

## **PART – I**

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

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## I. 1. Introduction to the State Manipur and its People

Manipur, one of the seven sisters of north east India, is aesthetically described by many as “Land of Gems”, “Jewel of India”, “a little paradise”, “a flower on lofty heights” and “the Kashmir of Eastern India.” (Ahluwalia 1984: 1). Manipur is a gateway of India to south-east Asia. The word “*Manipur*” literally means the ‘*city of or the land of gems*’. In the olden days, Manipur was known by the neighboring states by different names which were given to it. In Rennell’s Memoir and maps of India it was called ‘Mecklay’. In the narrative of Symes and in maps of that period, Manipur was called ‘Cassey’. To the Shans it was known as ‘Kase’ and to the Burmese as ‘Kathe’, a corruption of the same word; the Ahoms called it ‘Makeli’ and the Cacharies ‘Magli’, while the old Assamese name for it was ‘Moglan’ (Yule & Burnell 1973: 597).

According to a Manipuri historical work, *Sanamahi Laikan*, the name Manipur was first officially introduced in the early eighteenth century during the reign of Hinduised Garib Niwaj (1709-1748). “*Mekhala*” was another name of the kingdom as indicated by the coin of the same king describing him as Mekhaleswar, Lord of Mekhala or Mekhale. The indigenous names of Manipur are ‘*Kanglei (pak)*’, ‘*Poirie (pak)*’ and ‘*Meitrabak*’ (Sanajaoba 1987:3).

Geographically, Manipur is a border State in the North-Eastern corner of the country having an international boundary of about 350 km. with Myanmar on the East and South East. The rest of the boundary is shared by the neighboring Indian States of Nagaland in the North, Cachar district of Assam in the West and Mizoram in the South (Handbook of Manipur 1983: 1). Manipur lies in the North-Eastern region of Indian Subcontinent, between 23.5° North to 25.3° North Latitude and 93.4° East to 95.3° East Longitudes. Encircled by nine hill ranges, Manipur is marked out by a picturesque valley in the midst<sup>1</sup>.

Manipur with a total area of 22,327 sq. km has a population of 23, 88,634. Imphal is the capital city of the state with an area of about 908 sq. km. Out of the total area only 2,238 sq. km lie in the valley while the remaining areas are covered with hilly tracts. The average elevation of the valley is about 790 M. above the sea level and that of the hills is between 1,500 M. and 1, 800 M. (Handbook of Manipur 1983: 1). It is a land locked territory having only two land routes, Imphal- Kohima- Dimapur Road (N.H. N0.39) and Imphal-Cachar Road (N.H.N0.53) joining the adjoining states of Nagaland and Assam with runway of about 215 km. and 224 km. respectively. (Laiba 1992: 84). The state is also connected by air with Guwahati, Dimapur, Calcutta and Delhi.

The Manipuris demanded statehood and on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1970, the Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi announced in the Lok Sabha the acceptance of the Government in principle, the granting Statehood to Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya. In 1971, the Reorganization of North East India Bill was framed and passed the Act in 1972. On 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1972, Manipur State was formally inaugurated by Shrimati Indira Gandhi at Imphal (Roy 1958: 149).

There are sixty (60) electorate constituencies, of which nineteen (19) are reserved for Scheduled Tribes and one for Scheduled Castes. The population of the state can be broadly divided into highlanders and lowlanders. The former consists of almost exclusively the Scheduled Tribe population (very loosely grouped conventionally into two groups, viz, the Naga tribes and the Kuki tribes) of the state where as the later consists of mainly the Meiteis and other communities such as the Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) (Bhagat & Bimol 2002: 518-520). The State of Manipur is inhabited by various ethnic communities having their own distinctive cultural affinity. These ethnic groups can be broadly divided into Meiteis, Naga tribes and Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes. According to 2001 census, there are over 29 tribes in Manipur. They are: Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chiru,

Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Koirao, Koireng, Kom, Lamgang, Mao, Maram, Maring, Any Mizo, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Purum, Ralte, Sema, Simte, Salte, Thadou, Tangkhul, Vaiphei and Zou.

The origin of Manipuris is altogether obscure. Greison (1967: iii, 20) was of the opinion that the Manipuri language fell into the general Tibeto-Burman group but expressed some doubts as to the adequacy of Kuki-Chin to delineate the subgroup to which this language belongs. Physically the Manipuris are distinctively mongoloid in appearance, which suggests that their origin should be sought further east. Some of the early British observers, such as Brown, Dunn and Johnstone, on the contrary, thought they discerned certain "Aryan" features in the people, and this idea has been taken up by those Manipuri writers who are anxious to establish an Aryan pedigree for them. In the absence of clear data from the point of view of physical anthropology it is hardly possible to assess the merits of these theories (Paratt 1980: 2).

There is not much of historical evidence available on the origin of the people of Manipur. There are different schools of thought regarding the origin. Some people considered Manipuris as the descendants of Tartar Colony from China. Others considered that the Manipuris were descendants of the surrounding hill tribes i.e. the big race of Nagas which was once in existence in many parts of the world. The Manipuris are related to the present Naga race of the hills also in respect of many customs still in existence in both groups. Some believe that Manipuris are a fine stalwart race descended from an Indo-Chinese stock, with some admixture of Aryan blood. Some scholars consider that the Manipuris are Kshatriyas as mentioned in the Epic, 'Mahabharatha'. Another school of thought considers Manipuris the descendants of Kiratas. The distribution of Kiratas in north-eastern region is one of the evidences to support this school of thought.

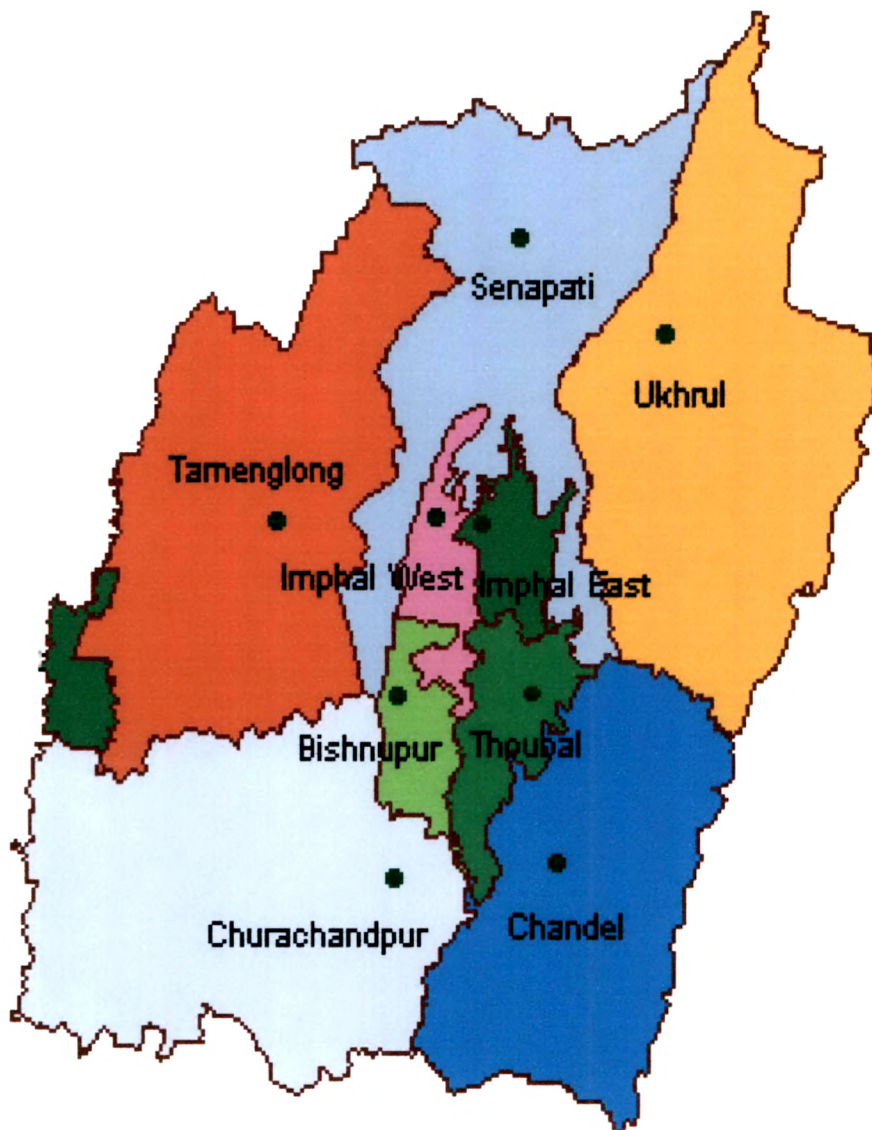
Another school of thought considers Manipuris to be descended from the stock of Dravidians who migrated from South India to Manipur and Naga hills through Burma.

The map of India showing Manipur state (Map1.1) and the map of Manipur highlighting the nine districts of Manipur (Map1.2) are being presented below.



