

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### Women Entrepreneurs in Urban Informal Sector

The word *entrepreneur* is derived from the French verb '*Enter Prendre*'; and for the first time the term entrepreneur was used for bold planners and adventurous Frenchmen who organized and led military expeditions during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. An entrepreneur must, accordingly, possess such attributes as self-confidence, risk-taking ability, skill-use deployment, decision-making, planning and organizing abilities, moreover, the ability to respond to innovations (Say, 1803; Mill, 1848; Knight, 1921; Schumpeter, 1934; Hayek, 1937; Leibenstein, 1968; and Krizner, 1973 in Singh, 1992 and Rani, 1996).

While the role of women as procreator of human species i.e. wife and mother is well documented, her role as an economic entity (Carr, 1984) is not so well documented more so, as an entrepreneur. Women may work as wage employed or self-employed. When wage employment is not available, suitable or stable, self-employment is the only option- a push route to entrepreneurship. Alternatively, they may become entrepreneurs when environmental factors pull them (Singh, 1996; Lakshmi, 1998).

A country's economic progress is found to be positively correlated with the rise in number and quality of its entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurship as one of the determining factors in the creation of new wealth in society has since long back been recognised (Schumpeter, 1934; McClelland, 1961; 1987; Guildler, 1984; Drucker, 1985). But Akhouri (1985) (cited from Dhillon, 1993) foresaw 1990's as the decade of entrepreneurial explosion in India and stated that 'Entrepreneurship is going to be the focal point of development in the next two

Five Year Plans. Be it the problem of unemployment, low income generation capacity, decreasing Gross National Product, regional imbalances in industrial progress, entrepreneurship seems to be the potential answer'. Entrepreneurship is an important facet of industrial growth and development of a nation. It is the backbone of a nation that sets its eyes on maximising its performance in every field. Entrepreneurs are the persons who have the ability to discover, create, invent and exploit them to the benefit of the society, which in turn brings prosperity to the innovator and the organisation. From the social and micro-economic perspective, it is held that the economic development of any nation is a direct function of the number of high quality innovators and entrepreneurs it supplies (Tiwari, Ojha, and Pani, 1998). The spirit of entrepreneurship brings about enthusiasm, persistence and the ability to seek entrepreneurial opportunities that lead to success. A nation's ability to generate a steady stream of business opportunities can only come about when its people take to entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurs are essentially the engines of growth for a nation. In addition, today's world with its burgeoning population offers limited avenues of employment. This makes entrepreneurship all the more necessary for self-employment and small business (Swarajyalakshmi, 1998).

A society cannot be said to have advanced unless men and women are more or less equal partners and contributes towards that end. Economic contribution is a major factor for such scenario. To realise this under the social, political and economic situation that prevails in India, it is essential that women should be organised, trained and educated. Women are playing increasingly indispensable roles in international, national and household economies (Swarajyalakshmi, 1998). But they still have a disadvantaged economic position relative to men and also face serious discrimination. Although women are no longer a reserve labour force, equality of opportunity is still an elusive goal; the role of women in the economy can no longer be ignored or neglected. Since 1980s in the labour supply in both industrialised and developing countries and in

all most all regions of the world, the share of women labour force have been rising, during the periods of prosperity as well as the periods of recession. It is viewed that women are the wheels of a nation, constituting 50 percent of the total population. They contribute one third of labour force and supply two third of the total working hours and yet they are earning only one-tenth of the income and they own only one percent of the total wealth (Saravanel, 1987). Though they found (Chidambaram and Themozhi, 1998) a significant part of the workforce in India, still they lag behind men in terms of level and equality of employment. They are burdened with discrimination, which in turn perpetuates their low status. Women at home and work place are considered as inferior to male. They have had and still have lesser access to assets, resources, technology and credit. Women's work in communities combines domestic service and 'productive work' (Vinze, 1987). It is often said that they bear a 'double burden' (Iyer, 1991), working long hours in the economic activities and equally long hours in childcare, food preparation, cooking, washing and cleaning. Despite distributive justice being categorically underlined in the developmental plans, the needs of women have not been adequately addressed. Employment of women (Dhillon, 1993) is characterised by low pay, long hours of work, low productivity, low skills and lack of job security. Whether in the organised or unorganised sectors, women face several enigmas, which account for their low status as women workers. Their lack of access to productive inputs such as raw materials, credit, technology, training and markets are the major impediments. Women represents a bulk of the labour force especially (Singh, 1992) in the developing economies of Asia, Latin America, and Africa, however they are not yet brought under the fold of main stream of development and has not been given appreciation of their considerable contribution. Growing cognizance has previewed among nations that, if the operation of social and economic change has to be guaranteed it is the women who has to be mobilised and may lead the nation towards progress and prosperity. It is also found that women by all means can be very effective agents

of change for a better home, society and ultimately for a better economy (Singh, 1992).

Entrepreneurship is an important way to fulfil their personal needs, to make them self-dependent and moreover to improve their economic status. Women entrepreneurship is an emerging reality. Over the years hundreds of women-owned business appears to have mushroomed in large cities of the country (Sethi, 1994). It is mainly an urban phenomenon where economic compulsion led many women to opt for employment and the collective forces of education work experience and urbanisation gave an impetus to women entrepreneurship.

It would be very important to promote active involvement of women in micro enterprises because it is widely seen as one of the most effective ways of directly responding to women's own expressed needs. Whenever a change is necessitated in the society, the need of participation of women is very much felt. Women's development through women's participation in micro enterprises should be seen as a process whereby they can attain gradual control over resources and processes in the production, marketing, and financing of goods and services. Promotion of women entrepreneurship aimed at establishing their right to take training and education for micro enterprise development, providing access to credit and financing opportunities, and promoting their role in initiating and managing economic enterprises (Arunachalam, 1997). The aim is to generate and increase their income and to improve their bargaining power through collective initiatives. It is important to foster and promote the spirit of self-reliance by directing entrepreneurial support services, programmes and policies to those who live at the edge of economic survival.

Women have been regarded as the nuclei of a nation and the builder and moulder of its destiny (Kapoor, 1986). The position and status of women in any society is an index of its civilisation. The quest for economic Independence and

better social status and sometimes sheer need for the family's survival force women into small entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship (Pillai and Anna, 1990). The role of women entrepreneurs help industrial development promotes economic development and helps to solve the problems of unemployment and poverty. Many studies have proved (cited in Rageswari and Sumangala, 1999) that unemployment and poverty are contributory factors for the emergence of women entrepreneurs. Besides, both in the rural and urban area self-employment helps to solve the chronic problems of unemployment, poverty and to generate additional income through activities like tailoring, job typing, embroidery work, pickle making, food processing, printing, and so on. In India economic development has brought about changes in business lives in many ways, because of advancement in medicines, availability and access to birth control devices, modern household appliances reducing the time and drudgery of household work. But with the tiring cost of living, the middle class family finds it very difficult today to manage with the husband's income alone (Reddy, 1986). At this critical position self-employment is the safe way to generate employment. Economic development is based on the high individual income. In addition women shifted their motive from being-job-seekers to job givers (Tapuraih, 1988). Women are trying their level best to attain quality of opportunity in various ways, which are different over the time and society. Women entrepreneurship enables to pool the small capital resources and skill available with them. It paves the way for fuller utilisation of capital and also mobilises the female human potential. A self-employed woman is gaining better status and it also helps them to take decision in their family affairs. It is suitable for them because it is possible to do work when they have free time. Development of women entrepreneurship enables men to understand and appreciate women's abilities.

