

A Critical Study of Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community

A thesis submitted during 2023 to the University of Hyderabad in
partial fulfillment of the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Gender Studies

by

Soraisam Nirupama Devi

13CWPG04



Centre for women's Studies

School of Social Sciences

University of Hyderabad

(P.O) Central University, Gachibowli,

Hyderabad – 500 046 Telangana,

India

October 2023



CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled A Critical Study of Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community submitted by Soraisam Nirupama Devi bearing Registration Number 13CWPG04 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Centre for Women's Studies is a bonafide work carried out by him/her under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from Plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

Further, the student has the following publication(s) before submission of the thesis/monograph for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of his/her research:

1. SORAISAM NIRUPAMA DEVI AND SRIPARNA DAS. **A Case Study on Chenba (Elopement) of Meitei Community Through the Gender Lens.** Research Journal Of Social and Life Sciences Volume-XXIV-II, 12 June 2018, ISSN 0973-3914.
2. SORAISAM NIRUPAMA DEVI AND SRIPARNA DAS. **Elopement, Gender and Manipuri Digital Film,** Asian Journal of English Studies, Volume No.7 January 2018, ISSN 2277-3606.

and

has made presentations in the following conferences:

1. National Women Submit, 2018, Hyderabad, India (National)
2. UGC-CPE Sponsored International Conference on Gender and Empowerment. Bijoy Krishna Girl's College in collaboration with School of Women Studies, Jadavpur University, 2016 Kolkata (International)

Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfillment of coursework requirement for Ph.D.

Course Code	Name	Credits	Pass/Fail
1. GS803	Understanding Gender	4	Pass
2. GS805	Kinship and Marriage	4	Pass
3. GS829	Women and Society: Reading North-East of Indian	4	Pass

Sriparna Das 17/10/23
Dr. Sriparna Das
Supervisor

Assistant Professor
CALTS, School of Humanities
University of Hyderabad
Hyderabad-500 046.

K. Suneetha Rao 17/10/23
Prof. K. Suneetharani
Head of the Department

अध्यक्ष / Head
महिला अध्ययन केन्द्र / Centre for Women's Studies
समाजिक विज्ञान संकाय / School of Social Sciences
हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय / University of Hyderabad
हैदराबाद-४६ / Hyderabad-46., T.S.

[Signature]
Dean of School of Social Science

समाज विज्ञान संकाय
School of Social Sciences
हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय
University of Hyderabad
हैदराबाद-500 046., भारत
Hyderabad-500 046. INDIA



DECLARATION

I, **Soraisam Nirupama Devi** hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**A Critical Study of Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community**” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Sriparna Das is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Date: 17/10/2023

Name: Soraisam Nirupama Devi

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Nirupama", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Signature of the Student:

Regd. No.13CWPG04

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the phenomenon of *chenba* marriage, which is a type of elopement, among the Meitei people in Manipur, India. *Chenba* is a term used by the Meiteis to describe the act of eloping as a declaration of their readiness or interest for marriage. Previous research on elopement marriage has documented the discrimination and violence faced by the eloping couple from their families. However, in Manipur, *chenba* is accompanied by a detailed marriage ceremony and it is widely assumed that both men and women have equal freedom in selecting their spouse in the context of *chenba* marriage. This research critically investigates the role of the couple in decision making and consent regarding the *chenba* by conducting a thorough analysis of the rituals and practices involved in *chenba* marriage to critically examine the idea of equal freedom that is commonly held among the Meiteis.

The data from both qualitative and quantitative methods show that *chenba* marriage enables the couple to overcome any obstacles they face due to differences in caste, clan and social status. Couples of various ages chose *chenba* marriages. Even underage couples resorted to marriage, where only one case was filed by the girl's parents. This study also discovered that some elopements were forced under the pretext of *chenba*. The father, who is the head of the family, has a very important role in deciding the marriage. The final decision for conducting the wedding ceremony is entirely dependent on the fathers of the couple.

The girls who are coerced into *chenba* are made to marry their kidnapper. Some of them also face sexual abuse during the *chenba*. The customary laws of *chenba* marriage do not adequately deal with the problems of child marriage and sexual

violence. The customary laws of chenba marriage permit under-age marriage. Girls who are eloped against their will are given the choice of either marrying the kidnapper or asking for a financial compensation.

The rituals of chenba marriage reveal that marriage institution also plays a very important role in socializing gender role especially the role of husband and wife. Through the chenba marriage it can be observed that emphasis of the gendered division of labour, men as superior and women as subordinate, women's sexuality as taboo and objectification of women's body in many of the rituals.

Acknowledgement

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude towards my PhD supervisor Dr. Sriparna Das for extending her unconditional academic support in completion of this study. Under her guidance I was able to explore the study area, deconstruct my understanding about the elopement, marriage, gender, decision maker and consent and move ahead with insights that helped to frame this study today as a complete thesis.

My PhD would remain incomplete without my doctoral committee members' suggestions, comments, and discussions. I owe my gratitude towards Prof. K. Suneetha Rani and Prof. Sudhakar Reddy for extending their support and giving me a patience hearing during my doctoral committee meeting.

I would like to express my sincere thank you towards my respondents, key informers for helping me gather the first-hand information on the chenba marriage system in the study area. This study would have remained incomplete and unfinished without them agreeing to be part of it.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude towards Centre for Women's Studies, its faculty members Prof. K. Suneetha Rani and Dr. Deepa Srinivas for their academic supports during the course work in my PhD period. I would like to thank the staff members of the Centre for Women's studies, Mr. Prasad and Mr. Kotaiya for providing all necessary information, guidance and help in matters relating to administrative work during my PhD years.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. George Tharakan C., faculty of Anthropology Department for teaching and helping to understand the foundation of marriage system and kinship during my course work for the completion of PhD.

I extend my gratefulness towards my family members, especially Dr. Soraisam Joychandra and Bonkuri Anil Kumar for extending help in gathering information and resources from field area.

CONTENTS

	Page No.
Acknowledgement	v- vi
Glossary	xi- xii
List of Map	xiii
List of Table	xiii- xiv
List of Figure	xiv- xv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1-32
1.1. Overview of Love Marriages: A Historical Context	2
1.2. A Comparison between Chenba and Elopement	5
1.3. Significance and Context of the Study	7
1.3.1.A Different Voice from the North-East India	11
1.3.2.The Politics of Gendered Spatial Demarcations among Meitei Society	12
1.3.3.Locating a Shift in the Framework of Marriage Studies	14
1.4. Rational of the Study	17
1.4.1.The Researcher's Location	17
1.4.2.Difference between Chenba and Elopement	18
1.5. Theoretical framework on gender in Chenba Marriage	19
1.6. Research questions	23
1.7. Objectives	24

1.8. Scope of the Study	24
1.9. Methodological Framework	25
1.9.1. Methods used for the data collection	25
1.10. Sources of the Study	26
1.11. Fieldwork Experience	26
1.12. Chapterisation	28
 Chapter 2: The Evolution of Chenba Marriage in Manipur	 33-58
2.1 Introducing the Meitei	33
2.1.1. Origin Story of Meitei: Facts and Myths	33
2.2. Interrogating the Influence of Manipuri Folklore on Chenba Marriages	39
2.3. Contemporary Media and Portrayal of Chenba	42
2.4. Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community during Pre- 18 th Century	45
2.5. Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community during Post- 18 th Century	47
2.6. Chenba Marriage and Inter-caste Marriage	53
2.7. Chenba Marriage and Inter-religious Marriage	55
2.8. Influences of Colonisation, Education and Globalisation on Chenba Marriage	55
1.9. Observation	57
 Chapter 3: Customary Laws of Marriage and Family in Meitei Community	 59-111
3.1. Clan exogamy	59
3.2. Caste endogamy	61
3.3. Religious endogamy	61
3.4. Bride Price	61
3.5 Divorce Rule	62
3.6. Chenba marriage versus customary rule	62

3.6.1. Clan Exogamy and Chenba	63
3.3.2. Caste Exogamy and Chenba	64
3.6.2.1. Caste Hierarchy among the Meitei	64
3.6.2.2. Relationship between the Caste system and Marriage among the Meitei	66
3.3.7. Inter-Religious Marriage	70
3.8. Decision for Fixing Marriage Ceremony	74
3.9. Social Legislation and Chenba	77
3.9.1. Age	78
3.9.2. Reason for Chenba	83
3.9.3. Chenba Marriage, Koojaba and Loukhatpa	87
3.9.4. Education qualification	88
3.9.5 Occupation	90
3.9.6. Property or asset	94
1.10. Analysis of the Customary Laws, Family and Chenba Marriage	100
1.11. Uniform Civil Code and Chenba Marriage	106
 Chapter 4: The Rituals of Chenba Marriage	 112-138
4.1. Paopiba	112
4.2. Nupi Haidokpa	112
4.3. Machin Hangba	113
4.4. Heijingpot or Heijing Kharai Puba	114
4.5. Apok Asha Thaba	115
4.6. Lamlai Khurumba	116
4.7. Bor Baton Touba	116
4.8. Luhongba	117
4.9. Mitam Nga Thaba	125
4.10. Mangani Chakouba	126
4.11. Reading Symbols of the Rites in Chenba marriage	126
4.12. Gender and Language in Chenba marriage	129

4.12.1. Androcentrism in Language of Chenba Marriage	132
4.13. Objectification of Women	133
4.14. Women in Secondary Position	134
4.15. Embodiment of God and Goddess	135
4.16. Reinforcing Gender Role	135
Conclusion	136
Chapter 5: Case Study	139-150
5.1. Case Study on Inter-caste/Inter-ethnic Chenba Marriage	139
5.2. Case Study of Consent in Chenba Marriage	142
5.3. Case Study on Violence and Chenba Marriage	147
Chapter 6: Conclusion	151-156
Bibliography	157-168
Appendix	169-171

Glossary

Arangbam	Event organizer
Awang	North
Bor	Groom
Chakouba	Feast
Chelhong	Marriage by conducted after the couple runs away elopement
ChellagaLuhongba	Marriage by conducted after the couple runs away
Chenba	Eloping
Haina Singnaraga Luhongba	Arranged marriage
Hamei	An ingredient made of mixed rice powder with yangbi to prepare rice beer
Heijing	Citron
Heining	Wild Mango
ImaKeithel	Women's market
Kangsubi	Sweetmeat made of jiggery and black sesame seed
KhoijuLeikham	A herb used to ward off evil spirit by Meitei community
Kundo	Star jasmine flower
Kwa	Areca nut
KwaMana	Betel leaf
Lai Haraoba	God merry making
La-Ikouba	A ritual which is solemnised before the celebration of La horaoba
Laiphi	Cloths for deity
Leisang	A flower called huperzia squarrosa
Loi	Slave
Luhongba	Marriage
Luhongphal	A bench where the groom is made to sit

Malem	The earth
Mamang	East
ManganiChakouba	A feast on the fifth day of marriage at the bride's place
MeiraOkpa	Welcoming the bridegroom with a bonfire
NatSanskritana	Hymn of Meitei Hindu
NupiLal	Women's war
PatchaLoisang	Women's court
Phak	Mat
Phanek	Lower garment worn by Manipuri women
Pheijom	Dhoti
Phiruk	Basket made of bamboo
Piba	The eldest male member of the clan or family
Potloi	Types of skirt worn by the bride in marriage
Pungyat	A type of kurta worn by the groom
Sagei Salai Pokpa	Ancestor
Salai	Clan
Sana Keithel	Golden Market
Sangoi	Out house
Tairen	Medicinal plant
Thabal Chonbi	Traditional dance of Meitei at night during Holi festival
Tulsi	Basil plant
Yaosang	Holi festival

List of Map:

Sl. No.		Particulars	Page No.
1	Figure 1	Location of Manipur state in India Map	xvi
2	Figure 2	Manipur state Map	xvii
3	Figure 3	Meitei's migration from different areas	35

List of Table:

Sl. No.	Name of the Table	Page No.
1	Table 1: Distribution of Clan Exogamy and Endogamy in Chenba Marriage	63
2	Table 2: Inter-caste Chenba marriage in Meitei community	67
3	Table 3: Distribution of Religion of the Respondents	72
4	Table 4: Inter-religious Marriage in Chenba marriage	73
5	Table 5: Distribution of the decision maker for the marriage	76
6	Table 6: Distribution of the Age of Female Respondents at the Time of Marriage	79
7	Table 7: Distribution the Age of Male Respondents at the Time of Marriage	80
8	Table 8: Distribution of Female Respondents for the Consent of Chenba	81
9	Table 9: Filed case at the Police Station	82

10	Table 10: Reason for Chenba by Female Respondent	84
11	Table 11: Reason for Chenba by Male Respondents	85
12	Table 12: Distribution of other customs of Marriage in Meitei Community	88
13	Table 13: Education Qualification of Female Respondents	89
14	Table 14: Education Qualification of Male Respondents	90
15	Table 15: Occupation of Male Respondent	92
16	Table 16: Occupation of Female Respondent	92- 93
17	Table 17: Finance Holder in the Family of the Respondent	94
18	Table 18: Distribution of Property or Assets of Female Respondents	96
19	Table 19: Distribution of Property or Assets of Male Respondents	97
20	Table 20: Distribution of the Finance Holder by the Couple	98
21	Table 21: Distribution of the couple who bears the responsibility of their children's education	99

List of Figures:

Sl. No.	Name of the Figure	Page No.
1	Figure 4: Performance of Nat Sankritan in marriage ceremony	49
2	Figure 5: Pakhangba in the form of Snake.	50
3	Figure 6: Attire of Bride and groom of Meitei Marup Marriage	50

4	Figure 7: Attire of bride and groom in Hindu marriage	51
5	Figure 8: Groom receiving Bor Baton.	117
6	Figure 9: Iratphu Macha and Phambal Macha Latpa	118
7	Figure 10: Women carrying Phiruk for Jatra	119
8	Figure 11: Bor Mei Okpa	120
9	Figure 12: Koojaba	121
10	Figure 13: Bride bowing to the groom	123
11	Figure 14: Bride putting garland to groom	123
12	Figure 15: Groom putting garland to bride	124
13	Figure 16: Women performing Mitam Nga Thaba	125

Figure 1

Location of Manipur State in India Map

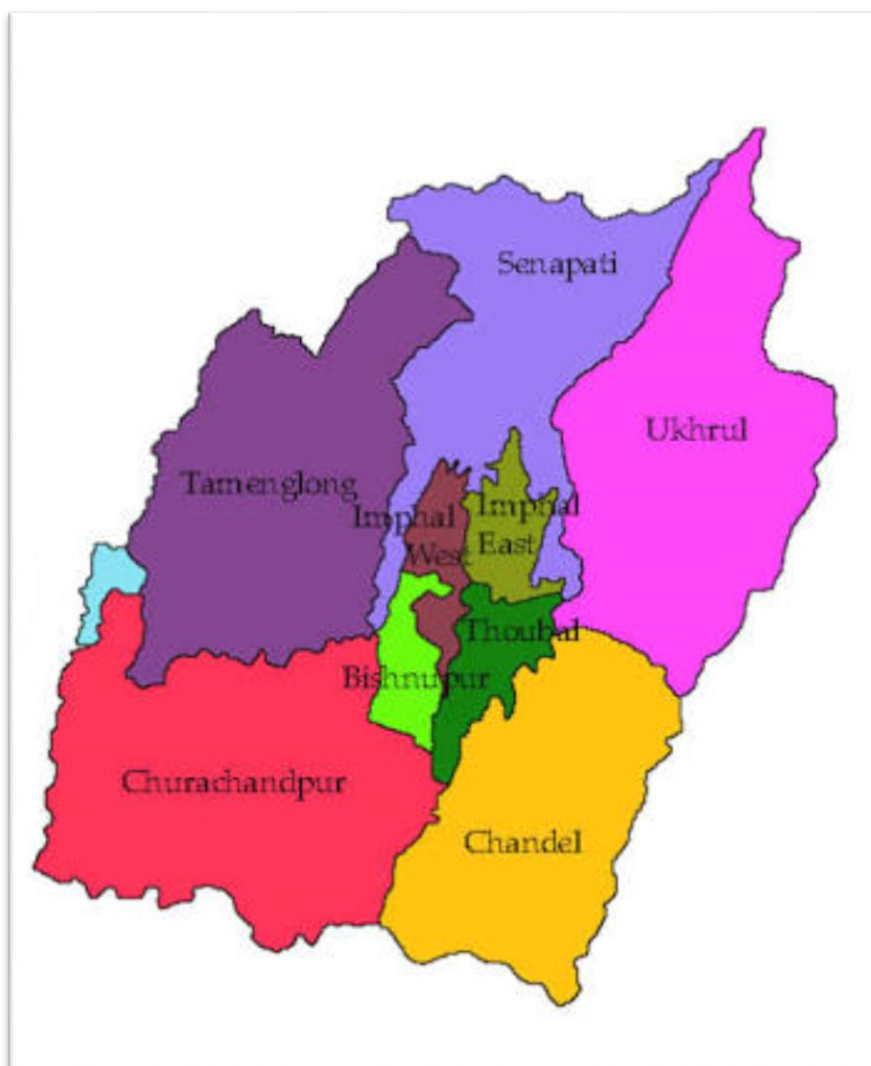


Note. TUBS. (2011) Manipur. (Location of Manipur state in India map). Retrieved from

https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Manipur#/media/File:Manipur_in_India.svg

Figure 2

Manipur Map



Note. OnefiveNine. (2021). Manipur state (Manipur Map). Retrieved from https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.onefivenine.com%2FIndia%2Fvillag%2Fstate%2Fmanipur&psig=AOvVaw35mFYwLzhq8mYPs9Ok3Me6&ust=1684238303741000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CA4QjRxqFwoTCJir4eSi9_4CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAI

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis titled “A Critical Study of Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community” attempts to bring out the nuances and gendered significance/s of *chenba* marriage in the life of the Meitei women in particular, and society, in general. Further, this study will also look at how gender role is performed by the couples within chenba marriage. Meitei people are described as romantic people and most of the marriages are love marriages (Chaki- Sircar, 1984). The couples prefer for elopement (Basanta N., 2010) which is termed as chenba in Meitei language and the marriage by chenba is termed as *chellaga luhongba*. It is generally believed that both men and women enjoy equal liberty in choosing their partner. However, as Meitei community is a patriarchal community, the notion of equal liberty may be questioned. To understand if Meitei women are genuinely included in the decision making process while choosing their life partner. This study attempts to open up debates on several issues like:

- 1) The cultural practices of elopement marriage in Meitei society versus the other part of India,
- 2) The ‘mythical’ emancipated or empowered status of Meitei women,
- 3) The gender issues in the of chenba marriage.
- 4) The contextual situation of the Meitei community with regard to this marriage practice within the mainstream¹ feminist movement in Indian scenario, in particular, and South Asian context, in general.

1.1. Overview of Love Marriages: A Historical Context:

To start the discussion about the cultural difference between chenba marriage in Meitei community and elopement among the mainstream society of mainland² India, let's first define the meaning of elopement. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, elopement means to run away with somebody in order to marry them secretly. Elopement often happens when the couple wants to marry and their parents do not accept their proposal after which the couple decides to get married by themselves. Based on a study done on traditional marriage practices in the Dardic speaking Kalasha community of Hindukush Mountain of Pakistan, Irum Sheikh, Hafeez-ur-Rehman and Arab Naz (2013) found cases of elopement due to the parents' rejection or disapproval of the couples to marry and the average age of the couples who eloped are 14 to 15 years of age for girls and 17 to 20 years for boys. They found out that mostly the elopements took place during Chalm-festival in Chitral and the friend of the boy helps the couple as a mediator. After the elopement, the girl's father or her elder brother visits them and if it is found out that the girl eloped with her consent then the girl is left with the boy to live with him.

Similarly, in Cuba, Martinez and Alier (1972) also found out that the couples' elopement happened because of the parental rejection. In addition to that, they also found out that the ill-treatment of the girl by her parents ranked for second reason for elopement. Loss of chastity brings dishonour to the girl's family and that demands for the marriage.

In South Eastern Turkey, among the Yoruk community, Bates (1947) found out that twenty percent of all the marriages arise through bride theft and, in Yoruk, bride theft is not distinguished from elopement. However, both forms of marriages are not accepted in Yoruk.

It is taken as the most outrageous incident and extremely shameful for the girl's family. Bates also found out that women play as a mediator for the abduction or elopement and during the abduction the girl is raped by the prospective husband so that she cannot be declined for marriage as her virginity is lost and it will be difficult for her to get other alliances.

Kudat (1974) also found the same pattern of abduction and deflowering the girl when their parent's disapprove of the couple. In this case, the girl's chastity is used as a strategy for marriage. Kudat includes that once the girl's virginity is lost, the chances of finding a suitor for the girl is very difficult. The bride-wealth given in such marriage is very low compared to the marriage of a virgin girl.

Cherlin and Aphichat Chamrathirong (1988) show that in the Central Thailand, elopement happened when there is disapproval from the parents or because of the cost of marriage ceremony would be very expensive and they cannot afford it. In such situations, the couples run away for a few days to a nearby village. After they return back, the boy apologises to the girl's father for such an act and requests for organising a marriage ceremony. Then, an abbreviated marriage ceremony is performed and less bride price is paid.

A study on the love marriage in Kutali Muslim community of Srilanka, Munck (1996) observes that elopement is the core symbol of love marriage which oppose to the social and religious sanctions against the premarital sex and disobedience to parental authority. During his field work he found out that twenty two marriages were results of such successful elopements and two more resulted in attempted but unsuccessful elopements. He further determines that the reason for elopement centers around the indulgence of premarital sex of

the couple and this lead to the inability of the boy's family to demand or obtain an adequate dowry.

In India, Gupta (1976) opine that Gandharva marriage is the nearest to what may be referred to as 'free of choice,' 'romantic or love marriage'. He quoted from the Manusmriti III, 32 which describes that the Gandharva marriage is a voluntary union of a maiden and her lover. In the verse (III, 32), Manusmriti says that such as a union springs from its purpose of fulfilling the sexual desire. However, according to Meyer (1989), Gandharva is suitable only for the males from the warrior, military, administrator and royal families, suggesting that free choice is reserved for the upper caste.

In modern India, the concept of love marriage still struggles for societal acceptance. A study done on love marriages in Gujarat by Twamley (2014) finds that love marriages are generally seen as undesirable and it is termed as 'impermissible marriage' as it is believed that it breaks caste, community, religion barriers. She also observes that couples who feel that they cannot convince their parents about their marriage, may choose to elope and return to their parents for announcement and eventually their parents would accept in some cases as these couples would have them believe that the relationship has been consummated.

Here, we can observe that elopement is used as one of the tools or strategies to compel parents to accept the marital status of the couples. An extensive work on love marriage in Haryana, by Chowdhry (2007), looks at the cases of run-away couples who fall victim into the hands of their family members and it is supplemented with the biased judiciary laws. In the chapter 'Cases of Runaway Marriage: State Intervention' from the book *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender, Caste and Patriarchy in Northern India*, she brings out

the legal intervention in the cases of runaway couples or elopement marriage. This study shows that most of the girls from the runaway couples are proved to be minor and the marriage is cancelled. The couples face with separation except in very few cases. Moreover, it is found out that if the runaway case is involved between higher and lower caste, the judgment is always in the favour of the higher caste. This study helps us to understand the lacunas in judiciary laws which have failed to protect the rights of the couples.

Mibang and M.C. Behera (2007) have edited a book *Marriage in Tribal Societies: Cultural Dynamics and Social Realities*. It brings out the forms of marriages that existed in Arunachal Pradesh. Elopement is found to be one of the most preferred forms of marriages among Kaman, Sartangs, and Puroik tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Generally, a boy and a girl who are in love and wish to marry, choose to elope. The reasons for preferring elopement are mainly because of the rejection of the couple by their respective parents and also because of poverty, they choose to elope to save the expenditure for the wedding ceremony.

1.2. A Comparison between Chenba and Elopement:

In Meitei community, elopement is called chenba. However, chenba has a bigger scope than elopement with respect to meaning. In chenba also the couple chooses their own partners and decides to marry but the differences in chenba from the other community elopement is that the marriage is not performed during the elopement unlike in the mainstream elopement. In fact, chenba is the signifier of marriage.

Chenba is used as a tool to inform the parents and the public that the couple wants to get married. In chenba, the couple stays together for one night and in the next morning the boy's father is informed and again in the same day the boy's father has to go to the girl's residence

and has to inform to the girl's father and her family. With the permission of the girl's father, a wedding date for the couple is decided. This wedding ceremony is performed at the girl's residence inviting all their relatives and friends. After the wedding ceremony the bride stays with the bridegroom at his home as Meitei community is patriarchal.

In the book titled *The Meitheis*³ written by Hodson (1989), the custom of marriage in Meitei community is written in detail. He described the rituals carried out in the Hindu Meitei marriage ceremonies. He also briefly mentioned about the existence of cohabitation without marriage among Meitei community. However, he did not mention about the practice of chenba and acceptance of the same in Meitei community.

On the other hand, Ghosh and Ghosh (1997) in their book *Women of Manipur* have described marriage customs in details, the rituals and the customary laws of marriage in Meitei community. They also mention about the existence of chenba in Manipur. They further described that love marriage with chenba is practiced in Meitei. The boy meets the girl during festive occasions like *Lai haraoba* or *Yaosang* (Holi festival). As they decide for the marriage; they elope for a few days after which, they return together so that their parents could go ahead for arranging the marriage ceremony.

Moreover, Chaki-Sicar (1984) has also explained the marriage custom of Meitei minutely. According to her observation, the bride is given an important position, and the bridegroom's family members especially the bridegroom and his father, have to fulfil the bride's or her family's demands. She has described how the groom's relatives and friends have to take responsibility for the safety and protection of the couple during chenba. She also

depicted about the important contributions of Manipuri women in the state's economic, social and political sphere.

1.3. Significance and Context of the Study:

As already mentioned earlier, in chenba both the boys and the girls are free to choose their own partners. Unlike the mainstream community, chenba is culturally accepted and there is no stigma in Meitei. Such a scenario significantly raises the question of the need for a critical study on chenba marriage.

The answer lies in the contrastive fact that on one hand, Meitei, being a patriarchal community practices hierarchy between men and women. Women are not allowed to participate in decision making, and on the other hand, when it comes to chenba marriage, the same community, seemingly, allows both boys and girls the same liberty to choose their own partners. The point of intervention for this doctoral project is to state that it is a myth that within the Meitei community both boys and girls enjoy their freedom of choice in chenba. This statement is reinforced by the existing empirical literature which glorifies the Meitei women of their contributions in the state's politics and economic sphere. There is frequent mentioning about the role of Meitei women in history in bringing changes in administration of the state such as '*patcha loisang*'⁴, '*nupi lai*'⁵ and in religious sphere as the role of *maibi*⁶.

Chaki-Sircar (1984) opines that from the ancient period, Manipur has been glorified for the equal status of men and women in both public and private sphere. In forming the Meitei society, both the women and men take equal responsibilities. For both men and women are given separate responsibilities with a clear demarcation of work in family and in community. This structure can be seen in *lai haraoba* which is a prime ritual of the ancient Meitei religion.

Chaki-Sircar 1998) explains that lai haraoba means 'Pleasing of God.' The essence of this festival is to please the God in order to gain their favour and blessed the people. Lai haraoba is celebrated during April/May. In this festival, the traditional priestess, 'Maibi', plays an important role in performing the ritual of lai haraoba from the start to the end. Maibis are also believed that they have vision of gods and goddesses whom they serve and are expected to communicate their messages to the people. The Maibis are given responsibilities to perform all the rituals needed for the completion of the festival. Their performance includes creation of human beings and delegation of responsibilities of men and women by God. The responsibilities are equally distributed and the man and woman are interdependent.

The important contribution of Meitei women other than the religious aspect can be seen in a book, *Manipuri Women in Contemporary Situation* written by Chanu & Devi (2001). She explains that the economic aspects of Manipuri women are significant as they are economically independent. The centre for trade of Manipur is occupied by women. The main market of the state is called *Ima Keithel* is exclusively managed by women. They engage themselves in handloom and handicrafts, kitchen gardening, marketing of these products in market, silk rearing and yarn making, farming, poultry, fishing and animal husbandry, pan shops, tea and snacks stall etc. Women play an important role in the trade of this state since the establishment of Ima market in the 16th C by the King Meidingu Sembi Khagemba. This market is also known by the name *Sana Keithel* which means 'Golden Market.' All the marketing of the country has since been conducted by women in the open air and the markets were held in the morning during the olden days. At present, a new building is constructed and it is open daily from morning to evening. Till date, women of Manipur continue to do the petty marketing such as selling traditional cloths, fruits, vegetables and etc. in small scale and

trading in all the regions of the state. The Ima Keithel is unique not only in the sense that it is the market run solely by women folk, but is also symbolic of the role Manipuri women play in the family's economy and by extension, in the society. Over 3000 women sit in rows in the market, selling variety of goods and commodities.

However, the major question is that despite having such an economic independence, do these women have any core participation in the decision making of the political, social and economic issues of the state. In fact, they could be a passive convener in these spheres and act as a subservient as they never participate in decision making. As opined by Brara (2010), Meitei men never consider Meitei women as qualified to participate in decision making. They are taken as motherly, over emotional and instinctive and they are considered irrational for the serious talk which is very much needed in decision making. Observing these dichotomies concerning Meitei women, we need to do more in-depth research and study on their status. There is a need to regulate more number of literatures on social status of Meitei women and therefore the critical study on chenba marriage can be of some help in adding the emerging literatures which question the status of Meitei women.

Thirdly, this study will open up a space for locating Meitei women's voice/standpoint in the history of Indian feminism. The first women's movement in India was started by social reformers that also by men during 1850s to 1940s. This movement demanded education rights and legislation changes. The reformers believed that education for women and changes in the legislation can improve the status of the Indian women.

However, this was not meant only for the improving women's status but also enhancing the image of Indian women as a modern and civilized society whose women were to be made

presentable to colonial society and suitable companions for the men of the new Indian bourgeoisie (Khullar 2005, pp.3). By the end of the 19th century women who were born in reformist families started challenging the reform movement of India. They started questioning about the subordinate position of women. In 1917 women's Indian Association was formed and in 1927, All India Conference on Educational Reform was held for the first time. In this conference, for the first time women from all over the India came together and discussed about the problems faced by women in India. After this in 1930s women started involving in Nationalist movement. Independent India guaranteed gender equality through its constitution. Laws were formed to bring gender equality in social, political and economic spheres.

During 1970s there was renewal concern for the status of women. Under the mandates of UN a committee was appointed called Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) which included activists, academics and members of parliament. This committee submitted a report called 'Towards Equality' in 1974. This report highlighted the stark gender inequalities evident in the statistics of imbalanced sex ratio, differential male and female mortality, dowry, child marriage, polygamy (Khullar 2005, pp.11). After this report, feminist movement worked towards addressing the violence against women within the state, community, family and society. Feminists raised questions about the status of women in all over India. Feminist movement became widespread in India and also there is growth of different ideology among these women. Different ideologies sprang up from different regions, different cultures, etc. As an example Dalit women's movement have a different ideology from the mainstream higher caste women's movement.

1.3.1. A Different Voice from the North-East India:

Further, northeast Indian women have different voices apart from the mainstream Indian women's movement. They speak for liberation from the oppression done by the Indian Army. They speak for the reformation of legal system to check the crimes against women and children and also on men done by the Indian Army in the name of sweeping away the insurgency from Northeast India. As Manipur became most prone to insurgency area in the Northeast, Manipuri women formed an organisation called *Meira Paibi* which fights against the violence done by the Indian Army on the civilian in Manipur. Thokchom (2010) in *Meira Paibi: the Role of Women's Movement in Meitei Society* describes that in every village, married women form a group called Meira Paibi to fight and protect from any kind of human rights exploitation. Meira Paibi originated as a women movement to prevent and control public disorder due to alcohol abuse of husbands in the late 1970s. In the initial period of this movement Meira Paibi is called as *Nisha Bandh*. Manipuri women organized themselves as a strong defensive force against the government's policy of liberally licensing liquor vends. Many cases of wife beating as she refuses to give him money for alcohol and child battering under liquor influence appeared in the newspaper frequently. Women gathered around every village to tackle this problem.

Women have always been active in fighting against the social or political issues in Manipur. When we look at the history of Manipuri women's contribution, Mehrotra (2009) describes that during the British rule, one of the most significant movements called nupi-lal occurred in Manipur where women took the lead and brought about changes in the administration of Manipur. The first nupi-lal occurred during 1904, agitating against the British order to send the men folk to Kabow (one of the valleys of Burma) and bring

teakwood to rebuild the house of the Assistant Superintendent which was burnt down by some unknown people. Again during 1939, these women group fought against the exportation of rice by the Marwari businessmen and the king of Manipur. There were acute famines in the state and because of these protests done by these women group there was a change in the administration of the state and the state was saved from the famine.

