

**CHAPTER – IV**  
**MANIPUR: LAND AND PEOPLE**

## Chapter Four

### Manipur: Land and People

#### MANIPUR: GEOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

Figure/Chart 4.1:



Location of Manipur in India, (Source: [www.mapsofindia.com](http://www.mapsofindia.com))

The term 'Manipur' literally means "A Jeweled Land". It nestles deep within a lush green corner of North East India. It is a small land locked state in India's north eastern region lying in the latitude 23'83 and 25'68 N and in the longitude range of 93'03 and 94'78E. She is sharing its border with Nagaland to the north, Assam to the West, Mizoram to the south and a 385 Kms border with Myanmar to the east, with a population of 23,88,634 (2001 census) and a land area of 22,327

sq.km. The state has 9 districts (Imphal west, Imphal east, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Churachanpur, Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong), 43 community Development Blocks and 2182 villages.

**Figure/Chart 4.2**



(Source: [www.mapsofindia.com](http://www.mapsofindia.com))

Imphal is the capital of Manipur. The districts was spilt into Imphal West and Imphal East on June 18,1997.Imphal West had a

population of 439,532. Males constitute 50% of the population and Females 50%. Imphal West is the primary business hub of Manipur and major business areas are in and around Imphal. It is a tiny plain at the centre of Manipur surrounded by plains of other districts. Imphal West district is one of the nine administrative districts of Manipur with its head quarter located at Lamphelpat. Imphal East, with its head quarters at Porompat and occupying the eastern part of Imphal District. This district had a population of 394876, according to 2001 Census.

Manipur ranks fourth among the north eastern state in terms of population size and first in term of the sex ratio (Source Economic Survey, Manipur 2007-2008, Directorate of Statistics, Government of Manipur, Imphal.) Manipur was once a land of plenty, conspicuous by the absence of beggars or drug addicts but of people who were hard working, peace-loving, religious minded men and women and with cultural heritage, exquisite natural beauty and splendor and was described by Mrs. St Clair Grimwood as, "A pretty place more beautiful than many show places of the world." Lord Irwin described Manipur as the "Switzerland of the East". But alas! Manipur of today has caught the attention of the world not because of its traditional love for art and cultural dance, drama and music, handloom and handicraft works and scenic beauty, but because of presence of acute problems of drug abuse, drug addicts and AIDS.

**Table 4.1 District Wise Population (2001 Census).**

| District      | Area in sq.km | Male      | Female    | Total     |
|---------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Senapati      | 3,271         | 80,230    | 76,283    | 1,56,513  |
| Tamenglong    | 4,391         | 58,014    | 53,485    | 1,11,499  |
| Churachandpur | 4,570         | 1,17,232  | 1,10,673  | 2,27,905  |
| Ukhrul        | 4,544         | 73,465    | 67,313    | 1,40,778  |
| Chandel       | 3,313         | 59,741    | 58,586    | 1,18,327  |
| Bishnupur     | 496           | 1,04,550  | 1,03,818  | 2,08,368  |
| Thoubal       | 514           | 1,82,250  | 1,81,890  | 3,64,140  |
| Imphal West   | 519           | 2,21,781  | 2,22,601  | 4,44,382  |
| Imphal East   | 709           | 1,98,371  | 1,96,505  | 3,94,876  |
| Total         | 22,327        | 10,95,635 | 10,71,154 | 21,66,788 |

Source: Economics Survey GOM, 2007-08

### **Climate**

The climate of Manipur is moderate. The valley gets the reflection of the heat of the summer and the cold of the winter from the neighbouring hills. The months of November, December, January and February remain dry and the remaining eight months are more or less rainy. January is very cold in winter and May-June are the hottest in summer.

### **Administrative Units**

Manipur and Assam became involved in the disputes between Thailand and Burma, and Manipur took advantage of a Burmese invasion of Thailand to raid deep into its western frontier. This triggered the Burmese invasion of Manipur and Assam, which stucked in the British, ruling neighboring Bengal. The British, to safeguard their position against the Burmese, intervened, defeated Burma and took over Assam, and brought Manipur under British paramount in 1891. During the Second World War, Manipur was the scene of many fierce battles between the Japanese and Allied forces. The Japanese swept over East Asia and came up to Manipur. They were beaten back the before they could enter Imphal and this proved to be one of the turning points of the War. There are two cemeteries maintained by the British War Graves Commission in Manipur, which are the final resting places of several Indian and allied soldiers who died here. In 1947, with British Parliament's repeal of British Paramountcy, in preparation for Indian independence, Manipur became an independent kingdom once again. The King, Maharaja Budhachandra, began a process of democratisation of the state, enacting the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947, which established a democratic form of government with the Maharaja as the Executive Head and an elected legislature. In 1949, the King Budhachandra was summoned to Shillong, capital of the Indian province of Assam and was forced to sign an agreement for merging the kingdom into India. The King had already signed the Instrument of Accession with the Indian Dominion in 1947. Once Manipur became part of the Indian Union, India dissolved the State's Constitution Assembly in October, 1949, and made it into a part C state. Later on, it was further degraded to the status of the union territory from 1956 onwards. In 1972, Manipur was elevated to the status of an state (or province). She got her full Statehood within constitutional limits of India. Presently, it is divided

into nine administrative units, i.e. districts. Imphal, the capital city of the State of Manipur is the largest and an important city having over one and a half lakh population. The population of Bishnupur and Moirang are 1, 79,903 (Males: 90415 and Females: 89,488) as in 1993 census.