This in turn can lead rationalisation of domestic life and it creates awareness about the potentiality in women through which, individual, families

and society at large can be benefited. The educated self-employed girls prefer relatively late marriage and further with this attitude the role of dowry gets reduced. It also helps to increase the physical and social mobility, and ultimately they get scope for more interactions, which really enhances their social interaction (Sapru, 1989).

Entrepreneurship development among women offers mental satisfaction and provides diversion to women from routine work. It gives psychological satisfaction or relief to the educated women and profiles a sense of achievement and separate and enhanced identity in society (Rageswari and Sumangala, 1999).

Development of entrepreneurship among women in India heavily depends on removing all social, economic and personal problems. Most of these problems could be solved within a short period, since they involve changing the societal values and tradition with respect to women. The Indian Government can take up some of the economic problems immediately for their redressal. The society and the government have to undertake many concentrated efforts before an enabling environment is created for developing women entrepreneurs in large number.

Women Entrepreneurs may be defined as the women or a group of women who initiate organize and operate a business enterprise. Government of India has defined Women Entrepreneurs as an Enterprise owned and controlled by a women having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of the employment generated in the enterprise to women. Like a male entrepreneurs a women entrepreneur has many functions. They should explore the prospects of starting new enterprise; undertake risks, introduction of new innovations, coordination administration and control of business and providing effective leadership in all aspects of business.

### **Need for Women Entrepreneurship:**

The concept of women as entrepreneurs is becoming a global phenomenon today. All over the world, women are playing a vital role in the business community. In India, however, women have made a comparatively late entry into the business scenario. Therefore, entrepreneurship among women in India is relatively a recent phenomenon. Realizing the importance of women entrepreneurship, the area is being given increasing attention in terms of Government concern, research and new courses. In fact, with the advent of liberalization and the move towards globalization, the Indian economic environment offers immense opportunities to entrepreneurs in India.

With the growing realisation of importance of entrepreneurship in the state of dragon of unemployment in the country, it is given more importance, and the stress and emphasis is now more upon women entrepreneurs as their contribution, participation as a percentage to total human effort is very low. India is a vast country with an estimated population of more than one billion (Chandra and Kajipet, 1998) of which nearly half are women. It has been rightly stated by Pandit Jawarhalal Nehru 'in order to awaken the people it is the women who have to be awakened. Once she is on move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves' (cited from Swarajyalakshmi, 1998).

Independence bought the promise to equality of opportunity (Kohli, 1991) in all spheres of the Indian women, and laws guaranteed for their equal rights of participation in the political process and equal opportunities and rights in education and employment were also enacted. The process of modernisation has adversely affected the employment of women in industry as well as in agriculture. In the post-Independence period, with the growth of industrialisation, the share of household industries like weaving, jute making, papermaking, and so on declined rapidly. Since women constitute the biggest traditional source of

employment as unskilled workers in industries and agriculture, they were the main victims of this process of economic transformation. Low labour demand and increased regular and seasonal unemployment force women to go for extremely low paid jobs which do not always ensure minimum subsistence to their family needs (Singh, 1992). Under these circumstances it is very necessary to promote employment in which majority of women willing to take economic activities as self-employed. Commercialisation and modernisation of the economy gradually eliminated many of the avenues of employment for women in agriculture and small-scale industries, which has enabled them to find ways of supplementing their family income. As a result a vast section of women in urban areas have emerged as potential self-employers and established themselves as independent entrepreneurs. This development of women has changed the orthodox system in our society. Now they are not only confined into the four walls of the house but also engaging themselves in full of challenges and facing the problems and trying to cope up with the new environment. Entrepreneurship plays an important role in the growth of our country, which has abundant of human and natural reserved resources. Nafziger (1971) remarked that entrepreneurship and other high level of human skills are the key variables, which link the socio-cultural milieu with the rate of economic development. Recently, some economists have shifted the emphasis away from the growth of capital to the high-level manpower such as entrepreneurship as a major determinant of the rate of economic growth of a country. Growth of women entrepreneurship would be supplementary and complementary for women in particular and for the country in general. On one hand, their enthusiasm and skills in constructive performance is met and simultaneously they can earn enough for proper maintenance and improvement of their socio-economic status. On the other side, this work force in production process will enrich the national economy by way of ensuring optimum utilisation of human and material resources for adequate employment opportunities. This calls for promoting congenial environment for fostering entrepreneurship among women. The main

object was to widen women's participation in all areas of activities in economical, social and political life, but unfortunately government sponsored development activities have benefited only a small section of women. A large majority of women have not been benefited from development activities. The Sixth Plan has (Singh, 1992) articulated strongly, 'Despite all these developmental measures, and the constitutional/legal guarantees, women have lagged behind men in almost all sectors'. Jawaharlal Nehru also observed that 'Freedom depends on economic conditions more than political' (cited from Vinze, 1987). It is also said that if a woman is not economically free and self-earning, she will have to depend on her husband or someone else and dependents are never free (Kohli, 1991). So, in order to improve the status and position of women at home and in the larger society it is necessary to achieve economic Independence for women. The development of indigenous entrepreneurship especially among the women section is embarking on small industrial development programmes. Entrepreneurship amongst women has been a recent concern for everyone. The entrepreneurial potentials of women have gradually been changing their role and economic status of the society and women is increasingly being conscious of their existence, their rights and their work situation. Women are the large section of the human resources of the country, can be utilised in the field of economy in most productive way. Patel said, 'One must accept the fact that entrepreneurship is not related to sex of an individual, women can be as successful entrepreneurs as men can'. So, in this view it is very necessary to promote and establish small-scale businesses by women to make them economically self-dependent. All over the world women are playing a vital role in the business community. In India, however, women have made a comparatively late entry into the small business scenario mainly due to the orthodox and traditional socio-cultural environment.

Since 1970's ushering the (Iyer, 1991) decade of the International women's year, effects were made in precursor manner by government and private agencies.

Although women constitute a large section (Singh, 1992) of the total population of India, so far only a small minority of women have education and job opportunities. The year 1975 was declared International Year for Women. During the decade, several governmental and voluntary agencies carried out symposia, conferences and workshops to highlight the importance of entrepreneurship for women. These conferences and workshops gave impetus to development of women entrepreneurs. The main topics were discussed in the conference like, status of women entrepreneurs, government and non-governmental efforts to promote self-employment, participation of women on small-scale industries, development of appropriate technology, role of training and financial institutions, and so on.