1.3.2. The Politics of Gendered Spatial Demarcations among Meitei Society:

Despite the above mentioned facts and crucial contributions of women towards ascertaining their basic human rights, Meitei women continue to have different positions when it comes to social spheres. In *Politics, Society and Cosmology in India's North East*, Brara (1998) discusses about the rites and rituals for marriage, new born baby, death ceremony etc. Interestingly, it is observed that these rituals are practiced in separate form by both the men and women. If one looks through these rituals critically, women are meant or kept inferior to men, for example, in marriage the bride going around the groom and offering him flowers with folded hands symbolizes that the bridegroom is considered a god by the bride and it emphasizes the rise of patriarchal notions in the Meitei society.

In another ceremony called *Lai-Ikoubu*⁷, women play a very significant role. In this ceremony, a woman, who had married 'properly' with parental engagement, whose first born is a son, who is still alive, carries the pitcher to be filled with water from the river. This ritual emphasises on the purity of the woman who has to carry the pitcher and she should bear a son first. This signifies that Meitei society gives more importance to the patriarchal construct of gender roles and performances. A woman can attend such position if only she is virgin or have son. Another interesting culture or norm of Meitei is that man is compared with right

side which signifies the power and leadership whereas woman as left side which signifies weak and helping nature (Brara, 1998). There is a clear distinction and segregation of males and females in social congregations in the Meitei society. These spatial demarcations are maintained during the rituals of birth, marriage, death, in the placement of the rooms in the house structure and even in the sleeping arrangement of the husband and the wife. The author mentions that women in household and also in public space always stay on the left. In the arrangement of the house also after the birth of a female child the placenta is buried on the left side of the house, while in the case of male child it is buried on the right side of the house. The kitchen a place exclusively used by the women of the household is also on the left side of the house. The household Goddess *Leimaren Sidabi*, being a female, is placed on the left side of the house while Sanamahi, the male household deity is placed on the right side. It is only during the marriage ceremony also the bride's party is seated on the right while the groom's party on the left. Since the bride's family hosts the marriage ceremony, they are given a superior position. Left is also associated with impurity, defilement, death and inauspiciousness. Right on the other hand is associated with purity, life and auspiciousness.

These lived experiences show the contradiction in the representation of the Manipuri women as claimed/ understood. There is, therefore, a need of a critical study to know the actual status of the Manipuri women with regards to their empowerment and representation in the contemporary context. It is evident from the lived experiences cited above that though ordinary Manipuri women played a prominent role in the public political sphere, they continue to occupy inferior position compared to men.

The literatures of Manipur women's movement are also do not justify the social status of women as it is wholly occupied by the insurgency issues. There is little focus on the

women's status within the state, community and society of Manipur. There is need for research on the status of women in its political, social and economic spheres of Manipur to bring out the real scenario of women's life in Manipur and to help in forming legislations which will help in bringing gender equality in Manipur. This present study is as attempt to take a step towards establishing an alternative history of women's life by looking into the practices of chenba marriage.

1.3.3. Locating a Shift in the Framework of Marriage Studies:

The study on the marriage institution has always been on defining kinship, alliance, affinity, consanguinity, etc. Fox (1967) in *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective* describes the interrelation of kinship system and the marriage rules. He says that kinship and marriage is about birth, copulation and death. He circulates that kinship and marriage can be reduced to four basic principles”

- the women have the children
- the men impregnate the women
- the men usually exercise control, and
- primary kin do not mate with each other.

These four principles are the root of all marriage rules and family structure and these are basic ways in which a family can spread from generation to another generation through matrilineal or patrilineal or cognitive.

Then, there comes a shift in the study of kinship and marriage when Uberoi (1994) brings out the significance of polyandry in Kerala. She divides the discussion of types of marriage into two 1) the Nayar System 2) Polyandry. She opines that the kinship system of

the matrilineal Nayers of the central Kerala is famous in comparative anthropology as a test-case for examining general theories regarding the nature of the human family, the institution of marriage and matrilineal and specific theories of the relation between kinship and caste status in India as this is articulated through marriage. Nayar marriages could be simultaneously polygamous and polyandrous, and the social role of fatherhood has been reduced to a minimum. However, two important and universally recognised functions of marriage are in fact evident in Nayar case too; that is a) the establishment of relations of affinity between exogamous social group, and b) the establishment of the legitimacy of children. Moreover, anthropologists suggested that the definition of marriage should be modified to accommodate the features of the Nayar case that the fact that social and biological paternity may be shared among a number of different men which is the tali-tying partner and the sambhandham partner or partners and the fact that Nayar marriage is polyandrous from the viewpoint of women and polygamous from that of men. Uberoi says that polyandry is found in many places such as among some Hindu communities of Himalayas, among the tribal Todas of South India and among a number of groups in Kerala but for whatsoever reason in an andocentric bias in traditional anthropology, anthropologists have usually viewed polyandry as a phenomenon requiring special explanation in a way that monogamy or polygyny do not and it remains elusive.

However, Kaur & Palriwala (2014) opine that in the last two decades feminist started looking at the marriage system from different point of view. It brings out the women's position in the marriage system and the family, how women are kept subordinate in the patriarchal family.

Kumar (2014), in *Transgressions, Accommodations and Change: Configuring Gender and Sexuality within Marriage Practices of the Kolams*, draws out that the ideology of kinship among the traditional hoe cultivators of Kolam (Kolam is one of the tribes settled in the Central part of India) never emphasised upon the virginity and purity of women. In spite of gender hierarchy practised among Kolam community, such as sexual division of labour, elaborates rules of menstrual taboo and men asserting physical prowess, both men and women have enjoyed several sexual freedom. There is an evidence of deviance from the prescribed sexual norms by men and women such as pre-marital sex relatively free mixing sexes, extra-marital affairs, etc. Kolam women are not subjected to violence in case of pre-marital or extra-marital pregnancy. She is either married off to that man who is responsible for the act, or the man is heavily fined if he is found guiltier than the woman. However, such marriage is limited among the Kolam community only. They do not encourage inter-community marriage.

Vatuk (2014) brought out the changes in marital alliance pattern among the South Indian Sunni Muslims of the Nawwayat Qaum of Madras (now Chennai). She has done a study of the past nine to ten generations of the Nawwayat Quam. She observes that the manner of arranged marriages have considerably changed over the past thirty to forty years in terms of providing opportunity to the young people of both sexes to give inputs into their choice of life partner. However, at the same time endogamy is still widely practised. Amin and Das (2014) conducted a study on the rising dowry demands in Bangladesh. They found that women who did not pay any dowry have more control over their choices and decisions than women who paid dowry. They also observed that education is in general associated with a lower likelihood of paying dowry and with a lower likelihood of an early marriage.

The above review of literatures on marriage institutions provides us different shades of marriage institutions such as practice of matrilineal in Kerala, providing platforms to make choice among the young people, transgressions in women's sexuality, etc. The purpose of this study is an attempt to bring out the gender nuances in chenba marriage which will help us to understand the women's position in Meitei community.

1.4 Rationale of the study:

1.4.1. The Researcher's Location:

The researcher is one of the Meitei women who got the privilege to come out from Manipur and be educated at the other states of India. She has specialised in Gender Studies and during the course of my study on Gender Studies, the researcher has found out those Northeast women, especially Manipuri women, have a lot to say on their contribution for the social welfare. There are literatures on the role of Manipuri women in its political, social and economic spheres. However, these literatures are not fully accessible to the mainstream India. In fact, Zama (2013) has opined that the literature from the Northeast region have undergone historical and political trauma of untold sufferings and marginalisation, registers various voices that need to be heard and understood in the context of India's multicultural mosaic. On the other hand, the existing literatures on Meitei women glorify the contributions made by these women for the welfare of the state. It is disheartening because these literatures represented only one facet of the Meitei women. While the researcher agrees that Meitei women are very aware of their role in political, social and economic spheres of the state, at the same time, it cannot shy away from the fact that Meitei women are not far from the victimisation from the patriarchal state and family. This observation is further strengthened by

the critical views that establish the fact that Meitei women have become victim of rape in the hand of the state government (Gill, 2010). National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-2006) also has found out that forty percent of the Manipuri women faced domestic violence. Therefore, the researcher feels that we need to carry out an in depth study on the social status of Meitei women. A critical study on the chenba marriage can shed light on the status of women in Manipur. This can help to gain a holistic understanding of the role of Meitei women in the society.

1.4.2. Difference between Chenba and Elopement

The concept of chenba in Meitei community is very different from the concept of elopement in the mainstream Indian society. Not only there is lack of study in the chenba marriage in Meitei community, there is also a need for an in-depth study to know about chenba marriage. This needs to define the significance and analysis of studying this marriage practice in Meitei community that is different from the elopement marriages in other parts of India. Though it is perceived in Meitei community that chenba liberates both boy and the girl to choose their own partners and this liberty is given equally to both the couple, this so called liberty can become an instrument to manipulate Meitei women into decisions that are not their choices. A Girl's decision of choosing her partner and the decision of eloping can be violated by the boy. This call for a need to critical analyse the couple's decision for elopement, whether the couple eloped with the girl's consent or the girl has been forced or manipulated to elope and face the consequences.

This study has attempted to study how chenba is different from elopement, the significance of chenba in Meitei community, and how this culture of chenba affects women

and men. The rituals will be analysed critically to look through the gender lens to find out that how the rituals in chenba marriage socialised the couple into gendered division of roles of husband and wife. It will also focus on how the liberty of choosing their own partners with their choice is being distorted and force the girl to marry the same guy (who elope her). This study will also attempt to ascertain whether the chenba happens with or without the consent of girl and how her sexuality is threatened. Further it will also study whether chenba marriage cuts across the caste and religion of Meiteis and find out the consequences as it is restricted in Meitei community. In doing so, this study will also look into the laws which deal with chenba marriage and critically analyse its significance in settling any types of disputes that happen in chenba.

Above all, this study will also help in collating information on Meitei women's inferior status in the family and in the state at large, and also will help in bridging the gap between the emerging literatures of the Northeast with the mainstream literatures of India.

1.5 Theoretical framework on gender in Chenba Marriage:

The theoretical framework of this study on a critical analysis on chenba marriage in Meitei community is based on some of the seminar works as discussed in this section.

In *Sexual Politics*, Millett (1968) brings out the relevance of patriarchal bias in the literary works of D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Norman Millet. Here, by 'politics', Millett means the power structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of person is controlled by another (pp 23) and she opines that sex is a status category with political implications.

Millett (1968) argues that, sexual politics is evolved through the ‘socialization’ of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics about status, temperament and role. She further explains that there is pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superior status, as in temperament, it involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category that is ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’. By sex role, she opines that it is a role which decrees a consonant and highly elaborated code of conduct, gesture and attitude for each sex and as well assigned domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female and the rest achievement, interest and ambition to the male.

When we talk about patriarchal domination of men over women, we cannot neglect the role of kinship, caste, culture and religion. *Patriarchy*, by Geetha. V (2007), published in the series of the book *Theorizing Feminism* edited by Krishnaraj. M brings out how the concept of patriarchy is different from the western world. Geetha. V (2007) opines that in India patriarchy is ingrained with the kinship structures and the caste system. She further opines that the subordination of women in India is confirmed by the patriarchal control over the women’s production and reproduction which is again complicated with the disposition of patriarchy with the norms and values practiced inside the household, kinship and caste. These norms have a bearing on how women have to eat, work and whom they love and marry and importantly socialized them into particular sorts of roles (pp.71). Further, she says that masculine and feminine values are acquired normative value through our day-today functions. Our cultural practices make these values to be normative and we also inherit them.

Mukhim (2019), one of the prominent feminists from the Northeast of India, brings out the male domination in the matrilineal society of Khasi. Mukhim (2019) explains that women in matrilineal Khasi are not necessarily better off nor naturally empowered. Women are not

appreciated to participate in the political sphere as a decision- maker and they are used by the male as a mere political agent during campaign. To overcome this discrimination, Mukhim (2019) opines to relook into the traditional institutions and rectify those norms and values which are perpetuated through these institutions that devalue the participation of women in the decision-making processes. Until and unless these institutions are rectified, gender equality is far yet to come.

Ao (2013) in her *Benevolent Subordination: Social Status of Naga Women* expresses the difficulties of positioning Naga women's oppressive status at the front as there are no 'tangible' issues of 'abuse' of women like dowry-deaths, physical abuse or mandatory wearing of burqas and the women becoming the 'exclusive property' of the husband after marriage. Naga women are given secondary roles both in public and private affairs. Girls need to stay back at home and help the parents on the farm so that their brothers could get higher education in cities and it was not considered as 'sacrifice' but the 'duty'. During the public meetings, women make tea for the male members and have no role in the actual decision-making process. Ao also opines that the sub-ordinate position of Naga women is determined by cultural traditions that have governed Naga society for centuries. To overthrow it there is a need for revolution. To start this revolution, first Naga women have to believe into own self so that she could realise that she has been excluded from birthright as a Naga citizen. She adds the opposition to such a vision of Naga Society is mind-boggling and two-pronged. The obvious opposition will be from men but equally from a section of women who are themselves still traditionalists. Ao suggests that cultural impediments to social change can never be removed by legislation alone but to start reformation from the grassroots level that is the village polity.

These theoretical understandings, that is, Millett, 1968; Geetha.V 2007; Ao, 2013; and Mukhim 2019, help us to realise the patriarchal nature of the Meitei community in terms of temperament, status and role of both men and women concerning. Even though there are opinions that Meitei women have elevated status (Chaki-Sircar, 1984; Ghosh and Ghosh, 1997; Devi, 2001), I reiterate that observation that those literatures have not reflected the realistic scenario of Meitei society in a gender sensitive way. So far, I would reflect that the works of literatures on Manipur have not been able to bring out the genuine voices of Meitei women and their sufferings.

This present study would bring out how both women and men are bound with the social norms and roles and by practicing these social norms make the men superior and women subordinate in the Meitei community. Moreover, we would also examine whether kinship and caste have any roles in chenba marriage.

In *Sexual Politics*, Millett (1968) demonstrates that the languages used for the sexual act of women subjugate women's position which shows the power structure of patriarchy. She opines that the question of with whom and under what circumstances women are permitted to engage in sex is an essential part of the patriarchal power structure. She further argues that women are never their agents but they are commodities silenced by the freedom of men to sexually possess them.

The chenba marriage is also very much relevant to the act of sexual politics. We are made to believe that in chenba both the partner has the equal right of decision to choose their partners and to elope. However, it is found that women are forced to elope and are prone to be sexually exploited. Once a woman stayed a night with a man at some other place, she is taken

as eloped by that man and taken as no longer a virgin. In the Meitei community, once woman loses her virginity before marriage is ostracized by society and no men accept her for marriage. Men take the advantage of women's sexuality to manipulate them into the marriage. Her sexuality thus is used against her and therefore her agency to choose a partner is invalidated. If she does not get married after the chenba then she and her family will have to face stigma for the rest of their life. However, the man is free from stigma for his sexual activity. His virginity is not taken into account. He can marry any girl whether he is a virgin or not. In this way, women's decision is silenced under the power structure of patriarchy.

1.6 Research questions:

The major questions that this study attempts to raise and stay with are:

- 1) What is the role of chenba in the present and past of the Meitei community? Does chenba happen with the consent of a girl? What are the reasons that make the girl marry the guy who eloped her without her consent? What are the consequences if the marriage is canceled after the chenba?
- 2) Is there any customary law or constitutional law to deal with the problems regarding the chenba marriage?
- 3) Does chenba marriage in the Meitei community carry the same status of elopement in mainstream society? Does chenba give equal liberty to both the couple to choose their partner? Does chenba emancipate or victimize women?

1.7 Objectives:

- 1) To study the rituals of chenba marriage of the Meitei community through a gender lens,
- 2) To look into the laws that deal with the chenba marriage,
- 3) To find out the impact of chenba marriage on Meitei women,
- 4) To study the changes regarding the status of the couple in the family hierarchy within the ambit of chenba marriage, and,
- 5) To bring out a new dimension of the concept of elopement marriage to mainland India.

1.8 Scope of the study:

As chenba is culturally accepted in the Meitei community there is no such particular place where chenba is not practiced in Manipur where Meiteis are settled. Therefore, to avoid the ambiguous nature of the samples, the sample was collected based on the highest population density in Manipur. According to the 2011 census, Imphal West is the highest populated district in Manipur where Meitei has the highest population. This district is divided into four sub-divisions in which Lamphelpat Sub-division has the highest population. Keisampat Leimajam Makha Leikai is one of the localities of the Lamphelpat Sub-division and it is chosen as a research field area for the data collection. This field area is chosen according to the accessibility for collecting data. There are one hundred and seventy houses settled at Keisampat Leimajam Makha Leikai and there are one hundred and twenty four couples had chenba marriage (this number of marriages is applicable only to the duration of

data collection). All these one hundred and twenty four couples were interviewed. Separated women, divorced women and widow who have had chenba marriage are separately included in the case study depending on the sensitivity of the nature of their chenba.

1.9 Methodological Framework:

This is an ethnographic study of chenba marriage in the Meitei Community. The methods adopted for the study are both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Purposive sampling was used, whereas only those couples who had chenba marriage were selected deliberately so that the study can be carried out with the best result. One hundred and twenty-four couples as respondents were taken purposively who have done chenba marriage and thirteen case studies of married, separated and divorced women and including their parents have been collected. Moreover, colloquial terms are used in writing to get the nuances of the meaning or the emotion of the Meitei marriage ceremony. These indigenous terms, when used in for the first time, is kept in italics for easy understanding. Thereafter, the same terms are used in the normal font and style.

1.9.1 Methods used for the data collection:

A semi-structured interview schedule was conducted to collect regarding the chenba marriage. This semi-structured interview schedule was used to get quantitative and qualitative data about the respondents. Case study was also used to collect in-depth information about the chenba marriage. The key informant tool was also used to get information regarding the functions of chenba marriage and the rituals associated with it. The observation method was used to collect the data in which participatory observation helped to get information about the ritual processes and customs practiced during a marriage ceremony.

1.10 Sources of the Study:

Both primary and secondary data is collected for conducting the study. Primary data includes the data collected from the semi-structured interview schedule, case studies, and the participant observation on chenba marriage. The secondary data includes all the literature collected from books and articles related to the form of marriage, gender and culture.

1.11 Fieldwork experience:

After a thorough review of the Meitei community and the marriage systems, a pilot study was conducted at Keishampat during the month of September 2014. Two families were chosen for conducting a pilot study, which has the highest number of family members in the households of the Keishampat Leimajam Leikai to know the density of the chenba marriage within the single family. In these two families, the first family consists of forty-seven members and the second family consists of twenty-seven members. In the first family, there are twelve married women and two widows and in the second family, there are nine married women and one widow. All the women in the first and second families got married through chenba except one woman of the second family who got arranged marriage. This pilot study shows that Meitei people prefer chenba marriage more than other forms of marriage. Among these thirty-two women, five case studies were also collected. These case studies represent various nuances of chenba marriage such as inter-caste marriage, inter-ethnic marriage, women victims of chenba marriage, etc. The data collected for the pilot study also includes women of different ages, ranging from fifteen to seventy. This variation of ages of the women shows that chenba is practiced across age groups and carried out from generation to generation. The pilot data raised several questions like the inter-caste marriage, encountering

the clan endogamy, abduction of girls, force marriage, stigmatization, the question of chastity, etc. which should be concentrated on to understand the structure and the reflection of chenba marriage. The pilot study data proves the significance of this critical study.

Another field visit was conducted from the month of October 2015 to January 2016. For Meitei people, the months of the later half of October, November, December and the first half of January are the most auspicious months for conducting marriage ceremony. Therefore, a field visit was conducted during these months to observe and to witness the rites and rituals of the marriage ceremony of Meitei. One can find two to three marriage ceremonies in a week in every village. Chenba marriage is conducted on the even dates of the month and also on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday as Meitei regards these days as an auspicious day for conducting marriage ceremony. During these marriage months, there is heavy traffic in the afternoon caused by the processions of grooms coming from different places and in the evening by the processions of brides.

In the field area, the researcher has attended two marriage ceremonies of Meitei Hindu and another Meitei Marup. The rites and rituals performed in these two groups of Meitei are slightly different. The rites and rituals performed in the Meitei Hindu marriage ceremony are upgraded from the Meitei Marup marriage ceremony. The details of these rites and rituals are explained vividly in the following chapters.

During this field visit, the researcher also met the key informants and the scholars, *arangbam*⁸, *Nat Sankritan Pala*⁹, to get in-depth information about the rituals of the marriage ceremony.

The experience while interacting with the respondents for collecting quantitative data and case studies gives me a mixed feeling. Most of the respondents were feeling nostalgic recalling their memories of chenba and retelling it. However, those respondents who were abducted and forced into marriage felt remorse and anger about the incident. They could not stand for their voice and silenced them for the sake of the family honour. They were married off to their abductor. They carry a heavy heart when they encounter the question of how they got married. However, trying to console by them blaming their fate to live their life peacefully.

1.12 Chapterisation:

1.12.1 Introduction:

The introduction chapter will deal with the concept of elopement marriage worldwide and particularly in the Meitei community. This chapter will also consist of the literature survey of both books and articles on marriage, the Meitei community and women in elopement marriage. It also consists of the significance of the study, research questions, objectives, methodological framework and the scope of the study and fieldwork experience.

1.12.2 The Evolution of Chenba Marriage in Manipur:

This chapter will deal with the ethnographic profile of the Meitei such as the origin of Meitei, their clans, caste and religion. Folklores of Meitei in the context of love stories, a depiction of chenba, love songs and further the depiction of chenba in the Manipuri movies from 1980 to 2014. Chenba marriage before the arrival of Hinduism in Manipur explains the marriage rituals, customs of the bride and groom, etc. Chenba Marriage after the arrival of Hinduism in Manipur. In this section, it explains the changes or the additions in the ritual of

chenba marriage which are influenced by Hinduism.

1.12.3 Customary Laws of Marriage and Family Meitei Community:

This chapter brings out the features of the existence of clan endogamy (clan endogamy is restricted) because of chenba marriage, inter-caste and inter-religious marriage and its consequences, decision for the marriage ceremony, chenba and social legislation such as underage marriage, abduction and police case, property rights, etc. Other miscellaneous features such as: education, occupation, the reason for chenba and decision-maker in the family, etc.

1.12.4 The Rituals of Chenba Marriage:

This chapter explains the stages of rituals performed in chenba marriage and the significance and how these rituals are gendered. Some of the rituals performed during the marriage ceremony are found objectification of women, they are in a subordinate position, the gendered division of labour, etc. It also analyses the gender roles through the languages used in the chenba marriage.

1.12.5 Case study:

This chapter recorded thirteen case studies which are based on the sensitivity of the nature of chenba. Here, twelve case studies are the cases in which different women have gone through different forms of chenba without their consent and the thirteenth case study is taken from the parents who reported to the police about the chenba of their minor daughter. This chapter analyses these case studies through a gendered lens.

1.12.6. Conclusion:

This chapter will deal with the conclusion on the findings of the study on chenba marriage with the recommendations and suggestions from the researcher for the complete study.

Notes:

1. The feminism which focus on the urban, English speaking upper class and upper caste of India.
2. Mainland in this thesis represent the states of India excluding the North-Eastern states of India as the states in the North- East of India are seen as having different culture and tradition from the other part of India.
3. Meithei and Meitei are synonymous. The difference in spelling of 'Meithei' and 'Meitei' might be because of the influence of the British accent.
4. Patcha Loishang means women's court where women related cases were taken up and settled. This court was headed by Queen Linthoingambi wife of King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba who ascended the throne of Manipur in 33AD.
5. Nupi-Lal is a women's movement that brought changes in the administration of Manipur during British rule. The first Nupi-Lal occurred during 1904, agitating against the British order to send the men folk to Kabow (one of the valleys of Burma) and bring teakwood to rebuild the house of the Assistant Superintendent which was burnt down by some unknown people. Again during 1939, these women groups fought against the exportation of rice by the malware businessmen and the king of Manipur.
6. Maibi is a priestess who performed the rituals of Lai haraoba which is a prime ritual of the ancient Meitei religion performed annually from five days to one month by almost all the villages in the valley of Manipur.
7. Lai-Ikouba is a ritual which is performed on the first day celebration of Lai haraoba.

8. Arangbam is a professional group of people who arranged and help to carry out the marriage ceremony.

9. Nat Sankritan Pala is a group of professional singers for marriage or death or any other types of ceremonies consisting of four singers and two Dhulok players.

Chapter 2

The Evolution of Chenba Marriage in Manipur

A comprehensive nuances of the chenba marriages in the Meitei community requires a framework, outlining the social setting and ethnographic profile of this community. An overview of the social setting or ethnographic profiling will enable us to gain insights into the origins, culture, behaviour and lifestyle of the Meiteis. It will also prove to be of assistance in obtaining specific information about the modes in which chenba has influenced and been influenced by various aspects of the community such as its rituals, religion, caste and clan. This chapter is designed to provide with that comprehensive outline.

2.1. Introducing the Meitei:

With a population of over 27.2 lakh, the Meitei constitutes the largest community in Manipur, a state situated in the North Eastern part of India, consisting predominantly of valleys and hills. With an area of 22,327 sq. km and a population of 27,93,896 (2011 census), Manipur is surrounded by Nagaland in the north, Mizoram in the south, Myanmar in the east and Assam in the west. Manipur is populated with Meitei in valley and 29 major tribes in the hills. During the early 20th century a steady migration of Nepali and other communities of India had started and settled in Manipur.

2.1.1. Origin Story of the Meitei: Facts and Myths:

The origin of the Meitei community is still contested owing to the prevalence of conflicting narratives about the same. The history of Meitei is obscured because the records of kings who ruled Manipur began to be maintained in a systematic way only from the reign of

King Kyampa in the year 1485 CE. The chronicle of King Kyampa, called *Cheitharon Kumpapa*, records the events that transpired in the state during the reign of various kings until the end of kingship in 1955. Cheitharol kumpapa is the only source of information of the historical records of Manipuri left after burning down all the puyas by King Khagemba in the advent of conversion to Hindu religion.

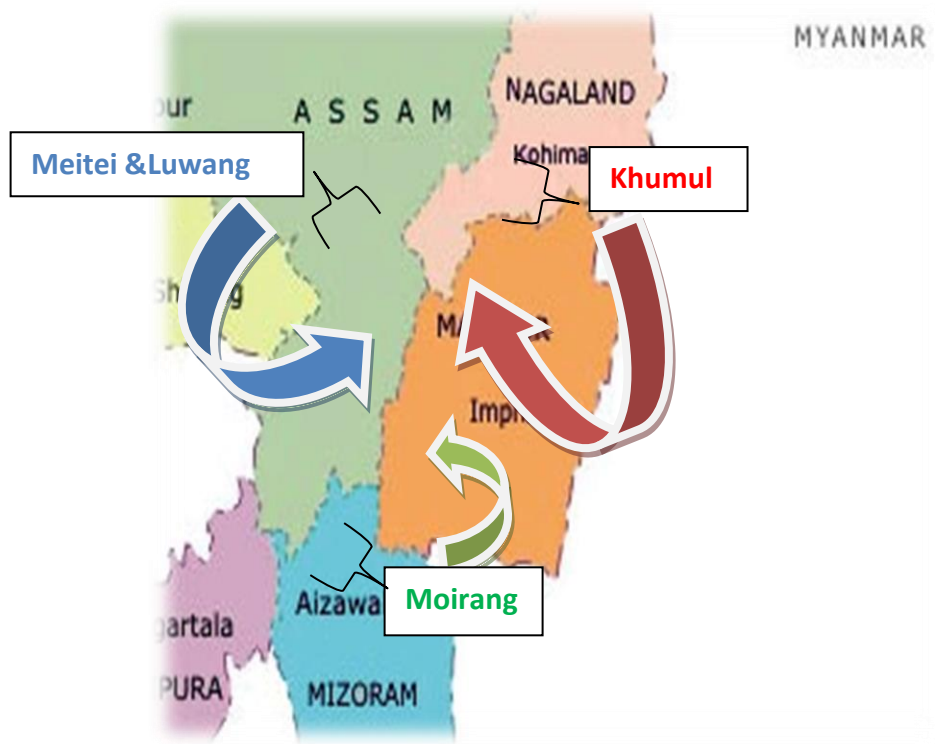
One of the theories of the origin of the Meitei is that the Meitei race originated from the Naga and Kuki tribes who were settled in the hills surrounding Manipur. Colonial British anthropologists, McCulloch (1980) and Hudson (1989), claimed that the Meitei are the descendents of the tribes of Manipur. In *Valley of Manipur*, Mc Culloch (1980) writes:

From the most credible traditions, the valley appears originally to have been occupied by several tribes, the principal of which were named Khumul, Luang, Moirang and Meithei, all of whom came from different directions. For a time, the Khumul appears to have been the most powerful. But by degrees, the Meiteis subdued the whole and the name Meithei has become applicable to all the Moirang tribe from the south to the direction of the Kookies, the Khumul from the east to the direction of the Murrings and the Meiteis and Luang from the north-west to the direction of the Koupoous.’ (4)

A map describing the migration of the Meitei according to Mc Culloch (1980) is provided below (Figure3: Meitei Migration)

Figure 3

Meitei Migration



Note. Map 3: Meitei migration (source: prepared by the researcher based on the information given by Saha, 1994)

In support of the claim that the origin of Meitei is from the surrounding tribes of Manipur, Hudson (1989) asserts:

The ceremony denominated Phumbankaba or ascending the throne, is performed in Naga dress, both by the Rajah and Ranee, and the Yim Chau, or great house, the original residence of the Meithei Chief, is, though he does not now reside in it, still kept up, and is made in the Naga fashion.(6)

The choice of Naga dress and the influence of Naga architecture in the Yim Chau point to a possible connection between the two communities. Meitei community seems to be attracted to Naga customs and traditions, indicating that the community might originally have been the Naga tribes who migrated later.

However, Grierson. G.A. (1968), Pemberton. R.B. (1979), Dun.E. (1992) and Sanajaoba. N. (1988) has different opinions about the origin of the Meitei. They claim that since the Meitei speaks Tibeto-Burman or Sino-Tibetan, they migrated to India from China. Grierson. G.A. (1968) opines that:

the Meiteis belonged to the Tibeto-Chinese dialect speaker group. This means that Meiteis belong to the Tibeto-Chinese and their origin was at the beginning part of the Chinese rivers like Yangtze and Hoiang-Ho in China. And they spread up to Irrawady and Chindwin River Bank. And some of them had spread to the Himalaya hills range and some others had gone through the bank of the Brahmaputra in Assam and settled. (92)

In the *Gazetteer of Manipur*, Dun. E. (1992) portrays the Meitei to be the descendants of the inhabitants of the Tartar colony in China who migrated during the conflict between the Pong dynasties. Pemberton. R.B. (1970) *The Eastern Frontier of India* corporate this line of thought and asserts that they had intermarried with the hill people in the area. He says:

the Muneepoorees of the present day, we may safely conclude [them] to be the descendants of a Tatar colony, which probably emigrated from the North west borders of China during the sanguinary conflicts for supremacy, which took place between the

different members of the Chinese and Tatar dynasties, in the 13th and 14th centuries.

(36)

In support to Gereison. G.E. (1968), Dun. E. (1992) Pemberton. R.B. (1979), Sanajaoba. N. (1988) in '*The Roots*', an essay from the book *Manipur: Past and Present*, Vol.4 opines that the Meiteis are Tibeto-Burman speakers from South East Asia, representing a unique South East Asian personality through the ages since the Palaeolithic age till the contemporary period. Further, he challenges Mc Culloch and Hudson, asserting that the Meitei, being one of the tribes who came to Manipur from China, share fraternal ties with the Naga and Kuki-Chins, and therefore, they possess similar cultural features and traditions.

In yet another account of the origin of Meitei, Vaishnavite scholars opine that they are the offspring of Arjun and Chitrangada of the *Mahabharata*. Hudson, quoting from Brown, argues "although the general facial characteristics of the Manipuri are of the Mongolian type, there is a great diversity of features amongst them, some of them showing a regularity approaching the Aryan type. Among both men and women the stature is very various, differing about as much as is found among Europeans.'(2). Hudson (1989) rejected the very idea of Aryan influence on Meitei. Sanajaoba. N. (1988) also asserts that although certain Aryan traits are found in the tribe, the Meiteis are predominantly Mongolian. He says: 'One of the evidence is that every Meitei or Naga or Kuki-Chin infant would have a blue patch birth-mark of Mongolian origin at its buttock. This evidence would be missing in other population groups having a different racial heritage' (4). However, the claim made by Sanajaoba. N (1988) is highly questionable as there are many infant born without the birth-mark among the Meitei, Naga and Kuki.