### **The State Symbol**

The State symbol or emblem of Manipur is Kanglasha ( Nongsaba), i.e. half lion and half dragon. Sangai or brown antlered deer is the State animal, while Nongin remained as the State bird. Iningthiu is regarded as the State tree and the world famous Shiroy Lily ( Liliun) is the State flower of Manipur. Friday, January 21 (1972) is the Statehood day and Date of Manipur.

### **Literacy Profile**

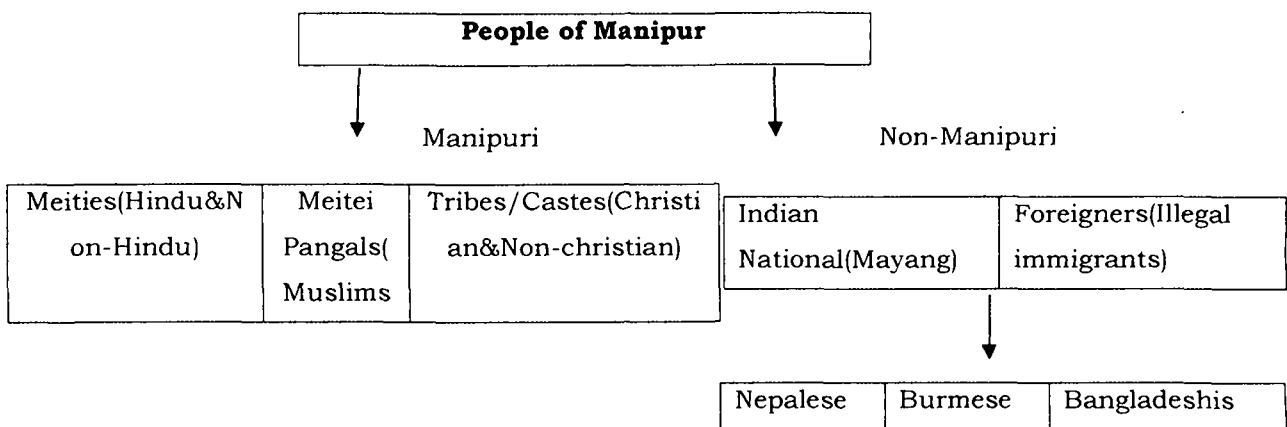
Literacy continues to be one of the most pressing worldwide problems. It is also one of those problems which along with hunger, sickness and unemployment, have aroused the greatest responses in terms of International collaboration. Literacy is an important characteristic of population for the purpose of the census. A person is regarded as literate if he/she can read and write with understanding in any language. In the last few census, children below the age of five were treated as illiterate. Since ability to read and write with understanding is not ordinarily achieved until one develop these skills, it was felt by the Ministry of Human Resources Department (M.H.R.D) and Planning commission that the population from 7 years and above is to be classified as literate or illiterate. Hence, in 2001 census the question of literacy was canvassed only for the population aged 7 years and above unlike earlier census which took into account population of 5 years and above for this purpose.

Literacy rate is another indicator which plays a crucial role in the socio economic development of the state. One of the significant aspects of the expansion of education facilities in Manipur relates to the increase in literacy rate. The quality of the population or for that matter, of the worker may be gauged from their level of educational standard. The percentage for the state was 68.87% by 2001. The average literacy rate is 77.87% for males and 59% for females.

The per capita income is Rs 12,198.00 against the all India figure of Rs.21, 120.00. 74% of the total population lives in the rural area. Hill districts constitute almost 90% of the total area but have less than 40% of the total population of the state. The density of population is 44 persons per sq.km in hill districts and 628 persons per sq.km in the valley. The sex ratio is 978 females per 1000 males (2001 census).

**The People**

Manipur assumes an isolated entity not only in its geographical settings but also in peopling by virtue of the land being a buffer zone between the Caucasoid Dravidian belt of the west and oriental mongoloid belt of the east.



(Adopted from Singh & Shyamananda, 1988)



The state is a land of social cultural linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity. There are 29 Scheduled tribes and 7 scheduled castes having their own distinct dialects, tradition and culture. Scheduled tribes and scheduled castes constitute 31.3% and 2.51% of the total population of state respectively. The lingua franca of the state is Manipuri Language (*Meiteilon*). *Meiteilon* was recognized as a Major Indian National Language in 1992 under VIII Schedule of the Indian constitution.