Various attempts have been made to understand the emergence of entrepreneurship, such as need for achievement, creativity and propensity to take risks, Independence, leadership, and so on. Women are usually not able to take benefit of the economic activities, especially those of self-employment because unemployment among the youth is considered a far more important issue with women being seen only as supplementary earners. Young unmarried girls are normally not allowed to work independently and women mostly illiterate, naïve and unaware, cannot find their way in the maze of formalities involved in getting economically engaged. In recent years, women have come to the forefront in different walks of life and are competing successfully with men despite the social, psychological and economical barriers. This has been possible because the scenario is changing fast with modernisation, urbanisation, and enhanced level of education, political awakening, legal safeguards, and the democratic system taking roots in the country. The tradition bound Indian society (Saravanel, 1987) is now undergoing a sea change and women are now seeking gainful economic participation in several fields in increasing numbers. Thus, the opportunities of economic activities for women have increased drastically. They have disproved the old theories and assumptions about the women. It is

necessary to increase the opportunity of employment for the unemployed through the development of entrepreneurship. It is very necessary to state here that self-employed entrepreneurs create employment not only for his/her but also creates employment opportunities for the others (Grown, 1989). The status of women and its contribution to social and economic development largely depends on the availability of economic opportunities for the women. Normally women entrepreneurs are perceived as a producer of pickles, papads, masalas and other food. However, with the changing scenario of women's development, they are assuming the role of becoming actual owners and decision-makers of non-traditional enterprises, where growth and employment generations are eminent. Therefore, there is a need for providing an appropriate environment to promote entrepreneurship among women (Vinze, 1897). Not only is that to promote entrepreneurship among women there a need for greater commitment and involvement of financial and other supportive agencies. Max Weber (1904) explained the entrepreneurial manifestations with reference to socio-cultural factors have been savagely criticised by those who believe that economic force provide a better explanatory framework. Other variables often mentioned in this paper included the family background, societal, environmental and functioning of the support systems.

Developed countries like the United States, Japan and UK have acknowledged that it is the 'spirit of enterprise' among their people that has transformed their small agro-based industries into big industrial giants (Lalitha, 1996). These countries have further specified that the need to promote entrepreneurship among the people to achieve the higher levels of economic growth. Therefore, the entrepreneurs play a very vital role among the factors of production and have enormous potential to galvanise the other components such as land, labour and capital towards generating increased output, income and employment which directly hit the national development. Not only that even the Government is playing the role of enabler, facilitator and providing

infrastructural facilities to the prospective women entrepreneurs who have the potential, capacities and achievement propensity to run a business.

The Industrial Revolution boosted entrepreneurship in the developed economies. Immediately after the liberation while the country found itself in poverty, unemployment and chaos. It was only in the late fifties that interest in the development of entrepreneurship emerged especially through small-scale sectors to achieve repaid economic development in most parts of the world.

India and other developing countries viewed entrepreneurship as an effective instrument to combat their many problems. India made some systematic efforts to develop entrepreneurship to enhance national production, promote balanced regional development, and create more employment opportunities. Some other factors like urbanisation, technical progress, women's education, and so on has changed the traditional bound Indian society. With the increasing landlessness, and with the inability of the large-sectors to provide more jobs small-scale sectors including informal sectors' activities provide the only avenue for supplementing income for the great number of poor and disadvantaged in least developed countries who are struggling at subsistence level. Thus, it is hardly surprising that rates of participation in rural off-farm activities have been growing rapidly. For example, in West Africa, the production of the rural labour in off-farm activities rose from 12 percent to 25 percent in 1980.

As knowledge of the small-sector it has become apparent that women play a major role in it not just as employees and self-employed part-time workers, but also as entrepreneurs. They also tend to be more prominent in rural areas where they cater to basic rural needs for foodstuffs, clothing, shelter, basic household durables and household related services as well.

What could have motivated these women to take entrepreneurship? What has been the role of support systems in their success or failure? What are the

problems they face at their work place and at home? And how they cope with the situations? These are the complex questions, which can be answered through the sustained and extensive research. But women entrepreneurship has remained a much neglected field (Singh, 1993). While we do have a relatively large number of studies about middle class women in white-collar jobs, very little attention has been paid to the women entrepreneurs. One reason for this could be that, this is an area that women have entered very recently (Iyer, 1991). The present work has been attempted to fill the gap and tried to make a modest endeavour to respond to some of the questions raised.

### **Poverty, Unemployment and Women Entrepreneurship:**

Economic backwardness implies low incomes, stark poverty, illiteracy and lack of adequate remunerative employment. It is obviously a highly complex problem, the solution of which requires political determination, ample financial and other resources besides an effective, honest and efficient administration. In the backward and underdeveloped countries, the major problems are how to remove poverty and unemployment and raise the standard of living. These problems can be solved by accelerating economic development through “entrepreneurship”. It can help to solve the problem of backwardness through economic development. Entrepreneurship development is an important aspect for meeting the requirements of skilled personnel in economic development. This is necessary because it will take care of the future industries based on resources of the region. There are also different areas where co-ordination and co-operation is needed for the overall economic development of the region. To develop small scale industrial units joint efforts of all the concerned such as entrepreneur, financial institutions, public health etc. are necessary.

“Entrepreneurship is a multidimensional, multi disciplinary and multi faced phenomenon which encompasses innovations and newness as an integral part.”

The industrial growth and economic development of a nation depend on its enterprising spirit. Entrepreneurship is an important factor in the process of economic development, without entrepreneurial functions development would be inconceivable. For economic development needs new ideas, invention and innovations. These can be supplied by entrepreneurs. So, for transforming any words into practice talented human resources are needed. Individuals performing these functions are the entrepreneurs and only through enterprising ability and skill that this can correctly be understood in entrepreneurship. The concept of entrepreneurs or entrepreneurship differs depending upon the state of economic development in a country. A rapid and balanced economic development and expansion of opportunities for employment as well as self employment are the basic objectives of developmental planning. Entrepreneurship is a kind of self employment where a large number of educated and illiterate persons are engaged in self employment scheme. It generates employment to other persons. For speeding the process of industrialization and economic development talented entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are the basic requirement. From these point of view entrepreneurs of the region has to play a vital role in all aspects.

Now, in all economic developmental activities, more and more focus is being made on entrepreneurship of the people. Entrepreneurship is now being recognized as a concept and is not only vital for starting industry and other enterprise but also in the development of livestock. The centrally planned economic liberalization evolved the transfer of economic and social activities, to provide hands. Privatization in effect means orientation of economy more and more to local, regional, national and international market forces. The State would more and more confine itself to public utilities and withdraw from the competitive and commercial activities. So there is the need for strengthening the private hands. These private hands are those who have the entrepreneurs' potentiality and achievement propensity.

### **Women Entrepreneurship in Manipur:**

In majority of cultures of North Eastern States of India, indigenous women traditionally manage trade and commerce. Manipur, the Indian border State boasts of having one of the largest networks of women's market not only in India but in the whole of Asia.

In Manipur, almost all the women agree that market plays a significant role in their socio-economic life. For majority of them it is the only means of livelihood while some of the women are beginning to make use of their leisure and consider it as good place for passing time. The women are so emotionally attached to their market that even one has commented "if I had to stop my shop, it will be like stopping my breath". Regarding the management of the family affairs, all the women agree that each of them is aware of their responsibility towards their family and children. Their involvement in the market never affects their day to day family life. Moreover majority of the women were involved in this trade when their children had grown up. Even those who have younger children; arrangements are always made to look after their needs.