Map 1.1 Map of India





**Map 1.2 Map of Manipur**

The people of Manipur, both in the valley and the hills are having predominantly Mongoloid features. But it is not difficult to distinguish the valley and the hill people. The people from the valley show a developed sharpness in their features over their hill counter-parts. The valley population had numerous occasions to come in contact with the invaders and migrants through the valley. This contact over the ages regenerated a race of some peculiar characteristics, in physical features reflecting the basic Mongoloid characters with definite modifications, to a certain degree<sup>2</sup>.

In the patriarchal Manipuri society, 'Yek' (clan) was the utmost important organ of the social formation. The story of the growth and evolution of this system is still shrouded in obscurity. Pakhangba was endowed with the credit by the myths and some other sources he was regarded as the founder of the "yek" (clan) system. He was the chief of the seven clans under the title of "*Kanglei Mayum Taretki Piba*" in which all the Meiteis belong to. The seven 'yeks' of the Meitei society are *Ningthouja, Mangang, Angom, Khuman, Moirang, Luwang, Chenglei / Sarang Leishangthem and Khaba Nganba* (Promodini 1995: 15). All the high clans of the Kshatriyas and Brahmins belong to a Pana (division of members in the society) which is four in number namely Naharup, Ahallup, Khabam and Laipham. These four Panas may be called man-building clubs. They compete with each other in sports and games (Singh 1987: 15). The Lois were excluded from the Pana system of the Meiteis and formed the lowest strata in the hierarchy of the Meitei society (Singh 1993: 45).

The state has rich cultural heritage and religious peculiarity. The geographical peculiarity of Manipur is that it has a bowl-shaped valley surrounded by hills which are mostly inhabited by the Scheduled Tribes. While the bowl-shaped valley is occupied by a variety of people among which the Meiteis are the major group, other inhabitants like Manipuri Brahmin, Manipuri Muslims, Tribals and migrants coming from other states of India which are called '*the Mayangs*' by the Manipuris. However, in some parts of the valley, generally at the periphery, there are indigenous Scheduled Castes, '*Lois*', a community known as '*Meitei Ariba*' are located (Devi 2002: 1-4).

The Meiteis (Hindu and Sanamahi) with a population of 13.62 lakh constitute the majority community. The Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) has a population of 1.67 lakh. Total tribal population is 7.13 lakh. Others (Nepalis and Mayangs) have a population of 1.46 lakh. The majority of the inhabitants in the valley are



Meiteis who can be divided into three sections based on religious practices; Meitei Hindus, Meitei Sanamahis, and Meitei Muslims (Bhagat & Bimol 2002: 518-520). The literacy rate in the state is 77.9 % for male and 68.9 % for female. The major religions followed in the state are Hinduism 58 %, Christianity 34 %, Islam 7 % and others 1 % (Manipur Fact File 2001: 35).

The common language is Meiteilon or otherwise known as Manipuri to the outsiders. The Meitei language, which is the official state language, is basically the language of the valley people and other dialects spoken by the tribes in the hills are classified under Tibeto-Burman family. Meitei language has been borrowed by the Naga and Kuki people of the hills<sup>2</sup>.

According to the census of 2001, Manipur has a total population of 23, 88,634 in which the scheduled caste population is 60037.

The state has nine districts:

(1) Senapati district has total population of 379,214 in which 238 are the Scheduled Caste population, (2) Tamenglong district has total population of 111,493 in which 03 are the Scheduled Caste population, (3) Churachandpur district has total population of 228,707 in which 205 are the Scheduled Caste population, (4) Chandel district has total population of 122,714 in which 210 are the Scheduled Caste population, (5) Thoubal district has total population of 366,341 in which 33,969 are the Scheduled Caste population, (6) Bishnupur district has total population of 205,907 in which 1,727 are the Scheduled Caste population, (7) Imphal East district has total population of 393,780 in which 10,409 are the Scheduled Caste population, (8) Imphal West district has total population of 439,532 in which 13,276 are the Scheduled Caste population and, (9) Ukhrul district has total population of 140,946 and the Scheduled Caste population is nil here (Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1**  
**S.C. Population of the State and of each District as % of Total Population**

State/ Districts	Total Population	S.C. Population	% of S.C. Population
Manipur	23,88,634	60037	2.51
Senapati	379,214	238	0.2
Tamenglong	111,493	3	0.00
Churachandpur	228,707	205	0.1
Chandel	122,714	210	0.2
Thoubal	366,341	33,969	9.33
Bishnupur	205,907	1,727	0.83
Imphal East	393,780	10,409	2.63
Imphal West	439,532	13,276	2.98
Ukhrul	140,946	0	0

The Scheduled Castes in Manipur present a rather unique and interesting picture in the sense that they constitute a very small segment of the total population i.e. 2.51 percent and that they live as a part of wider society in a situation where the caste system is almost non-existent (Devi 2001: 10). The Scheduled Castes of Manipur have been enlisted under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Amendment Act of 1976, No.108. According to 2001 census of India, in Manipur, under the Article 341 (1) of the Constitution of Scheduled Caste Order, 1950, Scheduled Part XI, seven communities are recognized as Scheduled Caste communities. They are: (i) Lois, (ii) Yaithibis, (iii) Namsudra, (iv) Patni, (v) Dhobi, (vi) Muchi/ Ravidas and (vii) Sutradhar (Table 1.2).

Of all these, the Lois and Yaithibis are the only two indigenous scheduled caste communities of the state. While others are recent migrants coming from outside the state (Devi 2002:4 & Sharma 1987: 3). So, the original Manipuri Scheduled Caste communities are only the 'Lois' and the 'Yaithibis' and as such are the only Scheduled Castes dealt in this study.

**Table I. 2**  
**Population of Scheduled Castes in Manipur**

Sr. No.	Name of the Scheduled Caste	Total Population	Proportion to the total SC population
1	All Scheduled Castes	60,037	100%
2	Lois	51,668	86.1%
3	Patni	3,335	5.6%
4	Namasudra	3,312	5.5%
5	Yathibi	532	0.9%
6	Sutradhar	147	0.2%
7	Dhupi	80	0.1%
8	Muchi	45	0.1%

The above table shows that the Lois represent 86.1 per cent of the total SC population of the state, whereas Patni represents 5.6 per cent, Namsudra 5.5 per cent, Yaithibi 0.9 per cent, Sutradhar 0.2 per cent, Dhupi and Muchi are 0.1 per cent.

The sex ratio of total SC population is 1006, reflecting preponderance of females. Loi have recorded the overall sex ratio of 1034, which is higher than the state average for the Scheduled Castes. Yaithibis have recorded a lower sex ratio of 928.

According to 2001 Census, in Manipur 72.3 per cent of the SC population is literate, which is above the national average for SCs as a whole (54.7%). The Lois have a total literacy of 72.5 per cent in which 82.1 per cent and 63.3 per cent are for male and female respectively. Yaithibis have a total literacy rate of 70.5 per cent in which male are 81.5 per cent and female are 58.3 per cent (Table I.3).

Shri N. Biren, Chairman, All Manipur Scheduled Castes Welfare Association, made a strong representation to the Government of Manipur alleging, inter-alia, that the status of Kakching villagers had been upgraded long ago by the Meitei rulers and as such none of them belong to Scheduled Caste. The Kakching villagers, even if they are Lois, it is further stated, are not included in the expression 'Lois' mentioned in the

President’s Notification. The expression ‘Lois’ mentioned in the President Notification includes only Chakpa Lois now living in the following eight villages: (i) Awang Sekmai (ii) Khurkhul (iii) Phayeng (iv) Leimaram (v) Leimaram Khunou (Tairelpokpi) (vi) Koutruk (vii) Andro and (viii) Kwatha (Manipur Gazette 1994: 9).

**Table I. 3**  
**Literacy rate of the Lois and Yaithibis of Manipur according to the Census of India, 2001**

Name of the Scheduled Caste	Male	Female	Total
Lois	82.1	63.3	72.5
Yaithibis	81.5	58.3	70.5

**I. 2. The different groups of people inhabiting Manipur**

The different groups of people inhabiting Manipur can be classified as the Meiteis, which are the majority in the state, the Kuki and the Naga Tribes, Muslims which are known as Meitei pangal and the various other migrants from different parts of the country generally known as Mayangs by the Manipuri (Table I.4), (Fig. I.3).