Apart from scientific and historical records about the origin of Meitei, there are also various myths which explicate the origin of this community. In *Politics, Society and Cosmology in India's North East*, Brara (1998) provides detailed accounts of these myths:

Myth 1: Atingkok (Father Void) is the Supreme Being. He, along with his consort Amamba, (left-side of Atingkok), told Atiya Sidaba (Immortal Sky Father) and his consort Leimaren Sidabi (Mother Earth who lives seven layers below the earth) to create the world on earth. Atiya Sidaba had two sons– Asiba and Konchin Tingthokpa. Atiya Sidaba then told the two sons to go around the universe seven times to attain knowledge. While Ashiba, being physically stronger, literally went around seven times, Kochin Tingthokpa on being advised by his mother went around his father's throne seven times. Lord Atiya Sidaba, pleased with his younger son's wisdom, conferred the title Pakhangba (the one who knows his father) on him. He became the complete incarnation of his father. Since then, he is also referred to as Atiya Sidaba. The elder son Asiba was told to create the physical world. Ashiba created nine highlands, Nonglen, and nine lowlands, Leirol, the moon, stars and rivers. He was also named as Sanamahi and became a household deity for protection from all evils. For creating human beings, Atiya Sidaba sought the help of Atingkok. Atingkok opened his mouth and showed him the world of living beings. With tremendous joy, Atiya Shidaba drew out the living beings from inside the mouth of Atingkok.

Myth 2: Another version says that Atingkok manifested himself in two beings. His right side became Lainingthou (King of Gods) also known as Atiya Sidaba and his left side became Lairembi. They became the supreme *Pa* and *Pi* (father and mother) of the whole world. *Pa* and *Pi* had their male and female divine associates also as manifestations of the supreme. This concept of *Pa* and *Pi* is also mentioned with reference to the Sky God and Mother Earth.

Their copulation along with the elements of fire, water and air is believed to have created human beings.

There are many more different myths which explain the formation of human by the God of Meitei. These different versions of the myth itself implicate the different beliefs which were prevailed among the Meitei. This could be also because Meitei is formed by seven clans and each clan has its different perspectives of human origin.

In the past Manipur, the Meitei are a group of people comprising nine *salais* (clans), namely the Ningthouja, the Khuman, the Luwang, the Angom, the Moirang, the Khaba, the Nganba, the Sarang and the Leisangthem (Basanta.N, 2007). These salais inhabited different areas in Manipur and were autonomous entities. Over time, the Ningthouja salai became politically powerful, gradually absorbing the other clans, forming a united group called the Meitei. Later, the Khaba and the Nganba merged to form the Khanganba salai. The Sarang and the Leisangthem merged to form the Sarangleisanthem and become politically strong. Therefore, at the present, there are seven salais in Meitei, namely the Ningthouja, the Khuman, the Luwang, the Angom, the Moirang, the Khanganba and the Sarangleisangthem.

2.2. Interrogating the Influence of Manipuri Folklore on Chenba Marriages

Love marriages existed in the Meitei community since time immemorial, as evidenced by the folk songs, tales and folk dances of the community. The love story “Khamba Thoibi”, which is about the seven incarnations of a couple seeking the fruition of love in each birth, for example, has given rise to innumerable folk performances. The seven incarnations are called *Moirang Sayon*. These stories are narrated by a male crane called Pongba Hanba Kadaanba to his wife Wainu Mori Thoudanbi and their son. The story begins with the love story of

Henjunaha-Thongnang Lairulembi and then continues on to the tales of Samba Naha Lamganba-Khamnung Yaidingkonu, Wanglen Pudinghanba-Chakpram, Wainu Fishahaibi, Nganba-Sangloulembi, Khoyonhaoba-Yathingkonu, Khamba-Thoibi and Kadeng Thangjahanba-Tonu Laijinglembi.

In the story of Khamba and Thoibi, when Thoibi comes back from Burma to Moirang (her homeland), her father sends Nongban to escort her till home and plans Thoibi's marriage to Nongban. But Thoibi, who is in deep love with Khamba, tricks Nongban and escapes from him. Riding Nongban's horse, she came to Khamba's home and stays with him. When the king of Moirang, who is Thoibi's paternal uncle, is informed of the incident, he expresses his approval and arranges for their marriage. Although the story does not mention chenba specifically, Thoibi escaping Nongban and staying with Khamba against her parents' wishes is indicative of the prevalence of chenba in the community.

The folktale *Panthoibi Khonkul* also attests to the existence of chenba among the Meiteis. There are many different stories mentioning Panthoibi (it is not the name of an individual woman. Beautiful, able, disobedient women are known as Panthoibi). In one such tale in Panthoibi Kongkul, Panthoibi and Nongpok Ningthou (the Sun God) fall in love at first sight. But they do not meet each other again or communicate further. Meanwhile, Panthoibi's father betroths her to Tarang Khoinucha, the son of the king of Kanglei and they get married. After their marriage, one day, Panthoibi and Nongpok Ningthou meet again and reveal their love for each other. Although Nongpok Ningthou requests Panthoibi several times to elope with him, she refuses. Panthoibi's father-in-law comes to know of her relationship with Nongpok Ningthou and plans to admonish her. Knowing this, she elopes with her lover; her husband chases them in vain. At the end of the story, Panthoibi reveals her divine power and

turns into a goddess. She unites with Nongpok Ningthou at the Nongmaiching hill. These folktales reveal that romance between men and women as well as that between gods and goddesses were accepted with good will by the community. Such stories are narrated and performed in Manipur, have had a deep impact on the literature of the area and as well as on the people. It reinforces morals and values to the people. The moral of this story is to go against the social norms and achieve one's desire especially, for a woman she has to be more than a human. Further, it reinforces the very idea of women being called 'disobedient' if she does not accept and follow the rules set for her by her family. And to overcome such blame she has to be supernatural.

Another aspect which we can observe in 'Panthoibi Khongkul' is two important implications on chenba marriage. First, chenba marriage is associated with the divine figure, Panthoibi. Second, the women who are involved in chenba marriage are associated with 'disobedient' women. Therefore, the character as Panthoibi encourages the young generation of Meitei to ascertain their love life and at the same time it also gives a tag of 'disobedient' woman. In addition to this, in this story the character of Panthoibi is only criticized. The male character 'Nongpok Ningthou' did not received any criticism of being involved with a married woman. These stories show us the gender bias that is prevailed in the Meitei community. Here, we can raise a question that even though women who are involved in chenba marriage are called as disobedient why the youngsters prefer chenba for marriage.

The love life of these characters are frequently narrates in folksongs. There are three types of folksongs in Manipur namely 1) *Phamshak* 2) *Pena Khonglaga Sakpa Eshei* 3) *Dhulok Yeiraga Shakpa Eshei*. In *Phamsak*, the singer sits on the mat and claps while singing. In *Pena Khonglaga Sakpa Eshei*, the singer sings to the accompaniment of the *Pena* (a

traditional musical instrument of the Meitei community), and in *Dhulok Yeiraga Sakpa Esei*, the singer uses the *Dhulok*. These songs narrate the exploits of the kings of Manipur as well as love stories, especially those of Khamba-Thoibi. Folksongs of Khamba-Thoibi connect the people with love and harmony. It inspires youth to search for their love and encourage them to fight against any odds to unite with their lovers.

Manipuri folk narratives, through their idealisation of romance and love marriages, inspire the young generation to choose their partners by themselves. As a result, love marriages are very common in the area. There are two kinds of love marriages in Manipur: *Haina Singnaraga Luhongba* and chenba marriage or *chelhong* marriages, also known as chenba marriages. Although the three names for chenba marriages are similar in meaning, it is worthwhile to notice the nuances of their significations. ‘chenba’ means ‘elope’; in ‘chellaga luhongba’, ‘chellaga’ means ‘by eloping’ and in ‘luhongba’, ‘lu’ means ‘root’ and ‘hongba’ means ‘change’ – that is, the term literally means a change of root or clan through elopement. It also means ‘marriage’ –i.e., ‘marriage by elopement’. In ‘chelhong’ ‘chel’ which is the prefix of ‘chenba’ means ‘running’ and ‘hong’, the prefix of ‘hongba’ means ‘change’ or ‘marriage’, producing the same meaning.

2.3. Contemporary Media and Portrayal of Chenba

The depiction of love stories and chenba marriages is not limited to Manipuri folk narratives. Similar themes can be observed in Manipuri plays, especially in *Sumang Lila/ Kumhei* also known as courtyard play/ theater), and in movies such as *Olangthagi Wangmadasu* directed by Aribam Syam Sharma (1979), *Aroiba Bidai* directed by Okem

Amakcham (1999), *Nongalabasu Thabalei Manam* directed by Moirangthem Inao (2003) and *Luhongbagi Ahing* Directed by Bijgupta Laishram (2011)

Olangthagi Wangmadasu is one of the notable Manipuri films of the 1970's. It received a regional award for Best Feature Film in Manipuri Language at the 27th National Film Awards. This film shows the practice of chenba which is used as a way of escaping from the parental choice for the marriage. It is used to fulfill the desire to marry and live with their loved ones. Chenba also breaks the wall of class status. The conflicts in chenba are further portrayed in one of the Manipuri blockbuster movies of the 21st century titled *Nongalabasu Thabalei Manam* (2003). The movies show the significance of chenba in Meitei society. Further, it portrays how the desires of the couples are fulfilled by the existence of chenba. It is the escape way for the couples who are different status and achieved their destination. Chenba seems to be so easy and smooth however, it can also ruin the life of people. There is also the existence of chenba without consent. And in most of the time, women become the victim of such Chenba. In the earlier days of Meitei society, chenba without consent was termed as *Faraga Louba*. Faraga Louba is synonymous to abduction. However, the Meitei scholars claim that this Faraga Louba no longer exists in Meitei society (Basanta. N, 2010). However, this claim is questionable as one of the popular weekly magazines called *Nupi gi Pungsi* publishes a case of violence against women inflicted by many factors in which Faraga Louba is one of the factors and the term Faraga Louba is overshadowed by chenba. The popular digital Manipuri films also display the story of Faraga Louba of the heroine by the hero and she is forced to marry him.

Luhongbagi Ahing is one of the Manipuri digital movies released in 2011. It is a story about a man who is a rogue and abducts the heroine (Purnima) for marriage. Purnima's

parents are informed about the chenba of their daughter and they are accepted for marriage. But, she tells her mother that she did not elope with Koireng and he only abducted her. But as her father has already given his words for fixing marriage they did not listen to her plea and force her to marry Koireng. On the other hand, the films Olangthagi Wangmada and Nongalabasu Thabalei Manam bring out the nuances of chenba in the Meitei community which shows the positive side of the chenba culture where men and women are liberated to decide for their choice of partner. It also shows the existence of inter-class marriage even though the couple has to overcome the challenges and disagreements between their respective family members. The film Luhongbagi Ahing shows the negative side of chenba where man has the power to own a woman of his desire. In faraga chenba, instead of giving punishment or penalty to the criminal, it is always found out that both the family urges for solemnizing marriage ceremony. The revelation of faraga chenba is never brought to the people and the term faraga chenba is altered into chenba. Faraga chenba was accepted long back in Manipur however, after the modernization and the formation of the Indian constitution, the culture of faraga chenba is eradicated from the Meitei community. However, men still enjoy their power of owning the woman of his will and to abduct her. To protect woman's chastity and her family's honour, she is made to accept her marriage with her abductor.

As Meitei is a patriarchal society, the social norms and rules for men and women are structured according to the male power structure. As media has the power of moulding the public opinion on any situation, media plays a medium of reinforcing the stereotypical gender roles and helping in reaffirming the power structure of male dominance on women.

Further, the film industry of Manipur is dominated by men and the above mentioned films are directed by men which portray the patriarchal ideology. These films are the outcome

of the fantasy or desires of the director through which they have been moulding or perceiving the way of life which they have learned from their childhood. Therefore, mainstream films depict stereotypical gender roles.

2.4. Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community during Pre- 18th Century:

In order to understand the historical context of chenba marriage vividly, we need to divide the history in two categories that is pre and post 18th century. Because during 18th century there was a mass conversion of Meitei people into Vainavism under the order of the Meitei king Garibniwaz (Chaki-Sircar, 1984, pp. 104). This conversion brought many changes of rites and ritual in many ceremonies including marriage ceremonies (Brara, 1998, pp. 152-163). Therefore, it is important to understand the practice of chenba marriage in Meitei culture in both pre and post 18th century which will throw light to our understanding of the chenba marriage rituals.

As discussed earlier, chenba marriage, which is similar to Gandharba Vivaha has (one of the eight types of Hindu marriage), had been prevalent in the Meitei community from the time immemorial. However, in the ancient days, chenba was not considered as a prestigious form of marriage and the community often disapproved of such couples (Kulachandra, 2003, 20). Once the girl eloped with a boy, their marriage ceremony was not performed as they indulged in pre-marital sex which was not accepted in Meitei society. After chenba, the couple began living together at the boy's house because he is responsible for the girl's chastity. However, if the girl's family was rich and powerful, they insisted on conducting the wedding ceremony with all the traditional customs and rituals disregarding the norms of marriage rules.

The marriage ceremony was conducted in a very simple mode with the fathers of the bride and groom fixing a date for the marriage after the *chenba*. One or two days before the marriage, a ceremony called *Heijingpot*, where the marriage is announced to the public, was performed with rituals and offering to the deities. For this ceremony, the groom's family presents vegetables, fruits and sweets to the bride's family, which are then offered to the bride's clan god called '*Sagei Shallai Pokpa*' and the village god '*Lamlai*'. A key item in *Heijingpot* is '*Heijing Kharai*' –a basket for ritual use. This basket contains seven different fruits including *Heikru* (Amla), *Heining* (wild mango), *Heijang* (citron), a cluster of bananas in odd numbers when counted in pair, white sugarcane, *Heiruk* (goose berry) *Kwa Maru Mana* (betel leaves and areca nuts), *hamei*⁵, *Leisang* (*huperzia squarrosa*) and *Laiphi* (cloths for deity).

The offering of the fruits, including *heikru*, is symbolic of Meitei culture. Basanta. N. (2010) asserts that *heikru* is a reflection of the social status of Meitei women. In the Meitei community, *heikru* is regarded as the leader of all fruits. During the marriage ceremony, *heikru* also symbolises the purity of the bride. The groom's side offering fruits to the bride's side is a token of bride price, symbolic of the elevated status of women. Along with the *Heijing Kharai*, clothing and ornaments are brought for the girl and special sweetmeats are given to the bride and her friends. On this day, a bamboo pole is erected at the centre of the courtyard of the bride's house. This is called *Shumang Urong Khinba*. This reveals the popular perception of women as chattel, to be 'owned' by a man. 'Ownership' of the woman becomes essential for asserting the masculinity of the man and the possibility of another man taking her away is considered 'emasculatation' of the groom. The entrenched notions of femininity and masculinity are visible here. The marriage ceremony is performed at the

bride's home normally one or two days after the Heijingpot. During the marriage ceremony, the bride and groom wear traditional dresses of their choice as there is no prescribed dress or costume. The ceremony concludes with the exchange of the *Kwatanga* (betel nuts with pan leaf placed on two round pieces of banana leaf) between the fathers of the groom and bride. All the sweet meats brought by the groom side is distributed to all the guests who come to the ceremony. Five days after the wedding, *Mapam Chakouba* is organised at the bride's place. And the bridegroom and the groom's family members, relatives and friends are invited for a feast. Fish curry is the main dish for this ceremony and it is sponsored by the groom's family to share the financial burden of the expenditures. The wedding ceremony underwent some changes due to the influence of Hinduism in the community.

2.5. Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community Post 18th Century:

Hinduism produced immense transformations in the culture and tradition of the Meitei community. During the reign of King Garibniwaz in the 18th century, the king and his subjects converted from Sanamahism to Hinduism. People who followed the old Sanamahi religion were called the Meitei Marup and the people who adopted Hinduism were the Meitei Hindus. The conversion led to alterations in the rituals of the chenba marriage ceremony among the Meitei Hindus. Although the heijingpot rituals remained the same, new rituals were incorporated in the marriage ceremony as a result of the influence of Hinduism. For instance, the Nat Sankritan came to be performed. A new type of attire known as the *Potloi* was introduced for the bride and the groom was expected to wear *kurta* and *dhoti*. The exact year and time of introduction of the Nat Sankritan cannot be traced owing to lack of adequate historical records. However, the use of the potloi began after Raslila, during the time of King Bhagyachandra. Nat Sankritan is a kind of hymn praising Lord Krishna and Radha, sung

during prayers in temples. In due course of time, it came to pervade other ceremonies such as those related to death and marriage. In marriage ceremonies, Nat Sankritan is generally sung by male professional singers (see Figure 4); however, female singers have also begun reciting it now. In Meitei Marup marriages, hymns eulogizing Sanamahi and Leimarel, the deities of the community, are sung. In Meitei Hindu marriages, Nat Sankritan narrates a story in which Gourachandra Maha Prabhu visits Vrindavan and meets a man called Godhador, who looks like Radha. Seeing Godhador, Gourachandra Maha Prabhu remembers Radha and he visualises Lord Krishna and Radha with the *gopi*. The Nat Sankritan is a blend of Hindu and indigenous religious traditions, adopting elements from both. It emphasises the Meitei belief in God Pakhangba and his power and is performed by four singers and two *Pung* (a kind of two faced drum) players. The positions of the singers and drummers signify the structure of Pakhangba in popular depictions. In the Meitei community, Pakhangba is one of the supreme Gods and he is depicted in the form of a snake coiled into three rings and biting the tail, symbolising the formation of the organs in the human body (see Figure5). In Nat Sankritan, the movement of the singers and the Dhulok players follow the structure of the formation of Pakhangba. While performing the Nat Sankritan, they move in such way that the structure of Pakhangba is formed on the stage, symbolising the creation of the human body and its organs and the processes of birth and death. Therefore, Meitei marriages are considered as possessing a pure connection with the supreme divinity. Nat Sankritan is performed with immense devotion so that the couple may begin their conjugal life with Pakhangba's blessings.

Figure 4

Performance of Nat Sankritan in Chenba marriage ceremony



Note. WildFilmsIndia. (2014). Nupa Pala (Performance of Nat Sankritan in chenba marriage ceremony) Retrieved from https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DfbkS9_tYCF4&psig=AOvVaw3DqOMpQdLDMCCswgF2ISCu&ust=1638761915684000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAsQjRxqFwoTCKizoYTey_QCFQAAAAAdAAAAA BAT

The influx of Hindu belief systems can be observed in the bride's attire after the arrival of Hinduism in Manipur. Before Hinduism made its presence felt in the region, the bride used to wear a *Kajeng* on the head, a blouse with *enaphi* on the upper body and *mapannaiba phanek* for the lower body. Enaphi is a traditional shawl made of cotton and mapannaiba phanek is a garment wrap around the waist to cover the lower body part by women. (See Figure 6 Bride's attire in Meitei Marup marriage)

Figure 5

Pakhanba in the form of snake



Note. Pakhangba in the form of a snake image is collected by the researcher from field work.

Figure 6

Bride and groom in Meitei Hindu marriage



Note. Bride and groom in Meitei Marup marriage collected from field

The potloi was first introduced by Bhagyachandra Maharaj in the 18th century as the costume of gopis in *Rasa Lila* dance. The design of the potloi was adopted from the *Ghagra*, a dress worn by *dashis* at Brindaban. The king instructed the women designers of the palace to create a costume similar to the ghagra. The new dress, called the potloi, was worn for the first time by King Bhagyachandra's daughter for her wedding, making it a popular costume for Meitei brides in later years. Nowadays, brides of the Meitei Marup also wear potloi. This adoption of the potloi shows the cultural assimilation and acculturation that characterized the relationship between the Meitei Marup and the Meitei Hindu communities. (see Figure. 7: Bride's attire in Meitei Hindu marriage).

Figure 7

Bride and groom in Meitei Hindu marriage



Note. Bride and groom in Meitei Hindu marriage collected from field.

The ritual termed *lei taret koiba* in Meitei weddings can be equated with the *Sath Phere* in Hindu marriages. However, in *lei taret koiba*, the groom sits facing the *tulsi* plant planted at the centre of the courtyard and the bride walks around the groom clockwise. After the

completion of one round, she showers flowers on the groom and bows with folded hands. The process is repeated till the completion of seven rounds. This ritual signifies that the groom is the bride's god and that she is now a devotee. The male is always projected as the superior entity who should be worshipped. The devotee is almost without exception, a woman, signifying the subservience expected of women. Then the bride garlands the groom with a pair of garlands and then sits to his left side. The groom then takes one of these garlands and puts it around the bride's neck. The time of introduction of the lei taret koiba is uncertain. Kulachandra (2003) claims that this rite was adopted from Hindu marriages, imitating the sath phere of mainstream Hindu culture. However, in the book *Khamnung Ingaal Leisaba Hiyam-hayeechak* (Meitei, 1995) describes the performance of this rite during the marriage of Pakhangba and LaireimaThingba Ngambi, the supreme God and Goddess of Meitei. This shows that the ritual of lei taret koiba existed earlier before the contact with Hindus.

The rituals elaborated upon above are performed for both arranged marriages and chenba marriage. However, chenba marriage was not considered a respectable form of marriage in the olden days as it involves the copulation of the couple before their marriage which is prohibited in Meitei community and only a few people, especially those who were rich and powerful, conducted marriage rituals after the chenba. However, Nanjesh Thongbam (personal communication, August, 2016) claimed that with transformations in the social order – for instance, the shift from agrarian society to an industrial one – a majority of the people in the Meitei community began choosing the chenba marriage. The transformation in economic status accounts for this shift to a limited extent. With the modernisation of the Manipuri social order, class divisions among the Meitei people became very apparent, becoming one of the barriers to love marriages. To avoid it, young boys and girls began choosing chenba marriage.

Another reason for the booming of chenba marriages in the Meitei community is the relatively lower expenditure incurred in conducting the marriage ceremony.

2.6. Chenba Marriage and Inter-caste Marriage:

In the Meitei community there are severe restrictions on marriage between people of different castes. In Manipur, the Meitei and the Bamon are considered higher castes and the sub-caste, termed *Lois* is divided into two groups namely the *Chakpa* and the *Yaithibi*. There is no hierarchy among these clans except for the relatively higher status accorded to the Ningthouja. At present, these clans belong to the General and OBC categories (in Manipur, caste is designated according to yearly income). They are believers of either Hinduism or Sanamahi and follow exogamy.

The Loi/Chakpa are believed to be the ‘original’ Meitei. With the passage of time, the community has become more ‘Hinduized’; however, the Loi/Chakpa retain the customs, behaviour and religion of the ‘original’ Meitei. It is believed that the latter had been exiled by the king of Manipur to places far from the city and accorded the lowest status in the social ladder because of their refusal to convert into Hinduism. Another narrative centered on the Lois asserts that they were defeated in a fight with the Ningthouja and were driven out to the foothills as punishment. Designated as Loi, they later formed a separate ethnic group called the Loi/Chakpa, (Saha, 1994).

The Yaithibis, another social group in Manipur, also belonged initially to the Meitei community. Owing to their illicit and sometimes incestuous relationships, they were exiled by the king and accorded very low social status as untouchables. It is believed that there were marriages between stepsons and stepmothers and between cousins among the Yaithibis-

relationships which are unacceptable in the Meitei community. Now they have formed an autonomous ethnic category in Manipur.

During the 15th century, Brahmins migrated from Assam and Bengal to the Manipur valley (Saha, 1994). With the permission of the king of Manipur, they settled there and came to be known as the *Meitei Bamon*. Being close to the King, the Bamons enjoyed a high status in the Manipuri social order. The Meitei and the Bamon were equals in the caste hierarchy and they were expected to perform religious rituals and serve God. However, owing to the Bamons' zealotry and their fanatic attempts at proselytization, the native communities were hostile to them. In order to reduce the inimical attitude, the Bamons adopted some of the customs of the Meitei community. They began worshipping Lainingthou (the supreme God of Sanamahi) and Leimaren and built shrines for these deities in their houses. They also adopted Meitei food habits such as eating fermented fish, kangsoi, eromba, etc. Although they referred to themselves as Meitei, marriages between the Meiteis and the Bamons are still prohibited.

Since the Meiteis consider the Bamons as 'outsiders', intermarriages between people of these communities are not permitted. Caste endogamy is followed strictly. However, the prevalence of chenba makes it possible for a couple to elope and marry. When the couple of different caste elopes, they are often not accepted by their parents. If it happens so, even if the boy's parents do not approve of the girl, the boy's parents are obliged to arrange for a marriage ceremony. The parents arrange marriage as their son has eloped with her and the boy is responsible for taking away her chastity. However, the couple is punished by the groom's family for disobeying the norms of the respective communities. The groom is barred from attending rituals in any ceremony. The punishment is relatively harsher for the woman. She is

not permitted to serve her husband's family members and is prohibited from entering the kitchen until she bears a son as the first child. As the family lineage is carried through male, men are given importance than women. Therefore, bearing son as the first child will validate women to become part of her husband's family and its clans.

2.7. Chenba Marriage and Inter-religious Marriage:

The Meitei community comprises people belonging to four major religions - Sanamahi, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Sanamahi is the indigenous religion of the Meitei, practiced from ancient times among the Meitei. However the period of its origin is unknown because of the lack of archaeological evidence. During the end of the 15th century, there were mass conversions of the Meitei into Hinduism. Christianity came into Manipur in 1894.

Inter-religious marriages are also prohibited in the Meitei community. However, owing to the prevalence of chenba, these boundaries are being gradually dissolved. Evidence of inter-religion marriage through chenba marriage was found from the field visit (see Chapter 3, Table 11. Inter-religious Marriage in Chenba Marriage).

2.8. Influences of Colonisation, Education and Globalisation on Chenba Marriage:

Before the annexation of Manipur by the British, Manipur was an agrarian society and there was no formal education system. The Meitei education system emphasized more on the practical rather than the theoretical knowledge. At least one male member of every family was compelled to learn warfare and military education. This could be obtained from the scholars who were at the Department of Scholars which was established at the *Kangla* (capital of Manipur) or else from their elders. On the other hand, girls were expected to learn weaving which was confined in the home. It was an essential qualification of a good bride.

A formal education was introduced by Captain Gordon, the Political Agent of Manipur. In 1837, he introduced primary education in Manipur. However, it had failed and after several more attempts to establish an English school in Manipur, a Middle English School called Johnstone Middle English School was opened in 1885 by the political Agent Sir James Johnstone at Imphal. Since then education has been making steady progress into the state.

The first girl's school was established in 1898. Only two students attended it. However, later many more girl students started attending school. At the end of colonisation, the total numbers of schools were 178 in Manipur. Lower primary, upper primary, Middle school high school, and college, vocational and technical schools were opened by the British.

The opening of formal education somehow made young boys and girls come out from their homes. This education system brought western knowledge to them. People started being aware of their political rights, freedom, liberty, etc. Especially it encouraged girls for formal education and participates in the public realm in a larger spectrum. Boys and girls get more chances of meeting and get involved in a relationship. It also influenced the couples to decide on a chenba. However, till the mid of 20th century, couples who eloped did not perform marriage ceremonies except those girls who belong to the rich and powerful families. However, as more public started accessing higher education, the mindset of people started changing. Modern ideology was in its prime. On the other hand, more people who were involved in the agrarian profession now opted for government services. The economy of the mass population became better and stable. The common people of the Meitei community slowly started accepting the eloped couple and arranged their marriage ceremony. This change in acceptance of eloped couples could be because of two reasons. First, people became

modern and less orthodox. Second, they have the financial ability to organise marriage ceremony.

As Manipur progressed in modernity, the preference to opt for chenba has been increasing. The development in technology also has pushed it further. The arrival of the internet, cell phone and social media platforms empowered men and women to expand their sociability. It helps in finding like-minded people easier.

However, the advance in technology also could bring dooms to the life of women. There is a high chance of encountering fraud identity in social media. Many numbers of people hide their true identities from social media. During the fieldwork, one of the social activists cited that more women who faced domestic violence from their husbands are not likely to have known their husbands through chatting on mobile, and without properly knowing each other they eloped at their first meeting itself. Later after marriage, these women find themselves as victims of domestic violence.

2.9. Observation:

Going through the evolution of chenba marriage, we can observe that there is the influence of religion, education, technology. There is an existence of inter-caste marriage, inter-religious marriage due to the practice of chenba marriage in the Meitei community. The rites and rituals conducted during the marriage ceremony have evolved over the period of time. The advent of education enlightened many people to start organising marriage ceremonies after chenba, with all the rites and rituals. Meitei community has become more open-minded towards the purity and impurity of women who indulge in chenba. Further, the

technology has broadened the space and scope of young people in finding their life partner as well as it also brings the fear of sexual assault on women.

Chapter 3

Customary Law of Marriage in Meitei Community

Marriage is a set of rules which infuse duties, rights and privileges for the husband and wife (Lundenberg, 1958). It is also a relationship that is recognised by the custom or law in every community. Meitei also has its customary law for marriage and follows to date. This law is applied to all forms of the existing marriage of Meitei and they are:

3.1 Clan exogamy:

In the Meitei community there are seven clans viz. Ningthoucha, Angom, Khanganba, Luwang, Khuman, Moirang and Sarangleisangthem. These clans are termed as Yek Salai Taret in Manipuri which means seven clans. These Yek are exogamous in nature. According to Bansanta (2010), the exogamous marriage rules of the Yek is not the only prevalent laws but there are more rules that existed within the clan exogamous and they are 1) EE Tinnaba, 2) Pen Tinnaba, 3) Sairuk Tinnaba, 4) Leinung Pen Tinnaba, 5) Pi Tinnaba and 6) Pellol Tinnaba.

EE Tinnaba means the offspring of the same progenitor and these offspring are spread as time passes and they form a sub-clan. The marriages between these offspring who exist in various sub-clans are restricted.

Pen Tinnaba are the children of the same mother but a different father. This incident can happen to the widow whose society makes her marry another man. The children from these women are restricted to marry each other. However, this law lapses after three generations.

Sairuk Tinnaba is the fusion of the progenitor to another clan. The offspring of this progenitor cannot marry to the original clan but can marry to the other clan in which it was fused into. The fusion happened because of the genocide attack and to hide from this attack the progenitor fused to the available clan. It is found out that this incident occurred during the reign of the king 'Nongda Leiren Pakhangba' (A.D. 34-154) and king Naotheringkhong (A.D. 663-738) (ibid). Sairuk Tinnaba law was formed in order to preserve their clan identity and a book called *Salai Poklakpa Langwon* was written to record the original identity and for the restriction of marriage in Sairuk Tinnaba.

Leinung Pen Tinnaba is the descendants that were established from a secret relationship of the maternal grandmother from different marriages. The children who belong to the same maternal grandmother are restricted to marry each other and come under the Leinung Pen Tinnaba law of marriage.

Pi Tinnaba is the children of different fathers but from the same mother. The different father is from different clans but as the mother is the same, the children born by this mother are not allowed to marry each other even they belong to different clans as their father is from different clans.

Pelloi Tinnaba means girls who belong to the maternal grandmother's lineage. Pelloi Tinnaba law restricted marriage with those girls from the maternal grandmother's lineage.

3.2 Caste endogamy:

Meitei community also practiced the caste system. The community is divided into General, Other Backward Class (OBC) and Schedule Caste (SC). This division is based on the income of the family except for SC. General and OBC are occupied by Meitei whereas SC is the people who were exiled to the hillock by the king for the punishment of their illicit behaviour. Marriage between the higher caste and the lower caste is restricted.

3.3 Religious endogamy:

Inter-religious marriage has always been on the debate. The couples who are involved in inter-religious marriages are likely to face rejection from their family as well as from their community. The customary laws of marriage encourage marriage only among their community itself. To break through this law is very hardship especially in India. In the Meitei community also inter-religious marriage is not appreciated. In Manipur, there are four major religions namely Hindu, Sanamahi, Islam and Christian. Marriage between different religions is not encouraged; however, we can find historical records of Muslim men marrying Meitei women who are either Hindus or Sanamahi during their migration to Manipur (Arambam. Parrett, 2005). This event shows Meitei community gives some flexibility in its marriage customs. Further, through the chenba marriage we can observe whether it follows its custom strictly or exempted inter-religious marriage.