The role of Manipuri women in society was quite prominent from ancient period. Of course, the picture of women in North-east have traditionally been doing trade and managing markets. The women's market Nupi-Keithel (Women's market) of Manipur, for example, is one of the biggest markets in Asia controlled and run by women. It has a distinctive position, because of its function as a controlling institution of women that affects and contributes to the whole economy of the state. It is a glaring example how women continue to play a role in the economy and society, which is a continuance of earlier form of social structure. The advent of colonialism in 1981 integrated Manipur to a worldwide capitalist system, developed transportation network where further

enabled the women to extend their trading activities throughout and beyond Manipur. Thus, the socio-economic role of women was gradually expanding.

The present scenario perceives a complete transformation of the traditional market complex in Manipur which is undergoing a mammoth task of urban restructuring under the aegis of the state authorities. Whether or not these policies include preservation of the established ethics of the traditional market convention are only an anticipation of the public and an understand clause of the Government policies. When the furor of the market women to preserve the old market complex as a museum went unheard, it is now only nail biting situation for these women while they ponder on the activities of the state authorities.

### **Changing Nature of Women Employment**

Traditionally, women employment has been limited to those activities, which are closely linked to domestic and household duties. Due to socio-cultural attitudes vis-à-vis women's participation in the labour market, they have been occupying activities related to agriculture, forestry, fishing, animal husbandry, food processing and so on. By and large, they have been involved in household activities as a part of family labour. Over the years with the pressure of population on available land and natural resources, economic compulsions have necessitated women's participation in the Indian labour force. However, the kind of activities in which women workers have found employment is primarily manual in nature. The nature of their employment is largely informal.

In the rural unorganised sector women care for cattle, sow, transplantation, weeds, harvest and thresh of paddy and other crops. They are also engaged in weave and work on handlooms and produce handicrafts mostly as low wage earners, or as unpaid family workers. In the urban informal sector, women work as petty traders, and producers selling and producing a wide variety of goods, such as vegetables, fruits, flowers, cooked food, groceries, and so on, or work as

domestic workers. In both urban and rural areas they are engaged as construction workers. A majority of women are to be found in the vast rural and urban unorganised sector. But employment in this sector is characterised by low paid jobs, long hours of work, low productivity, low skills and lack of job security. One of the major reasons for women's works becoming increasingly limited to acquire skills and training, which could facilitate occupational shifts.

Economic necessity compels most of the women workers to accept such low paying jobs, thereby, making their aspiration wages lower in comparison to the male workers.

With a view to explore a deeper understanding of the informal sector in general, the present section has been divided into four sub-sections:

- i. Concept of informal sector,
- ii. Characteristics of informal sector,
- iii. Role of informal sectors in economic development, and
- iv. Significance of informal sector in Indian Economy.

#### **Origin of the Concept of Informal Sector:**

In developing countries a major part of economies consists of small production units, which usually run on an informal and self-employment basis (Rao, 1994). Not only are agricultural activities in these countries informal in character, a high proportion of their urban activities are also carried on an informal basis (Mittar, 1988). Despite the failure of the 'modern' sector to absorb these labour supplies, large-scale unemployment has not been rampant in the metropolitan centres as was predicted by competitive models (Mehta, 1985). The surplus labour unable to gain entry into the 'modern' sector has been generally found to be absorbed by the rest of the urban economy, which has been loosely termed as the informal sector (Mehta, 1985).

The theoretical basis of the concept assumes some dichotomy in the urban economy arising out of the dualistic tendencies. The models of sectoral dualism were put forth first by Lewis (1954) and Fei and Ranis (1964). Hart first used the formal-informal 'dichotomy' in a study of Urban Ghana in 1973. During his fieldwork among the urban workers in Ghana, he came across a large self-employed sector, which provided means of livelihood for new entrants to the urban labour force who were unable to obtain employment in the formal sector. Most of the literature (Sethuraman, 1976) using this concept from the studies undertaken under the auspices of international bodies such as ILO, World Employment Programme and World Bank. In the early sixties, it was recognised that the assumed trickle down effects under accelerated growth policy were not operating. This led to a search for alternative solutions. Hart's (1973) study of 'Urban Ghana' identified a number of income and employment generating activities in the 'unenumerated' sector of urban settlements. He observed that many income-generating opportunities are informal in nature. The workers engaged in this sector and mainly work as self-employed, as against the wage labourers of the 'enumerated' sector. The new entrants to the urban labour market, particularly migrants from the rural areas were forced to work in the informal sector due to lack of adequate opportunities in the formal sector and also due to workers lack of skills and experience required for the jobs in the formal sectors. He used the term informal income generating activities, unorganised sector, unenumerated sector, self-employed individuals, and urban proletariat in his study more or less interchangeably and alternatively to signify this segment. He also mentioned informal sector as unregulated, traditional, household and peasant activities.

One of the most convenient ways to identify the informal sector is to define it in the terms of the source of employment of the urban poor. Since a majority of the urban labour force, particularly the urban poor depends on private sources of employment, public sector employment is considered to fall outside the informal

sector (Sethuraman, 1976). Likewise, the large industrial and commercial establishments in the private sector particularly foreign-financed ones are excluded for the simple reason that only a small fraction of their labour force consists of the urban poor. Thus, the informal sector, defined as a residual, includes all the remaining private enterprises in the urban economy. In this context an enterprise is broadly defined to include any economic unit engaged in the production of goods and services –whether it employs only one person (the proprietor) or more, whether or not it uses fixed capital, whether or not it has a fixed location for conducting business. Thus, self-employed construction workers, self-employed service workers are all treating as constituting an individual enterprise even they hire no employees.

ILO (1985) has defined the informal sector, as that set of economic activities, which take place outside the framework of, corporate public and private sector establishment (Deolankar, 1992). Such activities are usually characterised by small-scale operation, few barriers to entry, reliance on family labour, local resources, labour intensive technology, low capital endowments, high degree of competition, unregulated market, unskilled workforce and acquisition of skills outside the formal education system (Desi and Wadhwa, 1984). This sector usually does not employ with established regulations governing labour practices, taxes and licensing. By contrast, formal sector refers to the activities in private and public owned enterprises of an established, minimum size that are registered, generally complying with licensing procedures and labour and tax laws and are paying regular wages and salaries to the employees. Formal sector has relatively protected labour force having strong trade unions and the workers are covered by effective labour legislation. On the other hand the workers of informal sector are deprived of such benefits (Vashistha, 1990).

The most striking feature of the development process in Latin America in recent decades has been the slow expansion of productive employment opportunities in spite of fairly rapid economic growth urban based production were set-up in the first place to satisfy a small and highly diversified demand for consumer goods.