***Meiteis***

The conception of the term ‘Meithei’ is extended to the people belonging to one of the seven clans in Manipur. In the later age, we use the term with a wider connotation. It is used as a synonym for the combination of the people of the seven clans and arrivals from the east and the west (Kirti 1980: 19). The Meiteis are distributed throughout the Manipur valley. The Meiteis make up about 60% of the total population of Manipur and are primarily agriculturalists. Among the Meitei-fold are included the Bamons (Brahmins) and Scheduled Caste groups like the Lois/Chakpas and Thoubal Khunou (previously, Yaithibis)<sup>3</sup>. The Brahmins do not belong to any of the clans but they are treated as equal in political status and culture, as having the epithet “Meithei” in their

names. The Lois/Chakpas are the backward group who constitute the degraded section of the society. They specialized in rice-beer manufacturing, silk making, pottery etc. The Yaithibis are regarded as even more unclean than the above mentioned group. Most of them have taken to cultivation (Kirti 1980: 20). While the Bamons and Meiteis are Hindu Vaishnavites, Lois/ Chakpas and Yaithibis mostly follow traditional Meitei faith. A large number of Meiteis also follow the traditional Sanamahi religion at present after the revival of the old Sannamahi faith. Even the Brahmins and Hindu Meiteis worship Sanamahi inside their houses. Since Meiteis are the dominant community, culturally and economically, Meiteilon (Meitei language) has become to be known as Manipuri after the name Manipur was introduced in the erstwhile Kangleipak, Sannaleipak, and Meitrabak. However, Meiteis randomly refer the word Manipuri among themselves. Manipuri should reserve for all things associated with the state of Manipur, not only of the Meitei<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Kuki Tribes***

The term 'Kuki' was perhaps applied to a number of tribes which had migrated from the Chin Hills of Burma in the earlier period and entered the territories of Manipur and Assam. On the basis of the period of migration they are referred to as 'old' and 'New'. The Kukis, both old and new, speak languages which are understandable to many of them. In this respect the Kukis must have got greater reasons for organizing themselves into larger ethnic forum. With regard to mythical origin, majority of the tribes claim origin from cave which is translated into 'khur' or 'khul' (Pakem 1990: 242). The Kuki-Chin tribes who live in Manipur are; Kom, Purum, Gangte, Paite, Sime, Thadou, Vaiphei, Sukte, Hmar, Zou, Ralte and other Mizo (Lushai) tribes (Roy 1973: 149). The Chin-Kuki tribes were of comparatively late migrants (as late as the 18th-19th century) to Manipur from the Chin state of Burma compared to other communities in the north and central Manipur. Unable to handle the flux of the large migrants, the Meitei Maharaja with

the help of the British assisted the Thadous and other Chin-Kukis settle in different parts of the hills, which were not inhabited at that time, although claimed by local tribes as their territories. The population of Manipur was very sparse in those days. Therefore, Thadous live in many districts of Manipur<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Naga Tribes***

The “Naga” is a generic name for the group of tribes inhabiting Nagaland, Northern Manipur and bordering districts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (Horam 1990: 21-22). The Nagas numbering as many as 32 tribes occupy the contiguous areas of Manipur, Nagaland and Burma. The Nagas unlike the Kukis do not share a common culture, language and tradition. Since they speak a number of independent dialects they are bound to communicate between them in Assamese, Nagamese or Manipuri. A few cultural traditions such as head-hunting and democratic-based political system are believed to be pervasive Naga ideals (Pakem 1990: 243). The Naga tribes of Manipur are the Tangkhuls, the Rongmeis (Kabui), the Mao, the Kacha Naga, the Maram, the Maring, the Anal, the Monsang, the Lamgang, the Moyon, the Zemi, the Thangal, the Angami and the Sema (Roy 1973: 189).

### ***Muslims***

The Manipuri Muslims began to live in Manipur from 1606 A.D. They were brought as war captives by King Khagemba from Sylhet and Cachar at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Manipuri word for Muslims is *Pangan* which comes from the word “Bengal”. The Manipuris corrupted the word Bangal into Pangan. Among them, there are Pathans and Mughals. They adhere to Islamic culture in dress, customs, eating and family arrangements (Kirti 1980: 21). These Muslims were settled as a separate community in the valley, and were joined from time to time by other Muslims who came

as peaceful settlers. They are settled in different villages at Mayang Imphal, Yairipok, Lilong, Thoubal, etc. (Paratt 1980: 1)

### ***Sikhs and Punjabis***

The Sikhs entered Manipur after the Second World War and some others after the Burmese government disallowed them of Burmese Citizenship. They are mostly of Punjab origin and are pioneer transporters in Manipur. All of them are involved in business of transport, textiles, contracts, etc. They communicate fluently in Manipuri language and even in tribal languages. There are also non- Sikh Punjabis who have been settled in Manipur mostly for business purposes.

### ***Nepalese***

Nepalese entered Manipur after the Second World War and settled there as laborers and servants. They went into the interiors of the hills and found a suitable climate for grabbing land. Some started cultivation of the tribal chief's land as tenants with sufficient share of the crops. They are scattered into small valleys in Mao, Maram, Karong and Kangpokpi areas.

### ***Biharis***

Biharis are the migrants from Bihar who are comprised of mostly labor classes. They are mostly Hindus who have migrated in search of jobs and are good in business. They are fluent in Meiteilon and have also learnt different tribal dialects.

### ***Marwaris***

Marwaris are mostly concentrated in the established old towns and main business centers like Imphal, Churachandpur and Moreh. They have migrated from Rajasthan and started entering Manipur in the late nineteenth and early twenty century.



Majority of them are adopted to Hinduism. The Marwaris are the main dealers in business and whole sale trading.

### ***Bengalis***

The Bengalis are the old settlers in Manipur. Due to geographical closeness with Bengal the land has experienced a lot in terms of socio-cultural and socio-religious interaction between the two societies. The food habits of the Bengalis resemble those of Meiteis. Bengalis in Manipur are in government services, teaching profession and in business.

### ***South Indians***

The Tamilians and Keralites are mostly settled in the Moreh town of Manipur. Some of them are posted in Government services, some of them have come for teaching in convent schools while majority of them are refugees from Burma. They are all Hindus and a few Christians are also present among them. All these different groups of people settled in Manipur shared a harmonious relationship<sup>2</sup>.

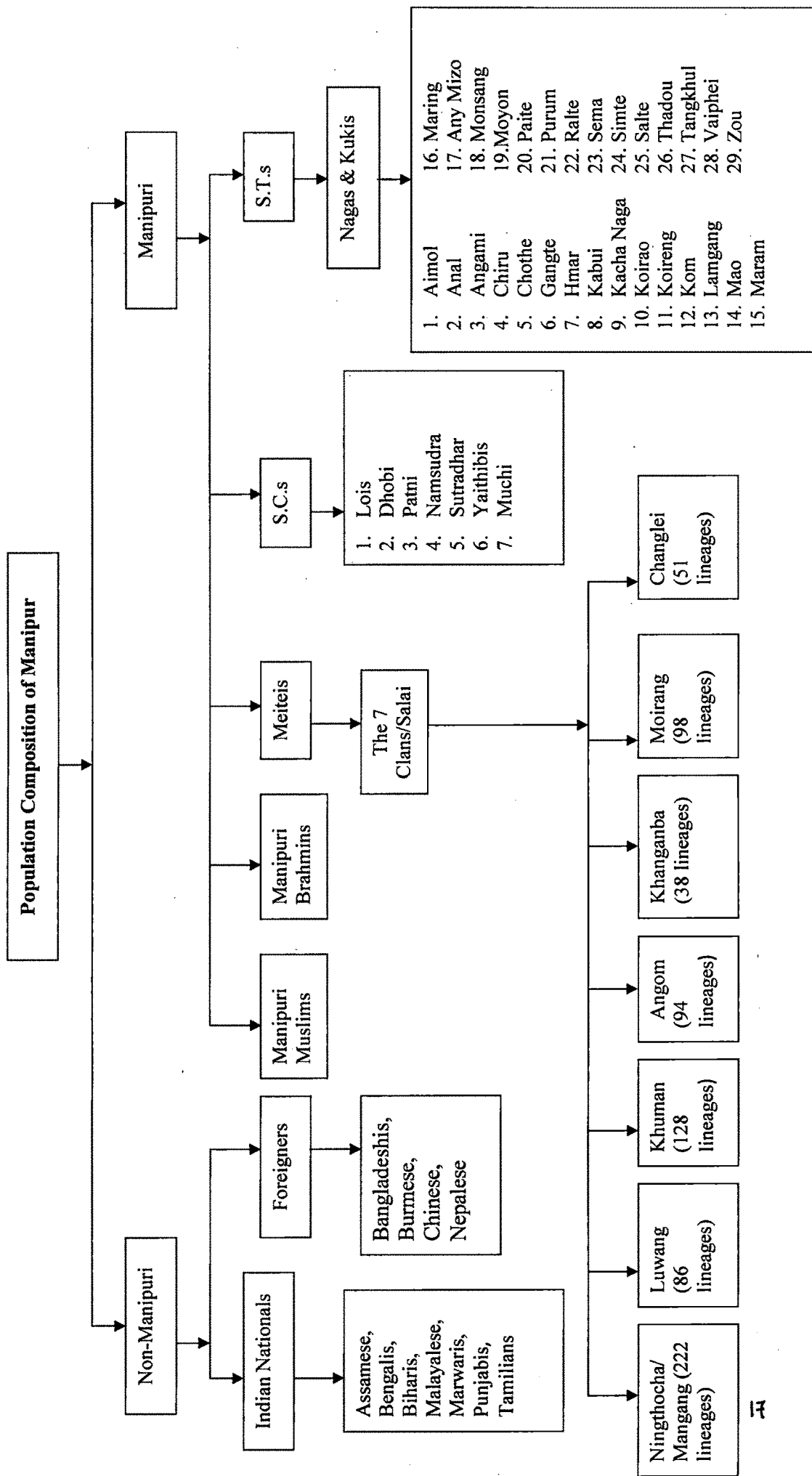
**Table I. 4**  
**Total Population Distribution of Manipur**

Total population of Manipur is 23, 88,634 (twenty-three hundred eighty eight thousand six hundred thirty four) according to the Census of India, 2001(Provisional).

