu, political consciousness, emancipation of women, etc., are also put forward to various age-group of people to gather essential data about the women.

Data relating to traditional custom, religious ceremony, ritual and observation are collected through participant observation as I keenly sometimes took part in those and sometimes even observed that when happening/organised. Several rounds of chit-chat,



wherever possible, by sitting together and eating with the respondents to make them feel free and at ease is a technique which is also adopted in course of data collection.

Case study method is also adopted to obtain certain useful data for qualitative development of idea and understanding the entire matter. Hence, to understand perception of Manipuri women regarding their cultural signifiers, some prominent persons, intellectuals and educated women have been identified and interviewed. Case study facilitated to know different kinds of issues, matters and problems of the women from various dimensions, mind-sets and backgrounds of the respondents.

Diary is an important tool employed to write and store unorganised or raw data as sporadically given by the respondents. This method assists to store data for a lengthy period of time providing ample space and time to the data collector to utilise it as and when necessary in the course of the study.

For fieldwork from 2011 to 2015, I visited several times the state of Manipur and accordingly divided my visit into two phases in each year. The first phase of visit took place in months of May and June generally as these two months are holidays for summer break, while the second phase fall in month of September and October as these two months are holidays for autumn recess. In first phase of visit, the period of work lasted near about forty days while in second phase, it lasted only around twenty days as holidays in second phase are shorter than those of first phase. Out of the nine districts of Manipur, since concentration of the Manipuri is in the plains, I willingly opted for the four districts that lie in plains, that is, districts of Bishnupur, Thoubal, Imphal West and Imphal East. Again, out of the four districts, I selected in total, six rural and six urban area randomly as sample as these area were convenient and logical to undertake study. The six rural (villages) area are Moirang, Lourengbam, Kakching, Icham Kunou, Heinoukhongnembi and Jiribam while the six town area are Sagolband, Bijoy Govind, Langjing, Porompat, Lairikyengbam and Chingangbam Leikai.

In total from 2011 to 2015, I made ten visits to Manipur. In each visit, the first half of total day was devoted to furnish the questionnaire/ schedule while the second half was duly spent for interaction and collection of multitude reports from offices and talking to respondents.

The study adopted simple random sampling. Detail of sample is as put below:

**Table no. II.I: Sampling Method**

Age Area	Old (married) Age (51-75)	Young (unmarried/married) Age (20-35)/(36-50)	Total
Rural	75	75	150
Urban	75	75	150
Total	150	150	300

As already mentioned in universe of the study, unit of sample was Manipuri women and the work concentrated exclusively on both rural and urban parameter with two distinct variables, old and young people belonging to different age-groups. Criterion of sample was random and a total number of three hundred sample are studied randomly with division as shown in the above table. The three hundred samples are assumed to methodically appropriate to properly represent the entire universe of study. Because for any intensive and qualitative study a standard of three hundred sample size are normally understood to be appropriate. The survey covering entire course work also checked on different fronts such as whether the respondents are literate or illiterate, married or unmarried, homemaker/housewife or working, etc.

### **Fieldwork experience**

At the initial stage, before approaching Manipuri women at the grassroots level for fieldwork, some eminent scholars of Manipur have been identified and interacted for understanding their perception about Manipuri women regarding their cultural signifiers. In most cases it is observed that the respondents were very responsive and co-operative towards my study. The people mostly represented educated and emancipated Manipuri women from urban area of Manipur. Of course, some eminent men of various fields were also interviewed to gather their views on the study concerned.

Teachers from Manipur University, Canchipur and from various colleges, engineers, doctors, social activists, journalists, media personnel, artistes and teachers of various performing arts including music, dance and theatre, sports personnel, players and coaches alike, entrepreneurs (handloom), writers, etc. as well as the Minister for

Women and Child Welfare, were interacted during my sojourn in the State. Besides, I met and interacted with *maibis* in their *Maibi Loisang* (Institution), visited the Jawaharlal Nehru Dance Academy, Imphal, and met some maibis, dancers and singers of repute and chatted with the Secretaries of the *Ima* market in their market office. I also interacted with students of sports, dance and music, workers/weavers working under the entrepreneurs/designers, vendors of the market and trade fairs, ashram dwellers and social workers, NGO workers, etc. Their lived experiences, views and opinions on cultural practices that are prevalent in the society were highly informative in shaping the framework of my study. Also their advice and suggestions were noted down as to the proper way to approach the womenfolk in the strife-torn State of Manipur. In the course of my stay in the State, I have also been fortunate enough to witness *Rasleela* performed at night in the famous Govindaji Mandir and *Lai Haraoba* festival of Moirang.