Guy (1974) argued that formal-informal sector can be broken down into two sub-sectors: (a) an 'irregular sector', consisting of a variety of legitimate low status-fringe activities (imploring, various forms of casual labour, such as gardening, car washing and leaf raking and so on) and, (b) the 'informal sector proper' consisting of small-scale economic activities, commonly non-wage and carried on by family concern. Moreover, Latin American industries grew up to a large extent during a period of worldwide expansion by subsidies, and this left its mark on the type of goods produced and on the technology employed. Finally, while the technical advances introduced were ostensibly capital saving, their net effect was actually labour saving.

Majumdar (1973) distinguished the formal-informal sectors based on size, employment, security of jobs and un-unionism of the factory labour force. He also stated that the entry into labour market is unrestricted by norms and procedures. Whereas, in the formal sector, labour market is restricted by artificially raised hiring standards, norms and procedures. Majumdar pointed that this sectors as the unprotected sector. He observed that employment in the formal sector is protected by the actions of trade unions and Government, while the same is denied to the informal sector labour. He has brought out the distinction more sharply by arguing the entry of the sector.

Weeks (1975) provided an analytical base to the highly descriptive nature of the distinction between formal and informal sector. He explained his idea that officials are favourable to the formal sector in many forms to improve their

business like, restrictions of competition, reduction in risk and uncertainty through tariff quotas protection, low interest rates, credit facilities, licensing of operations, access to resources etc. While the informal sector does not carry the benefits as they are outside the system of official regulations.

Joshi (1976) analysed the formal-informal sectors in a study of Bombay under three major heads: (i) market structure, (ii) technology and (iii) relationship with the Government. They defined informal sector as those engaged in economic activities, which are not identifiably performing for the formal sector.

Steel (1977) distinguished between the informal-formal sector, intermediate sector and the modern sectors on the basis of the fixed capital. He identified that informal sectors firm use virtually no fixed capital. They are characterised by small-scale operation, labour intensive techniques, low-income levels and indigenous ownership.

In his study on Calcutta, Lubell (1973) commented that the informal sector constitute the residual labour market. He stated that people entered in this sector as self-employed, low-income producers of marginal goods and services for lack of any other means of earning of livelihood.

While attempting to quantify informal sector, Souza and Tokman (1976) stated that this sector comprises all those engaged in domestic service, casual labour, the self-employed and employees of white collars, blue collars and family workers in enterprises with a total staff of not more than four.

Yap (1976) classified certain occupational categories based on published statistics in Brazil into formal and informal to examine the relation between rural and urban migration and informal sector in Brazil.

Breman (1976) considered mode of production as a basis for analytical distinction between formal and informal sectors.

Focusing on the employment and development policies in an urban economy, Sethuraman (1976) defined informal sector as one, which consists of small-scale units engaged in the production and distribution of goods and services with the primary objective of generating employment and incomes. He further stated that informal sector would include all unregistered commercial enterprises and all non-commercial enterprises that had no formal structure in terms of organisation and operation.

Popala (1981) opined that the distinction between the formal and informal sector employment could be made on the basis of the registration of the manufacturing enterprise under the Factories Act, 1948. Under the act registration is obligatory; the size of employment is ten workers with the use of power and twenty workers without the use of power. Once the enterprise is a registered factory, the conditions of work such as recruitment, working conditions, hours of work, leave, payment of wages, dismissals etc., get regulated. In the case of non-factory organisation the conditions of work are not regulated and are quite informal.

Dore (cited from Popala, 1981) defined the informal sector as the roadside and empty tin to shed the exhaust pipe of the civil servants.

The ILO (1985) conducted a study, on informal sector employment in Pakistan and the findings of the study, the concept of the informal sector can thus be given an operational definition. This has been demarcated with the three major criteria:

The first of which must be met- that the informal sector contains household enterprises only, (ii) the second one concerning to the size, and (iii) the third one

pertaining to the basis of registration. Therefore, the classification of an enterprise as formal or informal depends on the following criteria.

1. If the enterprise is a corporate enterprise, such as a government office/department, bank, hospital limited or unlimited companies, it belongs to the formal sector,
2. If the enterprise is not incorporated but it runs as if it were, keeping full, written accounts, it is considered quasi-incorporated and belonging to the formal sector,
3. If the size of the enterprise (measured by the number of persons it employs) is above a certain minimum (more than nine in case of Pakistan) a certain degree of organisation and some division of tasks and responsibilities become necessary and this creates a formal structure, and
4. If an enterprise is registered under legislation governing factories and follows some rules and regulations which require a certain measure of organisation. This makes the enterprise formal.

Therefore, the informal sector in Pakistan has defined for statistical purposes are:

1. Informal, own-account enterprises: all household enterprises owned and operated by own-account workers irrespective of the size of the enterprise,
2. Enterprise of informal employees: household enterprises owned and operated by employers with fewer than ten persons engaged.

All household enterprise exclusively engaged in agricultural activities or wholly engaged in non-market production are excluded from the scope of the informal sector.

At the conceptual level the informal sector being defined by Amin (1987) while talking about the role of urban informal sector in Bangladesh. He stated that one of the most important and dominant attributes of the urban informal sector is the absence of official status. In other words, enterprises, and individuals in the informal sector operate outside the incentive or social security system offered by the state and its institutions. The lack of status is due largely to the tiny size of these enterprises and their unauthorised operations. In practice, some easily identify the physical features and the legal characteristics, which distinguish them. Hence, rather than rely on the size of the enterprise as the sole criterion, the definition adopted for the urban informal sector comprises enterprises that employ fewer than ten workers (including the owner) and meet at least one of the following additional criteria: the enterprise is not registered under the Factory or Commercial Enterprise Establishment Acts; it operates in an unauthorised location and because of that it is operating illegally; or it is located in a temporary structure or in a person's home backyard. Amin (1987) also pointed the five categories for the urban informal sector. These are (a) street selling and other petty retailing, (b) repair and other personal service (c) crafts and other manufacturing, (d) construction work, and (e) rickshaws and other informal means of transport.

Defining the informal sector, the Central Statistical Organisation (another Governmental source), (cited from Devala, 1994), stated the unorganised sector to be those unincorporated enterprises and household industries which are not regulated by any legislation and which do not maintain annual accounts or balance sheets.

Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), member work in what has been termed as the informal economy where is no clear employer-employee relationship, workers are not covered by social security measures and workers and the sector as a whole tends to remain unorganised.

From the above discussion of informal sector has been attributed to different meaning by various researchers over a time viz. urban poor, urban proletariat, low income households, urban population living in slums and squatter settlements. Generally this sector includes not only traditional artisans, services and petty traders but also small units in manufacturing, construction, trade and commerce, transport and services sectors, engaged in the production of goods and services, carpenters, cobblers, tailors, washer man, metal and leather products, hawkers, rickshaw pullers, who operate on very small scale basis and has no formal business organisation (Amin, 1987). The term 'informal sector' has no analytical meaning in itself; most often it is used 'for lack of better alternatives' (Sethuraman, 1976). Hart (1973) based his dual model on one simple characteristic namely the distinction between income opportunities in wage and self-employment. Employment in the formal sector was correlated with wage employment while that in the informal sector with self-employment.