3.4 Bride Price:

The term 'bride price' as such does not exist in the Meitei community. However, on heijingpot day the groom's family has to gift the traditional clothes and ornaments which the bride has to wear on the wedding ceremony of kundo lengba and ningol chakouba and the

bride's family has also to gift white dhoti to the groom which he will wear for the marriage. This gift is called *Koojaba*.

3.5 Divorce Rule:

If a man or a woman wants to get a divorce he or she has to approach the elder people of both husband and wife's family and the relatives or the elder people of their respective villages. In the presence of these people, an agreement for the divorce or reconciliation (if possible) of the couple will be settled upon. If a married woman happens to chenba to another guy, she has to demand divorce to marry the new guy then he has to pay some amount of money to the former husband. After divorce, the woman can bring her movable properties that she brought during the marriage. However, she has to leave her children under the custody of the children's father except for the suckling child. At present, most couples who want to get a divorce approach the legal aid at court directly.

3.6 Chenba marriage versus customary rule:

In this section, we will examine whether chenba marriage strictly follows the marriage rules which are mention above or whether chenba marriage breaks the rules of marriage. If it breaks the rules then we will observe the status of the couple in their family and also in the society, whether are given punishment or reconciled and if they are punished then whether the punishment is equally given to the men and women. We'll also examine whether state government assures safety for such couple or they also counter against the couple.

3.6.1. Clan Exogamy and Chenba:

The marriage rules or the customary laws of clan exogamy are applicable to the chenba marriage system as well. However, the analysis of the data of chenba marriage between or out the clan shows that there is quite a good number of clan endogamy.

Table 1

Distribution of Clan Exogamy and Endogamy in Chenba Marriage

Types of Marriage	Frequency
Endogamy	11.3
Exogamy	88.7
Total	100

Note. The data for distribution of clan exogamy and endogamy in chenba marriage are from field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

From the above table 1 we can observe that despite the restriction of clan endogamy, there is an existence of clan endogamy. There are 11.3 percent endogamous marriages through chenba marriage. In fact, couples who are from the same clan purposely elope to get married as it is an easy way to convince their parents for the marriage. On the other hand, a large section of the respondents have married to different clans following the rules of marriage. This result shows that in the Meitei community even though they are free to choose their life partner they use this freedom inside the boundary of customary law. Whoever falls out of this boundary is also accepted for marriage with some kind of resentment.

3.6.2 Caste Endogamy and Chenba:

3.6.2.1. Caste Hierarchy among the Meitei

The caste system in the Meitei community is divided into three categories and they are 1) General 2) OBC (Other Backward Caste) and 3) Schedule Caste. Both in General and OBC, Meitei, Meitei Bamon (Brahmin) and Rajkumars are included (Government of India, Ministry of Welfare Resolution No. 12011/68/93, 1993) The OBC and General categories are categorised based on the family income levels. The family who has more than eighty thousand of annual income comes under the General Category and those who are below it come under the OBC category. Regarding the Schedule Caste, there is a specific term used for the Schedule Caste in the Manipuri language that is Loi. Loi is also called a slave. Meitei people, who were outcast and enslaved by the king for their illicit behaviour and who were refused to convert their religion into Vaishnavism under the order of the King of Manipur, were considered as Loi. This group of people was exiled from the Imphal valley of Manipur to the foothills of Manipur.

The classification of the caste system in Manipur is not documented. But if we dig down the history of Manipur and its traditional systems which they followed to run the administration, we find four types of system. These four systems were practiced before colonialism entered Manipur. These systems were structured into kings, Panas (district or sub-division of place), lallups (military organisation) and Lois. The first kingship system was established under the rule of Nongda Leirem Pakhangba after several struggles between the different ethnic groups of Manipur. The king became the head of the administration of Manipur.

The kingdom of Manipur was divided into six Panas and they are Ahallup (the club of old men), Naharup (the club of young men), Laipham (abode of the gods), Khabum (great house of Khaba), Hithakphanba (gatherer of tobacco) and Potsangba (watchmen). Each Panas consist of a number of families and the head of the families has to appoint one member from the family to render their services to the king. Every Meitei must belong to one of these Panas and if not then they are not considered as pure Meitei.

Lallup system is mainly made for the military service in which the subjects of the king have to render their service to the king. However, this system covers not only the military service but also social development works and activities. Every man who is on and above the age of seventeen has to take part in Lallup service. They have to attend the royal office works for ten days and the remaining twenty days they have to render their service in social development works like construction of roads, bridges, administrative buildings, etc. The persons who were liable to work in this Lallup system were Meiteis, Bamons and the Meitei Pangans (Hodson 1904: 59-64). However, this system was abolished after the British government annexed Manipur.

The slavery system was also prevalent in Manipur. According to Mc Culloch there were two types of slavery systems in Manipur and they are; 1) those people for discharging a money debt which they can't otherwise do and 2) those because of their sheer laziness.

In 1891, Manipur came under British rule and the king was made to follow the British rule. Under the British rule, the Lallup system was abolished as this system was very exploitative for the poor people because the rich and noble escaped from doing their work assigned under the Lallup system by paying some amount of money to the king.

After the Independence of Manipur from British rule in 1947, Manipur made its constitution and an election was conducted to form a government. However, on 15th October, 1949, Manipur was merged into India. It got statehood in 1972 and a Legislative Assembly was formed.

The categorisation of the caste system in Manipur went through changes through the pre and post-colonial rule. This might also lead to the non-importance of the caste system to be followed strictly in many terms compared to the other parts of India.

3.6.2.2. Relationship between the Caste system and Marriage among the Meiteis:

Relating to the marriage institution, the inter-marriage of Meitei and Meitei Bamon has more significance than the marriage between the higher caste (General category) and lower caste (OBC category). Despite both Meitei and Meitei Bamon belonging to the same caste category, marriage between them is considered as taboo and those types of married couples were punished according to the customary laws.

Marriage between the Meitei who belongs to the General category with the Meitei of OBC is accepted and the same in Meitei Bamon also. The problem arises only when there is a marriage of a Meitei woman to the Meitei Bamon and marriage of a Loi woman to Meitei or Meitei Bamon. Such marriages are not accepted. But a woman from Meitei Bamon to Meitei is accepted and a woman from Meitei marrying Loi is also accepted. Therefore through the marriage structure, one can observe that there is a hierarchy between the Meitei Bamon, Meitei and the Loi. Whether the hierarchy in the Meitei community is based on the caste system is difficult to define. Therefore for a better understanding of chenba marriage, one has

to look into Meitei, Meitei Bamon and Loi instead of categorising the Meitei community into General, OBC and SC.

Table 2

Inter-caste Chenba marriage in Meitei community

Inter-caste marriage	Marriage ceremony perform at bride's place	Loukhatpa
Meitei to Meitei Bamon	Yes-3	NA
Meitei to Loi	Yes-1, No-2	Yes-1, No-2
Meitei Bamon to Meitei	NA	NA
Meitei Bamon to Loi	NA	NA
Loi to Meitei	NA	NA
Loi to Meitei Bamon	NA	NA

Note. The data for inter-caste chenba marriage in Meitei community are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

Table 2 shows the data of women who married to a different caste. According to the customary law of the Meitei marriage system, inter-caste marriage is not permitted and however, if it happens, the groom's father should mandatorily arrange a marriage ceremony at the groom's place as his son brought someone's daughter. In case a marriage is not performed, the groom's family will be ostracized by the people. However, the married couple has to face punishment after the marriage. Moreover, as the Meitei society is becoming

modern, the restriction upon inter-caste marriage has become little flexible and some of the family accepted the marriage by giving some kind of punishment. We can observe this type of marriage in case studies Sanatombi who is a Meitei woman married to a Meitei Bamon. She says-

I got married to a Meitei Bamon guy. We were in a relationship for three years. We know that our relationship will not be accepted by his parents as I belong to Meitei. So we decided to elope. As we were in proper age (wife-27, husband-30) of marriage and we eloped, nobody rejected our marriage. Our marriage was organised according to the decision of my father and my father-in-law. Even we were married according to the marriage ritual; I was not allowed to enter the kitchen of my husband's house. I was also not allowed to perform the rituals and enter the shrine of the Krishna temple which was built beside the house. In our society, if a non-Brahmin woman is married to a Brahman man she is allowed to enter the kitchen and cook only if she bears the first child as a son. Unfortunately, I bore a girl as a first child. Therefore, for my entire life I cannot attain the similar status that the other women were enjoying in my husband family (Personal interview, Sanatombi, 19/4/2015)

Another Meitei woman respondent who got married to Loi says-

We eloped with the help of his friends.... we come to know that my father does not want to go for the marriage and want to cancel it as my husband is from a lower caste and poor status. Therefore, we again eloped. This time my father did not accept us and cast out me from the family. We got married without my father's consent and blessings (Personal interview, Chanu, 4/5/2015)

The primary data clearly shows that out of 124 (couple) respondents only six couples got inter-caste marriage. These marriages could happen only because of the existence of the chenba system. In hainaraga luhongba (arranged marriage) inter-caste marriage will never exist as hainaraga luhongba follows the customary laws strictly.

As per the primary data, one can also observe that two of these six couples have not performed their marriage at the bride's place which is necessary according to the customary law and one of these two couples has not done *Loukhatpa* by the bride's parents. *Loukhatpa* is another type of marriage that is performed for accepting the marital status of the bride by her parents before she gives birth to her first child. It is performed only when the parents of the bride do not accept her chenba and cast out her from her family. Those women are not allowed to perform any ritual for their children's marriage in the future.

Three of the Meitei women got married to Meitei Bamon and their marriage ceremonies were performed at the bride's home according to the customary law however, only one of them did not enjoy the same status as other women in her in-law's house as her first child is a girl.

Another three Meitei women married to Loi and only one of them is accepted by parents of both the family and married according to the customary law. However, two of them have not been accepted by the bride's parents and their marriage ceremony is organised by the groom's family. Among these two couples, one couple has done *Loukhatpa* and the other one has not done *Loukhatpa*. The data for inter-caste marriage of Meitei Bamon women to Meitei men, Meitei Bamon women to Loi men, Loi women to Meitei men and Loi women to Meitei Bamon was not found in the field area.

3.7. Inter-Religious Marriage:

Meitei community is comprised of Hindu, Muslim, Sanamahi and Christian religions. Meitei Hindu has the highest population in Manipur. Even the fieldwork area showed that Meitei Hindu as the largest population, Sanamahi as the second largest and Christian as the least one. None of the Muslims were encountered in the field area.

In the Meitei community, there is no written law about inter-religion marriage however, it is not appreciated. There is always a tussle of hierarchy between the Hindu religion and the Sanamahi religion. The people of the Sanamahi religion feel that as they follow their indigenous religion, they are proud of their religion and they never accept their religious status as inferior to the Hindu religion. On the other hand, Meitei who follow the Hindu religion believe that the Hinduism is a more civilized religion and it is superior to the Sanamahi religion. There is also abhorrence between the people of these two religions. Hinduism came during the 18th Century and the King of Manipur (Garibniwaz) converted his religion from Sanamahi to Vaishnavism and also made his people convert into Vaishnavism forcefully, even for the people are against it. This has created a divide among the religious communities. During this religious revolution, the king, under the guidance of a Hindu priest, burnt down the historical documents of Manipur which is called 'Puya Mei Thaba'. And some scholars have linked Meitei to the Hindu mainland of India relating to Mahabharat and have rewritten the history of Manipur according to the Hindu ideology. However, it is rejected by other scholars (Arambam Parratt, 2005).

Coming to the Christian religion, Christianity is looked at as a Western or tribal's religion among the Meitei community. It is looked at as a missionary and Western ideology.

Conversion into Christianity is not appreciated among Meitei people; however, there is a slow conversion into the Christian religion at present.

The data collected for the study of chenba shows the Hindus represent the highest number of population in both pre and post-marriage, the Sanamhis in second and the Christians in the third. In the pre-marriage, there are 89.5 percent of Hindu females which has dropped down to 84.7 percent. For the Sanamahi religion, the number of female respondents has increased from pre-marriage to post-marriage by 3.2 percent, that is, 7.3 percent in pre-marriage and 10.5 percent in post-marriage. Regarding the Christian religion, it also shows the increase in a number of female respondents from pre-marriage to post-marriage religion status. The number of female respondents who are Christian before marriage constitutes 3.2 percent and after marriage is 4.8 percent. From the distribution of the female data of pre-marriage and post-marriage religion status, we can observe that there is an inter-religious marriage between these three groups of religions or the changes in the distribution of the religions can be caused by the conversion of religion, especially in the case of Christianity. We will find out the factor for these changes after the analysis of the male data.

The data of the male respondents also shows the changes in the number of respondents from the status of pre-marriage religion and post-marriage religion in each of the religious groups except the Sanamahi. The male Hindu in pre-marriage status is 84.7 percent which is dropped down to 82.3 percent; the male Sanamahi remains the same constituting 12.1 percent in both pre-marriage and post-marriage religion status. The number of male Christian in the pre-marriage religion is 3.2 percent and 5.6 percent in the post-marriage which means 2.4 percent of the Hindu male respondents convert their religion from Hindu to Christ

Table 3*Distribution of Religion of the Respondents*

Name of the Religion	Frequency of Female Pre- marriage Religion	Frequency of Female Post- marriage Religion	Frequency of Male Pre- marriage Religion	Frequency of Male Post- marriage Religion
Hindu	89.5	84.7	84.7	82.3
Sanamahi	7.3	10.5	12.1	12.1
Christian	3.2	4.8	3.2	5.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note. The data of distribution of religion of the respondents are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

Before getting into the detail of the factor of the changes in the religion, let us observe the inter-religion marriage between these three groups of the community. This is of women marrying to different communities.

From the below Table 4 Inter-religious Marriage through chenba marriage of the Meitei Community we observe the inter-religious marriage exists in the Meitei community despite of it is not appreciated. Five of the Hindu female respondents are married to male respondents who follow the Sanamahi religion; three of the Hindu women are married to Christian men and one in each of the Sanamahi woman to Hindu man and Christian woman to Sanamahi man. This signifies that inter-religion marriages occur even is it in a small number. Therefore,

out of one hundred and twenty-four couple respondents, only ten of them have an inter-religious marriage. The reason behind these few inter-religious marriages is the non-appreciation of inter-religious marriage. And on the other hand, due to the existence of the culture of chenba, the endogamy of religion is breaking slowly.

Table 4

Inter-religious Marriage in Chenba marriage

Name of the inter-religion of marriage	Frequency
Hindu to Sanamahi	5
Hindu to Christian	3
Sanamahi to Hindu	1
Sanamahi to Christian	Nil
Christian to Hindu	1
Christian to Sanamahi	Nil
Total	10

Note. The data for inter-religious marriage in chenba marriage are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

Therefore, from the tables of Distribution of religion from pre and post marriage and the Inter-religious marriage in chenba marriage of Meitei community, we can observe that the increase and decrease in the number of female respondents from the pre and post-marriage religion status in each of the three religions is because of two factors that is 1) the conversion

of religion by both couple after marriage and 2) conversion of religion by the woman according to her husband's religion.

3.8. Decision for Fixing Marriage Ceremony:

The decision of chenba is done by both partners or by anyone among them by persuading or forcing the other partner. For a successful chenba, the couple decides on an auspicious day and fixes a place for the stay at night. In this process, close friends of the boy or the girl helps. The couple stays at their friend's home or relatives' home or the hotel according to their comfort and feasibility. The host (the host can be a friend or relatives of the boy or the girl) is responsible for providing any needs of the couple. The host has to provide food, clothes for the girl, a room for the stay and most importantly the security of the couple must be assured by the host. For chenba, the couple has to stay for one night together, however it differs from place to place. Even chenba can be happen with or without the knowledge of the family members of both the couple. Or else, the boy's father or his family members are informed about the chenba at the earliest hour of the next morning of the chenba night by the friends of the boy or any of the family members where the couple stays for chenba.

On the next day of chenba night, it is customary to inform at the earliest hour of the morning about the chenba to the father of the girl or any of the head of her family. This custom is called *Nupi Haidokpa*. If it fails then it is taken as insulted by the boy's father or by his family and it affects the marriage of the concerned couple. On this day, after the father of the boy gets information about the chenba then he has to request/invite two elderly male members from his own family or relative or from his locality to accompany him while visiting the girl's home and informing about the chenba to the girl's father and her family

members. While going for Nupi Haidokpa, it is customary for the father of the boy and the other members to wear a traditional dress that is a white colour dhoti with Pungyat (it is a type of kurta which is worn on the upper part of the body). They also should wear Chandan on their forehead and if they neglect any of the above-mentioned customs then they are not regarded as civilized people.

On the other hand, at the girl's home, the father and the other elderly male members of the family or relative dressed in the traditional clothes with Chandan on the forehead waits for the arrival of the boy's father. A traditional mat called 'Phak' is kept in place at the right side of the veranda of the house and another at the left. The girl's father sits on the phak of the right side and the guest that is the boy's father along with the other members sits on the left phak. Phak on the right side can sit only the head of the family and other male relatives who are older than the head of the family. Sitting on this phak spread on the right side of the house has its significance. It shows the position and authority of the man who is sitting on it. Moreover, no women are allowed to sit on it.

The boy's father and the other members are welcomed with tea. Here, offering tea signifies the courtesy of showing respect to the guests. Non-offering tea to the guest is showing disrespect to the guest and also an indirect sign of not accepting the proposal of chenba and for the further marriage. After informing about chenba, the girl's father will expresses his plans for the marriage ceremony and request them to send his daughter back to the house on the evening of the Nupi Haidokpa day itself. The custom of sending the girl back to her paternal home is termed *Nupi Thinba*. And also request to meet again for the final discussion to fix the date for the marriage ceremony.

Here, in this whole process, the role of the women of the respective family has to do with shopping- to buy new clothes for the eloped girl and to arrange for the eateries. After the Nupi Haidokpa is over, the boy's mother with other women of their family and relatives goes to the place or the house where the eloped couple stayed for chenba. They will bring the girl to the boy's home. She has to buy new clothes for the girl. She has to invite elderly women and young girls from her relatives and neighbours to accompany her while sending to her parents' home in the evening because she is going to be her daughter-in-law. On the other hand, the girl's mother arranges eateries for the guests and waits for her daughters' arrival. The mother of the couple and other women of the family do not take part in the decision-making body for fixing the marriage ceremony. The fathers of the concerned eloped couple have the ultimate power to decide and fix the marriage ceremony as well as they only have the power to cancel the marriage too.

Table 5

Distribution of the Decision-Maker for the Marriage

The decision for marriage ceremony	Bride	Groom
Father	71	68
Mother	1.6	3.2
Both	10.5	21.8
Brother	2.4	4
Other	14.5	2.4
Total	100	100

Note. The data for distribution of the decision maker for the marriage are from the fieldwork collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

Through the study of chenba marriage in the Meitei community, we can observe in both the boy's and the girl's family their respective father decides for fixing the marriage ceremony. 71 percent of the female respondent's marriage decision is taken by their father and 68 percent for the male respondents. The second highest decision-maker for the marriage in the female respondent is the 'other' constituting 14.5 percent. This 'other' consists of maternal or paternal uncle or any other elderly male relatives of the girl. In fact, in the absence of the girl's father, it is the duty of the uncle or any elderly male members of the family to decide for the marriage ceremony. However, concerning the male respondents, the second-highest decision-maker for the marriage is his father and mother together with 21.8 percent but in female respondents, it constitutes only 10.5 percent. In the female respondents, 'brother' and 'mother' constitutes the lowest number of the decision-maker for the marriage and the male respondents 'Other' and 'Mother' are in the lowest.

As Meitei is a patriarchal society where the father is the head of the family and the decision-maker of any happening in his family has to go through his approval. The liberty of deciding for chenba by the couple became diluted when comes through the actual/bigger rituals for marriage. The power of decision-making will shifts from the couple to their respective fathers. Luhongba after chenba can be accepted or rejected by both fathers of the couple.

3.9 Social Legislation and Chenba:

According to the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, the eligible age for marriage is eighteen for girls and twenty-one for boys. If any of the girl or boy indulge in marriage before attaining their age of marriage will come under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act and whoever is responsible for such a marriage is liable for punishment as per law. In this section,

we will examine the respondents' age to identify any child marriage in chenba marriage and to find out the responses of the people on such cases.

3.9.1 Age:

The suitable age for marriage is not prescribed in the customary law of marriage of Meitei. In the olden days once the girl and boy attained their puberty, they are eligible for marriage. However, after the arrival of modern education in Manipur, both boys and girls are expected to marry after the completion of their education and economic independence. Therefore, the expected age for marriage in the present scenario is 25 to 30 for girls and 30 to 35 for boys approximately.

The data of the age of the couples at the time of their marriage shows a range of different ages. We can observe that 2.4 percent of the female respondents are married under fifteen years of age and 7.3 percent under fifteen to eighteen years of age. Further, the marriage age of females between eighteen to twenty-six years of age shows the highest in number. The age range of female respondents of twenty-four to twenty-six of age is 20.4 percent, eighteen to twenty of age is 19.4 percent and twenty-one to twenty-four is 18.5 percent. The percentage of female age of marriage between twenty-seven to twenty-nine years of age is 14.5 percent, thirty to thirty-two is 9.7 percent, thirty-three to thirty-five is 1.6 percent, thirty-five to thirty-eight is 3.2 percent and thirty-nine and above is 1.6 percent.

Table 6

Distribution of the Age of Female Respondents at the Time of Marriage

Age of Female	Percentage (%)
Under 15	2.4
15-18	7.3
18-21	19.4
21-24	18.5
24-27	21.8
27-30	14.5
30-33	9.7
33-36	1.6
36-39	3.2
39 and above	1.6
Total	100.0

Note. Data for distribution of female respondent at the time of marriage are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

Again, the data of male respondents also shows the existence of under-age marriage. Here, the male respondent who married under fifteen years of age is 0.8 percent, fifteen to twenty years of age constitute 2.4 percent, twenty-one to twenty-four years of age constitute 18.5 percent, twenty-five to twenty-nine is 32.3 percent. Thirty to thirty-four years of age is 22.6 percent, thirty-five to thirty-nine years of age are 13.7 percent and forty and above years of age during marriage constitute 9.7 percent. Based on the case studies (Chapter 5) couples

marrying before their legal age is being found 60 years ago and also practiced at present even though the present generation wants their children to attain higher education before their marriage.

Table 7

Distribution of the Age of Male Respondents at the Time of Marriage

Male Age	Percent (%)
under 15	0.8
15 – 21	2.4
21 – 25	18.5
25 – 30	32.3
30 – 35	22.6
35 – 40	13.7
40 and above	9.7
Total	100.0

Note. Data for distribution of male respondent at the time of marriage are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

The above data is shows that under-age marriage still exists in Meitei society even though it is against the law. Moreover, the maximum number of age of the couples during their marriage is younger than the Meitei society's expectation of suitable age of marriage. This shows that young couples take advantage of the chenba system to fulfill their desire for marriage. It can be also examined that a diverse range of ages is practiced chenba.

Again, the data of the consent for chenba by the female respondent shows that 13 percent of them are forced to elope by their spouse.

Table 8

Distribution of Female Respondents for the Consent of Chenba

Consent for Chenba	Percent (%)
Yes	87
No	13
Total	100.0

Note. The data for distribution of female respondents for the consent of chenba are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

The above data of female respondents of chenba marriage shows that there is an occurrence of under-age marriage, and chenba is not taking place by the mutual decision only but also by force or abduction by their spouses. These cases are very sensitive and need attention of the law. However, despite of the existence of such crimes, the parents and the family members of the concerned victims are either unaware or do not care about such incidents. There is only one case filed at the police station regarding the chenba marriage of under-age marriage by the parents of the girl who is only fifteen years of age during her chenba time. This case clearly shows the family members' unawareness or their carelessness or casual behaviour towards such incidents.

The girl's parents want to separate her from her spouse and want to continue her study before her marriage. However, the police took a decision on behalf of the boy's family who wanted to conduct the marriage.

Table 9

A Filed Case at the Police Station

The Filed Case at Police Station	Percent (%)
Yes	1.6
No	98.4
Total	100.0

Note. The data for a filed case at the police station are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

The role of the police is to curve the crimes happening in the society and to maintain peace. However, for curving crime and bringing peace in society police are not the sole agency. Police need collaboration from the civilian. And to bring a good collaboration there is a need to build trust between the police and civilian. This trust system is very weak in Manipur because of the continuous harassment or atrocities that occurred to the general public by the Manipur police because of the insurgency issue. Therefore, the people might not have trust in the police of Manipur to figure the problem of under-age marriage or forced marriage. Moreover, the reason for not taking help from the police is that the parents do not want to

make it a bigger issue or the parents are orthodox and believe in solemnising the marriage ceremony once the girl has eloped. Besides, from case study of the chenba couples, we can further observe that even the police too suggested the parents of the girl to accept their chenba and organise marriage for their daughter, despite separating the eloped couple as they are too young to marry. As police are also a part of the culture, they also find difficulties in breaking off the norms and continue to follow the conventional norms.

3.9.2 Reason for Chenba:

Even though chenba marriage is not regarded as the most prestigious marriage; the number of chenba marriages is practiced widely in the Meitei community. There can be several reasons for it. As per the respondents, the different reasons for their chenba are:

- 1) their families did not give consent to their relation,
- 2) their family insisted on chenba,
- 3) their friend insisted on chenba,
- 4) their spouse insisted,
- 5) insisted their spouse by them,
- 6) forced by their spouse, and
- 7) other reasons.

According to the female data, 7.3 percent of the respondents opted chenba because their families did not give consent to their relation. 9.7 percent eloped as their family insisted them to elope, 3.2 percent of them have been insisted by their friends to elope, and another 5.7

percent is insisted by their spouse. Only 0.8 percent is insisted by them, 12.9 percent is forced by their spouse and 60.4 percent have eloped because of ‘other reasons’ and it constitutes the highest number of reasons for chenba. The data of ‘other reason’ is kept as an open-ended question; hence, it consists of different answers. We will discuss it separately further.

Table 10

Reason for Chenba by Female Respondent

Reason for chenba	Percent (%)
Families did not give consent to our relation	7.3
Families insisted	9.7
Friends insisted	3.2
Spouse insisted	5.7
Insist by me	0.8
Forced by spouse	12.9
Other reasons	60.4
Total	100.0

Note. The data for reason for chenba by female respondent are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

Regarding the male respondents, the ‘other reason’ constitutes the highest in number. 62.9 percent of the male respondents have ‘other reason’ for chenba, 4.8 percent have reasoned that their family did not give consent to their relation, 9.7 percent due to their family

insisted them to elope, 15.3 percent have been insisted to elope by their friends and 1.6 percent is insisted by their spouse and 5.7 percent is insisted by themselves.

Table 11

Reason for Chenba by Male Respondents

Reason for r	Percent (%)
Family did not give consent to our relation	4.8
Families insisted	9.7
Friends insisted	15.3
Insisted by spouse	1.6
Insisted by me	5.7
Other reason	62.9
Total	100.0

Note. The data for reason for chenba by male respondent are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

The highest number of couples has given the reason for their chenba as in the category of ‘other reason’. This category is kept as an open-ended question. It leads to many different reasons for their chenba. According to the female respondents based on the open-ended question, 72 percent out of the seventy-five female respondents have opined that they have eloped because they want to marry and chenba is the easiest way to disclose their intention to their family. Secondly, 13.3 percent has opined that they were late while coming back home

and they were scared to go home as they assumed that their parents or their brothers will beat them as women are not allowed to come back home late. 5.3 percent opined that as they are at the right age for marriage they decided to elope. Another 5.3 percent said that they were forced to elope by their brother-in-law falsely. 4 percent of the female respondents have opined that they eloped twice as their parents did not accept their relationship. 1.3 percent of the respondents eloped to escape from bettering and another 1.3 percent of the respondents said that they were very young when she eloped with her boyfriend and she did not understand anything at that time.

Further, the highest number of reasons for chenba given by the male respondents also falls into the category of 'other reason'. Out of one hundred and twenty-four male respondents, seventy-eight of them have given different reasons for their chenba and out of this 78 percent 67.9 percent male respondents have opined that they have eloped because they want to marry and chenba is the easiest way to disclose their intension to their family. 16.7 percent of the male respondents opined that they forced their spouses to elope. They said that their spouse did not accept their proposal. Therefore, with the help of their friends or relative, they abducted their spouse. Another 12.8 percent of the male respondents have opined that they were late while coming back home. Therefore, to escape from the stigma or the family torture on their spouse, they decided to elope. Lastly, 2.6 percent of the male respondents opined that they were at a very young age when they eloped and they simply eloped as they want to stay together.

3.9.3 Chenba Marriage, Koojaba and Loukhatpa:

In the Meitei community the solemnising of a marriage ceremony is done at the bride's place. A mandapa for a wedding ceremony is set up in the courtyard of the bride's house. The solemnising of the wedding is decided by the father of the bride and further, he will inform the father of the groom. If the chenba of the couple is accepted by the girl's father, marriage is conducted at the bride's place with all the rites and rituals of marriage. If the girl's father will reject the chenba of the couple and outcast the girl from his family, then the groom's father is obliged to conduct the marriage in his place. However, the groom's father also has the liberty to accept or reject the chenba and cast out both couple. However, if he doesn't conduct marriage for his son and his future daughter-in-law then the father of the groom loses his prestige and people regard him as very stubborn and arrogant and his decision is not appreciated.

Further, a marriage gift for the bride is given on the heijingpot puba numit which is performed one or two days before the marriage day. If a marriage is fixed by the acceptance of the bride's father and solemnised at the bride's place the heijingpot puba numit is necessary. On this heijingpot puba numit, the marriage gift term as koojaba is brought by the groom's mother and it is given to the bride. However, if the marriage is performed at the groom's place the heijingpot puba is not conducted and the wedding ceremony is directly solemnised. Therefore, the bride does not get her koojaba.

The data collected from the field area shows that 89.5 percent of the female respondents or the couples' marriage are solemnised at the bride's place and only 10.5 percent is not conducted at the groom's place. As a consequence of the nature of the marriage ceremony,

89.5 percent of the bride got their koojaba and only 10.5 percent of the bride did not get their koojaba.

Table 12

Distribution of Other Customs of Marriage in Meitei Community

Marriage at Bride's place	89.5
Marriage at Groom's place	10.5
Loukhatpa	0.5

Note. The data collected for distribution of other customs of marriage in Meitei community are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

For those couples whose marriage was not accepted by the brides' father or her family and their marriage has not been solemnised at the bride's home, they have a further custom called loukhatpa, which is necessary to conduct by the bride's father before the bride gives birth to her first child. In loukhatpa, the bride's father accepts the marital status of his daughter and accepts the husband of his daughter as his son-in-law. The data shows that only five of the couple respondent has done loukhatpa but six of them did not have loukhatpa till the date of the data received.

3.9.4. Education qualification:

Education is one of the most important tools to empower a person to make the right decision for his or her choices. Getting proper education elevates one's ability to make the right decision and improves their life. Therefore, the type of education plays an important role

in chenba marriage. Chenba marriage involves a decision by the couple themselves for their action. The data collected from the fieldwork can help us to understand the relation of education to chenba and decision making.

The data of the educational status of the female respondents shows that the maximum number of females studied till tenth standard. It constitutes 37.9 percent. The second-highest number of the respondent has studied till under-graduate, constituting 29 percent. The next highest number of respondents constituting 24.2 percent has studied till the twelfth standard. 6.5 percent of the respondent is illiterate; 1.6 percent of the respondent is post-graduate and only 0.8 percent of the respondent has studied above post-graduate.

Table 13

Education Qualification of Female Respondents

Education Qualification of Female	Percent (%)
Illiterate	6.5
Matric (10 th Standard)	37.9
Secondary (12 th Standard)	24.2
Under Graduate	29.0
Post Graduate	1.6
Above Post Graduate	0.8
Total	100.0

Note. The data for education qualification of female respondents are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

The data of the educational status of the male respondents shows that the maximum number of males studied till under-graduate. It constitutes 37.7 percent. The second-highest number of the male respondent has studied till the tenth standard, constituting 32.3 percent. The third-highest number of male respondent constituting 23.4 percent has studied till the twelfth standard. 4 percent of the male respondent is post-graduate; 1.6 percent of respondent is post-graduate and 3.2 percent of the respondent is illiterate. There is no male respondent who has studied above post-graduate.

Table 14

Education Qualification of Male Respondents

Education Qualification of Male	Percent (%)
Illiterate	3.2
Metric (10 th Standard)	32.3
Secondary (12 th Standard)	23.4
Under Graduate	37.1
Post Graduate	4.0
Total	100.0

Note. The data for education qualification of male respondents are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

3.9.5 Occupation

In the Meitei community, both men and women are expected to get a job settlement or have a source of income before they marry. However, in the above data of educational

qualification of the respondents, we have observed that respondents who studied till the tenth and twelve standards constitute the highest in number. The educational qualification of these respondents will certainly have influenced their occupation. Further, their occupation will lead to their standard of living.