### **Religion**

The religions in Manipur are Sanamahi(indigenous Meitie), Vaishnavism, Tingkao Rawang(Kabui), Christianity. Besides, Islam and many of the indigenous religion of the tribal are also present. Maharaja Garibniwaz adopted Hinduism as the State's religion in 1714AD. Slowly, people were converted to Hinduism, however there were many who refused conversion and worshipped their old god and goddesses. Because of the people's resistance to the new religion, the king could not ignore the indigenous faith altogether. Some of the later kings worshiped both the god and goddess. Some of the groups who resist were seen as an outcast and they were made to live in the periphery of the city. These people were now included in the Scheduled caste like Lois. Religion-wise the King abstained from preaching to the hill. During the census count, the Meitei can be found in two heads (Hinduism and other religion). Others religion are those who are consciously trying to maintain the indigenous faith. So we can see from data that the other religion is increasing in every census. The hill people instead gradually started imbibing the values of the new administrator's i.e the British who brought their missionaries to the hills. The first -ever conversion to Christianity which took place at Ukhrul ( in the eastern hills)in 1894 was supposed to be the prelude for the large scale progress in education,

economy, change in political outlook, and ultimately, the overall socio-economic change coupled with fresh identity consciousness among the tribes.

### **Social Mores of the People**

Based on the foregoing hints of ethno- religious polymorphic society in Manipur, a brief overview of the general social norms and taboo of the people governing their social life, sexuality, marital affairs, ritual beliefs, food habits, management of mental stress and illness are essential in the present context study of risk behaviors and diseases related to HIV/AIDS. The social life of Manipuris is governed by the legacy of old tradition and customs rather than the set norms and legal acts. The Manipuri word *Touheide* meaning Taboo is a powerful vocabulary used to keep strict discipline in their social life. Nevertheless, development of deviant behavior is a confirmed human tendency in search of enjoyment and personal contentment.

Like in other Indian society, pre-marital sexual acts are strictly prohibited. It is a taboo since long back. Theoretically, there is no marriage barrier between different areas of the valley. However, strict prohibition against consanguineous marriage was maintained in the past. Families are patriarchal in structure with wives showing loyalty to their husbands. Nowadays, monogamy is preferred with the abolishment of kingship system of administration and its changes to the modern democratic setups for regulating the social norms. Polyandry (a woman having many husbands) is hardly known in Manipur society. But remarriage of widows is socially permitted.

The using of psychoactive substances on religious occasion and festival was recorded and socially sanctioned even in the past and its legacy is still accepted in the present society. Using of intoxicating

substances becomes a popular activity among youths with the result of abuse and addiction to it.

### **Human Resources and Socio-economy**

In real sense of the term, the total population of Manipur is the human resource with the young ones as the potential future manpower resources. In the study, the total work force in age group 15-59 years of the state has been shown to be 55% of the total population which is a fairly rich manpower resource (Singh and Shyamanada). The total number of employment was estimated to be 2.80% in the public sectors and 0.02% in the private sectors of the state showing an extremely narrowed employment avenue in private sector. At present, the Government of Manipur and its departments are inundated with more than two lakhs of educated job seekers. With this, the height of corruption has caused an unhealthy environment in the appointment sectors. As a result, hundreds of youths are frustrated and claiming to remain useless without contributing anything to the society. There is a great concern and crucial stage reminding the concept of proper management of manpower. Due to failure to adopt and implement a strategic policy in this regard, the people of Manipur are considered to face a tough time in near future. The initial sign of failure is now manifested as hundreds of youth are indulging in drug menace and still others remain in the crossroads of uncertain future. Thus, a severe damage of manpower resources is observed in Manipur.

Manipur is the most backward state in its economy with 60% of the State population are below the poverty line as against the 48.4% of all India average as observed by the end of fifth plan period (Singh and Shyamanada). It is also proved that per capita state income of Manipur is smaller as against the all India level at current price for 1990-91 (DES, 1990-91).

Lack of irrigation facilities, industrial backwardness, poor transport facilities, etc and lack of skills in the man power planning are all the determining factors for the poor economy in the state. Over the last few decades, the mobilization of economy and generating of a sound manpower planning programme in Manipur has been far less to the desired goal.

### **Industry**

Manipur has made some progress in the setting up of small scale industrial units of which 7700 have been set up. A joint sector plant to manufacture drugs and pharmaceuticals has been commissioned and electronic goods, Steel fabrication articles and plastic goods are being produced in the state. A cement plant has also come up in Manipur. Among other industries a spinning mill, a ghee manufacturing unit and similar factories to make other consumer products have been commissioned up to 2000AD and a profile of a number of industries which could be set up in the state has been prepared. Training facilities have also been created to enable the young men and woman to acquire technological capability and provide industries with ready- made trained man power. A centre for electronic design and technology and the central institute of plastic Engineering and Technology have been set up at Imphal. A factory is already making colour and black and white, TVsets.