For intensive fieldwork, approaching and interacting with women of different age-groups did not prove much of a challenge as I, as a data collector as well as the student, am a woman and belong to the same community. To the contrary, most women accepted me whole-heartedly into their fold and household whosoever I met and wherever I visited and they extended necessary help and assistance in data collection process. Much of the qualitative and some quantitative data are obtained as I was flexible to interact with women of the study area/universe of study. Besides, there was also no language barrier or communication gap between the researcher and the respondents.

In spite of that, there were certain sporadic difficulties which were difficult to rule out totally. As the women are engaged in various chores of work at home as well as outside, they failed to spend much time for interaction though they wish to. Also, since my area of work is in the state of Manipur, and I am a resident of Assam, working in a College, I could only manage to visit field during holidays and vacation. There were times when I could not even meet some prominent persons due to their periodical and sporadic absence from the State. And further because of frequent strikes, bandhs, economic blockades, bombings due to insurgency, militancy and ethnic cleansing in the State, planned visits to the State was also bound with several unforeseen problems and life risks. Over and above, communication of many rural

areas in Manipur was not conducive due to bad road condition and unavailability of transport, etc.

### Fieldwork Chart

A table has been prepared relating to the comprehensiveness and yet sporadic fieldwork conducted spreading over 2011 to 2015. Owing to several overt and covert factors, entire fieldwork period were devised very methodically and executed accordingly. Therefore in the table below the detail period of visits are represented likewise: (i) the year of visit, (ii) the phase of visit, (iii) the period of visit, (iv) the district visited, (v) CD Block No. under which the place is located, (vi) the places (villages/towns) visited, (vii) the distance of the village/town from headquarters, Imphal and (viii) No. of days of the visit.

**Table no. II.II: Fieldwork Chart**

Sl. No	Year	Phase	Period	District	Block	Place: Rural (R)/ Urban (U)	Approx. distance from HQ	No. of day
1	2011	1st	May-June	Bishnupur	0023	Moirang (R)	40 Km	40
2	2011	2nd	Sept-Oct	Bishnupur	0022	Lourenbam (R)	25 Km	22
3	2012	1st	May-June	Thoubal	0025	Kakching (R)	40 Km	38
4	2012	2nd	Sept-Oct	Thoubal	0024	Icham Kunou (R)	8 Km	25
5	2013	1st	May-June	Imphal West	0027	Heinoukhongnembu (R)	4 Km	29
6	2013	1st	May-June	Imphal West	0026	Sagolband (U)	0 Km	10
7	2013	2nd	Sept-Oct	Imphal West	0026	Bijoy Govind (U)	0 Km	12
8	2013	2nd	Sept-Oct	Imphal West	0026	Langjing (U)	6 Km	11
9	2014	1st	May-June	Imphal East	0029	Porompat (U)	1 Km	35
10	2014	2nd	Sept-Oct	Imphal East	0029	Lairikyengbam (U)	4 Km	23
11	2015	1st	May-June	Imphal East	0029	Chingangbam Leikai (U)	3 Km	40
12	2015	2nd	Sept-Oct	Imphal East	0028	Jiribam (R)	225 Km	25
<b>Total</b>	5 year	2 phase	different	different		Rural and urban		310

**Conclusion**

This chapter clearly reflects vicissitudinal aspects of framework of study having with methodological as the main component of the chapter. The study is depended on explorative and descriptive to develop qualitative aspect. In the course of the study involving with the problematique of the study, scope and rationale of the study, review of literature, research question, objectives, hypotheses and method of data collection are undertaken. The study is also depended upon scientific method for selection of universe, sample and tool for data collection. Participant observation, interview guide and case study are used for data collection to make the study more intensive and informative. Systematic analysis of data is applied and a standard format is employed to develop the study accordingly. I am confident that the present inquiry may successfully reflect one of the ways of understanding the true identity of women belonging to a particular society and their role and status in that society. In view of this aim and intent, the forthcoming chapter will concentrate on general profile of the specific society in question, that is, the Manipuri society.