Community	Population	Distribution
Meiteis	13,61,521	All the districts of Manipur
Meitei Pangal (Muslim)	1,67,204	Imphal East District : Thoubal District : Bishnupur District : Chandel District : Churachandpur District :
Nagas	3,26,324	
(a) Old Nagas		
Angami	650	
Kabui	62,216	Senapati District : Sadar Hills Imphal East : Jiribam Sub-Division Bishnupur District : Churachandpur District :
Kacha Naga (Zemi and Liangmei)	20,328	Tamenglong District : Tamei, Tharon
Mao	80,568	Senapati District : Mao
Maram	10,510	Senapati District : Maram
Sema	25	
Tangkhul	1,12,944	Ukhrul District :
Total population of Old Nagas	2,87,241	
(b) New Nagas/Old Kukis		
Anal	13,853	Chandel District :
Lamkang	4,524	Chandel District :
Maring	17,361	Chandel District : Machi Ukhrul District : Thoubal District :
Monsang	1,635	Chandel District : Komlathabi and Pallel
Moyon	1,710	Chandel District : Moyon Khullen, Khongjom, Mitong, Komlathabi, Penaching, Heigru Tampak
Total population of New Nagas/Old Kukis	39,083	
Kuki-Chin		
Aimol	2,643	Chandel district : Unapal, Satu, Kumirei, Chingunghut, Aimol Tampak, Khodamphai, Ngairong Aimol, Chandonpokpi, Soibohg (Khudengthabi) Churachandpur district : Kha-Aimol, Luichungbum Senapati district : Tuikhong
Chiru	5,487	Senapati District : Tamenglong District : Churachandpur district : Henglep
Chothe	2,676	Chandel District : Bishnupur District : Khangkhang

Gangte	15,100	Tamenglong District : Churachandpur District : Senapati District : Sadar Hills
Hmar	42,690	Churachandpur District : Tipaimukh
Mizo (Lushai)	10,520	Churachandpur District :
Paite	44,861	Churachandpur District : Khuga Valley, Ccpur bazar
Purum	503	Senapati District : Purum Khullen and Purum Likli Chandel District : Lamlang Huipi, Chandanpokpi, Khongkhang Chothe, Loirang Talsi, Salemthar, Zat'lang, New Wangparan
Hralte	110	Churachandpur District :
Simte	7,150	Churachandpur district : Mingjang, Tubuong, Simveng, New Bazar, Thanlon, Leikangpai, Zouthang, Shumtuk, Monjon, Pamjal, Sasinoujang, Tallian, Dumsao, Khungung, Lungthul, Singhat, Moijin, Maokot, Suangdai, Suangpuhmun
Sahlte	311	Churachandpur District :
Thadou	1,15,045	Churachandpur District : Senapati District : Sadar Hills Tamenglong District :
Vaiphei	27,791	Churachandpur district :
Zou	19,112	Churachandpur District : Chandel District :
Total population of Kuki-Chin	293999	
Komrem		
Koirao/Thangal	1,200	Senapati District : Mapao Thangal, Thangal Surung, Makeng Thangal, Tumnoupokpi, Yaikangpou, Tikhulen, Ningthoubam, Mayangkhang and Gailongde
Koireng	1,056	Senapati District : Imphal District :
Kom	15,467	Churachandpur District : Senapati District :
Total population of Komrem	17,723	
Unspecified tribes	75,768	
Others (including Mayangs and Nepalis)	1,46,096	

Fig. I.1 ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF MANIPUR



### I. 3. The Scheduled Castes

As Sorokin (1927) has pointed out, all permanently organized societies are stratified. Most societies of the world have had their type of what Ward calls '*the lowly*'. The Romans had their *Plebeians*, the Spartans their *heitos*, the British their *villains*, the Egyptians their *slaves*, the Americans their *Negros*, and the Germans their *Jews*. So the Hindus have '*Untouchables*' and the *Girijans*. Slavery, serfdom, villeinage have all vanished. But untouchability still exists. Their disadvantage arises from the fact that their status is ascribed to them by birth. India is a class as well as caste-ridden society. Hence these members suffer from economic as well as non-economic, that is, social, religious and educational disabilities. This unprivileged section, which is often treated as '*the backward classes*' in general consists of three main divisions: (i) *The Scheduled Tribes* (Girijans), (ii) *The Scheduled Castes* (Harijans), and (iii) *The Other Backward Classes*. The first two groups are listed in the Constitution while the third group is unlisted and loosely defined; it is the least homogeneous (Rao 2005: 602).

Caste is the traditional closed system of social stratification existing in India. Status distinctions are ascriptive, based on the circumstances of birth, and sanctioned by Indian religion. Attempts have been made to generalize the term and apply it to other stratification systems, particularly those that are highly rigid and immobile, those that are based on religious distinctions, or those that are based racial discrimination (Encyclopedia of Sociology 1974: 34).

The earliest account of this institution, given by a foreigner of the third century B.C., mentions two of the features characterizing it before it was modified by the close cultural contact with Western Europe during the last century (Ghurye 1961: 1). "It is not permitted to contract marriage with a person of another caste, nor to change from one profession or trade to another, nor for the same person to undertake more than one, except

he is of the caste of philosophers, when permission is given on account of his dignity” (Quotation from Megasthenes).

The term ‘Scheduled Caste’ is primarily an administrative category, used in the Constitution of India. They are the castes identified by the President of India under article 341, and put under a Schedule. The term was used for the first time by the British government in the Government of India Act, 1935. Before this, some of these classes were labeled as ‘depressed classes’, the term was used for the first time in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gupta 1985: 7-35). Sociologically speaking, these castes suffered the stigma of untouchability and were considered *ati-sudras* or *avarana*, i.e., beyond the pale of the Hindu caste-structure. However, all ex-untouchables do not find place in the ‘Schedule’ and all castes under the Schedule did not experience an equal degree of ‘untouchability’ in the near or distant past (Shah, 2000: 30).

In 1901, Risley, the then census commissioner attempted for the first time to classify the Hindu castes but his classification was rather broad. In accordance with the Government of India Act, 1935, some of the undefined depressed castes were singled out in 1936, and listed in a “Schedule” in order to ensure certain concession and privileges to them. Because their names have been shown in a “Schedule”, they came to be known as Scheduled Castes. Except listing a number of castes and sub-castes under article 341, no other explanation is given as to who are the Scheduled Castes (Das 1986: 5-6).

Article 341 (1) of the Constitution empowered the President to notify the list of Scheduled Castes. The article 341 (1) reads:

“The President may with respect to any State or Union Territory and where it is a State, after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for

the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union Territory, as the case may be”.

According to the population census of 2001, the population of Scheduled Castes stands at 1665.76 lakh which is 16.20% of the country's total population<sup>1</sup>. The percentage of Scheduled Castes populations of the different states of India is given below (Table I.5)

**Table I. 5**  
**Scheduled Castes Population of 2001 Census of India and the States<sup>4</sup>**

Sr. No.	States/Union Territories	Scheduled Castes (in lakhs)	% SC Population to the total Population
	India	1665.76	16.20
<b>States</b>			
1.	Andhra Pradesh	123.39	16.20
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	0.06	0.60
3.	Assam	18.25	6.90
4.	Bihar	130.48	15.70
5.	Goa	0.23	1.80
6.	Gujarat	35.93	7.10
7.	Haryana	40.91	19.30
8.	Himachal Pradesh	15.02	24.70
9.	Karnataka	85.63	16.20
10.	Kerala	31.23	9.80
11.	Madhya Pradesh	91.55	15.20
12.	Maharashtra	98.82	10.20
13.	Manipur	0.37	2.51
14.	Meghalaya	0.11	0.50
15.	Mizoram	0.00	0.00
16.	Nagaland	0.00	0.00
17.	Orissa	60.82	16.50
18.	Punjab	70.28	28.90
19.	Rajasthan	96.94	17.20
20.	Sikkim	0.27	5.00
21.	Tamil Nadu	118.57	19.00
22.	Tripura	5.55	17.40
23.	Uttar Pradesh	351.48	21.10
24.	West Bengal	184.52	23.00
25.	Jammu and Kashmir	7.70	7.60
26.	Uttaranchal	15.17	17.90
27.	Jharkhand	31.89	11.80
28.	Chattisgarh	24.18	11.60
<b>Union Territories</b>			
1.	Andaman and Nicobar Island	0.00	0.00
2.	Chandigarh	1.57	17.50
3.	D & N Haveli	0.04	1.90
4.	Daman and Diu	0.05	3.10
5.	Delhi	23.34	16.90
6.	Lakshadweep	0.00	0.00
7.	Pondicherry	1.57	16.20