The data of male respondents shows that the highest number of male respondents with 33.9 percent is self-employed before marriage and 56.5 percent after marriage. The second-highest number of male respondents works in the private sector (30.6 percent) before marriage, however after marriage; it constitutes only 4.8 percent. The number of male respondents who work in the government sector has increased from pre-marriage to post-marriage status (18.5 percent to 24.2 percent). Further, the number of the unemployed respondents has also increased from the pre to post-marriage status which is 10.5 percent to 13.7 percent. Lastly, 6.5 percent of the male respondents are students before their marriage but only 0.8 percent of them continued to study.

The female respondents' data shows that the maximum number of female respondents is unemployed before their marriage; however, after marriage the maximum number of them is housewives. 53.2 percent are unemployed before marriage and zero percent after marriage. The number of housewives constitutes 40.7 percent. The second-highest number of the female respondents is self-employed (17.7 percent) before marriage, and after marriage, it constitutes 34.8 percent. The number of self-employed respondents also increased from the pre to post-marriage status which is 17.7 percent to 34.7 percent. Further, the number of female respondents who work in the government sector has increased from pre-marriage to post-marriage status (9.7 percent to 12.9 percent). Lastly, 10.5 percent of the female respondents are students before their marriage but none of them continues their study.

Table 15*Occupation of Male Respondent*

Occupation	Pre-marriage	Post-marriage
Student	6.5	0.8
Government employee	18.5	24.2
Private sector employee	30.6	4.8
Self employed	33.9	56.5
Unemployed	10.5	13.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Note. The data for occupation of male respondents are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

Table 16*Occupation of Female Respondent*

Occupation	Pre- marriage	Post- marriage
Student	10.5	0.0
Government Employee	9.7	12.9
Self Employed	17.7	34.7
Private job	8.9	12.1
Unemployed	53.2	0.0

Table 16 Continued:

Occupation	Pre-marriage	Post-marriage
House Wife	0.0	40.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Note. The data for occupation of female respondent are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

As Meitei society is patriarchal in nature, the head of the family is male. He has the authority for taking any kind of decision in the family. In the Meitei community, women are also equally expected to contribute income to the family. However, there is a chance for a man to control the family income as Meitei follows patriarchal norms. On the other hand, chenba marriage talks about enjoying equal liberty in deciding for chenba by the couple. Therefore, in this section, we will examine whether the equal status of men and women in deciding for their chenba continues after their married life.

After a close examination of the data, it is found out that a maximum number of the finance holder of the family is the husband. However, a good number of the respondents' family finance is held by both husband and wife. Husband constitutes 84.4 percent, both husband and wife constitutes 42.7 percent, 6.5 by wife and only 2.4 percent by other (father/father-in-law).

Table 17

Finance Holder in the Family of the Respondent

Finance Holder	Percentage (%)
Husband	48.4
Wife	6.5
Both	42.7
Other	2.4
Total	100.0

Note. The data collected for finance holder in the family of the respondent are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

3.9.6 Property or asset:

As per the customary law of Meitei, married women are not entitled to property rights. Meitei is a patrilineal society. Although, it is also depends on her father to decide for entitling her for property share. During the marriage, the marriage gifts called *awoonpot* are given to the bride. This *awoonpot* consists of moveable property or assets such as jewellery, utensils, furniture, clothes, etc. For those rich families, a share of the paddy fields called Lou is also given as *awoonpot*. However, for men, they are entitled to the family property particularly, land property. Mostly, the land property is distributed after all the siblings get married or for any other reasons.

The data of female respondents show that only 0.8 percent of them has a house and land property each at pre-marriage. However, the number of female respondents who has land property is increased to 12.1 percent the post-marriage. On the other hand, a maximum number of the female respondents do not possess any type of property at their pre-marriage status (63.7 percent) and also at post-marriage status (30.6 percent). 4.8 percent at pre-marriage and 19.4 percent at post-marriage of the female respondents have a shop, 19.4 percent at pre-marriage and 23.4 percent at post-marriage have jewellery, 2.4 percent at pre-marriage and 1.6 percent at post-marriage have vehicle, and 1.6 percent at pre-marriage and 7.3 percent have house, land, jewellery and vehicle. Women who have possession are very few in number. This also automatically implicates their dependency on men for any financial requirement.

Further, for the male respondents, 62.1 percent have no property or assets at their pre-marriage which is declined to 13.7 percent at post-marriage. 12.9 percent of the male respondents has land and shop each at pre-marriage status which is increased to 46 percent of the male respondent who has land and shop possession increased to 18.5 percent at their post-marriage status. 0.8 percent at pre-marriage and zero percent at post-marriage of the male respondents have house, 5.6 at pre-marriage and 4.8 at post marriage have vehicle, 2.4 percent at pre-marriage and 7.3 percent at post marriage has house, land and vehicle, 0.8 percent at pre-marriage and 2.4 at post-marriage has house, land, shop and vehicle, 2.4 percent at pre-marriage and 4.8 percent has house, land, jewellery and vehicle. Zero percent at pre-marriage and 2.4 percent at post-marriage have land and vehicle. However, none of the male respondents has only jewellery asset.

Table 18*Distribution of Property or Assets of Female Respondents*

Property	Wife	
	Pre-marriage (%)	Post-marriage (%)
House	0.8	0.8
Land	0.8	12.1
Shop	4.8	19.4
Jewellery	19.4	23.4
Vehicle	2.4	1.6
Jewellery & Vehicle	6.5	4.8
House, Land, Jewellery & Vehicle	1.6	7.3
None	63.7	30.6
Total	100	100

Note. The data for distribution of property or asset of female respondents are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

Table 19*Distribution of Property or Assets of Male Respondents*

Property	Husband	
	Pre-marriage	Post-marriage
	(%)	(%)
House	0.8	0.0
Land	12.9	46.0
Shop	12.9	18.5
Jewellery	0.0	0.0
Vehicle	5.6	4.8
House, Land & Vehicle	2.4	7.3
House, Land, Shop & Vehicle	0.8	2.4
House, Land, Jewellery & Vehicle	2.4	4.8
Land & Vehicle	0.0	2.4
None	62.1	13.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Note. The data for distribution of property or asset of male responds are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

As Meitei is a patriarchal family, men are the head of the family; however, women are also the main contributor as a bread earner in the family. Meitei women share the burden of earning income from time immemorial. However, as man is the head of the family, he decides where and how the family income should be used. The data collected from the field also disclosed that the finance of a family is mainly handled by men. The maximum numbers of respondents who handle family finance are husbands which comprise 48.4 percent of the whole total. The second-highest number consists of both husband and wife in handling the finance which comprises of 42.7 percent. Only wife alone handling the finance constitutes 6.5 percent and in the least 2.4 percent by other (other consists of father, brother or mother)

Table 20

Distribution of the Finance Holder by the Couple

Who Handles Finance in the Family	
Person	Percent (%)
Husband	48.4
Wife	6.5
Both	42.7
Other	2.4
Total	100.0

Note. The data collected for distribution of the finance holder by the couple are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

Regarding child education, the husband constituting 50 percent of the whole total of the respondents takes the responsibility for their children's education expenditure and other decisions related to their studies. 36.3 percent consist husband and wife together, 7.3 percent by wife, 2.4 percent by other take the responsibility for their children's education. Whereas, four percent of the respondents do not have children as they are newly married. Therefore, they are not relevant in this particular data.

Table 21

Distribution of the Couple Who Bears the Responsibility of Their Children's Education

Who Bears Responsibility of Your Child's Education	
Particulars	Percent (%)
Husband	50.0
Wife	7.3
Both	36.3
Other	2.4
NA	4.0
Total	100.0

Note. The data collected for distribution of the couple who bears the responsibility of their children's education are from the field work collected during the October 2015- September 2016.

3.10 Analysis of the Customary Laws, Family and Chenba Marriage:

Despite of the restriction on clan endogamy, clan endogamy exists in the Meitei community. It is possible only because of the acceptance of chenba. The respondents who belong to the same clan opt for chenba to overcome the rejection of their marriage from their respective parents or family members. As chenba carries an inner meaning of the couple's indulging in sexual activity during their chenba, their parents are forced to accept chenba and accept for their marriage.

The restriction of clan endogamy in Meitei is because of the blood ties within the clan and the belief that every member who belongs to the same clan are brothers and sisters and marriage between them will bring miseries to either the couple or the family. There is also a scientific reason for such restriction. The children borne from the couple married to the same clan have a physical deformity. However, due to the chenba, clan endogamy is practiced in the Meitei community. According to the data collection, nine-point-seven percent of the couple married into the same clan.

2) 4.8 percent of the respondents got married to a different caste. 2.4 percent of the Meitei women married to Meitei Bamon and another 2.4 percent of Meitei women married to Loi. As the Meitei society is becoming modern the restriction of inter-caste marriage has become a little flexible and some of the families accepted the marriage with giving some kinds of punishment. When there is a chenba of inter-caste and the girl's parents happened to reject the chenba, the responsibility of the groom's father is mandatorily to arrange a marriage ceremony at the groom's place as his son brought someone's daughter and if marriage is not performed than the groom's family will be ostracized by the people.

Among these inter-caste marriages, three of the Meitei women got married to Meitei Bamon and their marriage ceremony was performed at the bride's home according to the customary law however, only one of them did not enjoy the same status as other women in her in-law's house as she gives her first child, a girl.

Another three Meitei women married to Loi and only one of them is accepted by parents of both the family and married according to the customary law. However, two of them are not accepted by the bride's parents and their marriage ceremony is organised by the groom's family. Among these two couples, one couple has done loukhatpa and the other one is not done loukhatpa.

3) Through the study of chenba marriage, it is found that in both the boy's and the girl's family, their respective father decides for fixing the marriage ceremony. 71 percent of the female respondents' marriage decision is taken by their father and 68 percent for the male respondents. The second highest decision-maker for the marriage in the female respondent is the 'other' constituting 14.5 percent. This 'other' consists of the girl's maternal or paternal uncle or any other elderly male relatives. In fact, in the absence of the girl's father, it is the duty of the uncle or any elderly male members of the family to decide for the marriage ceremony. However, concerning to the male respondents, the second-highest decision-maker for the marriage is his father and mother together with 21.8 percent but in female respondents, it constitutes only 10.5 percent. As Meitei is a patriarchal society where a father is the head of the family and the decision-maker any occurrence in his family has to go through his approval. The liberty of deciding for chenba by the couple became diluted when comes through the actual/bigger rituals for marriage. The power of decision-making is shifts from the couple to their fathers. Marriage after chenba can be accepted or

rejected by both fathers of the couple.

4) In the Meitei community the expected age for marriage in the present scenario is twenty-five to thirty for girls and thirty to thirty-five for boys approximately. However, in chenba marriage data, the age range of female respondents of twenty-four to twenty-six of age is 20.4 percent which is the highest in number. The second highest is eighteen to twenty of age is 19.4 percent. There is also under-age marriage. 2.4 percent of the female respondents are married under fifteen years of age and 7.3 percent under fifteen to eighteen years of age.

5) The data of male respondents also shows the existence of under-age marriage. Here, the male respondent who married under fifteen years of age is 0.8 percent; fifteen to twenty years of age constitute 2.4 percent. The age of twenty-five to twenty-nine is thirty; 2.3 percent which is the highest in number. Data of the couples shows that under-age marriage still exists in Meitei society even it is against the law. Moreover, the maximum number of age of the couples during their marriage is younger than the Meitei society's expectation of suitable age of marriage. This shows that young couples take advantage of the chenba system to fulfill their desire for marriage.

6) The data of the consent for chenba by the female respondent shows that 13 percent of them are forced to elope by their spouse. These cases are very sensitive and need attention from the guardians of the laws. However, despite of the existence of such crimes the parents and the family members of the concerned victim are unaware or not care of such incidents. There is only one case filed at the police station regarding the chenba marriage of under-age marriage by the parents of the girl who is only fifteen years of age during her chenba time. This one case clearly shows the family members' unawareness or their careless

or casual behavior towards such incidents. The reason for not taking help from the police is that the parents do not want to make it a bigger issue or the parents are orthodox and believe in solemnizing the marriage ceremony once the girl eloped. Even the police suggested the parents of the girl accept their chenba and organize marriage for their daughter despite of separating the eloped couple.

On above the social media, especially Manipuri films portrayal of female submissive roles is successfully reinforced and the normative notion of masculinity and femininity is carried out (example 'Luhongbagi Ahing', see chapter 2). The shifting of the heroine's status from an unmarried to the married life of a woman and her role as a wife and as a daughter-in-law is a version of what the audience wants and on this basis, the director builds up her stories and the stereotyped roles of man and woman are disseminated through the cinema. As pointed out by Mulvey (1975) the gender power asymmetry is a controlling force in cinema and constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses.' In her article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey uses the psychoanalysis theory to show how our film-watching experience is shaped by the patriarchic subconscious of society. She also opines that the cinematic text is structured according to the cultural subconscious which is patriarchal in nature.

Revisiting the Manipuri digital films where we compare the characters of Manipuri women in both folklore and cinema, the women depicted in folklore are strong as opposed to those in cinema, who are stereotypical patriarchal representations (see chapter 2). The factors for showcasing such stereotyped gender roles could be 1) to reinforce the socio-cultural framework and power structure, and 2) the director's preference to meet the profit margin.

As Meitei is a patriarchal society, the social norms and rules for men and women are structured according to the male power structure. Since media has the power of moulding the public opinion regarding any situation, it plays the role of reinforcing the stereotypical gender roles and helps in reaffirming the asymmetrical gendered power structure.

7) 12.9 percent is forced by their spouse and 62.9 percent has eloped because of 'other reasons' and it constitutes the highest number of reasons for chenba. The female data, 7.3 percent of the respondents opted for chenba due to their families did not give consent to their relation, 9.7 percent due to their family insisted them to elope, 3.2 percent has been insisted upon to elope by their friends and another 3.2 percent has been insisted by their spouse, only 0.8 percent is insisted by themselves. 64.5 percent of the male respondents have 'other reason' for chenba, 4.8 percent have reasoned that their family did not give consent to their relation, 9.7 percent due to their family insisted them to elope, 14.5 percent is insisted to eloped by their friends and 1.6 percent is insisted by their spouse and 4.8 percent is insisted by themselves.

8) The data of the educational status of the female respondents shows that the maximum number of females studied till the tenth standard. It constitutes 37.9 percent. The data of the educational status of the male respondents shows that the maximum number of males studied till under-graduate. It constitutes 37.7 percent.

9) The female respondents' data shows that the maximum number of female respondents is unemployed before their marriage; however, after marriage the maximum number of them is housewives. 53.2 percent are unemployed before marriage and zero percent after marriage. The number of housewives constitutes 40.7. The second-highest number of the

female respondents is self-employed (17.7 percent) before marriage, and after marriage, it constitutes 34.8 percent. The data of male respondents shows that the highest number of male respondents with 33.9 percent is self-employed before marriage and 56.5 percent after marriage.

10) It is found out that a maximum number of the finance holder of the family is the husband. However, a good number of the respondents' family finance is held by both husband and wife. Husband constitutes 84.4 percent; both husband and wife constitute 42.7 percent, 6.5 percent by the wife. As Meitei society is patriarchal in nature, the head of the family is male. He has the authority for taking any kind of decision in the family. In the Meitei community, women are also equally expected to contribute income to the family. However, there is a chance for a man to control the family income as Meitei follows patriarchal norms. On the other hand, chenba marriage talks about enjoying equal liberty in deciding for chenba by the couple.

11) A maximum number of female respondents do not possess any type of property at their pre-marriage status (63.7 percent) and also at post-marriage status (30.6 percent). For the male respondents, 62.1 percent have no property or assets at their pre-marriage which is declined to 13.7 percent at post-marriage. 12.9 percent of the male respondents have land and shops each at pre-marriage status which is increased to 46 percent of the male respondent who has land and shop possession increased to 18.5 percent at their post-marriage status.

12) The data collected from the field also disclosed that the finance of a family is mainly handled by men. The maximum numbers of respondents who handle family finance are husbands which comprise 48.4 percent of the whole total. Men are the head of the family;

however, women are also the main contributor as a bread earner in the family. Meitei women share the burden of earning income from time immemorial. However, as man is the head of the family, he decides where and how the family income should be used.

13) Husband constituting 50 percent of the whole total of the respondents takes the responsibility for their children's education expenditure and other decisions related to their studies.

3.11 Uniform Civil Code and Chenba Marriage

Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is a set of law which governed personal matters such as marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance and succession for all citizens of India regardless of their religion. The claim for need of UCC is to bring an integrated society in India. As India has diverse religious people UCC can play a very important role in marriage system. If we bring the idea of UCC into the marriage system of Meitei community, it indeed would have a vital role in legally supporting the chenba marriage of couple who belong to different religion or different community. The study on chenba marriage in Meitei Community has also found a good number of couples who belong to different ethnic adopting chenba marriage. Meiteis being an exogenic community, somehow it has allowed the inter-religious or inter-ethnic marriage which bring integration in Manipur.

If we look back to the history of Uniform Civil Code we can observed that feminists who were fighting to bring uniform civil code were focused on the marriage institution, succession and inheritance. As the time passes and these feminists felt the need to bring new laws which will take care of the violence which were and are taking place in the ambits of marriage system. This realisation brought demand to frame laws such as the Protection of

Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences, 2012.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is an act which defines and protects women from violence which is committed in the family by the family members as well as violence committed by the partner when they are in relationship. Domestic violence is found to commit in four ways that is physical violence, economic violence, psychological violence and sexual violence. With a careful observation in chenba marriage we can identify physical violence and sexual violence done by the partner as well as by the parents during and after their chenba especially parents of the girls. Sometimes the fear of facing physical violence in the hand of the parents leads to chenba. The fear of getting punishment makes girl to give their consent for chenba. There was a situations wherein the girls eloped because it was already late to go back home and they were simply scared that their family members will ostracize them. Along with this, the girl opined that their brother would have beaten her up as physical violence for coming back to home in late hours. Therefore, they decided to elope. The decision taken in such a situation cannot be taken as being based on complete consent. There was pressure which led the couple to take a decision for chenba to overcome from physical and psychological violence. A sense of fear is created among girls about going back home after dusk. Girls are expected to return home before dusk. If not, they are moralised using violence. If there is no stigma of going back home late which is actually permitted for boys, the decision for chenba would not have happened. This will be resulted in a fair decision from the respondents.

In chenba marriage both boys and girls are exposed to sexual activity. As they are far from their family they have the liberty to indulge in sexual act. Sometimes this liberty also leads to sexual assault and physical assault. Such violence happens because of the boy's presumption that as his girlfriend has eloped with him, she is ready for copulation. This presumption can lead to sexual violence where the girl does not cooperate. To satisfy his sexual desire, he uses force on his partner. The girl becomes a victim of sexual assault and there is no one to help her in far away situations. People also perceived that such things are normal among the couples which are not accepted in ethical and moral values.

Pitre A and Lakshmi Lingam (2021) have opined that a recent study on the child marriage law, parents specially girls parents are found filing cases under the Child marriage Act, POSCO and rape laws who have eloped to get married to their lovers against their parental wishes. In contrary to it, in Meitei community parents are reluctant to file case either under child marriage act or POCSO.

The violation of consent can also be observed in another sphere that is the age of consent. It is important to observe the age of both girls and boys when they get married, as there are cases where both the boy and the girl are underage. According to 2013, 'Criminal Law Amendment Act', the age of consent was increased from 16 to 18 years for girls. Further the Indian government has cleared a proposal in the month of December 2021, to raise the legal age of marriage for girls from 18 to 21 years. As we pin down the age of consent in Meitei community, this new bill will be preferred because Meitei community prefers their daughters and sons to get higher education, and then get a job, accumulate some money and have an economical status and should be ready for marriage when they become economically independent.

According to law, involvement of under-age boys and girls in sexual relationship or marriage is prohibited. It says that if any person makes under-age girls or boys to participate in any sexual act, it is equal to rape and is punishable. According to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, a child means any person below the age of 18 years. It is said that a person is said to commit 'penetrative sexual assault' if he penetrates his penis, any object or any body part, mouth, manipulated any part of the body of the child so as to cause penetration in vagina,, urethra, anus or any part of body of the child or makes the child to do so with him or any other person. Section C says that whoever with sexual intent touches the vagina, penis, anus or breast of the child or makes the child touch vagina, penis, anus or breast of such person or any other person or does any other act with sexual intend which involves physical contact without penetration is said to commit sexual assault.

However, we could see in the case of chenba, such prohibition is not taken seriously. Even though there is debate on the relaxing of age of consent, underage boys and girls whoever is involved in elopement needs to be reported under the child marriage Act. Because elopement marriage will deny the basic right that is right to good health, education, and freedom, which will again impact on their physical, emotional and psychological development.

Marriage in the early age will definitely affect to the development of a person whether it's in economic or social developments. As married couples are expected to run their separate family which debar them from further education. And make them to start earning from their early age which will imply in low earning income in most of the cases. This is directly related with the higher education. Mostly, girls are taken as granted to take care of the household

activities and taking care of the children once married. It stops the economical and social growth of the girl which could have been possibly able to achieve if not married too early.

Bringing to the ground reality, are all these legal benefits used by the people involved in chenba or by the parents whose children are involved in chenba? We need to ask this question because chenba is seen as a custom which is being practiced since time immemorial. So it became a normal for Meitei people even though they are legally minor. Secondly, if chenba happened with a minor, according to the customary law boy's father has to arrange marriage ceremony when the girl's parent outcast the girl or if the father of both boy and girl accept them then the girl's father has to arrange the marriage ceremony. The customary law of Meitei marriage system allows either marriage or monetary compensation to protect the minor or any girl who were forced to elope. The customary law is not stringent enough to rectify the mindset of the people. The perpetrator can easily escape from his crime by just paying money. The customary law do not take account of the trauma which the victim must have gone through and the amount of shaming by the society throughout her life.

Another question which is very important to raise here is that are these legal rights aware by the people? If people are aware of it then why do they hesitate to use those legal rights? In most of the time people always look for covering the issue among them. Taking the case to police is seen to be exaggerated, unnecessary and effecting their social status among the community as well.

This shortcomings clutch the minor or the girl who is abducted in the pretext of chenba into victimisation and they are forced to marry their own abuser. Customary laws are not going to change as they are the custom. However, what we can do at the least is to make

aware of the legal rights to all the section of the people and also to make these rights as simple and approachable at anytime and by anyone. Meitei community has youth club and women's group called Meira Paibi in every locality. So it will be good approach to spread the awareness of such legal rights through these youth clubs and women's group. This could help to address the issue at the grassroots level.

Chapter 4

The Rituals of Chenba marriage

The ritual of the chenba marriage starts from the day of chenba itself. The couple, who wants to get married, decides on an auspicious day (the days which fall on an even number based on the lunar calendar) for the chenba. During chenba, the boy takes the girl to his relative's or friend's home. It is inappropriate for the family to refuse shelter to the couple. The family is obliged to give shelter to the couple and notify the boy's family about the incident. The hostess is in charge of the well-being of the girl.

4.1 *Paopiba*:

Paopiba means to give information. In chenba, the boy cannot bring the girl to his home directly. For chenba, he has to take the girl either to his friend's or relative's home. It is the responsibility of the family to take care of the couple. The friend or the member of the family where the couple stayed the night has to inform the boy's father about the chenba at the very next early morning.

4.2 *Nupi Haidokpa*:

After getting the information about the chenba on the very next day, early morning of the chenba, the boy's father should inform about the chenba to the girl's father. In this ritual, the boy's father with some of the family or relative elder male members visits the girl's house. They apologise for their son's behaviour, and inform the girl's father about the present

situation and request to set a date for the marriage. If it is failed, then it is taken as an insult by the boy's father or by his family and it affects the marriage of the respective couple.

On this day, after the father of the boy gets information about the chenba, he has to request/invite two elderly male members from his own family or relative or from his locality to accompany him while visiting the girl's home and informing about the chenba to the girl's father and her family members. While going for nupi haidokpa, it is customary for the father of the boy and the other members to wear a traditional dress that is a white coloured dhoti with *Pungyat* (it is a type of kurta which is worn on the upper part of the body). They also should wear *Chandan* on their forehead and if they neglect any of the above-mentioned customs then they are not regarded as civilized people.

Meanwhile, at the bride's house, the father and other senior male kin or relatives are dressed in traditional attire with sandalwood paste on their foreheads. They await the arrival of the groom's father. Two mats called 'Phak' are arranged on the veranda of the house, one on the right and one on the left. The bride's father occupies the right phak, while the groom's father and his companions sit on the left phak. The right phak is reserved for the head of the family and his elder male relatives. It signifies the status and power of the person sitting on it. The two parties agree to meet again later to finalize the date for luhongba.

4.3 Machin Hangba:

After nupi haidokpa, in the evening of the same day, the mother and aunt of the girl with some of her female friends will visit the place where the couple has been staying. They will enquire the girl whether she performed chenba with the guy with her consent. If it is found out that the girl was being forced without her consent then there will be a big fight

between the family of the boy and the girl. In such a situation, the marriage is cancelled. However, it is often found out that the girl accepts the chenba even she was forced to do it. It might be because of the fear of the stigma that she stayed with a guy overnight which would question her chastity. In the process of *machin hangba*, the girl is given a chance to accept or reject marriage with the guy with whom she has run away. However, the irony is that most of the girls do not turn up for rejecting it despite of being forced to chenba with the guy as the damage has already been done to her value of chaste.

4.4 Heijingpot or Heijing Kharai Puba:

Heijingpot is a ceremony performed before two or three days of the luhongba at the bride's place. Without heijingpot the ceremony of luhongba is not taken as complete. Women who have performed luhongba without the ceremony of heijingpot are not allowed to participate in the ceremonies of *Heiruk Nungsang Puba*¹ and *ApokNungsangPuba*². And then those men are not entitled the 'Piba³' of his clan and also cannot cook food during the ceremony of 'Chaklongkatpa⁴' of his clan. The child borne by those couples is ridiculed by calling them 'Heinai-Sungnairaktaba' and 'Heinai-Sungnairaktabagi Macha'. In the heijingpot, only the family members of both the bridegroom and few relatives and the elder members of the neighbour participate. This ceremony is performed with rituals and offerings to the deities. For this ceremony, the groom's family brings vegetables, fruits and sweets and present them to the bride's family. These items are offered to the bride's clan god called 'Sagei Shallai Pokpa' deity and village god 'Lamlai'. The vital item in heijingpot is 'Heijing Kharai' which is a basket used for the ritual purposes. This basket includes *Heikru* (Amla), *Heining* (wild mango), *Heijang* (citron), a cluster of bananas which should be in odd number when counted in pair, white sugarcane, *Heiruk Kwa Maru Mana* (betel leaves and areca nuts),

*hamei*⁵, *Leisang* (*huperzia squarrosa*) and *Laiphi* (cloths for deity). Among these items, *heikru* and *heining* are compulsory and without these two items, *heijingpot* cannot be performed. During the off-season of *heikru* and *heining*, the leaves or the bark of the *heikru* and *heining* tree can be used. Over and above, along with the ‘*heijingkharai*’ clothing and ornaments are also brought as a gift for the girl. This gift is brought only to show the items to the bride. The bride will wear these clothes and ornament on the day of *Mangani Chakouba* and special sweetmeats are also brought for the bride and her friends. On this day, in the olden days bamboo is erected at the center of the courtyard of the bride’s house. This is called ‘*Shumai Urong Khinba*’. This symbolises that the girl has been owned by the boy’s side and no other is allowed to take her away. This ritual is only for the bride’s side. There is no such ritual for the groom. We can examine here, that this ritual elevated the bride and at the same time it reduces the status of the bride into an object which is owned by the groom’s side.

4.5 *Apok Asha Thaba*:

This ritual is performed on the evening of the same day of *heijingpot*. The ritual is conducted either at the verandah or courtyard of the bride’s house. During the olden days, this ritual was conducted by ‘*Sagei Piba*’ (eldest male of the lineage). But nowadays any elderly person who knows the ritual can perform it. This ceremony comprises of prayer and offering sweetmeats to ‘*Sagei Apokpa*’ (clan lineage God). The offered sweetmeats are distributed only to the members of the particular lineage of the bride. Persons of other lineage are not allowed to eat sweetmeats.

4.6 *Lamlai Khurumba:*

This ceremony also consists of offering fruits and clothes to the deity who is presiding of the bridegroom's locality. This ceremony is performed at both the bride and groom's places. The sweetmeats offered to the deity can be distributed to everybody irrespective of the person who belongs to their lineage.

4.7 *Bor Baton Touba:*

Bor Baton Touba means inviting the groom for the marriage. This is executed on a day in between *heijinpot* and *luhongba*. It is held only in the afternoon. A boy of young age, preferably the younger brother of the bride, visits the groom's house, accompanied and guided by the *Arangbam*⁶. At the groom's house, the groom sits on a *phak* placed at the right side of the veranda of the house facing at the east. The boy presents 'kwa' (betel leaves and areca nuts) and a garland of '*Kundo*' (star jasmine) flower which has been prepared by the intending bride to the groom with a bowing. The groom, the boy, and the elderly persons are dressed in the traditional attire of white dhotis and *pungyat*. The boy also bows to the parents of the groom implying that the boy on behalf of the bride is inviting the groom to attend the marriage. The purpose of *bor baton touba* is that the girl requests to the groom to be present in the marriage ceremony to be held at the girl's residence. It places the bride in a subordinate position.

Figure 8

Groom receiving Bor Baton



Note. Groom receiving bor baton is from the field area during October 2015- September 2016.

4.8 Luhongba:

On the next day of bor baton toubu, luhongba (marriage) is performed at the bride's home in the evening. The ceremony of luhongba is organised at the bride's place. However, at the grooms' place also some rituals are performed. The first ritual on the day of luhongba starts from feeding food to the groom by his mother (this ritual is also performed at the bride's home). The mother has to cook the food and the groom is served first with the food. After the meal the groom dresses in white dhoti with pungyat and a turban on his head. Such turban is worn only by God, kings and the groom. Any other man cannot wear it. This signifies that the groom is being regarded as the God or a person who has divinity in him for that particular day. In Meitei beliefs, the white colour represents the light of the Sun. In the afternoon, a phak is placed at the right side of the veranda of the groom's house covered with a white cloth. The groom sits on the phak facing the east direction. There, a small ritual called *Iratphu*

Macha and *Phambal Macha Latpa* is performed by a priest to bring auspicious blessings to the groom's journey for marriage and to avoid all the bad omens.

Figure 9

Iratphu Macha and Phambal Macha Latpa



Note. Iratphu macha and phambal macha latpa is from the field area during October 2015-September 2016.

After this ritual, the groom starts his journey to the bride's house after taking blessings from his parents. His journey is lead by the women who carry '*jatra*'. Jatra consisted of seven different items. The first item is *chengluk nungsanggi phiruk*⁶, secondly, phiruk for the bride's *phungga apok asha*, third, phiruk for the local deity of the bride's place, fourth, one phiruk for the bride's clan deity, fifth, it is carried by specially selected five women. The women in lead should be married whose their husband should be alive and also her firstborn child should be a male. Over and above, she should be very beautiful. Other women in the jatra should have similar qualities except their first child is a male.

Figure 10

Women carrying phiruk for Jatra



Note. Women carrying phiruk for Jatra image collected from field area during October 2015-September 2016.

Before the arrival of the groom to the bride's place, three elderly men from the groom's side will arrive earlier at the bride's place. After the arrival of these three representatives from the groom's side, the nat sankritan will start. During the whole process of luhongba, nat sankritan (a religious song based on Hindu God Krishna and Radha for those who are Hindus and song based on the Sanamahi Sidaba and Leimaren Sidabi for those who follow Sanamahism) is sung. Just after the nat sanskritan starts, the bride can start wearing her traditional costumes for the marriage.

The bride wears a green colour blouse, white shawl and potloi⁷ or a mapannaiba phanek⁸. The green colour blouse represents the earth. The bride is portrayed as the mother earth.

While the groom is reaching the bride's home, he is welcomed with *Meira Okpa* performed by three to four male members of the bride at their gate. *Meira okpa* is a kind of bonfire in which three strips of a pine tree is burnt with a herb known as '*Khoiju Leikham*'. Puffed rice is also sprayed over the fire. This is done to ward off evil spirits from the groom. This '*Meira Okpa*' is done three times. After *meira okpa*, the groom, with his friends, sits at the place which is specially arranged for him. This sitting arrangement should be either at the left side of the *mamang sango*⁹ or *awang sangoi*¹⁰.