### **Agriculture**

Agriculture and its allied activities are the single largest source of livelihood of rural folk. Paddy is the main crop grown. Manipuri rice is very sweet. It can be eaten without curry. Other crops are wheat, pulses, maize etc. There are two modes of cultivation viz, punghul and transplantation of seeds. In the hill area Jhum and terraced cultivation are carried in the agricultural season. In general, the land is cleared in

the month of January and February. Crops are sown in May-June and harvesting starts in October and ends about in the early part of December. The soil is considered fit for all kinds of grain crops, vegetables and fruits. Siroy hill in Ukhrul is famous for the Siroy lily. The species of this plant is endemic to that particular hill only. Fruits cultivated include pine-apple, arum, and orange. In some areas of the valley apricot, oranges, lemons and mangoes are also grown. Every kind of vegetables like cabbage, carrot, radish, beetroot, turnip, ladies finger, pumpkin and pulses are grown and the yield is very good. Vegetables also include chilly, potato, cabbage, pea, brinjal and tomato.

### **The Transport and Communication**

Being landlocked, the state is connected to the rest of India and Myanmar mainly by roads and flight connections to other cities of India. Manipur has poor transportation and communication system not only for transaction of trade and commerce but also for easy accessibility to health care facilities as compared to other states of the country. There is no train connection. The two National Highways passing through Manipur connecting to rest of the world are NH53 and NH39. The seasonal nature of the National Highways and unstable law and order situation further give hindrance to the great mobility of the people within the state and across the border. Though air transportation exists in Imphal, its international connection has been limited by the inner line permit system since long back. Long standing poor distribution system with political instability in the state has been found to be associated with improper management of human resources opening an avenue for adopting risky life style for the youthful manpower. On other hand, these two National Highways together with the state Highways seem to play a major role for transmission of all kinds of communicable diseases along with the movement of the people for their economic activities.

Internationally, Manipur is well known for its arts and culture and particularly for sports. So called 'polo' is said to be originated from Manipur. But today, Manipur is more popular in terms of its highest HIV prevalence state in India contributed mainly by injecting drug use.

### **Food and Food habit**

The type of food and food habit is closely related to the evolving religion and ever changing belief system over time and again. Accordingly, human being behaves to form a specific pattern of behaviors which is an important component for the young ones in the society to enter into the mechanism of socialization process. At certain point of time in the history of Manipur, the aboriginal people both Meities and Tribals had a school of faith on animism (Hodson, 1908). In association with this belief system, the food habit of the Meities and Tribals were found almost similar. They ate meat, used ardent spirit and tobacco. Rice was commonly consumed as their staple food. In a way, the people may be defined as non-vegetarians in the remote past.

With the advent of Hinduism, the Meities and Tribals people were dichotomized into two groups regarding their food habit in the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D along with the Hindu concept of purity and impurity. Those who had been converted to Hinduism were considered as 'pure caste' and adopted vegetarian diet, and those who did not, as 'impure caste' and remained as non-vegetarians. The faith and belief system of Meities and their food habit had been changed gradually over a period of time. Eating meat was forbidden. Using alcohol/spirits and tobacco was prohibited; milk was allowed to be consumed with the worship of cow.

### **Drug use History in Manipur**

Locally brew alcohol was the part of the traditional social drink in the state both at the valley and in the hill. The practice of local brewing

alcohol was stopped and banned by the Government under Narcotics drugs and Psychotropic substance Act (NDPS).

NH 39 leads directly to the “Golden Triangle”, where an estimated 29% of the global production of opium and the purest form of heroin are manufactured. But at the end of 2001, as a result of upheavals in Afghanistan, Myanmar became the largest source of illicit opium in the world.

### **The Golden Triangle**

The Golden Triangle is one of Asia’s two main illicit opium-producing areas. It is an area of around 350,000 square kilometers that overlaps the mountains of three countries of mainland Southeast Asia: Burma (Myanmar), Laos, and Thailand. Along with Afghanistan in the Golden Crescent (together with Iran and Pakistan), it has been one of the most important opium-producing area of Asia and of the world since the 1950s.

Myanmar, Thailand and Laos constitute the well known region-Golden Triangle. It is noted for opium production. Heroin in its purer form popularly known as No.4 (in the form of white inject able powder) is smuggled from Myanmar, which commences in the border town of Moreh and runs right through Manipur. Manipur also become an alternative route for International drug traffickers.

### **The Golden Crescent**

The Golden Crescent is the name given to one of Asia's two principal areas of illicit opium production, located at the crossroads of Central, South, and Western Asia. This space overlaps three nations, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, whose mountainous peripheries define the crescent, though only Afghanistan and Pakistan produce opium, with Iran being a consumer and trans-shipment route for the smuggled opiates. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_Crescent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Crescent)).