The term “Scheduled Caste” refers to a section of people formerly known as “Untouchables” who comprise 16.20 percent of India’s population (2001 Census). The British described these people as ‘depressed classes’, in 1931 census, they were classified as ‘exterior castes’. The term ‘Harijans’(meaning ‘children of God’), so called by a Gujarati saint- poet Narsingh Mehta in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and popularized by Mahatma Gandhi in the 20<sup>th</sup> century refers to the people of all the untouchable castes in the country. They have been referred to as *Chandalas*, *Antyajas*, *Dasas*, *Nagas*, etc in the ancient Indian literature and as untouchables, ex-untouchables and depressed classes during the British rule (Ahuja 1993: 364 & Venkateswarlu 1990: 1).

According to Mahatma Gandhi (1933): ‘Untouchability means pollution by the touch of certain persons by reason of their birth in a particular state of family’.

To Babasaheb Ambedkar (1948), “untouchability” is the notion of defilement, pollution, contamination and the ways and means of getting rid of that defilement. It is a case of permanent hereditary stain which nothing can cleanse”.

According to Marc Galanter (1969), “In its broadest sense ‘untouchability’ might include all instances in which one person treated another as ritually unclean and a source of pollution. A second somewhat narrower sense of the term would include all instances in which a person was stigmatized as unclean or polluting or inferior because of his origin or membership in a particular group i.e. where he is subjected to invidious treatment because of difference in religion and membership in a lower or different caste”.

According to the canons of Hinduism “untouchables” were people belonging to the lowest castes in the Hindu social hierarchy and even physical contact with them signified a high degree of ritual pollution (Yurlova 1990:1). In Russia the word “Untouchable” (*neprikasaemyi*) has a different connotation which means “someone who is not allowed to be touched; inviolable” (ibid: 469). Another example of a caste group in a

class society was the Eta of Japan. Unlike blacks in America, the Eta (now called the Dowa Kankeisha) was physically indistinguishable from other Japanese. Comparable to India's untouchables, they were a hereditary, endogamous group. Their occupations were traditionally those of farm laborer, leather worker etc with low living standard. Discrimination against the Dowa Kankeisha was officially abolished by the Japanese government in 1871 (Ember & Ember 1995: 281).

### **I. 3. a. *Gandhi's Views on Untouchables, Untouchability and Reservation***

The word 'Harijans'(man of God) which Mahatma Gandhi has adopted for the Antyaja (the last born) that is being used for 'untouchables' was first used by the great saint Narasinha Mehta, a Nagar Brahmin, who defied the whole community by claiming the 'untouchables' as his own. Mahatma Gandhi wrote "The 'untouchable', to me, is compared to us, really a Harijan- a man of God, and we are Durjan (men of evil). For whilst the 'untouchable' has toiled and moiled and dirtied his hands so that we may live in comfort and cleanliness, we have delighted in suppressing him. We are solely responsible for all the short comings and faults that we lay at the door of these 'untouchables'. It is still open to us to be Harijan ourselves, but we can only do so by heartily repenting of our sin against them. (Young India, 6-8-1931).

According to Gandhi, untouchability had no part in this divine ordering- the treatment of castes below the Shudra level as unclean was not only inhumane, but harmful to Hinduism. Gandhi described it at various times as a curse, an excrescence on Hinduism, a poison, a snake, a canker, a hydra-headed monster, a great blot, a device of Satan, a hideous untruth, Dyerism and O' Dwyreism, and the bar sinister. An Untouchable, wrote Gandhi, "should be regarded as a Shudra because there is no warrant for belief in the fifth castes." (Harijan, 11-8-1946: 254). To him, "One born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes, for a scavenger is as

worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President, that, according to me, is Hinduism” (Harijan, 6-3-1937: 6-7).

Gandhi was not very much enthusiastic about reservation. He was against spoon-feeding. Rather he wanted to make them self-sufficient so that they are not in the need of any outside help. Reservation was not only against his personal belief but also against his whole programme of social reconstruction and regeneration. Gandhi strongly opposed the demand for the separate representation of the untouchables and had to resort to fast unto death in September 1932 to oppose the Communal Award (Pasricha 2006: 126). He rejected the claim of Ambedkar that he represented the whole body of untouchables. The Mahatma was of the confirmed opinion that the attitude of Ambedkar would create a division among Hindus. Therefore he declared: “I would not bargain their rights for the kingdom of the whole.” To him, “untouchability was a stigma on Hindu religion. In the near future it would vanish but separate electorates would perpetuate the stigma.” (The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi Vol. 48: 258-59).

On 25 September, a conference of the leaders took place at Poona, where the famous Poona Pact was signed. Gandhi informed the British government telegraphically that he would break the fast if the latter would accept the Poona pact in toto. The British government did so promptly, and in the evening of 26 September, Gandhi broke his fast. He was of the confirmed view that the very purpose of the social justice will be forfeited if the reservation is made on caste basis. This should be for the weaker sections of society. To him, weaker sections included people in rural and urban areas leading a life of deprivation irrespective of caste or communities. If there is a section of people among the scheduled or backward in any other sense except their caste, giving the benefit of reservation to them is not at all justified. Rather these privileged few are exploiting their own deprived fellows in their own castes (Pasricha 2006: 114-126).

only, whereas the untouchables were the servants of all the villagers (Encyclopedia of Britannica, Vol.16: 857 ).

Untouchability was a permanent stain, but slavery was not so. Untouchability was hereditary, whereas slavery was not so, except in some cases. The slaves were eligible to be free provided they fulfilled certain conditions, for example, the war captives were allowed freedom if they substituted other persons, the debtors were freed if the payment of debt was made. They were manumitted if they saved the life of their master. However, in all these cases of liberation, the tacit consent of the master was necessary (Encyclopedia of Britannica, Vol.16:857).

Dr. Ambedkar pleaded for separate electorate system for the depressed for the sake of political equality in India. He firmly believed that the problem of depressed classes is religio-economic. Therefore, in his opinion separate electorate system for the depressed classes was essential in order to achieve political equality. Cabinet Mission did not allow separate electorate system and left it to the Constituent Assembly to take care of the problem of political equality of the depressed classes. Constituent Assembly did not favour separate electorate system on communal lines as had been granted by the British government, however agreed to grant political safeguard to the depressed classes in order to ensure their representation in the legislature. Therefore, Article 330-342 provided 'guaranteed reservation' instead of 'separate electorate'. However, after partition this reservation was confined to Scheduled Castes and Tribes only. Dr. Ambedkar was not happy with ten year's limitation period of the reservation (Pasricha 2006: 166).

Dr. Ambedkar's (1970: 12, 46) vision of the Indian society was secularism. He maintained that the state should be religion neutral which is a matter of individual conscience. In his Model constitution in Article II Section 1, Dr. Ambedkar provided that every one shall have freedom of conscience and the right to profess and preach any

religion within limits compatible with public order and morality and the state shall not recognize any state religion.

Gandhi firmly believed that untouchability could be removed only when the majority of Hindus realize that it is a crime against God and man and are ashamed of it (Kumarappa 1954: 57). He therefore, struggled for religious and moral purification, assigning them Shudra Varna. Ambedkar considered the awakening of the untouchables a pre-condition to the remedy of their woes. He therefore strived to inculcate among them the values of self-respect and struggle for justice (Doshi 1986: 49-50).

Initially both Gandhi and Ambedkar worked for the amalgamation of untouchables and caste Hindus under the Hindu fold. Gandhi strove to bring about such a situation through persuading caste Hindus in a spirit of humanitarianism. But Ambedkar tried to obtain the same objective by means of struggle. He argued that “the salvation of the depressed classes will come only when the caste Hindu is made to think and is forced to feel that he must alter his ways”. “I want,” he said, “a revolution in the mentality of the caste Hindus” (Keer 1971: 221).

### **I. 3. c. *The Mandal Commission***

The Constituent Assembly, dominated by a liberal political ideology, prepared the India Constitution with the hope that it would bring about social revolution in the country. The social revolution hoped “to get (India) out of the medievalism based on birth, religion, custom, and community and reconstruct social structure on modern foundations of law, individual merit, and secular education” (Austin 1972: 26).