Figure 11

Bor Mei Okpa



Note. A scene of Bor Mei Okpa image is collected from field area during October 2015-September 2016.

After awhile the groom enters the center of the mandap and sits on the *Luhongphal*¹¹ which is kept adjacent to the *tulsi* (holy basil) or *teiren*¹² plant planted at the center of the courtyard. Then, a priest performs a ritual of *Iratphu* and *Phambal Latpa*. It is a rite in which

the bride's father or a representative of the bride's father will offer a handful of rice and flower to the bride's clan deity.

He prays for the blessing of the bridegroom. After this rite, the bride comes to the mandap and sits next to the groom at the left side then another ritual called *Koojaba* is performed. For the koojaba, the right hand of both bride and groom is tied together with a cotton thread by the mother or a woman who is an equally representative mother of the bride. Groom's hand is kept at the bottom of the bride's hand. The item for koojaba- fruits, scissor, knife, is kept on a terracotta plate and placed on the hands of the bridegroom. The parents of the bridegroom give blessing during this ritual then the other audiences who are present at the wedding ceremony come to the mandap and give blessing and money to the bridegroom.

Figure 12

Koojaba



Note. Koojaba image is collected from field area during October 2015- September 2016.

After the completion of koojaba, the bride goes round the groom clockwise. After completion of one round, she showers flowers on the groom and bows with folded hands. The process is repeated till the completion of seven rounds. This rite signifies that the groom is the God of the bride and she is the devotee of him

Then the bride garlands the groom with a pair of garlands of kundo around his neck after which the bride sits in the left of the groom. The groom takes out one of these garlands and puts it to the bride. These garlands should be specifically made by kundo. In the off-season of this flower, the leaves can replace it. Basanta (2010) describes that the belief behind the garlanding is that '*Malem*' (the earth) was separated from the sun. The name is so given that the sun attracted the *Malem* to its fold again but the malem remained restrained at the last limit of the Sun's gravitation pull or attraction of power. To acknowledge that the two celestial bodies emerged out of a single body, the two garlands are using a symbol of the two heavenly bodies. Again the act of garlanding the bride by the groom by removing a garland from his neck symbolises that malem was separated from the sun (pp. 169-170).

Figure 13

Bride Bowing to the Groom



Note. A scene of bride bowing to the groom image is collected from field area during October 2015- September 2016.

Figure 14

Bride Putting Garland on Groom



Note: Bride putting garland on groom image is collected from field area during October 2015-September 2016.

Figure 15

Groom putting Garland to Bride



Note: Groom putting garland to bride image collected from field area during October 2015-September 2016.

After the exchange of garlands, the bride and groom are taken inside the house of the bride. There the bride and groom exchange '*Kangsubi*' (a sweetmeat) and '*Kwa*'. With this ceremony, the main procedure of wedding is completed. After this, the bride is brought to the groom's home accompanied by her family members, friends and relatives except the bride's mother. At the groom's place, all the people who came with the bride are treated with food. After the bride's family member, relatives and friends left, the groom takes his first dinner after the luhongba and he has to leave some amount of his food and this leftover food is served to the bride. The inner meaning of eating the leftover food of the groom is that from that day the bride has submitted herself to her husband.

4.9. *Mitam Nga Thaba*:

This rite is performed simultaneously with the rite of *koojaba*. *Mitam nga thaba* is called releasing of fish. It is conducted by three women, two women from the groom's side and one woman from the bride's side. One from the groom's side will hold the lamp and the remaining two women will hold the fish. These three women will go to a nearby pond of the bride's house and release the fish. It is believed that these fish carry away the awaiting sorrows and sufferings of the bridegroom. The women who perform this ritual are very selective. First, they should be comparatively good-looking, they must be mothers of first-borne sons, and they must not be divorcees or widows.

Figure 16

Women performing Mitam Nga Thaba



Note. Women performing Mitam Nga Thaba image is collected from field area during October 2015- September 2016.

4.10 Mangani Chakouba:

On the fifth day after the marriage the bride, groom and their family members, relatives and friends are invited for a grand feast at the bride's home. This feast is served with varieties of fish curry. With this *mangani chakouba* the marriage ceremony is completed. After mangani chakouba, the cooking skill of the bride is tested at the groom's place. The entire food has to be cooked by the bride. However, her in-laws help during the preparation of the food. The relatives are invited and served food. Women are expected to have good skills in cooking.

4.11 Reading Symbols of the Rites in Chenba marriage:

Turner (1967) describes that symbol is the smallest unit of the ritual and it carries the specific properties and the structure of the ritual. The symbol can be in the form of objects, activities, relationships, events, gestures and spatial units performed in the ritual. After a keen observation of the rituals performed in the chenba marriage of Meitei, we can observe several symbols used in the form of objects, activities, relationships and gestures. Turner (1976) interprets symbol into two categories:

- one, the sensory pole, and
- second, the ideological pole.

The sensory pole means the symbol which is related to the characteristic of the outward form of a thing. The ideological pole means the symbols which define the ideological belief of the particular culture. Using the interpretation of both the sensory and ideological pole defined by Turner (1976), here, we will analyse the symbols which are used in the chenba marriage rituals.

In chenba marriage, the bridegroom and the audience who are present in the luhongba have to wear uniform attire. The bride wears a green colour blouse, white scarf and a pink or red colour lower garment which is called potloi or phanek and the groom wears a white turban, pungyat, dhoti and a shawl. The bride must wear a green colour blouse and the groom has to wear white clothes. The bride is embodied as the mother earth. Whereas, the white colour attire of the groom represents the Sun god and the light. It also represents the union of all the salais (clans) of Meitei. The male audience has to wear a white pungyat with white dhoti and the female, particularly married women, have to wear white shawl with a pink colour lower garment called Phanek. The unmarried women can wear colourful shawls with phanek. The attires of the bridegroom are used to symbolise the ideological beliefs of Meitei. The bride is idolized as a body that carries and gives reproduction and nurtures it. The groom represents the light which gives light to the earth. The bridegroom also represents Sanamahi Sidaba and Leimarel Sidabi (the deities of Sanamahi religion) in the Sanamahi religion and Lord Krishna and Radha in the Hindu religion.

The symbol as an ideological pole is further displayed in the performance of nat sanskritan. The nat sanskritan performers sing hymns describing the charismatic beauty of Lord Krishna and Radha (Hindu religion) and the Sanamahi Sidaba and Leimarel Sidabi (Sanamahi religion). This hymn not only portrays the beauty of the god and goddess but also represents the *Yagna*. In the other part of India, during the marriage ceremony of Hindu people, a fire is set up. The fire is the witness of the marriage. However, in the Meitei community nat sanskritan signifies the Yaga. The singing of nat sanskritan purifies the whole ceremony. The bridegroom and the whole audience are deeply devoted to the nat sanskritan. This devotion brings an auspicious starting point for the new life of the bridegroom.

Nat sanskritan also symbolised the creation of human organ and comes into life. The movement of the palas (see chapter 2) symbolises the creation of a human body organs and the birth of them.

The rite, irat thouni latpa, is performed for both birth and death ceremonies. The luhongba ritual comes under the irat thouni latpa of birth. In this rite, a priest or maiba performs a rite and prays to the clan ancestors of the bridegroom to bless them. He prays to the ancestor to bless them to be able to reproduce ‘piba’ and spread the progeny of the groom’s salai to seven generations.

Another symbol that is displayed in the form of activity is the bride going round the groom seven times and bowing to him. This activity has different interpretations. It symbolises the bride as the earth and groom as the sun and the rotation of the earth around the sun. Another interpretation explains that the bride is the creeper and the groom is the tree and the bride going round the groom is the imitation of the creeper wrapping around the tree.

Symbol as an object can be traced in the form of the flower garland made of kundo. The flower kundo is essential for making the garland. The garlanding is the ending or completion point for the marriage. Any other flower cannot be used. According to Meitei’s belief, there are two versions of using kundo. One, kundo does not have any flavour. It is not pollinated by insects and it signifies its purity and virginity. Therefore, it is used in the marriage ceremony and symbolises the completion of the marriage. On the other hand, it also emphasises the importance of virginity. The other version tells that kundo is the incarnation of the goddess Sidapi she was bettered by her husband Sidapa the God in anger and she bears the pain with head hugging knees which is explained as ‘*khuru kulaga khangba*’ in Manipuri (Ibotombi,

2004, pp.3). The posture of the kulaga khangba looks similar to the shape of kundo flower. Hence, the Sidapi goddess is born in the form of kundo flower. The khuru kulaga khangba of the goddess while the God Sidapa battered her is the sensory pole. Turner (1976) explains that in the sensory pole, the content of the symbol is related to the outward form of the thing which is used as a symbol in the ritual. Here, the unpollination of the kundo is related to the maintenance of the virginity of the bride. In the Meitei community, sexual contact between men and women is not permitted before marriage. The chastity of the bridegroom before the marriage is idealised. In olden days, marriage ritual was not performed if the intended spouse was sexually consummated before marriage. However, with the advent of modernisation in Manipur, this ideology is exempted and luhongba is performed with its all rituals.

Through these symbols, we can observe that the luhongba of the Meitei community is about the sexual contact of men and women and producing its progeny. Luhongba is about producing of the patriarchal lineage of the salais.

4.12. Gender and language in Chenba marriage:

Feminist studies on language have long since observed that language is intrinsically andocentric and patriarchal in nature (Fan, 1996). Language perpetuates devaluing women. The analysis of language in the context of chenba marriage would provide the starting point for understanding how the husband and wife's relationship is conceived, how marriage institution is organised and how the language is used in the marriage institution to establish the identity of men as superior and women as subordinate.

In chenba marriage, the term 'chenba' or 'nupi chenba' implies the action of women. Here, the hidden meaning or the underline meaning of chenba is related to the involvement

of sexual acts. Once a person elopes, his or her virginity is under scrutiny. Losing virginity before marriage is taboo and stigmatised. The term 'nupi chenba' indicates the woman involving in sexual acts before marriage. Her act of chenba brings dishonour to herself and her family. On the other hand, the word 'nupi chelakpa' in which 'nupi' means 'woman' and 'chelakpa' means 'to bring', as explained above displays the boy as the commander and the girl following his commands. This shows the relation of 'master' and 'subservient'. Man acts as the master and woman as his subservient.

Again, the word 'luhongba' is made of two words 'lu' meaning 'root' and 'hongba' meaning 'change'. The word 'luhongba' also means changing from one clan to another clan. In luhongba or marriage, it is the woman who changes her clan to her husband's clan. Both the term 'nupi chenba' and 'luhongba' project the women's role and journey into the marriage institution. There is no such word as projecting men in the marriage institution. To substantiate the above analysis, the unmarried man is called 'pakhang' and unmarried women as 'leisabi'. After marriage, women are called as 'mou', however, there is no word or term in Manipuri for a married man. Men are free from labeling in the marriage institutions. The labeling of women as 'mou' confined her position to her married life and limits her relation as wife to only one man whereas, the non-existence of word or term for a married man, he could misuse his status in a certain time. There is a saying in Meitei that a man is the owner of ten women. The Meitei customary law allows for polyandry.

Further, after marriage, the wife calls her husband 'tamo' or 'dada'. In the Manipuri language, 'tamo' and 'dada' is used to address the elder brother. It is the symbol of showing respect to the elder male. In another way, it also carries the power or authority over the addresser. Therefore, when a wife addresses her husband by 'tamo' or 'dada', it shows the

power relation between the person being addressed and the addresser.

The analysis of the language used in the marriage institution of Meitei brings out that women are devalued, bound to her role prescribed by the marriage institution and are subordinate or subservient whereas, men are praised for their action and enjoys authority over women. It also indicates that the patriarchal forms of meaning and domination are structured in the language. The usages of such words play a significant role to instill the patriarchal norms and values in the people and internalized them through daily practice.

In the book *Rites of Passage* written by Ven Gennep (1960), he demonstrates that every human being has to go through some kind of rite of passage in their life. This passage brings the person from one group to another group for example from boyhood to adulthood and this passage involves some kinds of rites according to the community's belief. By performing it they believe that they will be saved from any kind of ill fate or incidents which are possible to face by them through the transition period or after joining the latter group. He also opines that these rites make a shift from profane to sacred. Through the performing of rites the person's status is shifted from being profane to sacred and therefore, every community has some kinds of rites which have to be performed at every stage of life and these rites are influenced by religion and therefore Van Gennep (1960) has termed it as magico-religious. He further says that the form of rites can be divided into three types that are a) rites for separation b) rites for transition and c) rites for incorporation.

As Van Gennep (1960) has opined that in marriage the couple goes through all the separation period, transition period and incorporation period and every society has its magico-religious foundation through which the rites or rituals are performed. Here, what I would like to add to the function of these rites is not only for safeguarding the couples from any bad luck

but also for socialising or reinforcing gender roles to the couple which they have to perform in their married life. Through these rituals or rites, the men and women or the husband and wife are made to believe that they belong to a certain division of roles and responsibilities which they must perform to bring peace in their married life. The rites or rituals act as a system of socialising the husband and wife to their gender roles. Further, if we look critically at these roles we can observe that these roles reinforce the idea of the public sphere for the men and the private sphere for the women. Through the process of rites, the couple learned and internalised their roles and disposition it deeply. They further carried out sincerely as these rites are so sacred and moreover it is their tradition and custom which has been carried out from time immemorial. The feeling of sacredness frequently makes people forget about the bias nature of the division of gender roles and started blindly adopting it as their definite duty.

One can observe the bias gender roles and responsibilities in chenba marriage rites through all these separations, transition and corporation periods. The analyses of the rites one by one are stated below and explained how they are gender bias. The analysis as follows:

4.12.1. Androcentrism in Language of Chenba Marriage:

Firstly the words or the terms used in this form of marriage are more implied to the women. The structure and formation of the term chenba has been explained above. The period from chenba and betrothal is the period of separation in which the girl is taken away by the boy from her home for performing the chenba rite. Then the girl is brought back to her home and she is not allowed to go out from her home till she gets married. In this way, the girl is kept separated from the outside world. This is not necessary for the boy. He takes the main role in arranging for the marriage with the help of his friends and family members. This could

be because of two reasons. First, it is not appreciated of a girl coming out in society after chenba as she has indulged in pre-marital sex. Second, now she is entitled to the man with whom she has eloped and if she goes out it might give chance to other prospective men who want to marry her. The first reason shows that only girls are made to feel guilty of her action and the second reason girl's choice is not counted. Millet (1962) in her book, *Sexual Politics* described that woman's sexuality is labelled as a bad influence, however, a man's sexuality is taken as heroic and desired. As in chenba also girl's sexuality is regarded as a bad influence therefore she is made guilty of her action and therefore not allowed to go out until her marriage ceremony is completed and on the other hand, boys are allowed involved in the arrangement of his marriage and meet friends and relatives as his action through chenba is seen as heroic and desired by.

4.13. Objectification of Women:

Objectification of women's body is one of the issues which have been discussed in feminist researches. Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr (2011) have quoted from the objectification theory established by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). According to Fredrick and Roberts, women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by other. Her body has been singled out apart from other women. This contributes to the mental health problems and disproportionately affects women in two ways. First, it is direct and overt and involves sexual objectification experiences. Second, it is indirect and subtle and involves women's internalization of sexual objectification experiences or self-objectification.

In the context of chenba, objectification of women can be seen in the ritual called 'Sumang Urong Khinba' and the 'Mitam Nga thaba'. In 'Sumang Urong Khinba' the erection

of bamboo at the center of the courtyard of the bride's residence symbolises the possession of the bride by the groom. She cannot be taken away by any other men. Here the bride becomes an object which is owned by the groom whereas there is no such case for the groom's side. Again in 'Mitam Nga Thaba' we can observe that the women's body is given importance. They must be comparatively beautiful, and above all, they must be the mother of a firstborn son and must not be divorcees or widows. Women with such qualities are considered auspicious and fortunate (Brara, 1996). This shows the very stereotypical patriarchal perspective which discriminates those women with less attractive or who bears female as a first child or single women.

4.14. Women in Secondary Position:

In the entire process of the marriage ceremonies starting from the beginning of chenba, men are the core of decision-makers. On the chenba day, the boy takes all the responsibilities. Then on the next day of haidokpa, it is the father of the boy who comes and informs about the chenba to the girl's father. The decision of whether to accept or reject for fixing the marriage wholly depends on the girl's father. It is a kind of business between man to man. Women do not have the right to decision-making. Their roles in wedding ceremony remain as a secondary role and obeying the family decision. Moreover, the first dinner which is served to the bride signifies the subordination of the woman status as a wife.

4.15 Embodiment of God and Goddess:

On the wedding day, Meitei believes that the bride and groom obtain divinity in them. Among the Meitei Hindu, the groom is believed as the incarnation of Lord Krishna and the bride as Radha. In Meitei Marup, the groom is Sanamahi Sidaba and the bride is Leimarel Sidabi. The incarnation of the bride and groom as the divine body is the shift from profane to sacred. It is also a transition period where the rites or rituals are performed through which the bride and groom passage from one group to another group that is from single life to married life. In these rites, both bride and groom are to be believed to possess divinity. However, the critical question is that is this power of divinity divided equally between both bride and groom. In the above explanation of luhongba, we see that the groom is sited at the center of the courtyard where the marriage ceremony is performed and the bride walks around the groom clockwise. After completion of one round, she showers flowers on the groom and bows with folded hands. The process is repeated till the completion of seven rounds. This ritual signifies that the groom is the God of the bride and she is the devotee of him.

4.16. Reinforcing Gender Role:

On the next day of mapam chakouba, elder members of the groom's relatives and localities are invited to the groom's place and offered lunch and the food is to be cooked by the bride. This is done for testing the cooking skills of the bride and this rite is performed for the corporation of the newly married woman into the groom's family and his clan. The groom's family members also keenly observe the behaviour of the bride in those initial days after the marriage. She has to wakeup very early in the morning, clean the courtyard and the house and performs prayers, and then she has to cook food for the family and serve them. In

this way, the bride becomes part of the groom's family. Women need to be very good in their skills for doing household work so that they can impress their in-laws and become good daughter in laws. Even a working woman cannot escape or bypass her household work at her husband's home and especially during her initial days after the marriage. The character of a newly married woman is defined based on her household work skills.

Conclusion:

The above analysis states that in all the periods of separation, transition and corporation, the rites or rituals performed through these periods act as an agency for socialising the husband and the wife to their traditional gender roles and responsibilities which is very discriminating in nature. Women are kept in subordinate positions through these rites and make the couples internalise their roles. The process of role-learning is ongoing. According to role- learning theorists like Hartley 1966; Parson and Bales 1956, girls and boys learn the appropriate behavioural roles for their sex during primary socialization, through interaction with adults, especially parents. Families are of paramount importance in gender socialization, including the education system and the mass media.

However, from the study of the rites and rituals of Meitei community, it is observed that marriage institution also plays a very important role in socializing gender role especially the role of husband and wife. Through the chenba marriage it can be observed that emphasis of the gendered division of labour, men as superior and women as subordinate, women's sexuality as taboo and objectification of women's body. Therefore, to understand the power play between the men's and women's position in the family, it is also important to look at the

marriage rituals and rites which reinforce gender roles in the form of the role of wife and husband.

Notes:

1. Heiruk nungsang is the fruit items brought by the groom side in luhongba and puba means to carry.
- 2 Apok nungsang is the items brought by the groom to offer to the ancestor of the bride's clan.
- 3 Piba is the head male member of the clan.
- 4 It is a ceremony in which food cook by the piba and offers to their clan ancestors.
- 5 Hamei is an ingredient made of mixed rice powder with yangbi to prepare rice beer
- 6 Phiruk is a traditional basket to carry things made of bamboo.
- 7 Potloi is a traditional skirt wear by the bride in Meitei Hindu marriage.
- 8 Phanek is Manipuri traditional cloth wear for the lower garment.
- 9 Out house built at the eastern side facing opposite to the main house.
- 10 Out house built at the northern side of the main house.
- 11 Luhongphal is a bench place at the centre of the madap. Underneath the bench pallandabipafan is drawn.
- 12 Tairen is a medicinal plant use by Meitei for purification.

Chapter 5

Case study

The Case study research method has been gaining recognition in the field of social science despite being mostly debated by social scientists who love numbers and statistics (Yin, 2014). It has become popular as it helps in bringing an extensive and in-depth explanation about the research question. It can also be used as an independent research method or as a supplementary method in any kind of research method be it quantitative, qualitative methods, etc.

In this research work, the case study is used as a supplementary method in the ethnographic study of the chenba marriages in the Meitei community to have an in-depth understanding of the research questions mentioned in the Introduction chapter. It can further help in developing a critical analysis of the research findings. This research work has opted for both quantitative and qualitative data and the case studies will help in answering several questions revealed from the quantitative and qualitative data.

5.1 Case Study on Inter-caste/Inter-ethnic Chenba Marriage

From the previous chapters, we came across the concept of inter-caste marriages through chenba. Chenba marriages give an advantage to overcome the caste issues that are prevalent in the society even when inter-caste marriages are not allowed in the Meitei community. Couples who belong to different caste used chenba as a tool to declare their

desire for marriage. Not only inter-caste marriages, we observed the existence of inter-ethnic marriages happening in chenba marriage.

Rakesh and Chanu belong to different castes. They eloped twice to get married. In their first attempt, they were separated by their parents of Chanu. Their marriage was conducted after a second attempt to elope. Chanu narrates their marriage journey-

I met my husband at a hospital in 2003. From then we were in a relationship. He belongs to Schedule Caste and comes from a poor family, who fall below the poverty line and lives in a village. And I am from the city and belong to a higher caste (OBC). His friends always supported our relationship and insisted he elopes and marries me as soon as possible as there were big differences between our statuses. He was afraid that he might lose me. After frequent discussions, he convinced me to marry him. We eloped with the help of his friends. I was sent back to my home according to custom. After some days his family members came to my home to discuss our marriage, my father told me that he wants more time to arrange for the marriage. Later we come to know that my father did not want to go for the marriage and wanted to cancel as the boy was from a lower caste and of poor status. Therefore, we again eloped. This time my father did not accept us and cast me out from the family. We got married without my father's consent and blessings. (Personal interview, Chanu, 4/5/2015)

Chenba has paved a way for couples to achieve their desire to be married. However, it comes with a cost, especially for those girls who belong to a different caste. Most of them had to break ties with their family. A similar situation can also be observed in cases of inter-ethnic marriages.

Anao belongs to Kabui (Kabui is one of the ethnic tribes of Manipur) tribe and her husband belongs to Meithei. They got married through chenba. Anao says-

The very next morning after we had eloped, my father-in-law went to my house and informed about my elopement to my father. My father and my brothers were very angry with me. As my husband is Meitei and I am Kabui, my father and brothers did not accept our elopement and threatened that wherever they see me they would kill me and my husband on spot. My parents disowned me. So, our marriage was conducted at my husband's place. As I am a tribal woman, I was not allowed to enter the kitchen and cook food. For Meitei, the kitchen is one of the sacred places, and Manipur tribes are considered to be from a subordinate community. A tribal woman entering the kitchen of Meitei house is not allowed. They think that entering the kitchen by a tribal would make the kitchen impure. After two years of our marriage, I bore a son. After my son was born, my father and my brothers accepted our marriage and reconciled once again. (Personal interview, Anao, 16/7/2015).

Even though Anoa was married to Kheshorjit, she had to break ties with her family. She was also not given an equal status in her husband's family until she bore a son as her first child. Such biased treatment can also be observed in inter-caste marriage of Nganbi. Nganbi is Meitei and she married to a Brahmin family. Nganbi says-

In our society, a Meitei daughter-in-law is not allowed to enter the Brahmin kitchen and cook for the family till she bears a son. The same was true for me as well. I was not allowed to cook food for the family till I bore my son. (Personal interview, Nganbi, 20/7/2015)

In the case of Sanatombi who belongs to Meithei community, who also had to suffer caste discrimination. She explains-

I got married to a Brahmin guy. Even though we were married according to the marriage ritual; I was not allowed to enter the kitchen of my husband's house. I was also not allowed to perform the rituals and enter the shrine of the Krishna temple which was built beside the house. In our society, if a non-Brahmin woman is married to a Brahman man she is allowed to enter the kitchen and cook only if she bears the first child as a son. Unfortunately, I bore a girl as a first child. Therefore, for my entire life, I cannot attain a similar status that the other women were enjoying in my husband's family. (Personal interview, Sanatombi, 19/4/2015)

The case of Anoa and Sanatombi shows that the couples are able to marry the person of their choice through chenba. However, women from other castes or ethnicity are not easily accepted in the husband's family. They have to prove their worthiness only by bearing son as their first child. Women who bear a girl as their first child have to live as an inferior member of the family. Such norms of Meitei community are very demeaning for women.

5.2 Case Study of Consent in Chenba Marriage

Through these case studies, we can observe that as Meitei is patriarchal in nature and women are not included in the decision-making body. The liberty for both the boy and the girl to choose their partners can become corrupted as Meitei women are not taken to be efficient in participating in the decision-making process. A girl's decision of choosing her partner can be violated by the boy through chenba. Post which, even without her consent, a decision for her marriage is usually taken by the girl's father.

Consent is to express willingness or to give permission. In chenba marriage it can be observed that the couple express their willingness to marry through chenba. Chenba is a way

for the couple to convey to their parents as well as to the society that the couple is inclined towards getting married. In this process, both the couple need to consent for their action. However, there is a question of whether this consent is given genuinely? Let us analyse the violation of consent in the ambit of chenba into three categories:

1. Faraga louga
2. Underage marriage in chenba and
3. Fear of getting punishment.

In this study, it is observed that faraga louba has been practiced in Meitei community. This is termed as abduction. Violation of consent is clearly seen in such marriages. The main target in faraga louba is the sexuality of women. Meitei people perceive men and woman who have eloped as having indulged in sexual acts. Therefore, men take advantage of it and abduct women of their choice.

According to Sumitra-

One day while returning from the theatre, I and my friend were waiting for a public bus. While waiting for a bus, my husband with two of his friends came by Gypsy. They told us to get in the vehicle and they would drop us. One of his friends was known to my friend so she also suggested me to go along with them. So I agreed and went with them. Before reaching my home, one of his friends suggested visiting another friend's home. They told us that they would not take much time and we would come back soon. So we went there. After reaching there, their friend treated us to tea and snacks. Meanwhile, one of his friends informed my father-in-law that his son has eloped with a girl and suggested to inform my father too. And

accordingly, my father-in-law went to my house and informed my father about the elopement. All this happened without my knowledge. (Personal interview, Sumitra, 10/12/2014)

Leima narrates how she was deceived by her husband and eloped-

I never had any relation with my husband before marriage. My husband was a colleague of my father. He saw me when he visited my house. I never liked him as he was much older and I was already in a relationship with another guy. I never thought of marrying him. One of my aunties brought messages from him. My aunt also advised me to meet him and tell him clearly that I do not like him and could not marry him. For this purpose, I agreed to meet him when he asked for the third time. He came to pick me up. I went with him by suggesting that we could sit in a park. He told me that he had some urgent work to complete before going to the park and would stop at one of his uncles' house for that. So, I agreed to go to uncle's house first. He took me to a very far away unknown place. It was almost evening. I started doubting that he was planning to kidnap me but I was helpless. He was driving so fast. It was too risky to jump out from that vehicle. It was already dark when we reached his uncle's house. His uncle's family members welcomed us and told to stay the night at their home. There it dawned on me that that I had been involved in an elopement without my consent. I felt so angry with him but could not help myself as I was not familiar with the place where we were staying. As it was already night, I could not go home. I had no other choice but to stay the night there. I was compelled to elope with him. It is a social tradition that once a girl eloped then chastity or purity of the girl is being questioned. She would be taken as married women. Her life is finished. So I was compelled to marry him. (Personal interview, Leima, 13/11/2014)

The violation of consent can also be observed in yet another sphere that is the age of consent. It is important to observe the age of both girls and boys when they get married, as there are numerous cases where both the boy and the girl were underage.

According to 2013, 'Criminal Law Amendment Act', the age of consent was increased from 16 to 18 years for girls. Further the Indian government has cleared a proposal in the month of December 2021, to raise the legal age of marriage for girls from 18 to 21 years. As we pin down the age of consent in Meitei community, this new bill will be preferred because Meitei community prefers their daughters and sons to get higher education, and then get a job, accumulate some money and should be ready for marriage only when they become economically independent.

According to law, involvement of under-age boys and girls in sexual relationship or marriage is prohibited. It says that if any person makes under-age girls or boys to participate in any sexual act, it is equal to rape and is punishable. However, we could see in the case of chenba, such prohibition is not taken seriously.

In the case of Pratima, she explains-

My husband and I studied together in the same school during our higher secondary class. We were in the same class and we came to know each other and fell in love. Soon after, we eloped we belonged to different castes and our parents would never accept our relationship. But after our elopement, my parents cast me out from our family and filed an FIR. They claimed that I was a minor and I should be separated from my husband. My parents informed my father in law that they have filed a case against my husband and my father-in-law for the false elopement. My father-in-law arranged for a court marriage for me

and my husband before the police came for the inquiry. However, neither the police nor my parents came. (Personal interview, Pratima, 3/11/2014)

In yet another case, where a minor who had eloped, because of the physical violence done to her by her family narrates-

I got married at the age of fifteen. I and my husband were in a relationship for five months before our marriage. In a short while, my family members came to know about our relationship. My father and brother started scolding and beating me frequently. They told me to end the relationship. I was not able to bear their torture so I eloped with my husband. As I was very young, my parents filed an FIR at the police station.... The police officer asked me whether I eloped with my consent. I told him that I have eloped with my full consent. Therefore, the police closed the case and allowed me to go with my husband and to get married. (Personal interview, Romila, 5/12/2014).

Here, the question that arises is one where the culture or the customs allows for such marriages but the government is not in agreement with the culture or the customs and hence is unable to stop such marriage without making people realise it. 9.7 percent of female and 3.2 percent of male respondents in chenba marriages (Chapter 3) had violated 'Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006'. People still consider their customs as being paramount. The police is also influenced by their customs. They have not acted on and taken actions under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

Lastly, the fear of getting punishment makes girl to give their consent for chenba. We also came across situations wherein the girls eloped because it was already late to go back home and they were simply scared that their family members will ostracize them. Along with

this, the girl opined that their brother would have beaten her up for coming back late. Therefore, they decided to elope. The decision taken in such a situation cannot be taken as being based on complete consent. There was pressure which led the couple to take a decision for chenba instead of going back safe. A sense of fear is created among girls about going back home after dusk. Girls are expected to return home before dusk. If not, they are moralised using violence. If there is no stigma of going back home late which is actually permitted for boys, the decision for chenba would not have happened. The respondents could have taken a fair decision.

5.3 Case study on Violence and Chenba Marriage

In chenba marriage both boys and girls are exposed to sexual activity. As they are far from their family they have the liberty to indulge in sexual act. Sometimes this liberty also leads to sexual assault and physical assault. Such violence has happened because of the boy's presumption that as his girlfriend has eloped with him, she is ready for copulation. This presumption can lead to violence where the girl does not cooperate. To satisfy his desire, he uses force. The girl becomes a victim of sexual assault and there is no one to help her. People also perceived that such things are normal among the couples.

Kamala narrates her first meeting with her husband and her sexual assault caused by her husband. She says-

One day, as suggested by my husband, our first meeting was at around 7 pm. He told me to elope with him. We were roaming around the street till 9 pm. After that, he told me to go back to my home but I didn't agree as it was already late at night and if I return home my parents would scold me. Then, he took me to a paddy field and raped me. There were a few

people in that field. They threatened him to take me to a proper place. He dropped me at one of my friends' homes. On the next day, he came with his friends and took me to a restaurant wherein he gave me some money and told me to go back home. He left me at that place with one of his friends. His friend helped me to go to his home and I told him everything about what he did to me to his parents. After this, we got married. (Personal interview, Kamala, 8/8/2015)

Lalitha also shares her physical assault during her elopement. She says-

We used to hang out together many times. He used to take me to his sister's home for a visit. As usual, he told me to accompany him again for a visit to his sister's home. So we took an auto-rickshaw and went to his sister's place but that day the auto-rickshaw driver did not stop at his sister's place. Instead, the driver crossed the lane where we were supposed to go. Then, I started doubting that something is wrong so I tried to jump off the running auto-rickshaw but my husband held my hair and pulled me back to the rickshaw. During this rush my head bang on the back of the seat and then I got giddiness. I was not able to move my body. Then, the auto driver took us to my husband's home where every one of his family members was eagerly waiting for us. (Personal interview, Lalitha, 8/7/2015)

Here, a question arises of whether after all the deception, abduction and sexual and physical assault, why are the girls still married to their spouse who victimised them? To understand this question lets observe what Lalitha has to narrate. She says-

A girl or an unmarried woman coming back home very late is considered morally wrong. Women should be back at home before sunset. If she is not able to go back home before sunset, then she is called with names. (Personal interview, Lalitha, 8/7/2015)

In chenba, whether it is done with consent or by force, chastity plays a key role especially the women's chastity. This chastity decides the status of the family in the society. If they conduct marriage then the status and prestige of the family will be saved. So, in order to stay away from the social stigma and save the prestige of the family, the family members especially the decision maker of the family decides to conduct marriage ceremony or disown their daughter even though they know that their daughter had eloped against her will and leave their daughter helpless. With no support from the family the girls end up marrying their abductor and take it as their fate.