The distinction between Formal and Informal sectors can be shown as following:

**Table No. 1.1**

<b>Formal</b>	<b>Informal</b>
1. Industry, business, government large scale operations	1. Artisans, services, private, petty trade and small scale operation
2. Restricted entry, regulated and taxed	2. Easy entry, unregulated and untaxed
3. Low unemployment	3. High unemployment

4. Wage employment, high skill employment	4. Family employment, low skill employment
5. Native population and productive employment	5. Recent migrants and residual (unproductive employment)

In developing countries urban economy is dualistic in nature. The nature of organisation (organised or unorganised), technology used (traditional or modern), the mode of production followed (capitalistic or subsistence) state recognition of the economic activities and state regulation of the product and the labour markets are taken as lines that demarcate the formal informal. The informal sector is a segment of the urban economy where production and marketing relations are informal in nature. So, it can be stated that formal sector is identified as combining some or all of the following characteristics: large scale, capital intensity, western advanced technology, public or corporate ownership possibly multi-national, regulated and protected market for labour and output, barriers to entry, formal contacts of employment, and the requirement of formal educational qualifications for its workers. The following paragraphs have briefly revealed the characteristics of the informal sector enterprises.

Sethuraman (1976) suggested certain criteria to identify the informal sector:

It employs less than ten persons (including the part-time and casual workers)

1. It operates in an illegal basis contrary to government regulations,
2. Members of the household of the head of the enterprise work in it,
3. It does not observe fixed hours\days of operation,
4. It operates in semi-permanents or temporary premises, or in a shifting location,
5. It does not use any electricity in the manufacturing process,

6. It does not depend on formal financial institutions for its credit needs, and
7. Its output normally distributed direct to the final consumers.

### **Characteristics of Urban Informal Sector**

The informal sector is a convenient way to designate a segment of the economy having certain characteristics, which lead to unfavourable conditions for the growth of enterprises and activities operating in this segment (Popala, 1981). There are a number of characteristics (Rao, 1994) of informal sector but some of the important features identified as characteristics of informal sector, which are discussed below:

**(i) Small Size of Operation** - All observers and researchers agreed that the informal sector consists of small establishment (Rao, 1994). The demarcation is generally made on the basis of size of employment. Hart (1973), suggested that single-worker establishments and those with self-employed and own account workers form the core of the informal sector. But it is also worth mention here that this would necessarily restrict the scope of informal sector as many of the establishments using hired labour. From the empirical viewpoint, 'enumeration' or 'registration' has been considered as good base for the distinction between the two sectors (Popala, 1981). Sethuraman (1976) identified sectoral attributes are such that would make such enterprises disadvantaged.

**(ii) Informal Structure and Family Ownership**- Informal sector enterprises are not primarily based on a formally structured organisation. There is a limited functional division of labour and specialisation, and most of the functions like managerial, supervisory and sometimes the owner of the organization performs some of the productions. In that sector there is an extensive use of family labour. All these character however are not always found to go together. Small size itself

makes it necessary and possible to run an organisation without a structured division of labour and management hierarchy. Even some organisations with wider ownership and using hired labour may fall under these characteristics if the size of operation is not large. So the structure of organisation is mainly a function of size and not necessarily related to the pattern of ownership. Thus, the distinction between formal and informal sectors on the basis of indigenous and foreign ownership is also not valid in a country like India where the indigenously owned sector constitutes a major part of the organised industry. But most of the informal sector unit has entirely indigenous ownership of its means of production. The proprietor would organise and control the activities of the enterprise. As they do not have the proper access of government credit as compare to their formal counterparts, this obviously would limit the scale of operations.

**(iii) Non-Modern Technology** - One of the major disparities between formal and informal sector on the basis of the use of imported foreign technology (Joshi, 1976). The intent of using technology as a variable in distinguishing informal from formal sector is to highlight that the informal sector units use labour intensive, pre-dominantly manual, low productivity techniques of production as compared to capital intensive, highly mechanised and high productivity which is used by the formal sector units. Due to some factors the use of technology varies from one to another (Mittar, 1988). First, due to the nature of the production and the size of the enterprises within the same group. Second, an informal sector producer does not use capital intensive, modern technology, because it does not have any access to it or it does not suit him in the given relative cost position of capital and labour as they hires labour at a much lower wage rate than the formal sector employers. Basically in this sector people rely on traditional as well as indigenous technology. The main feature of this sector is it is a labour intensive technology.

**(iv) Lack of Access of Government Favours** - A stepmother's attitude of the Government could be observed in the case of informal sector. The formal sector is portrayed as having access to resources controlled and distributed by the Government. Thus, they are getting the advantages of organised capital market, bank finance, foreign technology, imported raw material, and protection from foreign competition etc., which the informal sector is deprived off (Mehta, 1985). Even when the government is trying to mitigate some of their disadvantages giving them a preferential treatment, they are not able to avail these facilities because of their inability to cope up with the official procedures for obtaining them. Another problem that they face to enter certain activities are to get legal permission to render their services (Popala, 1981). The informal sector establishments operate on pavements, crowded streets and odd places for lack of suitable space which government quite often forces them to move due to overcrowding, health considerations, traffic congestion, environmental and or the land they occupy does not belong to them (Sethuraman, 1976). Consequently, they feel insecure in these operations and afraid of the harassment and punishment by the public authorities (Popala, 1981). Not only that they also face the problem of getting credit from the bank, space, electricity, water, transport facility, and so on., where as the formal sectors do not. Extreme inequities and discrepancies while operating their business characterised these enterprises.

**(v) Competition and Unprotected Labour Market** - The labour market for the informal sector is unregulated and highly competitive on the supply side, with absolute freedom to entry, while the formal sector is regulated and has entry restricted on the basis of norms and formalised hiring procedures. The informal labour consist mostly new entrants, migrants or young person entering into the labour force, who aspires for jobs in the formal sector, but finding the opportunities limited and entry restricted, starting something or other in the formal sector either as self-employment, part-time workers, apprentices or time workers in small establishments (Rao, 1994). As a result, the informal sector

bears the brunt of excess of labour supply which leads the situation of significant underemployment (Majumdar, 1973) and depressed wages in that sector while the formal sector workers do not feel the pressure of excess supply, as their wages and conditions of work are regulated. Their jobs are secure and a level of wages assured, while those in the informal sector suffer not only from low wages, but also vicissitudes of market fluctuations and whims of their employers.

Another distinguishing feature of urban informal sector is not formal in character. The enterprises of this sector have no access to the formal sources of credit. In fact in this sector they meet their needs of credit from their friends, personal savings or by their relatives.