The First Backward Classes Commission headed by Kaka Saheb Kalelkar, set up by a Presidential Order under Article 340 of Constitution of India on January 29, 1953, and submitted its report on March 30, 1955. The commission formulated the following criteria for identifying socially and economically backward classes:

### C. Economical

- (viii) Castes/Classes where the average value of family assets is at least 25 per cent below the State average.
- (ix) Castes/Classes where the number of families living in kaccha houses is at least 25 per cent above the State average.
- (x) Castes/Classes where the source of drinking water is beyond half a kilometer for more than 50 per cent of the households.
- (xi) Castes/Classes where the number of households having taken consumption loan is at least 25 per cent above the State average (Agrawal & Aggarwal 1991: 59-60).

A large number of castes were identified as backward in each state as a result of socio-educational survey. Two supplementary approaches were adopted to prepare complete lists of OBCs for each state. First, state-wise list of the 11 groups of primitive tribes, exterior castes, criminal tribes, etc. contained in the Registrar General of India's compilation of 1961 were included in the Commission's list of OBCs. This was done as the social and educational status of these castes and communities was more or less akin to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Secondly, based on the public evidence and personal knowledge of the Members of the Commission, State wise list of those OBCs were drawn which could not be covered by the socio-educational survey (Pasricha 2006: 183).

SCs and STs constitute 22.5 per cent of the country's population. Accordingly, a pro-rata reservation of 22.5 per cent has been made for them in all services and public sector undertakings under the Central Government. In States also, reservation of SCs and STs is directly proportional to their population in each State. But as there is legal obligation to keep reservations, under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution below 50%, the Commission recommends a reservation of 27% for OBCs. This reservation should apply to all Government services as well as technical and professional institutions, both in the Centre and the States (Agrawal & Aggarwal 1991: 69).

The commission has not explained why it chose to assign differential weightage to social, educational and economic backwardness and particularly why it devalued economical backwardness while determining the classes who are socially and educationally backward (Singh 1990).

There are five major methodology drawbacks of the Mandal Commission report- the use of 1891, 1931 and 1961 Census data for linking caste with traditions and for making population projections on the basis of an assumed constant rate of population growth, the bungling of facts and figures related to the identification of the other backward classes, the unobjective sampling procedure and lacunae in the data assembled, the terminological discrepancies specially with reference to use of terms like “caste” and ‘class’ and finally the criteria used for defining the other backward classes (OBCS) (Mirchandani 1990).

#### **I. 4. Historical Background of the Scheduled Castes in India**

The caste and race though determined by birth belong to different categories. These two groups have created a war-like situation in the world. If castes have created problems in South and East Asia, racial prejudices or discriminations have created problems in Europe, U.S.A and Africa (Doshi & Jain 2001: 105). Melville Herskovits (1955) argues that in its extreme form racism is observed in the racial doctrines of Nazism in Germany where the Jews are singled out for special indignities.

India is the only country in the world where a large part of the population are kept separated from the fellow citizens by an age old belief of the Hindu religion which divides society into a number of castes by birth and the Brahmins termed the labour class so low that, to touch them was even considered to be harmful to the members of the so-called higher castes. The caste system has got its origin in the Indus Civilization and flourished as early as 2500 B.C (Das 1986: 1).



In theory the caste system is interlinked with the '*Varna*' model which divides the Hindu society into four orders, viz, Brahmana, (Brahman, traditionally, priest and scholar), Kshatriya (ruler and soldier), Vaishya (merchant) and Shudra (peasant, laborer and servant). The first three castes are '*twice-born*' or '*dvija*' since the men from these castes are entitled to don the sacred thread at the Vedic rite of *upanayana*, which the Shudras were not allowed to perform. The untouchable castes are outside the varna scheme. The term '*varna*' literally means color and it was originally used to refer to the distinction between *Arya* and *Dasa*, in ancient India. The classes which existed at that time later came to be described as *varna* and the original distinction between *Arya* and *Dasa* gave place to the distinction between *Arya* and Shudra (Ghurye 1950: 52).

According to Srinivas (1962: 65) the varna-scheme is a 'heirearchy' in the literal sense of the term because the criteria of ritual purity and pollution are at the basis of this differentiation. Generally speaking, the higher castes are also the better off castes, and the lower castes are generally, the lower classes. However, this association between the caste and the class is not always true. A caste can be ritually high but ranked lower in the local class hierarchy because this hierarchy is determined by secular factors like economic, political, educational status also.

The origin of the four classes is repeated in most of the later works with slight variations and interpretative additions. The Taittiriya Samhita, for example, ascribes the origin of those four classes to the four limbs of the Creator and adds an explanation. The Brahmins are declared to be the chief because they were created from the mouth, punning on the word "mukha" ("mouth" and "chief"). The Rajanyas are vigorous because they were created from vigour. The Vaishyas are meant to be eaten, referring to their liability to excessive taxation, because they were created from the stomach, the receptacle of food. The Sudra, because he was created from the feet, is to be the transporter of others

and to subsist by the feet. In this particular account of the creation not only is the origin of the classes interpreted theologically, but also a divine justification is sought to be given to their functions and status (Ghurye 1961: 43).

The Vedic literature, which mainly includes the *Vedas*, the *Brahmans*, the *Aranyakas*, and the other *Upanishads*, does not provide any evidence that the 'Sudra Caste' existed in the early period. It seems that it was created by the Aryans in the closing phase of the Rig Veda. The terms and epithets used by the Aryans for the *Dasas* were '*Anyavrata*', '*Anasa*', and '*Mridhravaka*'. In the matter of social privileges and religious rights, the Sudras were given a very low status. They could neither perform sacrifices nor *yajnas* and were described as "despised, unholy and impure creatures whose touch caused ceremonial impurity" (Kamble 1979: 8-97). This does not mean that the Sudras were treated as untouchables. The idea of untouchability of the Sudras perhaps developed in the *Sutra* period. There are however, scholars who do not accept the idea that the Sudras had no place in Aryan sacrifice or they did not participate in the *yajna*. But these scholars do concede the low religious status of the Sudras (Ahuja 1993: 362-3).

Ghurye (1968: 216) has said , "Before 800B.C., we find the idea of ceremonial purity almost full-fledged and even operative in relation to not only the despised and degraded group of people called 'Chandals' but also the fourth order of the society, the Sudras. Ambedkar (1948: 62) has, however, maintained that while the impure as a class came into existence at the time of the Dharamsutras, the untouchables came into being much later than 400 A.D. He further said "if anthropology is a science which can be depended upon to determine the race of the people, then the result obtained by the application of anthropometry to the various strata of Hindu society disprove that the untouchables belong to a race different from the Aryans and the Dravidians. The Brahmins and the untouchables belong to the same race".

Hutton, (1963: 207) eminent anthropologist and author of one of the one of the best books on caste, "Caste in India" locates the origins of caste in the taboos and divisions of labour in the pre-Aryan tribes of India as well as in their efforts at self-preservation in the face of invasion. In his opinion untouchability is the consequence of ritual impurity. He says 'The origin of the position of the exterior castes is partly racial, partly religious, and partly a matter of social custom. There can be little doubt but the idea of untouchability originates in taboo'

The performance of the untouchability was first seen in the 6<sup>th</sup> century when Buddhism was on decline and Brahmanism was resurgent. During those the feeling of contempt for the Buddhists gave rise to hatred in the shape of social boycott through untouchability. This practice of out casting perpetuated the division of the society and gave rise to the institution of untouchability. Subsequently, the Hindus were divided into three categories by the then British Government and were classed as Hindus, Adivasis and Untouchables which was a deliberate attempt to further deepen cleavage in the Hindu society with the ultimate objective of strengthening and consolidating their administration by the Divide and Rule policy. Analysis discloses that the caste system was evolved to meet the needs of the Hindu society in good faith and was based not on birth but type of work, but with the passage of time the castes and sub-castes began to base on birth. The menials began to be maltreated and dominated by the superior. Afterwards they were treated as untouchables which were the outcome of degenerated caste system (Bharadwaj 1979: 3-5).

The untouchables have been called by various names, such as 'Untouchables', 'Harijans' (a glorified term, coined by Narasimha Mehta and adopted and popularized by Mahatma Gandhi), 'Exterior Castes' (used by J.H. Hutton), 'Depressed Classes' (by British officials). 'Outcastes', 'Pariahs' (commonly, but undoubtedly derived

from the Tamil word para or parai, the drum). In more ancient times the terms 'Mlechha', 'Chandala' (used by Manu), also Panchama (the fifth class), Avarna (i.e., outside the four varnas), Nishada, Paulkasa, Antyaja, Atisudra, etc., were used (Michael 1999: 12).

Although the Chandalas were severely stigmatized in the later Vedic age, it was only in the period between 600 B.C. and 200 A.D. that untouchability appeared as such (Webster 1994: 2).