The Golden Crescent has a much longer history of opium production than does Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle, even though the Golden Crescent emerged as a modern-day opium-producing entity only in the 1970s, after the Golden Triangle did so in the 1950s.

In the beginning, the mode of use was oral (smoking/chasing) but due to increasing cost and also many stringent measures enforced by the law enforcement agency and local drug resistant groups, the mode trend and patterns of use shifted from oral to injection. The choice of drug differs from time to time. In the 1970's the popular drugs were Morphine, Norphine and Pethidine which were used orally and by injecting as well. Heroin (No.4) became the illicit drug of choice from the early 80's, as there was a scarcity of morphine in the region. The Morphine injectors started using Heroin as a substitute. The old Morphine injectors continued to inject Heroin. The commonly used drugs today are heroin, Spasmo Proxyvon and other Pharmaceutical drugs; the recent trend of ATS (amphetamine type substances) used in Moreh (Manipur-Myanmar border town) as a new substance of use is primarily produced in Myanmar which has become the primary source of (ATS) in Asia producing an estimated 800 million methamphetamine tablets per year. Since population of drug injectors is more, sharing of injecting equipment is common ranging from 2-3 peers in the group. Drugs from Myanmar enter into Manipur through the passage of Behiang and Moreh both of which are very close to Myanmar. The long border with Myanmar (352kms) is thinly policed and as a result of which drug routes have come up.

***Four main Drug routes have so far been identified. These are –***

- i) Tamu-Moreh-Imphal-Kohima-Dimapur.
- ii) New Somtal-Sugnu-Churachanpur-Imphal-Kohima-Dimapur
- iii) Kheinan-Behiang- CCpur- Imphal- Kohima-Dimapur



iv) Somrah- Tulsong- Kharason-jessami-Kohima-Dimapur.

In addition to these all identified routes, there are innumerable jungle tracks all of which are used by drug traffickers.



Figure/Chart.4.3: Map Showing the Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent. (Source:www.heroin world.com)

### **Sex Work in Manipur**

The sex work was existed in Manipur society since the time immemorial but limited in number as revealed by the epics and folklores. However, there are also various reasons for increased sex work such as poverty and family malfunctioning. As the income is inadequate to meet the living costs many women indulged in sex trade and become the small drug peddlers.

Several research works and surveys suggest that the ever increasing number of prostitute/sex workers in Manipur is highly related to poverty.

However, it does not mean that all the women who enter in such trades are due of poverty. The reasons could be manifold:

- Struggle for survival forced them to select such trade.
- In order to earn more for purchasing drugs
- Not only for earning money but also for getting sexual enjoyment
- Due to social discrimination and deprivation

Even though in earlier days the usual mode of transmission was found to be through injecting drug it has been quit for a while that a sizeable population of transmission has been through sex. The vulnerable group has crossed over from IDUs to the general population through their spouses and sexual partners.

Women may be those who are exposed to extreme condition of poverty compounded with having no option for earning a livelihood. Such women who have no option for earning are categorized as unemployed and 50.9% of the samples fall into this category. Women who are widowed or those marginalized/ isolated by the general population such as widows or spouses of IDUs are exposed to vulnerability of becoming sex workers.

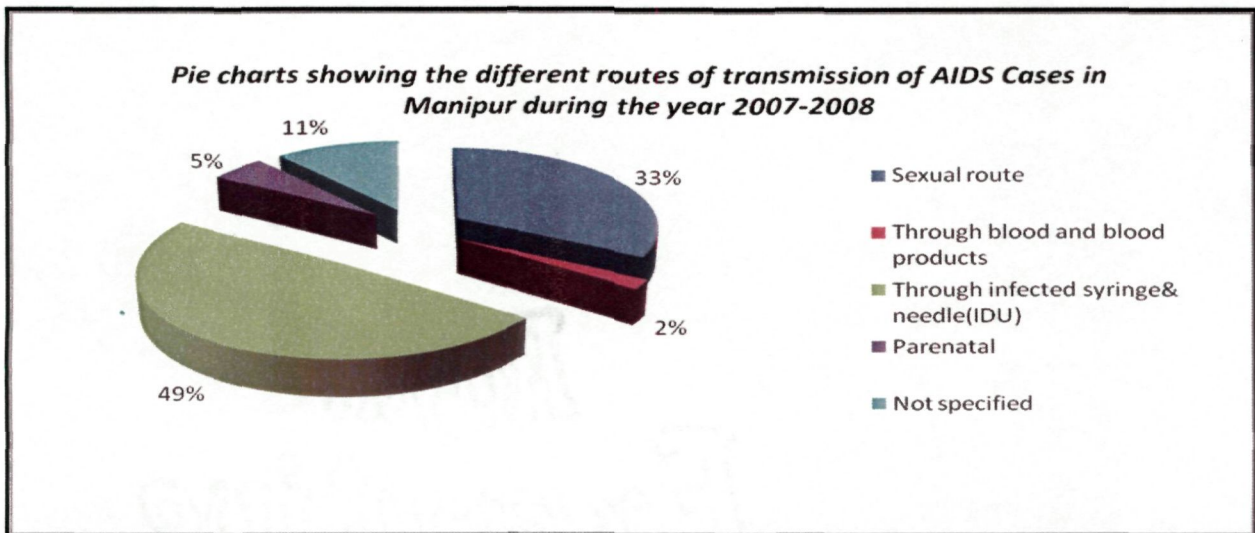
In the rural setting, the chief means of livelihood is agricultural activity. When a rural woman has no land for cultivation literally there is no option for surviving. They usually come to the towns and markets to look for means of their livelihood. Some women come out with money or valuable articles such as jewellery, utensils to use as capital to start some kinds of business. Usually they engage themselves in petty businesses such as selling of vegetables, clothes, fish or work as money lenders. Women who do not have capital to initiate any kind of business have no option but to go for labour work. Since labour work socially and traditionally falls in man's domain, many of such capital-less women have no choice but to enter into commercial sex work. Usually, many