Hence, what do these observations tell us about our society and the people's mindset? There are many advantages of chenba marriage such as; it allows inter-caste marriage, allows for the couple to choose their partners. However, there are many disadvantages too because of chenba marriage such as abduction, sexual and physical assault and showcasing of it as chenba with the consent of couple, girls are forced to give consent under pressure of being ostracized and without any legal support which will address these issues. If the government frames laws particularly addressing the issues of chenba marriage instead of depending on the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 and Indian Penal Code 359 for kidnapping and abduction.

There is a need for a relook the position of Meitei women's equal participation in decision making. The research project brought out a small glimpse of the reality faced by Meitei women in context of the marriage system. This has made us to understand that there are cases where women are not taken as being important in participating the decision-making process. We need to bring it into a larger context with more research on it that looks at it from

different vantage points which will enable us to understand the position of the Meitei women better.

We can definitely come to a conclusion that the very idea of empowerment and liberation with regard to chenba that literatures have portrayed is indeed a myth, folklore, based upon human tendency to cover up the true situation behind an incident. The restriction upon a woman returning home late which is solely contingent on time is a patriarchal construct which attempts to confine not only women's movement but in extension to her body and her will

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The marriage system is one of the predicaments which feminists have always criticized for subjugating women from the advent of the women's movement. If we look at the women's movement in India during the colonial rule the practice of Sati was banned in 1829 and later, Sati Prevention Act was passed in 1987 to protect the widow and allow them for remarriage. Indeed this change was brought by our male social reformers; it encouraged women to start questioning the evil practices on women that were prevalent in Indian society. In due course, Indian women got the right to vote, right to education and many women participated in the public realm. After India got independence, the government promised to uplift women in the economic, political, and social spheres. Many new acts were passed in the favour of women such as 'Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961,' 'The Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act, 1956,' 'The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence, 2005,' etc. However, during a survey conducted by the Women Commission of India, a report called 'Towards Equality (1974)' showed a rate of dowry death. This report was eye-opening for Indian women as well as for the Indian government. Many women become the victim of dissatisfaction with the amount of the dowry. It resulted in the assault and murder of the bride. With a huge protest from the feminist and social activists of India, the government has passed 'the Dowry Prohibition Act' in 1961. This Act defined Dowry and regulated that any person who gives and takes or abets dowry will be punishable with imprisonment for a term not less than five years and with a fine not to be less than fifteen thousand rupees or the amount of the value of such dowry

whichever is more. Even though the enactment of the Dowry Prohibition Act, there is still the practice of giving and taking dowry as the Indian constitution allows the practice of customary laws.

The report on 'Toward's Equality' also brought out the prevalence of domestic violence among the married couples. In 2005, the government has passed 'The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence.' The national and international governments have taken up certain declarations and resolutions to stop violence against women, though violence on women is still there at the family and community level. Many organizations have been set up to protect women from such violence as well as to counsel them. Organization such as SAATHI, SNEHA Foundation, etc. have been working to protect women from violence and to provide justice to them.

Coming back to the Meitei society, there were no such practices of so-called 'Sati' or 'Child Marriage'. Even after the death of the husband women were allowed for remarriage. Therefore, Meitei women were not fitted in the early phase of the women's movement which was prevalent in the rest of India. Moreover, in Meitei society, there is no such practice of the dowry system in the marriage institutions. Therefore, even though the 'Sati Prohibition Act' and 'Dowry Prohibition Act' were equally implemented in Manipur, as it is a part of India; such act was not relatable to the Meitei community.

However, the prevalence of domestic violence was one of the issues which were rising in Manipur during 1976 which lead to the formation of 'Nisha Band'. Women come out from their domestic life and form small groups at the grass-root level and scrutiny their locality from any kind s of alcohol activity. They opined that the major reason for domestic violence

is the consumption of alcohol by their spouses. This small group of women shifted. They are focused on the state violence done by the Indian Army to the people of Manipur.

The ideology of these women groups is rooted in the traditional values of norms that are assigned to women and men. They believe that if all the women and men follow their traditional norms then there will not be any violence against women. They are not able to see gender segregation in the traditional values themselves. The traditions which emphasize the role of women and men themselves subjugate women. They never treat women as equal to men which leads to the misuse of the power position by men. The qualitative and quantitative result on chenba marriage itself shows the dichotomy in the Meitei traditional institutions.

An in-depth study on the chenba marriage in the Meitei community found out that in the Meitei community chenba is being practiced from time immemorial. The folklore of Panthoibi and Khamba-Thoibi depicts the practice of chenba. Since then, the culture of chenba marriage is practicing widely with many changes of the rituals performed in it.

The practice of chenba became very popular in the Meitei community. The reasons for chenba range from chenba being the easiest way to disclose their intention to their family to the abduction of their desired girl with whom they want to marry. Despite chenba being the easiest way of marriage and liberalized the choice of partners, the existence of abduction of women and forcefully married to their abductor and turning it into a normative form of marriage should be scrutinized.

The case studies reveal that the questioning of women's chastity becomes the big obstacle in rejecting the chenba and further for the marriage. The girls are made to accept to marry the men who abducted them to overcome the stigmatization of the so-called 'impure women'. This

shows that there is a perception in the Meitei community that once a girl elopes she lost her virginity and she is not accepted by the community unless she marries the person with whom she eloped. The virginity of the girl comes under question by society whereas the boy is free from such question. This shows the gender bias and discrimination of women's bodies through marriage institutional norms of purity and impurity. The chenba practice is playing a dual role in which one form it is allowing the girl to choose her choice of partner for marriage and another form it is also pulling and restricting the girl to marry the partner who abducted her. The social structure of purity and impurity is playing a major role in the Meitei community when it comes to elopement marriage. By studying the practice of live-in relationship, we can gain insight into the Meitei community's views on purity and impurity.

Another important finding of chenba marriage is that it cut across the caste exogamy and clan endogamy which is restricted according to the Meitei customary law of marriage. When a lower caste woman is married to a higher caste man through chenba, they have to go through some kind of punishment. The woman is not allowed to serve her husband's family. She is not allowed to enter the kitchen or perform any rituals unless she bears a son during her first pregnancy. The Bamon who married to lower caste women is not allowed to serve the deity in the temple.

Even though chenba is culturally accepted, on one hand, chenba is giving space for choosing their partners as per their wish but on other hand resulted in terms of sexual assault, force marriage, caste discrimination, under marriage and violation of their individual choice. There are loopholes in the chenba which are reflected in the form of physical and psychological acceptance of the person who abducted them for marriage. Women are suppressed with the social norms and family prestige to marry the men without their

willingness for the marriage. Moreover, they also internationalised such deviant behaviour as normative.

There is a lack of awareness among women regarding their rights and laws which are protecting their rights. There is an urgent need for changes in the existing laws inclusive of chenba which can break the cultural sanction of such violence under the shadow of chenba to protect women and children. Initiative steps have to be taken to create awareness of women's rights and their legal rights to protect themselves from all situations. Women's decision for their marriage approval or disapproval of marrying their abductor should be appraised by their family members and by the community at large. Women must have the accessibility to decision-making for their life which will be a stepping stone to elevate women's empowerment on large scale.

The analysis of the language used in the marriage institution of Meitei brings out that women are devalued, bound to her role prescribed by the marriage institution and subordinate or subservient whereas, men are praised for their action and enjoys authority over women. It also indicates that the patriarchal forms of meaning and domination are structured in the language. The usages of such words play a significant role to instill the patriarchal norms and values to the people and internalised them through daily practice.

The analysis of the rituals of chenba marriage brings into light that in all the period of separation, transition and corporation as explains by Van Gennep, the rites or rituals performed through these periods act as an agency for socialising the husband and the wife to their traditional gender roles and responsibilities which is very discriminating in nature. Women are kept in subordinate positions through these rites and make the couples internalise their roles.

Lastly, the image of Manipuri women or the Meitei women has been created as very actively involved in the state's affairs. Whether it is about the economic, social or political, Meitei women have a huge contribution. The Nupi Lal from the history, Meira Paibi in the present, the domination of women in the trade and the position of Maibi in Lai Haroaba, these all keep the status of Meitei women in an equal position to men. However, the basic question, this study on chenba marriage brings out is that despite such a huge contribution made by these women, why they are not given equal status in decision making. Women do not have the right to participate in decision-making as much as men have. As Meitei society is patriarchal in nature, men take the advantage of being a man and exploit women's rights. Women are glorified for their hard work and their contribution to their families and the state at large. However, when it comes to the decision-making about the family or the state or women themselves, they are pushed to patriarchal social norms and values. Women are socialized and made to believe that they must contribute their hard work equally to their partner; however, they are subordinate and never equal to their male partner. Women should submit to their father or husband.

The false glorification of the contribution of Meitei women toward the family and society and keeping them away from their basic rights of participating in decision making shows the double standard of patriarchal Meitei society. There is a need for a fresh look at the status of Meitei women and to include these issues in understanding the women's movement in Manipur.

Bibliography

Books and Articles:

- Amin, Sajeda and Maitreyi Das. (2014). Marriage Continuity and Change in Bangladesh. In Ravinder Kaur and Rajni Palriwala (Eds.) *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts. Changing Practices in a Globalising World*. (pp 89- 115). New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited.
- Arambam Parratt. (2005). *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Arambam Parratt and John Parratt. (2010). *Collected Papers on the History and Culture of Manipur*. Imphal: Lamyamba Printers.
- Ao, Temsula. (2010). Benevolent Subordination: Social Status of Naga Women. In Gill. P. (Ed.), *The Peripheral Centre Voices from India's Northeast*. (pp 123-132). New Delhi: Zuban.
- Baramni, Sarangthem. (2012) *Moirang Sayon Taret*. Imphal: Disinet Office Printer.
- Basanta, N. (2010). *Meitei Family in Flux: An Empirecal Study*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.
- Bates, Daniel G. (1974). Normative and Alternative Systems of Marriage among the Yörük of Southeastern Turkey. *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 3.
- Basu, Srimati. (2000). The Bleeding Edge: Resistance as Strength and Paralysis. *Indian Journals of Gender Studies*.185.
- Bharti, Dr. Dalbir. (2008). *Women and the Law*. New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation.

- Bhaumik, Subir. (2009). *Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India's North East*. New Delhi: Sage Publication India Pvt Ltd.
- Brara, N. Vijayalakshmi. (1998). *Politics, Society and Cosmology in India's North East*. Oxford University Press.
- Brara, N Vijayalakshmi. (2010). The Gendered Space in Manipur. In Gill. P. (Ed.) *The Peripheral Centre Voices from India's Northeast*. (pp. 335-349). New Delhi: Zuban.
- Brown, R. (1975). *Statistical Account of the Native State of Manipur*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication.
- Chaki-Sircar, Manjushree. (1984). *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of Manipur Valley*. New Delhi: Shakti Book.
- Chanu, Urmani L. & M. Jamuna Devi. (2001). Manipuri Women in Contemporary Situation. In C. Joshua Thomas, R Gopalkrishna & K. Rajan Singh (Eds.) *Constraints in Development of Manipur*. (pp. 122- 129). New Delhi: Regency:Pub.
- Cherlin, Andrew and Aphichat Chamrathirong. (1988). Variations in Marriage Patterns in Central Thailand. *Demography*, Vol. 25 (3) 337-353.
- Chowdhry, Prem. (2007). *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender, Caste and Patriarchy in Northern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Chuki, Soma. (2014). Marriage in Bhutan. In Ravinder Kaur and Rajni Palriwala (Eds.). *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing Practices in a Globalising World*. (pp 49-69). New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited.

- Crawley, Ernesty. (1989). *Dimensions of Marriage Primitive Society*, Vol. 2. Caxton Publications India.
- Devi, Ksh. Bimola. (2001).The Role of Women in Manipur Politics in C. Joshua Thomas, R Gopalkrishna&r.K. Rajan Singh (Eds.). *Constraints in Development of Manipur*. (pp113- 121). New Delhi: Regency.
- Devi, Shanti. (2001). *Development of Education in Manipur*. Delhi: Rajesh Publications.
- Dun, E.W. (1992). *Gazetteer of Manipur*. Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.
- Eagleton, Mary. (1996). Who's Who and Where: Constructing Feminist Literary Studies.” *Palgrave Macmillan Journals*.1-23.
- Ellis, Albert and Ruth R. Doorbar. (1952). Recent Trends in Sex, Marriage and Family Research.”*Marriage and Family Living*, Vol. 14 (4), 338-340.
- Fan, Carol C. (1996). Language, Gender, and Chinese Culture. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 10 (1), 95-114. Retrieved from website:
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20019875>
- Flyvbjerg. B. (2011). Case Study. In Norman. K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (pp 301-316). New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
- Fox, Robin. 1967. *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

- Fox, Greer Litton and Velma McBride Murry. (2000) .Gender and Family: Feminist Perspectives and Family Research. *Journal of Marriage and Family*.1160- 1172.
- Geetha, V. (2007). *Patriarchy*. Kolkata: Stree.
- Ghosh, G.K. and Ghosh, Shukla. (1997). *Women of Manipur*. A.P.H Publication Corporation.
- Gill, Priti. (2010). *The Peripheral Centre Voices from India's North East*. New Delhi: Zuban.
- Grierson.G.A. (1968). *The Linguistic Survey of India.Vo. III, Part IV*. Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Gupta, Giri Raj. (1976). Love Arranged Marriage and the Indian Social Structure. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 7, (1),76.
- Hodson, T.C. (1989). *The Meitheis*. Delhi: Low Price Publications.
- Ibotombi, Yengkhom. (2004). *Meitei (Meetei) Gi Luhongbagi Hourakfam Chatnarol*. Imphal: Ima Sanahanbi Printing Press.
- Joshi, S.C. (2004). *Manipur: the Jewel of India*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.
- Kadambari, V. (2009). *Gender Studies- A Primer*. Chennai: Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development.
- Kaur, Ravinder and Rajni Palriwala. (2014). *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing Practices in a Globalising World*. . New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited.
- Khullar, Malla. (2005). *Writing the Women's Movement*. New Delhi: Zubaan.

Khwairakpam, Yaiskul. (2011). *Segmaida Poka Siba*. Imphal: Patriotic Writer's Forum.

Kudat, Ayse. (1974). Institutional Rigidity and Individual Initiative in Marriages of Turkish Peasants. *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 47(3).

Kulachandra, B. (2003). *Meitei Gi Luhongba Amasung Louna Leinabagi Wayel Waikhun*. Imphal:Tamar Publication.

Kumar, Pushpesh. (2014).Transgressions, Accomodations and Change: Configuring Gender and Sexuality within Marriage Practices of the Kolams. In Ravinder Kaur and Rajni Palriwala (Eds.). *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing Practices in a Globalising World*. (pp 70-88). New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited.

Lessinger, Johanna. (2014). Love in the Shadow of Sewing Machine: A Study of Marriage in the Garment Industry of Chennai, South India. In Ravinder Kaur and Rajni Palriwala (Eds.). *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing Practices in a Globalising World*. (pp 234-252). New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited

Lewis-Beck, M.S., Alan Bryman & Tim Futing Liao. (2004). *The Sage Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research Methods*. Vol.1 (pp.92-94).Sage Publication.

Mangang, Nongthombam Mera. (2014). *Eikhoigi Thouramlon*. Imphal. Paona Bazar Imphal: JC Office Printing Works.

Martinez-Alier, Verena. (1972). Elopement and Seduction in Nineteenth-Century Cuba. *Past & Present*,55, 91-129.

- Menon, Nivedita. (2014). A Uniform Civil Code in India: The State of the Debate in 2014. *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 480-486. Retrieved from web: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.15767/feministstudies.40.2.480>
- Mc Culloch, William. (1980). *Valley of Manipur*. Delhi: Gian Publication.
- Mc Millen, Sally G. (2008). *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mehrotra, Deepti Priya. (2010). Restoring Order in Manipur: The Drama of Contemporary Women's Protests. In Gill. P. (Ed.) *The Peripheral Centre Voices from India's Northeast*. (pp 266-283). New Delhi: Zuban.
- Meitei, Manglem. (1995). *Khamnung Ingel Leisaba: Hayam-Hayeechak*. Nambol: Komol Press Nambol.
- Menon, Nivedita. (2010). *Seeing Like a Feminist*. Delhi: Indian Penguin.
- Mehrotra, D.P. (2009). *Burning Bright Irom Sharmila and the Struggle for Peace in Manipur*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Meitei, Manglem. (1988). *Khamnung Ingel Leisaba Hayam-hayeechak*. Imphal: KR Press.
- Meyer, John Jacob. (1989). *Sexual Life in Ancient India: A Study in the Comparative History of Indian Culture*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers.
- Mibang, Tamo & M.C. Behera. (2007). *Marriage in Tribal Societies: Cultural Dynamics and Social Realities*. New Delhi: D.K. Fine Art Press (P) Ltd.
- Millet, Kate. (1970). *Sexual Politics*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

- Misra, U.S. and Nadeem Hasnain. (2009). Marriage. In U.S. Misra and Nadeem Hasnain (Eds.). *Introducing Social- Cultural Anthropology*. New Delhi: Jawahar Publishers & Distributers. (pp 161-180).
- Mukhim, Patricia. (2019). *Waiting for an Equal World: Gender in India's Northeast*. MLCU Press.
- Munch, Victor C De. (2009). Love and Marriage in a Sri Lankan Muslim Community: Toward a Reevaluation of Dravidian Marriage Practices. *American Ethologist* 23(4): 698-716.
- Nilvir, Sairem. (2004). *Eerat Thouram Thounirol Lairik*. Imphal: Puthiba Press.
- Panchani, Chandra Sheikhar. (1987). *Manipur: Religion, Culture and Society*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers PVT LTD.
- Pandey, Rajbali.(1969). *Hindu Samkaras: Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas Publishers.
- Pauwels, Heidi. (1996). The Great Goddess and Fulfilment in Love: Radha Seen Through a Sixteenth_Century Lens. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London Vol. 59 (1), 29-43. Retrieved from web: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/619389>. Accessed on, 15th March 2018.
- Pemberton.R.B. (1979). *The Eastern Frontier of India*. New Dehli: Mittal Publication.
- Pitre, Amita and Lakshmi Lingam (2021). Age of consent. *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters, South Asia regional issue on sexual and reproductive health and rights*, Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 461-474. Retrieved from web: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48714677>

- Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. (2000). Introduction: Feminism and the Politics of Resistance. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. pp 153.
- Rathod, P.B. (2010). *An Introduction to Women's Studies*. ABD Publishers.
- Saha, Ranjit Kumar. (1994). *Valley Soceity of Manipur: a Cultural Frontier of India Civilization*. Kolkata: Punthi-Pustak.
- Sanajaoba.N. Roots. (1988) in N. Sanajaoba (Ed.) *Manipur: Past and Present, Vol.3*. (pp 1-19). New Delhi: Mittal Publication.
- Sarkar, Tanika and Sumit Sarkar. (2007). Introduction. In Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (Eds.). *Women and Social Reform in Modern India, Volume 1*. Permanent Black.
- Seth, Lila. (2005). A Uniform Civil Code: towards gender justice. *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol.31, No.4, 40-54. Retrieved from web: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23005979>
- Sharma, Iswarchandra. (2012). Understanding Underdevelopment in Manipur: A Critical Survey. *Economics and Political Weekly* , Vol.47, no.46, 71-77.
- Sheikh, Irum.Hafeez-ur-Rehman and Arab Naz. (2013). An Ethnographic Study of Marriage System and the Runaway Brides of Kalash. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 16 (10)1393-1402.
- Sjoberg, Gideon and Roger Nett. (1992). *A Methodology for Social Research*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications.

Sinha, et al. (2013). Child. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 48, No. 52 p. 5. Retrieved from web: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24477880> JSTOR

Szymanski, Dawn M., Lauren B. Moffitt and Erika R. Carr. () Sexual Objectifications of Women: Advances to theory and Research. *The Counselling Psychologist* 39(1), 6-38.

Tejbati, Dr. L. (2014). *Meitei ArangPham Phamba*. Imphal: Lamyamba Prints.

Thokchom, Nandini. (2010). Meira Paibi: The Role of Women's Movements. In Meitei Society in Gill. P. (Ed.) *The Peripheral Centre Voices from India's Northeast*. pp 151-159. New Delhi: New Delhi: Zuban.

Turner, Victor. (1967). *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Twanley, Katherine. (2014). *Love, Marriage and Intimacy among Gujarati Indians: A Suitable Match*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Uberoi, Petrica. (1994). *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. pp. 225- 236. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Uberoi, Petrica. (1994). Sociology, Gender, Family Studies: Regressive Incorporations. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29, No. 27, 1686-1687.

Van Gennep, Arnold. (1960). *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960.

Vatuk, Sylvis. (2014). Changes and Continuity in Marital Alliance Patterns. In Ravinder Kaur and Rajni Palriwala (Eds), *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing*

Practices in a Globalising World. pp 28-48. New Delhi:Orient Blackswan Private Limited.

West, Lois A. (1997). *Feminist Nationalism*. UK: Routledge.

Westermarck, Edward. (1936). *The Future of Marriage in Western Civilization*. London: Macmillan Co.

Yin, R.K. (2014). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. New Delhi: Sage Publication India Pvt. Ltd.

Zama. Margaret Ch. (2013) Introduction. In Margaret Ch. Zama (Ed.) *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The dynamics of Culture Society and Identity*. New Delhi: Sage Publication.

Government Report and Image Reference:

Census India. (2011). *Manipur Population Census 2011*. Retrieved from <https://www.censusindia.co.in/states/manipur>

E-Pao.Net. (2009). Traditional/instrument of Manipur (Pung). Retrieved from https://www.google.com/search?q=manipuri+pung+photo&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwiWoZGhzMr0AhXBKbcAHXU5B9gQ2-cCegQIABAA#imgsrc=ms_AQs_x9mliFM

Government of India, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Department of Social Welfare. (1974). *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women*. <https://pldindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Towards-Equality-1974-Part-1.pdf>

Government of India, Ministry of Welfare Resolution No. 12011/68/93. (1993). The Gazette of

India, Extraordinary, Part 1 Section 1No. 186.

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India. (2007). *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) 2005-06*.

<https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/frind3/frind3-vol1andvol2.pdf>

OnefiveNine. (2021). Manipur state. Retrieved from

https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.onefivenine.com%2FIndia%2Fvillag%2Fstate%2Fmanipur&psig=AOvVaw35mFYwLzhq8mYPs9Ok3Me6&ust=1684238303741000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CA4QjRxqFwoTCJir4eSi9_4CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAI

TUBS. (2011). *File: Manipur in India.svg*

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Manipur_in_India.svg .

The Gazette of India, Ministry of Law and Justice. (2012). *The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012*. Retrieved from web:

<https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/POCSO%20Act%2C%202012.pdf>

The Gazette of India, Ministry of Law and Justice. (2005). *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005*. Retrieved from web:

<https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/wdvact.pdf>

The Gazette of India, Ministry of Law and Justice. (2013). *The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013*. Retrieved from web:

<https://www.iitk.ac.in/wc/data/TheCriminalLaw.pdf>

WildFilmsIndia. (2014). Nupa Pala. Retrieved from

https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DfbkS9_tYCF4&psig=AOvVaw3DqOMpQdLDMCCswgF2ISCu&ust=1638761915684000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAsQjRxqFwoTCKizoYTey_QCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAT

Appendix

INFORMATION COLLECTED IS TO BE USED AS DATA FOR THE PhD COURSE WORK FOR SORAISAM NIRUPAMA DEVI, CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

(Collected data will be kept as confidential and use for Ph.D. work only. Name and address of the respondents will not be exposed)

- A. Name: _____ Date: _____
- B. Gender: _____
- C. Age at the time of marriage: _____
- D. Name of the spouse: _____
- E. Age of spouse: _____

BEFORE MARIAGE:

1. Religion: _____
2. Caste: _____
3. Clan: _____
4. Qualification: _____
5. Occupation: _____
6. Monthly income: _____
7. Properties: (please tick below)

House	Land	Shop	Jewellery	Vehicle	Others
-------	------	------	-----------	---------	--------

AFTER MARRIAGE:

1. Religion: _____
2. Caste: _____
3. Clan: _____
4. Qualification: _____
5. Occupation: _____

6. Monthly income:

7. Properties: (please tick below)

House	Land	Shop	Jewellery	Vehicle	Others
-------	------	------	-----------	---------	--------

8. Who handles finance in family?

Answer:

9. Who bears responsibility of your child's education?

Answer:

MARRIAGE BY CHENBA:

1. Was your chenba with your consent? (please tick it below)

Yes	No
-----	----

2. If no, why did you marry him?

Answer:

3. Reason for chenba:

- a. Family did not accept our relationship.
- b. Family insist
- c. Forced by spouse
- d. If any other reason, give below:

Answer:

4. Who did take decision for conducting marriage?

Answer:

5. Did your family complained to the police about your chenba? Give reason.

Answer:

TENTATIVE QUESTIONS FOR CASE STUDIES:

- 1) How did you meet with your partner?
- 2) Why did you decided to elope with your partner?
- 3) Did your partner force you to elope with him/her?
- 4) Did you face any kinds of assault during the elopement from your partner?
- 5) Where did you and your partner stay for the night?
- 6) How did your parents/family members react on your elopement?
- 7) What is the reason for marrying your partner if you were eloped without your consent?
- 8) Does your husband mistreat you after marriage?
- 9) How is your relationship with your in-laws?
- 10) Did you continue your education or career after marriage? If not, than what is the reason for discontinuation?

Questions for the parents or guardian:

- 1) Do you support elopement marriage?
- 2) If your child was eloped underage than did you try to separate them?
- 3) What are the means or technique you used to separate them?
- 4) Did you file FIR to police station?
- 5) What can be the reason for accepting marriage even after trying to separate them?
- 6) Do you still support financially for your child's education even after his/her marriage?

The above Questions are based on the following objectives:

Objectives:

- 1) To study the rituals of chenba marriage of Meitei community through gender lens.
- 2) To study the laws which deal with the chenba marriage.
- 3) To find out the impact of chenba marriage on Meitei women.
- 4) To study the changes of the couples' status in the family hierarchy within the ambit of chenba marriage.



NATIONAL WOMEN'S SUMMIT

01-03 February-2018, Hyderabad



PRAGNA BHARATI

CERTIFICATE

OF PARTICIPATION

THIS CERTIFICATE IS PRESENTED TO

Soraisam Nirupama Devi and Dr. Shiparna Das

FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE

NATIONAL WOMEN'S SUMMIT AND

PRESENTING A PAPER / POSTER / FILM.

THE TITLE OF HIS / HER PAPER / FILM POSTER/ IS

Women and Chakra in Meitei Community

REKHA PANDE
CONFERENCE CHAIR
NATIONAL WOMEN'S SUMMIT

MONICA REDDY
SUMMIT DIRECTOR
NATIONAL WOMEN'S SUMMIT

N. NAGRAJ RAO
PRAGNA BHARATI
ORGANISING SECRETARY



**Gender
&
Empowerment**

UGC-CPE Sponsored International Conference
on

Gender & Empowerment



Organized by

Bijoy Krishna Girls' College, Howrah

in Collaboration with

School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata

16th & 17th of December, 2016



This is to certify that Sri /Smt. Sonaisam Nirupama Devi
& Sripurna Das of University Of Hyderabad

College /University / Institution has participated / presented a paper
entitled A Case Study Analysis On Women And Child
Marriage In Meitei Community as an academician / research scholar
in the conference held at Bijoy Krishna Girls' College, Howrah on
16th & 17th December, 2016.

Rupkatha Mukherjee
Ranjana Sarkar (Ghosh)
Convenors

Santosh
Director
School of Women's Studies
Jadavpur University Kolkata

Reena Chatterjee
Principal
Bijoy Krishna Girls' College, Howrah

ISSN 0973-3914

RESEARCH JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND LIFE SCIENCES

HALF YEARLY, BILINGUAL (English/Hindi)

A REGISTERED REVIEWED/REFEREED RESEARCH JOURNAL
Indexed & Listed at: Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory®,
ProQuest, U.S.A (Title Id: 715205)

Volume- XXIV-II English Edition Year- 12 June, 2018

UGC
Journal No. 40942
Impact Factor 3.112



JOURNAL OF

Centre for Research Studies

Rewa-486001 (M.P.) India

Registered under M.P. Society Registration Act,
1973, Reg. No. 1802, Year-1997
www.researchjournal.in

Research Journal of Social and Life Sciences

A Registered Reviewed/ Refereed

UGC Journal No. 40942, Impact Factor 3.112

Indexed & Listed at: Ulrich's Periodicals Directory ©, ProQuest

U.S.A. Title Id: 715205

Volume- XXIV-II	English Edition	Year- 12	June, 2018
-----------------	-----------------	----------	------------

Chief Editor

Prof. Braj Gopal

Honoured with Prestigious Bhartendu Harishchand Award

profbrajgopal@gmail.com

Honorary Editor

Dr. S. Akhilesh

Honored with Prestigious Pt. G.B. Pant Award Govt. of India 1997, 1998,

2000, 2004, 2008, 2014 and Bhartendu Harishchand Award in 2006

akhileshtrscollge@gmail.com

Dr. Sandhya Shukla

Professor and Head

Department of Political Science, Govt. T. R. S. College, Rewa (M.P.)

drsandhyatrs@gmail.com

Dr. Gayatri Shukla

Joint Director, Centre for Research Studies

shuklagayatri@gmail.com

Dr. R. N. Sharma

Retiary Professor, Rewa (M.P.)

rnsharmanehru@gmail.com



Journal of Centre for Research Studies

Rewa (M.P.) India

Registered under M.P. Society Registration Act, 1973, Reg.No. 1802, Year, 1997

www.researchjournal.in

A Case Study on Chenba (Elopement) of Meitei Community through the Gender Lens

* Soraisam Nirupama Devi

** Sriparna Das

Abstract- Meitei people are described as romantic people and most of the marriages are love marriages. Both the boys and the girls are allowed to choose their own partner. Love marriage is recognized by the community. To get married, the lovers preferred to elopement which is termed as "Chenba" in Meitei community. However, Chenba is very much different from the concept of elopement of mainstream society. Chenba is used as a tool to inform the parents and the public that the couple want to get married. As Meitei society is patriarchal and Meitei women are not in decision making body, the cultural sanction of Chenba can exploit women's right of consent and her sexuality is prone to exploitation at the hand of the man who elope her. A critical analysis of the case studies of the victim women of elopement marriage collected from field work will bring out the gender discrimination within the Chenba marriage institution and how women's rights for decision making, education and career are exploited.

Key Words- Marriage, Community, Chenba, Women

Introduction: Women empowerment plays a vital role in the development. Right to participate in decision-making process is one of the key aspects for empowerment. Any kind of empowerment whether economic or social or political, empowerment will not be achieved without the ability to participate or accessibility to decision-making process. Kabeer (1999) opines that elements of awareness or consciousness, access to resources, alternative choices, voice and engaging in decision making must be considered in the process of women empowerment. Further, Boateng et al (2014) quoted from Charmes and Wieringa that women empowerment can be achieved only when women can act by themselves or have their own agency. On above, women should be accepted as equal partner in the decision making process. Therefore, this paper will discuss how women are not included in decision-making process particularly in the context of Meitei women and *Chenba* which brings discrimination and violence against them. Further, it will also discuss the existing institutional structure loopholes which are reflecting a negative manner

* Senior doctoral student in the Centre for Women's Studies.

** Assistant Professor at Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies. Both of their affiliation is University of Hyderabad, India.

and not fulfil the wellbeing of women. Analysis in this paper is based on the research on Meitei women of Manipur and the elopement marriage. The term elopement is called '*Chenba*' in colloquial language of Manipur and the word *Chenba* is used instead of elopement throughout this paper.