In view of the above mentioned problems the urban informal sector find very difficult to compete with the formal sector. In many cases they have no premises to operate their business. For that they produce comparatively smaller outputs and hire very little wage labourers. Mostly they depend on their family members to operate their business. Their output is being less sophisticated in design and quality which is mostly used by the middle and low income group (Thippaiah, 1993). An indispensable quality of the formal sector is the small-scale establishments in it. The small size of employment is likely to be accompanied usually, though not necessarily, by small capital, fixed and total required to start and operate it (ILO, 1977). The small scale in terms of capital and employment is unlikely to be associated with the use of 'modern' or 'complex' or 'sophisticated' technology. Therefore, the generalisation that the informal sector uses 'simple', 'traditional' labour intensive technology, the skills required for which are picked up informally or handed down from father to son. The finance comes usually from past sources of the individual or his family supplemented at times by friends and by relatives, but not from formal institutions like co-operatives and commercial banks. Another factor that contributed to the ease to entry is the fact that production of goods takes place at

home with indigenous materials. Those engaged in this sector not buy or rent land separately for their business (Lall, 1989). Thus, most of the resources like land, labour and capital are owned and not hired. Greater dependence on indigenous rather than imported materials also makes the entry easy. In informal sector goods and services produced are undifferentiated. Each producer is too small to affect supplies and prices. He does not advertise and there are no economies of scale (Lall, 1989: 8-11). The demand for its products is elastic, perhaps perfect, because the sector caters to the urban poor (see in Deolankar, 1992). The informal sector a sizeable segment of the urban economy, suffer severe infrastructure, marketing and technological handicaps and is consequently characterised by low productivity and earning of those in it. While rural and agricultural activities are almost entirely carried out on this basis, a significant part of the economic structure of the urban and industrial sectors are also found to consist of the non-organised units (Rao, 1994).

Earnings of the informal sector are relatively very low compared to the formal sector – almost half or even less, yet they are found to be higher than what the migrant's people could have earned at their place of their origin (Sethuraman, 1976: 203). Basically it is the formal sector wages and conditions of secured work that attracts them to the city but it is the informal sector, which holds them there (Popala, 1981). Thus, it is concluded that the features attributed to the informal sector are generally associated with the lack of adequate resources manifest in the small size operations, working capital finance and in their inability to market their product profitably (Rao, 1994).

### **Women Entrepreneurship in Ima Market:**

Ima Market is one of the biggest market in Asia dominated by women traders and entrepreneurs. It is believed that the *lallup* (The taxation system) prevalent in Manipur during the olden days was responsible for the emergence of

this women market at Imphal. It is believed that the *lallup* system caused women to come out into market. Because of the *lallup* system, a man was asked to serve the state for a period of two months annually. Hence, male members in a family tend to stay away from the family for long period of time. This led to the formation of women markets in the whole country. In such markets, a woman can make her earning from the crops that are grown in her homestead. In the story of “Khamba and Thoibi” of Moirang Kangleirol (the history of Moirang principality of olden Manipur), poems are written in which Khamnu, the elder sister of Khamba, resort to selling firewood and Keng-ngoï (An edible wild grass) in Moirang Keithel. (Amar Yumnam, 2001)

The role of Manipuri women in society was quite prominent from ancient period. Of course, the picture of women in North-east have traditionally been doing trade and managing markets. The women’s market Nupi-Keithel (Women’s market) of Manipur, for example, is one of the biggest markets in Asia controlled and run by women. It has a distinctive position, because of its function as a controlling institution of women that affects and contributes to the whole economy of the state. It is a glaring example how women continue to play a role in the economy and society, which is a continuance of earlier form of social structure. The advent of colonialism in 1981 integrated Manipur to a worldwide capitalist system, developed transportation network where further enabled the women to extend their trading activities throughout and beyond Manipur. Thus, the socio-economic role of women was gradually expanding.

The only market place run and controlled by women in the world can be seen in Manipur, a north eastern Indian state. It is one of the oldest. Historical facts suggest that the Ima Keithel or the Mothers' market is 100 years old. More than 4,000 women congregate to sell fresh vegetables, fish, grain, handicrafts and other household utensils. The uniqueness of Ima Keithel is that one could not find a single man doing business in the market or its vicinity; all stalls are

managed and run by women alone. Ima (mother), Ine (aunt) and Iche (sister) from various community, caste or social strata comes under one canopy of market shed to support the families.

One striking feature is that goods and commodities sold by these 3,000 odd women are mostly local products. They collect from the neighboring kitchen garden, lakes, ponds, hills and farmlands and handicrafts. Bargaining can be possible in colorful handloom shawls and beautiful cane-bamboo baskets. Such bargaining will show how hospitable and kind-hearted these mothers are! They will treat with love and care to every customers as their own family members. (T. Michael Khumancha, 2003)

### **Contribution of Ima Market towards Women Empowerment in Manipur:**

Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities.

Ima keithel is a tourist spot as well as the archaeological site due to its place in the history of erstwhile Manipur kingdom. The mighty British rule India for almost 200 years, but the tiny kingdom remains independent for a long time. It came under the British administrations roughly for a short period of 56 years (1891-1947). But the beauty and the courage of these women are mentioned in British history and personal memoirs. The Imas (mothers) of Ima Keithel are not business oriented women. They are a leading example of leadership and revolutionists in the history too. Whenever they feel that the societies need their active role in freedom struggle or any state malfunctions they closed down their keithel (market) and stood for unity. The world has witnessed two nupi lal (women's war) during the British rule in 1904 and 1939 when the government atrocities have crossed its limit. Many died in that war of struggle for their rights. And it continues still to protect their identity and rights for self determination.

According to Gazetteer of Manipur 1786, all the marketing of the country was conducted by women in the open air and the markets were held in the morning. Of course the situation is different at present period and the market is opened from morning till night. The shops are built by the Government and the shopkeeper is to pay tax for it. The women from different places come to this market and it is a glaring example of the way the Manipuri women are struggling for their existence. All the essential commodities are made available here. The power of the market women of Manipur were demonstrated on various occasions. They had to face a challenge of rival markets, managed and controlled by men of the Indian trading community. In between 1948-52, a proposal came from some local rich persons in connivance with the petty alien trades to demolish the existing shed. But women were not outnumbered and were successful in retaining it. The other major incident occurred in the early nineties, when the women of the entire market area of the three main sections of the market and the adjoining areas were served eviction notice. But the women body of the market objected to this latest onslaught. They refused to budge even an inch away from the present market. So strong was their voice that their opponent had no choice. They finally consented to give to the women what was rightly theirs. Credit must be given to those courageous women, who do not only guarded their role as economic providers of their families but also took a strong places come to this market and it is one of the means of livelihood for them. Some of the women come to this market not only for money but they have started it long back and get pleasure out of it. But the majority is involved in this trade due to economic compulsion.

Now the women hold a high and free position in Manipur, all the internal trade and exchange of the product of the country being managed by them. The habit of the country is to have bazaars at convenient spots by the road side, where a handful of women congregate at an early, whiling the time away with gossip and light work.

Recently, the researcher conducted a study with the focus to the objective of the Research and found that, number of vendors have increase in the Ima Market in almost all the sectors of the trades. It is also being found that Banks are on the way to give inputs of financial assistance to these women to increase their productivity and income level.

Recent years have witnessed a sudden change in the market place as the state government interferes to rebuild it by demolishing the Ima Keithel. The historical site will be no more, but the spirit and the courage of Ima will still passed on from generation to generation. Here one can see the exact meaning of secularism where women from different religion and community sit together at the same platform to sell valuable local produce. Come and enjoy the historical sites adjoining the Ima market and spend the weekend at the World War II Cemetery for the British and the Japanese forces who sacrificed their life in Manipur.