women who opted for petty businesses also become CSWs when their business fails or to supplement their earning.

Another major cause for a woman to enter into sex work is her drug habit. There is no restriction in the age group but drug use usually takes place among younger age-group of 13 to 22 years. A drug using CSW finds sex work as an easy way to earn '*quick money*' for buying drugs. They stop looking for clients for a day when they have enough money to buy drug. They engage in sex work as long as they are into drug to buy drug and stop engaging in sex work once their drug use habit is overcome. Many male drug users and peddlers influence a number women and girls to test drug and subsequently make them addicted. When a woman or a girl is addicted she needs drug regularly and for that she needs money. Usually after 1 to 3 years of active addiction, a number of women are influenced by the male users or peddlers to get into commercial sex work.

MSM has become a significant population in the transmission of HIV/AIDS in view of the existing scenario i.e increasing population of MSM in Manipur, High risk behaviors they indulge with the general population i.e unsafe anal sex with multiple men and also with their female sexual partner. They are hidden population resulting from stigma and discrimination and its contribution of HIV prevalence amongst MSM. Their vulnerability to HIV is unknown, unaccountable and many people are ignorant of their sexual behaviors. Intervention programme for this population is very difficult because of varying definition and perception of gender, sexual roles. HIV prevalence among MSM in the Manipur is as high as 32% in 2003, 15% in 2004 and 29% in 2006 (Sentinel Surveillance-Manipur state AIDS Control Society /SASO).

**Figure/Chart 4.4**



(Source: Sentinel Surveillance MACS 2007-2008)

### **Women in Manipur**

Manipuri women hold a higher and more liberal position than others in patriarchal societies of the country. Their role in the socio-economic and cultural life is significant. Manipuri women do not stay behind veil. They are greatly involved in the agricultural activities. They are artistic and creative which they prove in the field of handloom and handicrafts and dance.

Manipuri society is patriarchal but comparatively Manipuri women hold a higher and more liberal position than others in patriarchal societies of the country. They play significant roles in transforming the society. Women contributed significantly to the socio-economic and political affairs of Manipur at different stages of the history. Increased social acceptance of women's participation in different activities, more access to education, less restriction on travel and out-door activities is witnessed in the last few decades. The number of working women, both in governmental and non-governmental sectors has been increased. More

and more women are studying outside the state and seek employment there.

Manipuri women are also making history in the field of sports at the national and International level and they also made important contributions to arts and culture. They are appreciated by outsiders for their hard work. There are historical factors which compelled them to work hard. Due to the constant warfare with the neighboring chiefs and rulers, most of the adult male members of the families had to accompany the kings in the war. In the absence of the male members of the families women had to shoulder social responsibilities in and outside their families and they inherit the trait till today. Manipuri women through the ages produced varieties of handloom products for household use and for sale. They also take active part in the agricultural activities. Marketing of agricultural products is entirely in their hands and provide cash for the family.

The role of women increases once they are married to another family that one has to take up all the domestic works, look after the old timers and the children. They also take part in decision making process of a family. A housewife usually goes out for marketing or visiting to her relatives or to her parental home or for attending ritual ceremonies. Working women have more liberty in mobility and are more in touch with friends. (Assessment of Situation and Response on CSWs in Manipur, 2005)

### **Status and Role of Women in Family**

The Manipuri society is a patriarchal one. But, the woman enjoys equal status in the family and also plays a pivotal role in all the households' activities. Both in the valley and in the hills she/they enjoyed a great deal of freedom and held a high distinctive position in

social religion and political life. They are hard working and performing all types of manual work.