The Culture of *Chenba* in Manipur:

When we talk about Meitei women of Manipur, the topic normally confine to their strong activity in economic, political and social spheres of the state. Even, the existing literatures on Manipur glorify the contribution of women in the state's development. Further, the people of Manipur perceive that women enjoy equal liberty to men while choosing their life partners. Love marriage is predominant form of marriage in Manipur. These love marriages are mostly performed through *Chenba*. And *Chenba* is the famous tool through which the couple may announce that they want to marry (Basanta, 2010). It is culturally accepted. It is performed with rites or rituals of marriage. *Chenba* is very much different from the so called elopement of the mainstream society. In *Chenba* also the couple chooses their own partners and decides to marry. However the difference in this *Chenba* from the mainstream elopement is that marriage is not performed during the *Chenba* unlike in mainstream elopement.

The studies which are carried out on elopement have found that the most common factor for elopement is the parents' objection and disapproval of the couples' relationships and it is taken as the dishonour, extreme shame and outrage of the family. However, in Meitei community *Chenba* is used as a tool to inform the parents and the public that the couple wants to get married. In *Chenba* the couple stays together for one night and in the next morning the boy's father is informed and on the same day the boy's father has to go to the girl's residence and has to inform to the girl's father and her family about *Chenba*. With the permission of the girl's father, a wedding date for the couple will be decided. The wedding ceremony is performed at the girl's residence by inviting all their relatives and friends of the both families. After the wedding ceremony the bride stays with the bridegroom at his home as Meitei community is patriarchal and the copulation of the newly married couple is done. It is believed that in Meitei community there is no gender discrimination in choosing their marriage partners. *Chenba* is culturally accepted and there is no stigma in Meitei as it is in the mainstream society. In such situation a question can be raised that why there is a need for a critical study on *Chenba* marriage?

As Meitei is a patriarchal community in which hierarchy exists between men and women and women are subordinate to men where women are not allowed to participate in decision making. But when it comes to *Chenba* marriage in the same community both boys and girls are liberal to choose their own partners. In contrast I would state that it is only a belief/myth amongst Meitei community that both boys and girls enjoy their freedom of choice in

Chenba. This belief is again reinforced by the existing literatures which glorify that Meitei brides enjoy higher position during the marriage ceremony (Basanta, 2010). However, these existing literatures fail to capture or document the culture of abducting of girls in the name of *Chenba*. Therefore, this paper will bring out the loopholes through case study analysis of *Chenba* and its consequences.

Case Study Analysis of Women in the Ambits of *Chenba*:

Data of these case studies were collected to understand the very idea of how men alter the women's liberty of choosing their partner and being forced for the marriage. Through the case studies, one can observe how woman is deceived and forced her to accept the *Chenba*. One of the case studies, the woman told that, 'My husband was a colleague of my father. I never liked him as he was very much older and I was already in relationship with another guy. I never thought of marrying him. One of my aunties brought messages for him... My aunty also advised me to meet him and tell him clearly that I did not like him and cannot marry him. With this purpose I allowed to meet him when he asked for the third time. He took me to a very far unknown place. It was almost evening... it was already dark when we reach at his uncle's house. His uncle's family members welcome us and told to stay the night at their home. They were already planning for our *Chenba*. I felt so angry that I could not help myself as I was not familiar with the place where he took me. As it was already night, I could not go home. I was compelled to agree for the *Chenba* with him... it is a social tradition that once a girl eloped than chastity or purity is being questioned. She would be taken as married women. Her life is finished. So I was compelled to marry him...'

Another woman experienced sexual assault during *Chenba*. The questioning of women's chastity becomes the big obstacle in rejecting the *Chenba* and the consequent marriage. The girls are compelled to accept to marry with the men who abducted them to overcome from the stigmatization of the so called 'impure women'. This shows that there is a perception in Meitei community that once a girl is eloped she lost her virginity and she is not accepted by the community unless she marries the person with whom she eloped. The virginity of the girl comes under question by the society whereas the boy is free from such question. This shows the gender bias and discrimination of women's body through marriage institutional norms of purity and impurity. She narrates, 'my husband and I come to know each other through mobile phone. One day, as suggested by him, our first meeting was at around 7 pm. He told me to elope with him. We were roaming around the street till 9 pm. After that he told me to go back to my home but I didn't agree as it was already late night and if I went back to home my parents will scold me. Then, he took me to a paddy field and I was sexually assaulted by him.' Women also face caste discrimination after their marriage. Inter-caste marriage is not allowed in Meitei community. However, the culture of *Chenba* helps in

bending the rigid law of caste endogamy. When a lower caste woman is married to higher caste man through *Chenba*, they have to go through some kinds of punishment like the woman is not allowed to serve her husband's family. She is not allowed to enter kitchen or perform any rituals unless she bears son at her first pregnancy. One of the victims of caste atrocities narrates that, '...my husband was adopted by a widow Brahmin woman who was the neighbour of my husband's family. When my elopement was informed to my family, my father was angry and he did not accept us. My father's family is a Meitei Hindu. During our days inter-caste marriage between Brahmin and Meitei were not allowed. It was strictly restricted. Therefore, my family did not accept us as my husband was adopted by a Brahmin woman. So I stayed with my husband's adopted family without marriage. In our society a Meitei daughter in-law is not accepted to enter the kitchen and cook for the family till she bears a son. So, even though I was staying with his family, I was not allowed to cook food for the family till I bore my son.'

In some cases, even the law could not protect the minor boys and girls from the under-age marriage. The protector of law and parents are more concerned about the girl's chastity and their family honour instead of giving proper guidance to these minor boys and girls for under age marriage. Women or her family members can file case for *Chenba* without consent under the Indian Penal Code 566, kidnapping and abducting or inducing woman to compel her marriage. We have a clear legislation stating that abduction and force marriage is a crime and punishable, however, the problem for implementing such legislation is being challenged by the cultural sanction of male prerogative and women internalising it as normal. Therefore, there is question of how far the existing legal aids are applicable to the context of *Chenba* and protect women victim from violence. One of the minor girl's parents says, 'our daughter was only 17 years old when she eloped. She was studying in class eleven and we wanted her to pursue higher studies.... We got news from her friends that she was eloped with her boyfriend. We did not want them to get married as both of them were very young. So, we filed FIR (First Information Report) to the police station. The police searched for one week for them... my daughter told to the police that she was eloped with her consent. So, the police suggested us to arrange for marriage even the boy's parents requested to us to organise a marriage ceremony for them... After *Chenba*, due to some situation if she did not marry with the same person who eloped her, it will ruin her life and also the family honour will be outraged.

Another case shows that woman's behaviour is blamed for resulting in *Chenba*. Her freedom of being herself becomes the cause of man's attraction towards her and desires to possess her. Here, the women's behaviour becomes questionable and men's action towards her behaviour is justified. One of the female respondents describes that, 'I told my parents that I have no idea about my *Chenba* and these guys only planned it without my knowledge.... I

was beaten and scolded by my father and brothers. I told them I do not want marry with him. But it was all in vain. My father decided to fix my marriage. He told to me that if I did not marry him it will bring dishonour to the family which he had always feared because of my behaviour since earlier. I was forced to marry him to save the family honour.'

The culture of *Chenba* opens up space for alternative choice for marriage in Meitei society however, at certaintime and space it also leads to crimes. Through the above case studies one can observe that *Chenba* has many loopholes which lead to the violence against women. Women are sexually exploited, deceived, abducted and forced for marriage, losses family support, blamed on the women's character. Women have to bear the shame and pain in silence to protect the family honour and compelled to marry with the abductor. Further, there is an existence of under-age marriage, drop-out from education and no career option which leads to the low income earning or becoming housewife and dependents. If she wants to continue her education after marriage, the decision of continuing or discontinuing her study depends on her father-in-law and her husband. The choice or the decision of the women to continue her study becomes shattered.

Conclusion:

Even though *Chenba* is culturally accepted, *Chenba* is giving space for choosing their partners as per their wish but onthe other hand can result to sexual assault, force marriage, caste discrimination, under age marriage and violation of right of their individual choice. There are loopholes in the *Chenba* which are reflected in the form of physical and psychological acceptance of the person who abducted them for marriage. Women are suppressed with the social norms and family prestige to marry the men without their willingness for the marriage. Moreover, they also internationalised such deviant behaviour as normative. There is a lack of awareness among women regarding their rights and laws which are protecting their rights. Initiative steps have to be taken up to create awareness about women's rights including legal rights to protect themselves from all such situations. And also there is an urgent need for an inclusive law to protect women and children from violence which is taking place under the shadow of cultural sanction of *Chenba*. Women's decision for her approval or disapproval of marrying their abductor should be appraised by their family members and by the community at large. Women must have the accessibility to decision-making for their life which will be a stepping stone to elevate women empowerment in large scale.

References :

Books:

1. Basanta, N. 2010. *Meitei Family in Flux: An Empirecal Study*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.
2. Brara, N. Vijaylakshmi. 1998. *Politics, Society and Cosmology in India's North*

- East*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
3. Chaki-Sircar, Manjushree. 1984. *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of Manipur Valley*. New Delhi: Shakti Book.
 4. Chowdhry, Prem. 2007. *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender, Caste and Patriarchy in Northern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
 5. Ghosh, G.K. and Ghosh, Shukla. 1997. *Women of Manipur*. New Delhi: A.P.H Publication Corporation.
 6. Kulachandra, B. 2003. *Meitei GiLuhongba Amasung Louna Leinabagi Wayel Waikhun*. Imphal: Tamar Publication.
 7. Lessinger, Johanna. 2014. 'Love' in the Shadow of Sewing Machine: A Study of Marriage in the Garment Industry of Chennai, South India in Ravinder Kaur and RajniPalriwala (Eds), *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing Practices in a Globalising World*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, pp 234-252.
 8. Mangang, NongthombamMera. 2014. *EikhoigiThouramlon*. Imphal: JC Office Printing Works.
 9. Nilvir, Sairem. 2004. *EeratThouramThounirolLairik*. Imphal: Puthiba Press.
 10. Panchani, Chandra Sheikhar. 1987. *Manipur: Religion, Culture and Society*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers PVT LTD.
 11. **Articles:**
 12. Bloom, S. S., David, W., Monica, D., & Gupta, K. 2001. Dimensions of Women's Autonomy and the Influence on Maternal Health Care Utilization In A North Indian City. *Health Care, iS(1)*, 67-78.
 13. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00703370%28200102%2938%3A1%3C67%3ADOWAAT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-C> (Accessed on 21st, January, 2018).
 14. Boateng, Godfred Odei. Vincent Zubedaar Kuuire, Mengieng Ung, JonathanAnim Amoyaw, Frederick Ato Armah & Isaac Luginaah. 2014. Women's Empowerment in the Context of Millennium Development Goal 3: A Case Studyof Married Women in Ghana. *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 115, No. 1, pp. 137-158
 15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24720220> (Accessed on 18th January, 2018).
 16. Kabeer, N. 1999. Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reactions on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(5), 435.
 17. <https://www.utsoc.utoronto.ca/~kmacd/IDSC10/Readings/research%20design/empowerment.pdf> (Accessed on 21st, January, 2018).
 18. Sheikh, Irum.Hafeez-ur-Rehman & Arab Naz. 2013. An Ethnographic Study of Marriage System and the Runaway Brides of Kalash. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 16 (10): 1393-1402.
 19. [https://www.idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr16\(10\)13/14.pdf](https://www.idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr16(10)13/14.pdf) (Accessed on 08th, January, 2013).

Volume No. 7 Issue No. 1
ISSN 2277-3606 Jan 2018

ajes

ASIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES



Printed, Published and edited by Ashok Rangnath Thorat, President Forum for Culture Studies
Aundh, Pune - 411 007. Published from 10, Usha Manor, Aundh, Pune - 411 007.

Printed at Prabhat Printing Works
427, Gultekdi, Pune - 411 037.

Reg. No. MAHENG 12979/13/1/2011-TC
Publishers Identifier No. ISSN 2277-3606

ELOPEMENT, GENDER AND MANIPURI DIGITAL FILM

Soraisam Nirupama Devi¹
Sriparna Das²

The aim of this paper is to analyse how 'chenba' or elopement marriage is represented in Manipuri Digital Films. In Manipur, the practice of 'chenba' or elopement has mutual consent as its core concept. This paper would critically interrogate this practice in Manipur and the gender normative/s of 'chenba' marriage. Manipuri films glorify the idea of love marriage that becomes possible mostly through 'chenba'. Normally, the lovers use 'chenba' to disclose their relationship to the family and to inform them about their intentions of marriage. 'Chenba' is frequently used in the Manipuri films to induce and to reinforce the normative gender roles among the audience. This maybe witnessed in cases where even if the hero abducts the heroine without her consent and forcibly marries her; he is never at fault whereas the heroine succumbs to her fate of marrying her abductor and fulfilling all the duties of 'a good wife'.

Introduction

Around fiftyfour celluloid movies are made in Manipur since the release of the first Manipuri celluloid film *Matangi Manipur* in 1972. However, due to the lack of market and the non existence of State Film Policies in Manipur, not many celluloid films are produced which lead to the domination of digital films in the area. The first Manipuri digital film *Lamnei* was released in 2002. Since then, approximately, forty to fifty digital films are made each year in Manipur. The banning of Hindi movies is also one of the factors for the sudden growth of the digital

1. Ms. S. Nirupama Devi is a senior doctoral student in the Centre for Women's Studies.

2. Ms. Sriparna Das is an Assistant Professor at Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies. Both of their affiliation is University of Hyderabad, India.

films in Manipur. One of the dominant themes in digital film is the love story and the 'chenba' or the elopement of the lead actors of the film. Elopement, which is termed *chenba* in Manipuri, is a repetitive and fascinating theme that has a huge market and demand as well from the audiences. This paper would discuss about representations of *chenba* in Manipuri digital films and how the films showcase the stereotypical roles which attribute in normalising the gender roles befitting the male power and subjugation of women.

Chenba in Manipur

According to Chaki- Sircar, (1984), Meitei (mainland people of Manipur) people are as romantic people and most of the marriages are love marriages. Accordingly, Manipuri literature abound in romantic narratives offer glorious descriptions of young men and women in love and their faithfulness but ends with tragedy. Both the boys and the girls are allowed to choose their own partners as per their choices. Love marriage is recognized by the community by mutual understandings of both families. However, other forms of marriages also exist. To carry out the love marriage most of the couple chooses *chenba* as a medium of declaring or announcing their wish for marriage. They elope for one night (days vary based on the caste and region wise). On the morning of the next day, the boy's family is informed about *chenba* through a mediator (friend/s of the boy). Following this, the boy's father or the male head of his family, along with some elderly male relatives, need to visit the girl's home and inform to her family members regarding the *chenba*. The marriage is arranged at the girl's house with the permission of the girl's father. Meitei culture sanctions *chenba* from time immemorial and it is not seen as stigma.

Even though love marriage is a marker of 'western modernization' (Chowdry, 2007) in India, it is not a new concept to the Meitei people. It was and is a part of the Meitei culture to recognise the choice of the individual for their life partner. An individual's decision for his or her marriage is not seen as derogatory by the society. This is, seemingly, in stark contradiction from the decisive processes of marriages in many

other parts of India. This claim may be validated through observations made by Chowdry (2007) and Lessinger (2014), who have shown that the young couples elope to marry as their choices are not accepted by their family and results in being outcast from the family. Further, in most cases in India, the boy would be charged with kidnapping and rape and the girl would be married off to a 'respectable' family chosen by her parents within few days or she would be killed in the name of family honour. Generally, this is the scenario with the eloping couples in India. However, in Manipur, *chenba* is accepted in a different manner. Instead of separating the couple, their parents take the responsibilities of arranging marriage for the eloped couples. The parents normally do not interfere into the couple's decision of marriage once they have eloped. It is mandatory for the parents, especially the boy's parents, to arrange the wedding ceremony as their son has eloped with the girl!

Representation of *Chenba* in Manipuri Folk Narratives

To ascertain one's ethnic identity or the roots of a distinctive community we need to look at the folklores. Folklores facilitate us to our origin and the past. When we look at the folklores of Meitei community we can see the prevalence of love marriage and *chenba* in Meitei culture and has been documented through folktales, folk songs and folk dances which are based on the love stories, especially, the most popular mythical love story of *Khamba Thoibi* in Meitei community. This *Khamba Thoibi* love story is one of the incarnations of seven couples whose love stories. These seven incarnations are called *Moirang Sayon*. These stories are narrated by a male crane, *Pongba Hanba Kadaamba*, to his wife *Wainu Mori Thoudanbi* and their son. The story starts with the love story of *Henjunaha-Thongnang Lairulembi*, followed by stories of *Samba Naha Langanba-Khamnung Yaidingkonu*, *Wanglen Pudinghanba-Chakpram Wainu Fishahaibi*, *Nganba-Sangloulombi*, *Khoyonhaoba-Yathingkonu*, *Khamba-Thoibi* and *Kndeng Thangjahanba-Tonu Laijinglembi*.

Narration of *Khamba-Thoibi Chenba*

In *Khamba-Thoibi* story, when *Thoibi* comes back from Burma to

Moirang (*Thoibi*'s homeland), her father sent *Nongban* to escort her till home and planned for *Thoibi*'s marriage to *Nongban*. But *Thoibi* and *Khamba* were in deep love. Knowing the intension of her father, *Thoibi* tricked *Nongban* and escaped from him. *Thoibi* took *Nongban*'s horse and came to *Khamba*'s home and stayed with him. The next day, the king of *Moirang*, who was the paternal uncle of *Thoibi* was informed about the incident. As the king approves *Khamba* and *Thoibi*'s relationship, he conducted a marriage ceremony for them.

Here, in this *Khamba-Thoibi* love story, there is no exact mentioning about the *Chenba* of *Khamba* and *Thoibi*. However, through the narration of *Thoibi*'s escaping from *Nongban* and coming to *Khamba*'s home and staying there without informing her parents seems similar with the process of *Chenba*.

Narration of *Chenba* in *Panthoibi Khongkul*

Another folktale '*Panthoibi Khongkul*' that portrays that *Chenba* has several versions. *Panthoibi* is regarded as an incarnation of goddess in human form and is worshiped as goddess of paddy. In one of the versions, *Panthoibi* and *Nongpok Ningthou* (the Sun God) fall in love at the first sight. But they do not meet again and do not know anything about each other. Meanwhile, *Panthoibi*'s father betroths her to *Tarang Khoinucha*, son of *Khaba Shokcharongba* who is the king of *Kanglei* (old name of Manipur) and they get married. One day, after their marriage, *Panthoibi* meets *Nongpok Ningthou* again. They reveal their love for each other. *Nongpok Ningthou* proposes *Panthoibi* to elope with him many times. But *Panthoibi* always declined his proposal. On the other hand, *Panthoibi*'s father-in-law comes to know about *Panthoibi*'s affair with *Nongpok Ningthou* and he plans to admonish *Panthoibi*. When she comes to know about her father-in-law's intention, she runs away with *Nongpok Ningthou*. *Panthoibi*'s husband chases them but fails to capture them. At the end, *Panthoibi* reveals her divine power, turns into a goddess and is united with *Nongpok Ningthou* at the *Nongmaiching hill*.

These folktales¹ establish the fact that romance between the men and

women was accepted and chenba, as a cultural practice, existed from time immemorial. Further, all these love stories have a great influence on the Manipuri literature. The depiction of love stories or love marriage or chenba is further carried out through other mediums of popular culture such as Manipuri dramas and plays at the courtyard theatre and Manipuri films.

Portrayal of Chenba in Select Manipuri Digital Films

Olangthagi Wangmadasu (1979) is one of the notable Manipuri films of the 70's. It received regional award for Best Feature Film in Manipuri Language at the 27th National Film Awards. *Olangthagi Wangmadasu* is about a love story of Bijay and Thadoi. Thadoi is a rich and modern girl who is a medical student and whereas Bijay belonged to a conservative Meitei family and is a singer. Bijay and Thadoi resorted to chenba. But they are separated because of the differences in their family status. After some year, during an accident Bijay was injured and hospitalised and he was treated by Thadoi who became a doctor. In this second meeting of Bijay and Thadoi, Thadoi storms out all her remorse and the misunderstanding they had in their past and they are again reconciled.

This film shows the practise of chenba which is used as a way of escaping from the parental choices for the marriage. It is used as to fulfil the desire to marry and live with their love ones. Chenba also breaks the wall of class status. *Olangthagi Wangmadasu* is the first celluloid film which depicted the culture of chenba in Manipur further, chenba is portrayed in many digital films⁹. The conflicts in chenba are further portrayed in another commercially successful Manipuri digital films titled *Thabaton* (2014), directed by Bijgupta Laishram.

Thabaton is a story of a woman called Thabaton. She is the personification of tolerance, patience and faithfulness. The movie depicts the tragedy faced by Thabaton from her first marriage caused by the early death of her husband, Yambung. The movie starts with scene of bringing the news of Thabaton's chenba with Yambung to Thabaton's house. A big fight ensues because of the class conflict and

the marriage is dismissed. But, Tabaton and Yambung elope again, and therefore, the society is forced to accept their choice of marriage conforming the rules of chenba. However, her natal family-friend forces her to opt for a second marriage to escape the hard life after Yambung's death.

The above two movies show the significance of chenba in Meitei society. Further, it portrays how the desires of the couples are fulfilled by the existence of chenba. It is a wish fulfilling way for the couples who belong to different economic or social backgrounds status and achieve their romantic aspiration. Seemingly chenba is an easy process but it can also ruin the life of people.

Depiction of Faraga Louba in Select Manipuri Digital Films

There are also practices of chenba without consent. Most of the times, women are the victims of such practices. Earlier, chenba without consent was called as *Faraga Louba*. Faraga louba is synonymous to abduction. In faraga louba, instead of punishing the guilty, it is always found out that both the families urge for solemnising the marriage. Though, faraga louba was an accepted societal norm in Manipur, the influence of western modernisation and the formation of Indian constitution, according to various Meitei scholars the culture of faraga chenba is seemingly eradicated from the Meitei community (Basanta, N, 2010). However, this claim maybe challenged as one of the popular weekly magazine, *Nupi gi Punshi*, published various cases of violence against women. These instances of violence brought forth many factors and faraga louba is one of the dominant factors. The term faraga chenba / faraga louba is modified or altered into chenba. What is significant to cognizance is that the nomenclature of this cultural practice (faraga louba) is consciously suppressed or made invisible by repeated use of the nomenclature 'chenba'. The judgmental value (negative) attached to faraga louba is thus neutralised or 'normalised'. However, men continue to enjoy his possession of the woman according to his will and abduct her. And in order to protect woman's chastity and her family's honour she is made to accept her marriage with her abductor.

The story of faraga loubu is portrayed in two of the successful films, *Luhonbagi Ahing* (2011) and *Sanagi Tangbal* (2014)⁴. *Luhonbagi Ahing* (2011) is a story about a man who is a rogue and abducts Purnima, the heroine, for marriage. Purnima's parents are informed about this incident as chenba of their daughter and their acceptance for the marriage is manipulated. However, Purnima informs her mother that she did not elope with consent but Koireng forcefully abducted her. But as her father has already given his words for fixing the marriage, they did not listen to her plea and forced her to marry Koireng.

Analysis of the Representation of Gender and Chenba in Select Manipuri Digital Films

A contrastive reading of these digital films reveal that on one hand, the films like *Olangthagi Wangmada* and *Thabaton* bring out the nuances of chenba in Meitei community that demonstrates the positive side where men and women are culturally liberated to decide for their choice of partner, and on the other hand, in *Luhngba Gi Ahing* the heroine is made to marry her abductor (hero) for the sake of the family honour. After marriage, even she refuses to recognise the hero as her husband yet, as per the social norms, she serves her role of daughter in-law perfectly. In the course of the time, her feelings for her husband changes and she even expresses her love for him holding his feet.

Thus, portrayal of female submissive roles is successfully reinforced and the normative notion of masculinity and femininity is carried out. The shifting of the heroine's status from a unmarried to married life of woman and her role as a wife and as a daughter in-law is the version of what the audience wants and on this basis the director builds up her stories and the stereotype roles of man and woman are disseminated through the cinema. As rightly pointed out by Mulvey (1975), 'the gender power asymmetry is a controlling force in cinema and constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses. In her 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Laura Mulvey uses the psychoanalysis theory to show how our film watching experience is shaped by the patriarchal

subconscious of society. She also opines that the cinematic text is structured according to the cultural subconscious which is patriarchal in nature.

Revisiting the Manipuri digital films where we compare the characters of Manipuri women in both folklore and cinema, the women depicted in folklore are strong as opposed to those in cinema, who are stereotypical patriarchal representations. The factors for showcasing such stereotyped gender roles could be 1) to reinforce the socio-cultural framework and power structure, and 2) director's preference to meet the profit margin.

As Meitei is a patriarchal society, the social norms and rules for man and women are structured according to the male power structure. Since media has the power of moulding the public opinion regarding any situation, it plays the role of reinforce of the stereotypical gender roles and helps in reaffirming the asymmetrical gendered power structure.

Further, the film industry of Manipur is dominated by men and the above mentioned films are directed by men, portraying the patriarchal ideology. Again, the main purpose of making film is entertainment and business. Therefore, an alternative film carries with it a chance of failure in carrying out the message to the mass. The audience may fail to appreciate the concept of the film, which would result in less profit. Therefore, to meet the target profit margin and to get a good business the film makers prefer to make the films which will gain audience appreciation.

Endnotes

¹ Once a couple elopes there is an underlined notion that the couple have sexual consumption during their chenba and the boy is responsible for his partner's chastity and to protect her, the boy's father takes further responsibility for arranging the marriage.

² Khanba-Thoibi and Panthoibi Khongkul are taken to analysis in this paper because they are the most influential and repetitive folktales

of Meitei people.

³ *Beragi Bomb*. 2013. *Mounao Thoibi*. 2013. *Maithakpi Chigonglei* (unknown), *Numitlei* (unknown), *Meera Mencha* (unknown), etc., are the successful films which depict chenba, due to the word limitation the narration of these films are included in the paper.

⁴ Due to the limitation of the length of words, the narration of *Sanagi Tangbal* is avoided in the content.

References

Books

Basanta, N. 2010. *Meitei Family in Flux: An Empirical Study*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.

Chaki-Sircar, Manjushree. 1984. *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of Manipur Valley*. New Delhi: Shakti Book.

Chowdry, Prem. 2007. *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender, Caste and Patriarchy in Northern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Culloch, Mc. 1980. *Valley of Manipur*. Delhi: Gain Publication.

Dun, E.W. 1992. *Gazetteer of Manipur*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.

Grierson, G.A. 1968. *The Linguistic Survey of India. Vol. III, Part IV*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Hodson, T.C. 1989. *The Meitheis*. Delhi: Low Price Publications.

Kulachandra, B. 2003. *Meitei Gi Luhongba Amasung Louna Leinabagi Wayerl Waikhun*. Imphal: Tamar Publication.

Lessinger, Johanna. 2014. "Love" in the Shadow of Sewing Machine: A Study of Marriage in the Garment Industry of Chennai, South India." *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing Practices in a Globalising World*. Eds. Ravinder Kaur and Rajni Palriwala. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, pp 234-

252.

Panchani, Chandra Sheikhar. 1987. *Manipur: Religion, Culture and Society*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd.

Sanajaoba, N. 1988. "Roots" *Manipur: Past and Present Vol. IV*. Ed. N. Sanajaoba. N. Delhi: Mittal Publication, pp.14.

Weblink

<http://scenemascope.blogspot.in/2011/04/manipuri-cinema-history.html> (Accessed on 2nd, October, 2017)

http://e-pao.net/epPageExtractor.asp?src=features.Manipuri_cinema_in_the_last_three_decades.html. (Accessed on 2nd, October, 2017)



A Critical Study of Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community

by Soraisam Nirupama Devi

Submission date: 06-Oct-2023 03:29PM (UTC+0530)

Submission ID: 2187423053

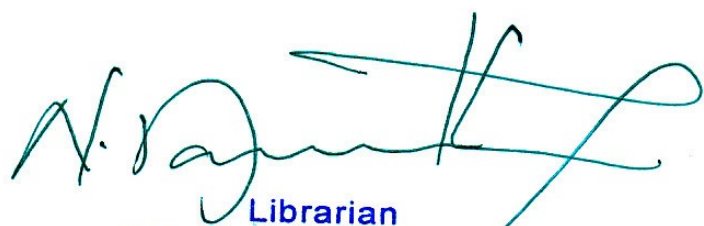
File name: S_Nirupama_Devi.pdf (2.24M)

Word count: 40796

Character count: 200902

A Critical Study of Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community

by Soraisam Nirupama Devi



Librarian
Indira Gandhi Memorial Library
UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
Central University P.O.
HYDERABAD-500 046.

Submission date: 06-Oct-2023 03:29PM (UTC+0530)

Submission ID: 2187423053

File name: S_Nirupama_Devi.pdf (2.24M)

Word count: 40796

Character count: 200902

A Critical Study of Chenba Marriage in Meitei Community

ORIGINALITY REPORT

6%

SIMILARITY INDEX

5%

INTERNET SOURCES

1%

PUBLICATIONS

2%

STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1

www.researchjournal.in

Internet Source

2%

2

ebin.pub

Internet Source

1%

3

baadalsg.inflibnet.ac.in

Internet Source

<1%

4

Submitted to Christ College of Law

Student Paper

<1%

5

shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in

Internet Source

<1%

6

"Lobola (Bridewealth) in Contemporary Southern Africa", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2021

Publication

<1%

7

Submitted to bne-catholic

Student Paper

<1%

8

lexlife.in

Internet Source

<1%

www.iaset.us

9	Internet Source	<1 %
10	wcd.nic.in Internet Source	<1 %
11	www.nagalanduniv.ndl.iitkgp.ac.in Internet Source	<1 %
12	www.enotes.com Internet Source	<1 %
13	www.pahujalawacademy.com Internet Source	<1 %
14	estimatorshn.hnsbuilding.com Internet Source	<1 %
15	mzuir.inflibnet.ac.in Internet Source	<1 %
16	Submitted to University of Durham Student Paper	<1 %
17	"Women, Political Struggles and Gender Equality in South Asia", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2014 Publication	<1 %
18	dspace.lpu.in:8080 Internet Source	<1 %
19	www.mid-day.com Internet Source	<1 %

20	Submitted to CSU, Fullerton Student Paper	<1 %
21	Pushpesh Kumar. "Gender and Procreative Ideologies among the Kolams of Maharashtra", Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 2017 Publication	<1 %
22	Submitted to Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati Student Paper	<1 %
23	Submitted to National University of Ireland, Maynooth Student Paper	<1 %
24	Submitted to University of Hong Kong Student Paper	<1 %
25	archive.org Internet Source	<1 %
26	docslib.org Internet Source	<1 %
27	repositories.lib.utexas.edu Internet Source	<1 %
28	www.krepublishers.com Internet Source	<1 %
29	Submitted to CSU Channel Islands Student Paper	<1 %

30	Submitted to Central University of Gujarat Student Paper	<1 %
31	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	<1 %
32	Submitted to Brigham Young University Student Paper	<1 %
33	blog.ipleaders.in Internet Source	<1 %
34	jcil.isyndicate.com Internet Source	<1 %
35	Submitted to National Law School of India University, Bangalore Student Paper	<1 %
36	Robin Etter Zúñiga. "Demographic Trends and Projections Affecting Higher Education", New Directions for Institutional Research, 1997 Publication	<1 %
37	Submitted to University of Missouri, Kansas City Student Paper	<1 %
38	hufind.huji.ac.il Internet Source	<1 %
39	Submitted to Bear Creek High School Student Paper	<1 %

40	Submitted to Central Oregon Community College Student Paper	<1 %
41	Submitted to Hoseo University Student Paper	<1 %
42	Submitted to Universiti Brunei Darussalam Student Paper	<1 %
43	tbic.ac.in Internet Source	<1 %
44	epdf.pub Internet Source	<1 %
45	www.hindustantimes.com Internet Source	<1 %
46	Submitted to Tata Institute of Social Sciences Student Paper	<1 %
47	Francis J. Murray. " Increasing population pressure and changing marriage modes in central Luzon ", Anthropological Forum, 2010 Publication	<1 %
48	Submitted to Higher Education Commission Pakistan Student Paper	<1 %
49	Submitted to London School of Economics and Political Science Student Paper	<1 %

50 Michael Taber, Daria Dyakonova. "The Communist Women's Movement, 1920-1922", Brill, 2023 <1 %
Publication

51 Submitted to The University of Texas at Arlington <1 %
Student Paper

52 www.news18.com <1 %
Internet Source

Exclude quotes On

Exclude matches < 14 words

Exclude bibliography On