There are three schools of thought about the origin of untouchability. They are: a) racial or conquerors vis-à-vis natives, b) religious and c) economic. The racial theory believed that the touchable- caste Hindus and untouchables- ati Sudras- belong to two different races, who conquered the latter, the Dasas or Dasyus, a black native race, and enslaved them (Risley 1908; Dutt 1931) while some scholars examine the relationship between Aryan and the indigenous people in the socio-cultural and economic contexts and argued that the practices of untouchability developed in the course of time (Bose 1942; Fick 1920; Oppert 1972; Sharma, R.S 1980). In the early phase till 800 B.C the Aryans had a peaceful relationship with those groups which cooperated with them but were hostile to the dasas, the rakshasa etc. who were identified as enemies. They were hated because "they spoke at different language and did not follow the religion of the Aryans". Cultural segregation increased with the passage of time. It was in the post-Shudras period that the habitational segregation and cultural-religious prejudice practiced by the Aryans vis-à-vis certain groups identified as hostile and inassimilable turned into untouchability. While the rebellious group when brought under subjugation were neither incorporated into main economic activity nor into any form of production and only unskilled and menial jobs were assigned to them (Mukherjee 1988: 104). Stephen Fuchs proposes a new theory regarding the origin of untouchability (1981: 15). According to him the theories presented by number of Indologists seem to suffer from one great defect: they do not penetrate

deeply enough into the past of the dominant Indian peoples. It is true that the caste system and untouchability developed after the arrival of the Aryans and Dravidians in India, that caste system, as it has grown in India, is unique and not found elsewhere in the world, and that nowhere in the world are Untouchables found in such vast numbers--138 million. Yet, the roots must be sought in an age when both population groups lived on the steppes of Inner Asia. Here the animal-breeding societies developed a pronounced hierarchical structure. These animal breeders gave up cultivation completely and regarded manual work of any kind as unworthy of a shepherd and a warrior.

Ambedkar (1948, 1990: 242,274-7) rejected racial theories of untouchability which sought to portray the untouchables as the original Indians who had been sub-ordinated by later invaders. He developed a complex theory of the origin of untouchability that they were 'Broken Men', fragments of tribes that had lost wars to certain other tribes. Much later, descendents of the Broken Men were constituted as untouchables by Brahmins who were seeking to overthrow the Buddhism practiced by these people and that Brahmins and untouchables were not of different racial stock.

Ambedkar (1948) argued that by the fourth century, as Brahmanical orthodoxy took a firm hold, killing of cows became a punishable offence. This was a reaction against Buddhism. From killing of cows, the Brahmin went a step further; they went against eating beef, although they used to eat it previously. Cows were held sacred and beef-eating was considered profane. Consequently, those who did eat beef came to be regarded with scorn in society. Thus, according to Ambedkar hatred for Buddhism coupled with contempt for beef eating were the reasons for making these people untouchable.

According to another view, occupational divisions, which in course of time became rigid, closed and hereditary, took the form of caste system. Henry Sumner Maine

(1887: 57) argues, 'caste is merely a name for trade or occupation, and the sole tangible effect of the Brahminical theory is that it creates a religious sanction for what is really a primitive and natural distribution of classes'. Majumdar (1961) questions the occupational interpretation of caste system. He argues that people of different castes following the same occupation do not form a caste.

Many Scheduled Castes, along with agriculture, or independently, pursue traditional caste occupations. They are leather workers, weavers, scavengers, basket makers, etc. They suffer from the stigma of untouchability and their occupation continues to be looked down upon as polluted (Shah 2000: 37).

In the context of Manipur also different interpretations of the origin of Lois and Yaithibis have been presented. According to Singh (1993: 41), originally, the Lois have been people of distinct identities and small independent/autonomous socio-territorial local units. On the gradual rise of their powers, the Meitei Kings vanquished and made them their dependent tributary subjects. It began to assume its social meaning as and when the Loi villages became penal settlements of the criminal and offenders from the Panna Meiteis, whom the Kings used to deport on exile. Hodson (1908: 9) mentioned that with the rise of Hinduism to the status of King's religion in the eighteenth century it started having the connotation of outcasting for the Hindu Meiteis. The Lois population consisted of those who were vanquished by the Meiteis, who paid tributes to the Meitei rulers, soldiers or people taken captive in the war.

Singh (1980) remarks that perpetual degradation of a Prince or a commoner to a Loi group may be caused by such trifling matters such as negligence of an official duty, practicing black magic and attempt for the throne. If an unhappy or unapproved act becomes known to the King, the offender is outcasted and treated as a Loi. Saha (1994: 63) mentioned that the Yaithibis once belonged to the Hindu Meitei community. The

Hindu Meitei looked down upon them as they are exiled and socially outcaste people on account of their grave offence such as marrying near kins. Some British scholars particularly Brown (1975:13) writes that the Yaithibis are the exiled people and they used to perform the scavenger's job in the palace only for the Raja and his family. He labeled them as "Mehter caste".

Earlier different Loi villages have their different occupations which were denied to the Panna Meiteis (the core Hindu Meitei) as considered polluting. According to Mc Culloch (1859), amongst them are the silk manufacturers, the smelters of iron, the distillers of spirit, the makers of earthen vessels, cutters of post and beams, manufacturers of salt, etc. The Scheduled Castes in Manipur especially the Loies were allotted certain occupations during the native rule but the occupations were never caste based or hereditary ones like the rigid caste based occupations in other parts of the country.

The expression 'Untouchable' may be interpreted to include persons who are made untouchables even though they might have been born in a higher caste. In Hindu Dharma-shastra there was always a sharp distinction between 'Jarhi Chandalas' (born untouchables) and 'Karma Chandalas' (those who become chandalas on account of their own bad conduct). If a person born in a high caste is effectively ex-communicated he becomes for all practical purposes, an 'untouchable' and has no place in the society in which he is born (Ghosh 1980: 137).

Some theorists believe that eating the carcass of a cow by a few groups of people reduced their status and become untouchables while some anthropologists believe that the untouchables were the original inhabitants but were conquered by invaders and reduced to slavery who were assigned impure works like scavenging and sweeping, and thus, this occupational origin of untouchability took place (Jatava 2001: 181-182). Soviet Indologist like Kotovsky has advanced the hypothesis that the appearance of the institution



of untouchability within the framework of the caste system of India was connected with the formation of a social stratum of field laborers in the structure of the feudal-agricultural community, who did not possess the rights of holding and usage of land (Yurlova 1990: 8-9). For many Marxists, untouchability has basically economic foundations (Desai 1948). The *chaturvarna* division of society, he argues, was a class division, and based on the system of production, distribution and consumption. It became hereditary in course of time, which distorted and modified class formation and class relations. Some social reformers such as Vivekananda, Dayanand, Gandhi and others rejected the caste system based on birth. They considered untouchability a blot on humanity. It was a stigma on Hinduism and said that untouchability arose out of aberration of the varna dharma (Shah 2000: 33).

It is beyond shadow of doubt that the self-styled supremacy of casteism especially Brahmanism disintegrated the oneness of the society. Brahmanic influence over the Hindu society monopolized the leadership at the cost of society itself. They misused their inherited mental awakening which they possessed by virtue of education having been placed in privileged and singular position since centuries. Because of which they impose supremacy and domination by framing social rules and weakening others. With the passage of time they get dignified place and made their position unquestionable in the society. Untouchability carved by Brahmans only of their own accord is the greatest blot on Hinduism. It is altogether against the fundamental principles of humanity. It is against the dictates of reason that a man should, by mere reason of birth, be regarded as an untouchable forever, even unapproachable and un-seenable (Bharadwaj 1979: 11-15).

‘Untouchability’ has to do with the caste ritual status side of the coin. The term has never been adequately defined, and now that untouchability has been abolished by the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 and any official attempt to define in

any form is forbidden. In common parlance the term is used in two senses: as a social stigma and as a set of disabilities, the latter usage being much more common than the former. As a stigma, an inherited mark of coin which can never be washed away by rite, dispensation, or individual achievement, its use is connected with the notion that the pollution associated with the lowest caste is so deep that their touch and proximity must be avoided. The most common customary restriction included denial of access to wells, temples, schools and other facilities and practices which segregate the lowest caste and symbolize their inferior status (Michael 1972: 167 & Venkateswarlu 1990: 1).

The cluster of terms devised mainly in British bureaucratic contexts from late in the nineteenth century to the 1930's included 'Outcastes', 'Depressed castes' and 'Exterior castes'. The endpoint of this line of conceptual development is the term 'Scheduled Castes', now the official identifier of the word untouchables. The so-called Schedule is a list of castes entitled to parliamentary seats, public employment and special educational benefits. The term was originally promulgated by the British Government of India in 1936 but the term 'Scheduled Castes' only became widely used after Independence. Perhaps the least attractive term is 'ex-untouchables', which is still to be found today (Mendelsohn & Vicziany 2000: 4).