In the primitive period, woman even enjoyed a very high social status. There was equality between men and women, and the women even enjoying higher status. On the other hand, Manipuri cultures support male supremacy and boy preferring culture. Husbands are generally equated with God. Female cannot compete with male in any field. The Manipuri woman has a remarkable phenomenon in the social and cultural life of Manipuri. She is also the most stabilizing and dynamic factor in the transformation of the Manipuri society through the ages. In the history of Manipur, women of different backgrounds ranging from the queen to the commoner came forward to save the society and the community.

The Manipuri mother is a social and professional mentor of her daughter. The mother- daughter relationship provides a secure base in a woman's life in a society where marital bond is rather brittle. The young girls are socialized to be self- reliant and independent instead of being twined into passive model of sheer dependence on male. Through life's joys and sorrows, success and failure the mother- daughter relationship of Manipuri women is always sustained and strengthened. They take a major part in respect of enjoying the maximum, independence. This high status accorded to the women folk is regarded as one of the greatest pride of Manipur.

In Manipur, almost all the households' maintenance work falls on women. The eldest daughter often helps in domestic affairs. In the history, Manipuri women fought several significant wars against the injustice of the British administrators and brought several remarkable benefits in the Manipur society. The ideal women in this country were described as hard -working in the rice field, efficient with children, devoted to religion and a shrewd business woman in the market. As

moulded by the strategic location of the region, demography, mode of share in the production, mode of settlement etc. Manipuri women enjoyed a good share in the production of the region and the result was her high status in the society which was higher than her sisters in others parts of India. Among the Manipuri women, negotiation of dowry in marriage is never heard off. In the traditional system of joint family, a woman is expected to adjust to her father-in-law household to which she goes after marriage.

Women irrespective of their professions have their priorities in the domestic chores of the family. Married women, in fact, are compulsory house makers, taking care of the children, handling house hold chores like washing clothes, cooking food, fetching water and taking care of the entire family members. And the role is the same whether she is a working woman or a housewife.

But the responsibility for housekeeping is more for the tribal women. She has to wake up early in the morning, cleaning the house, preparing food, washing clothes and sending her children to schools and in the afternoon till sunset she stays in the field collecting firewood, planting vegetables, fruits to sell in the local market and when she comes back in the evening she is expected to handle very minute details of the household chore in the family.

### **Contribution of Manipur women leading to the economic development of the state**

Economically and industrially, Manipur is one of the most underdeveloped states and the one that is largely isolated from the rest of India. Manipuri women make a remarkable contribution to the society, though most of the female workforce is in the ill-informed unorganized sectors. The contribution of Manipur women leading to the economic development is not a new thing in the state. In cultivation, Manipuri

women play a major role as a labourer. Another economic contribution of Manipur women is trade and commerce. Women folk sell all essential daily necessities and commodities like vegetables, pulses dry fish and merchandise goods etc. Weaving is another aspect of economic contribution landed by women and girls. Women folk weave fine clothes for male wear and female wears. It is an important and popular cottage industry of Manipuri women and it is even considered as an important agent in the women's development.

Now a day, the economic contribution made by educated working ladies is immense. Most of them work in Government and private firms, institutions and teaching profession.

### **Movement of Manipuri womenfolk**

In India, women are extremely limited to extend their role outside the household work. The scope for woman acting as a collective body is very rare. But, in Manipur, the women hold a high and free position that all the external trade and exchange of the produce are managed by them

Manipuri women also make significant contribution to the political process and social change movements of the land. Literally, *meira paibis* means woman torchbearer. The term '*meira*' is also occasionally used to connote initiative, progress and achievement or to signify a mechanical means for enlightening darkness. Therefore, a *meira paibis*, as an activist, is sometime defined as the repository of enlightenment whose utmost obligation is to defend and save society. Such an embellishment of the term *meira paibi* reveals a new development of the legend of *Meira Paibi* movement as an integral part of the national movement in Manipur.

The movement of the Manipuri womenfolk is called the "*Meira Paibi*" since 1970; the group has got the potential to become a very significant instrument of progressive social transformation. The *Meira Paibis* have been launching their acts against selling and using of Liquor



freely under the state policy. At that time, this movement is called “Nishabandh” then in 1980, women movement was directed towards checking drugs in the state. In their bid to take on the security forces at night, people in the Manipur valley communicate by beating lamp posts in a certain code. Women in a particular locality used to come out of their houses if the distress call was given by beating of lamp posts.

Practically, they are the only pressure group who can voice against the wrongdoings of state as well as non-state forces. Every locality has one *Meira Paibis* group and the groups have a strong state-wide network.

The outbreak of *Meira paibis* launched by the women folk of Manipuri is a new line of women’s role in the social, political and economic history of Manipur. It may be taken as one of the feminist activities for the protection, preservation and development of their sons and daughter as a mother.