### **Concept of Market:**

The term '**Market**' is derived from the Latin word **Mercari** meaning exchange of goods through barter system. Market is the connecting bridge between production and consumption. In common language "Market" refers to a place or locality where a commodity or commodities are bought and sold. The product of a market may be local, national or international. However, in economics, the term market does not refers to any particular place in which things are bought and sold but to the whole of any region in which buyers and sellers are in such free intercourse with one another that the price of the same goods tends to equality *easily* and quickly.

### **Evolution of the Market ‘Sanakeithel’ of Manipur:**

Markets are called *Keithel* in Manipur and exhibit a sophisticated system of trade. The term ‘*Market*’ seems inadequate to describe what *Keithel* really is and the role it plays in the local economy, culture and society.

*Kei* translates as storehouse while *thel* means display, loosely translating into display of store for exchange of goods either through barter or money.

This is the *Nupi Keithel*, the mother of all the *Keithels* in Manipur. Situated in the heart of Imphal, it is the biggest as well as most important of all women’s market. This market centre is run exclusively by women and constitutes a significant economic pulse of the state. *Nupi Keithel* and its off springs are collectively known as *Khwairamband Keithel*. It is said *Nupi Keithel* is the off-shot of the first market known as *Sanakeithel* or Royal Market.

Though the exact date of the introduction of *Sanakeithel* is obscured in antiquity, nevertheless it can be said with certainty that the idea of *Keithel* is not of recent origin. *Lamilton*, a book which deals with naming of geographical areas of Manipur validates the existence of *Keithel* when it mentioned that Maharaj Chalamba who reigned from 1545 to 1562 AD erected this big stone to mark the site of the Sanakeithel. It goes on to say – Maharaj Mungyamba actually founded the *Sanakeithel*, in 1580s.

Legends, traditions and folklores account on the essence of spiritualism as perceived in almost every aspect of Manipuri culture and tradition and as such in the market theory too it has strong implications. According to ‘*Khamnung Engal Leishaba*,’ the myth of Keithel weaves around the mysticism of seven Goddesses who initiated the Lai Keithel Kaba (Deities’ market endeavour) for selling wares. Goddess Chingba Leima, one of the chief goddesses, trade in rice; Pishum Leima traded gold and silver; Chinga Leima traded vegetables; Waithou

Leima in edible oil; Waisheng Leima Salt cake; Heibok Leima metal objects and so on and so forth.

According to the Royal Chronicles of Manipur, the Cheitharol Kumbaba, indications are that the Sanakeithel was originally established inside the Royal Kangla Fort. ***Sanakeithel***, in subsequent years, was shifted out of the western side of the Kangla fort. This market would gradually give way to what is known as the ***Nupi Keithel***.

Apart from the economic activities, the market also serves as an important venue of social and political interaction. Manipur has a patriarchal society but in the Keithel, women are encouraged to be individually self-reliant and collectively powerful. It is here, political consciousness and group solidarity is developed and strengthened. It is this dynamic aspect of this market that played a crucial role in the outbreak of the two Great Women Revolts.

At least on two occasions, first in 1904 and again in 1939, they rose against the exploitative colonial British policies and asserted themselves in what came to be known as the NUPI LAN or Women's war. Nupi Lan unveiled the collective potential of the women for national cause.

Every Keithel in Manipur is founded in methodological and mystical ways. Each market place has a sacred site for the Deity or Deities.

Before starting the day's trading, betel nuts and leaves, fruits flowers and other items are offered for good trading. In ***Nupi Keithel***, there is a sanctum for ***Keithel Lairembi*** and ***Lairemba***, - male and female deities of the market.

Most Kings of Manipur took keen interest in the development of the ***Khwaibraband*** Keithel. Maharaj Khunjaoba constructed canals and embankments and excavated a Langkhong or Moat in 1660 on the western side

of Kangla as well as constructed a 'bund' along the Naga River to check the inflow of excess water in the Khwairamband. Nambul River, at that time, was an important waterway for transporting produce to the market. Maharaj Chandrakriti is credited for developing the actual framework of the *Khwairamband* Bazaar.

One peculiarity of the Keithel is that all its affairs were managed by women. The reason why women took to the market may be found in Lallup system, prevalent during the times of the Kings. Lallup is a system of compulsory service to the king. Under the Lallup, loosely translating into War Club, every able-bodied, between the age group of 17-60 had to serve the Kings as warriors or as laborers for ten days out of every forty days. While men fought for the King, women had to take charge of their homes and mercantile affairs.

Mrs. Grimwood, wife of the then British Political Agent of Manipur gave an account of the role of women in the market which was prevailing in Manipur prior to the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1981 in her book, 'My three years in Manipur'.

“ The women did all the hard work as a rule, they wove all their women and their husband clothing, and cooked and looked after the house generally, besides working in the fields and coming every evening to the big bazaar with merchandise for sale or exchange. No men are allowed to sell in this bazaar with exception a few Bangalee traders, who sat in a different part of the market and sold clothes.”

Keithel is not restricted to selling and buying alone. It has multifaceted service. For the Kings of Manipur, the Keithel was the ideal place to feel the pulse of His subjects. Important proclamations were made in the crowded areas of the Keithel. Matters connected with administration, judiciary and socio-religious functions were also carried out in the Keithel.

Keithel also served as a place for entertainment. In the olden days, indigenous games of Khangjingsanaba, between male and female, were known to have been played in the Keithel with the Maharaj as spectator.

Keithel was also the place where criminals and immoral were punished. A woman convict would be publicly humiliated in the Keithel by parading naked or chopping off her hair.

Men, who committed theft, robbery, adultery and other heinous crimes, were flogged and executed in the Keithel. In some cases, dead bodies of crime doers were buried in the market areas. Even the dead bodies of the British officers who conspired against the Kingdom were buried at Khwairamband Bazaar. In retaliation, the British when they occupied the state after the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891 sent Prince, Bir Tikendrajit and Thangal General to the gallows at Pheidapung at the proximity of Khwairamband bazaar.

British occupation of Manipur marked the beginning of the downfall of the glorious days of the Nupi Keithel as an influential institution. Recognizing its importance, British, intentionally, propped up new markets with new rules, alongside the women's market to permanently rob its predominance over socio-political and economic affairs of the State.

It was the British who established **Sadar Bazaar**, now popularly known as **Paona Bazaar** and the **Maxwell Market**, now known as **Thangal Bazaar**. These markets, to a large extent, reduced the trading women to petty vendors.

Credit must, however, go to the British for improving the physical structure of the Khwairamband Keithel. In place of the open spaced stalls with earthen mounts, sheds with thatched roofs were erected by Maxwell much to the delight of the women. Due to frequent outbreaks of fire, the thatched roofs were replaced with corrugated iron sheets.

So In this context of above discussion the present study aims at examining the following questions on women entrepreneurs of Ima Market of Manipur. Why do women become entrepreneurs? Was it lacking of employment opportunities that compel them to lunch their businesses? How did the family background help them to run their business? What is the socio-economic background of the women entrepreneurs? Did they face any problem to continue their ventures? How did they handle the situations?