*Photo 4.1:Meira Paibis* against drug abuse and alcoholism



Photo 4.2: Meira Paibis responding against drug abuse and alcoholism  
(Source: PHI Report, 2005)

### **Manipur and HIV/AIDS: An Overview**

AIDS has emerged as a serious public health emergency in Manipur. Up to September 2005, there are 20980 persons in the state who are known to be HIV infected<sup>1</sup>. The alarming situation is, that out of the total number of 4216 HIV infected women, 84.24% of them fall in the young age group of 11 to 40 years and 78.58% fall in the age group of 21-40 years. The state with hardly 0.2% of India's population is contributing nearly 9% of India's total HIV positive cases. Manipur ranks third highest in regard to the total number of HIV positive cases after Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Further, if we calculate the sero prevalence rate per one million populations, the sero-prevalence rate of Manipur is 6 times higher than that of Maharashtra and 20 times higher than that of Tamil Nadu.

Manipur is the worst HIV/AIDS affected state in the country that 12239 persons in the state are known to be HIV infected (Macs, Oct 2001) of which 1609 are female. Since the beginning of Epidemiological analysis in September 1986, Injecting Drug Users have constituted the highest risk group of HIV infection through sharing of unsterilized injecting equipments. According to Technical Resource Group on IDUs (TRG, 1996), 40% of the Drug Users in Manipur has been married. Fortunately, the rate of HIV Infection among IDUs is decreasing from 72% in 1994 to 59% in 2001 as a result of prevention works by NGOs and the state wide outreach Intervention among IDUs undertaken by MACS since 1998. However, the rate of HIV infection is rapidly increasing among the wives of IDUs and the women in general.

The virus is spreading very fast among the women population of both the highly vulnerable groups such as CSWs and the female sexual partner of IDUs and general population such as housewives and young girls.

It has witnessed a generation of young widows whose husbands have died of AIDS and a large numbers of orphans are coming up. The report also indicates that the HIV sero-prevalence rate among STI clinic attendees has a steep increase from 4.8% in 1994 to 5.79% in 1998 and 9.6% in 2002, 13% in 2003 and 7.2% in 2004. In another estimation made by Manipur SACS, as published in the *Huiyen Laanpao*, a local newspaper in November 1999, it was found that "20 to 30% of the CSWs in Manipur had been found HIV infected". In the latest Status Report of Manipur SACS, 2004-2005, it is also mentioned that, out of 369 CSWs who had volunteered for HIV testing, 36 (9.7%) of them had been found to be HIV positive.

## **Women and HIV/AIDS**

Manipur is a state which has been ravaged by HIV/AIDS; a state which has one of the highest HIV infected population. The root cause of the increase in the number of HIV/AIDS cases in the state is due to sharing of needles and syringes or often other injecting equipments among the IDUs (injecting Drug Users).

When IDUs who are positive get into the family life they often spread the virus to their spouses. The women who are ignorant about their husbands' status are often blamed for his positive status. The spread is mainly through sexual transmission since many young women are affected. Gradually these women transfer the virus to general population.

The society looks down upon her since her husband is prone to certain types of OI (Opportunistic Infection) and very often she is compelled to earn a living and at the same time need to take proper care of her husband and the children, maintenance of the family etc. Secondly, if she herself is HIV positive then society calls her 'immoral woman' as the main mode of HIV transmission is through sexual contact. Thirdly, she suffers as the mother of HIV positive children. Seeing her children falling sick very often, she feels insecure about her children's future.

Once the husband is dead, she will be ousted by the in-laws and is not welcomed even at her maternal home. In order to find a roof over her head, and two square meals a day, she starts selling things like vegetables, running small tea stall etc. However such a mere income is hard to meet both ends meet for her family. So she will look for easier ways to eke out a living. Some of them start selling liquor, or get into flesh trade as the last resort to seek a livelihood.

**Table 4.2: Sentinel Surveillance Report**

| Risk group                | 2000  | 2001  | 2002  | 2003 | 2004  | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|------|------|------|
| IDUs Prevalence           | 66.02 | 56.27 | 39.57 | 30.7 | 21    | 24.1 | 19.8 | 17.9 |
| Pregnant women Prevalence | 1.02  | 2.04  | 2.4   | 1.34 | 1.66  | 1.3  | 1.4  | 1.3  |
| STD Prevalence            | 11.76 | 10.00 | 9.6   | 13   | 7.2   | 2.2  | 4.8  | 4.0  |
| TB Prevalence             | -     | -     | -     | -    | 18.75 | -    | -    | -    |
| Blood Donors Prevalence   | -     | -     | -     | -    | -     | -    | -    | -    |
| MSM Prevalence            | -     | -     | -     | 29.2 | 14    | 15.6 | 12.4 | 16.4 |
| FSW Prevalence            | -     | -     | -     | 12.4 | 12.4  | 10   | 11.6 | 12.9 |

Source: SSR (MACS-2008)