As Ghurye (1961) writes, "Ideas of purity, whether occupational or ceremonial, which are found to have been a factor in the genesis of caste are the very soul of the idea and practice of untouchability". Thus, because they were following occupations like scavenging, doing leather work, removing dead cattle from the village, and so on, they were required to live in a separate colony outside the villages.

In contrast to other pollution which can be purified by undergoing prescribed ritual for purification, the untouchable, is desecrated already in the mother's womb because he is born to a caste where every member irrespective of birth or

occupation is an untouchable. Hinduism does not provide any means to him to become "clean" by any ritual. They were considered capable of desecrating everyone and everything and were socially discriminated against and isolated from everything that was sacred for the "clean" Hindus (Yurlova 1990: 6-7).

The stigma of untouchability according to one's caste lasts a life time and cannot be eliminated by rite or deed. Defined in relation to behavior, untouchability refers to the set of practices followed by the rest of the society to protect itself from the pollution conveyed by the untouchable. This concern with 'ritual' pollution is not limited to the role of the untouchable behavior; rather, it is part of a configuration of "themes" (Michael 1972: 25).

A person's status vis-à-vis his caste rank was determined by his birth in the caste and by its place in the ritual hierarchy, though other factors also, like economic and political power, added substantially to his esteem (Nandu Ram 1988: 1). But, according to Dumont (1970: 24), both status and power were separate in their functions in the caste system even in the early periods, and power was subordinate to status. Thus, a person having more power had inferior ritual and social status in the caste hierarchy if he belonged to a lower caste.

Scholars also have written about Dalits in different ways. Two views predominate. Those using a class analysis of Indian society subsumed Dalits within such class or occupational categories as peasants, agricultural labour, factory workers, students, and the like. This can be seen in most Marxist historical writings, the subaltern studies volumes, and, to a lesser degree, in the Dalit Panther manifesto. To those using a communal analysis of caste, Dalits are the people within Hindu society who belong to those castes which Hindu religion considers to be polluting by virtue of hereditary occupation (Webster 1999: 68).

Most part of the world has had their type of lowly caste people. The Romans had their slaves, the Spartans their helots, the British their villains, the Americans their negros and the German their Jews, but none have been called upon to face a fate which is worse than the fate which pursue the untouchables. All vanished with time but untouchability exists and bids fair to last as long as casteism will last. The jews and the slaves are despised but not denied all opportunities to grow but the untouchable was not merely despised but denied all opportunities to rise (Kamble 1979: xviii). Earlier they have been unseeable, unheareable and untouchable. They were born in unequal conditions and die in those conditions. In sum they were "in a very real sense marginal men or outsiders to the system, they lived in communities but were not of it" (Singh 1982: 109-110).

Inspite of the fact that social inequality is a universal phenomenon the system of caste stratification in India has been unique in certain fundamental ways. The Harijans of India have been living in a social system which has been described as "a cultural phenomenon peculiar to pan Indian civilization. They were denied access even to the barber, the tailor, water-carrier, roads etc. Not only was a whole group of people considered as impure but their very existence, their residence, their touch and even their shadow should have created a state of impurity in certain parts of the country for the higher castes, is perhaps unique to India (Patwardhan 1973: 4-5).

History bears testimony to the fact that right from the hoary past till modern times this moribund Brahmanic philosophy has repeatedly inflicted national humiliation and shame. Time and again it has led to abject surrender and has caused centuries of slavery. It is this Brahmanic ideology which is iniquitous, discriminatory, obscurantist and its oppressive devices have conspired to pamper and elevate a handful of vested interests and have deprived and crushed the millions. It has advocated the perpetuation of absolute

or totalitarian governance by “right divine” and has licensed persecution of the multitudes (Majumdar 1958: 159).

Acceptance of cooked food or water from scheduled caste was considered polluting. In southern states women were not allowed to wear upper garments, to use sandals, umbrellas, silken cloth, ornaments, pucca and brick houses (Das 1986: 2). In Travancore untouchables hid themselves in ditches or climbed up trees to prevent atmosphere of pollution. In Kerala, the low-caste women were required to keep their bosoms uncovered; one who had impertinence to wear a dress when appearing before the ruling family had her breasts cut off (Ghosh 1980: 9). As Ayyappan (1965) writes, “While the belief in human beings as carriers of graded degrees of ritual impurity is common to all Hindus, these manifestations are nowhere as hypertrophied as in Kerala....To avoid upper castes being polluted, the distance at which the polluting castes have to remain has been fixed and prescribed by tradition.” Among the untouchables also there are various castes. The distance by which these castes had to remain, varied from about 30 feet to about 150 feet (Kuppuswammy 1972: 139). It was clear that in the north distance pollution did not exist at the time the Schedule was formulated. There were no public prescriptions as to the distance that the untouchable had to preserve between himself and a Brahmin or any other Hindu. Nor did pollution by actual touch provoke the same consternation and obligatory purification as it did in the south (Mendelsohn & Viziany 2000: 37-38).

The Scheduled Castes had suffered mainly on two counts- impositions of restrictions by Brahmins and religious fanatics and social persecution by denying them entry into schools and public places (Ahuja 1993: 377). These depressed sections of the society were subjected to various social oppressions and disabilities for ages. This, infact, led them to rise against their oppression in the form of various protest movements (Mathew 1986: 19). The enactment of Untouchability Offence Act, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1955 made it

possible for the Harijans to enter any Hindu temple or religious institutions, draw water, use public restaurants, hotels and other facilities (Michael 1972: 25).

The first stage of social struggle against untouchability in India is connected with the great Hindu religious reform movements whose social base had become noticeably broader by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning of “Brahmo Samaj” in 1828, none of these movements was purely religious in character. Different branches in other parts of the country and such religious reform organization as the “Paramahansa Mandal”, “Arya Samaj” etc in north India laid the ground for further social reform of Hindu society. Mahatma Gandhi raised his voice in defense of the human dignity of the outcastes. It was under his influence the Indian National Congress raised the question of allowing the untouchables entry into Hindu temples (Yurlova 1990: 15-31). The religious reform, followed by the nationalist struggle for Independence, helped in bringing enlightenment among the masses, of depressed group. The political changes after independence introduced a competitive element in the society particularly at the time of elections. Because of the practical value attached to individual votes, the local and general elections helped a great deal in raising the importance of the low caste in general (Trivedi 1977: 28).

The non-Brahman movement was a phenomenon of nineteenth century. Its initial stage had not been so fully organized and it contained diversified elements. The Scheduled Castes’ revolt against the existing system which was due to the fact that they were being deprived of social-cultural, political and economic status became stronger (Mathew 1986: 29-30). Political leaders and social reformers like Justice Ranade, Rev. Gokhale and Tilak expressed voice against the social justice that this evil has brought. The branches of the Depressed Classes Mission Society of India worked in their own particular warp and gave the call for putting to an end the atrocities on the untouchables. In this

regard the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar has important place in the history of social reforms of the Hindu society (Bharadwaj 1979: 23). In the approaches of Gandhi and Ambedkar on the question of removing social discrimination there existed a difference of opinion on principle relating to Hinduism. The keen debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar which continued in the thirties and forties on question of separate representation for untouchables drew public attention to the discrimination against the lower castes (Yurlova 1990: 76-103).

Guaranteed seats in national and provisional legislatures were provided to the Scheduled Castes after Ambedkar made his case to the British that his people should be treated as a social minority comparable with the Muslims. The road to preferential treatment in public employment and education was not so straightforward. Seemingly the first case of preference in employment was taken as far back as 1902. Under the influence of the non-Brahmin movement of Maharashtra the Maharajah of Kolhapur issued an order that half of all government positions in his princely state were to be filled from castes other than Brahmins (Mendelsohn & Vicziany 2000: 129).

Ambedkar demanded for separate electorate for them and this demand of Ambedkar and his followers was strongly opposed by Mahatma Gandhi and a large number of Caste Hindu leaders. Mahatma Gandhi believed that separate electorate would mean further fragmentation of the nation. Gandhi went on fast unto death against the 'Communal Award.' The political atmosphere changed and under pressure Ambedkar yielded to Mahatma Gandhi and gave up his demand for the Award. Gandhi conceded reservations of 148 seats for depressed classes for ten (10) years known as Poona Pact (Shah 2001: 40-41 & Kamble 1979: 162).

According to the Poona Pact which was signed on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1932 at Pune, the untouchables were given reservations in all elected bodies in services. Thus,

opportunity given to them to exercise their political rights was withdrawn (Das 1986: 19). The colonial authorities issued a decree in 1936, confirming the list of the untouchables. Since then they began to be called "Scheduled Castes". The list included "Castes and tribes" in relation to which other members of the Hindus observed untouchability. On the basis of this list members of the castes included in it received the right of reservation of seats in the Central legislative and the provincial assemblies and since, 1943, reservation of seats in government services as well (Yurlova 1990: 3).

In pursuance of the Directive Principles under Article 35, the Parliament enacted the Untouchability (Offence) Act, 1955 which makes the practice of untouchability a cognizable, but compoundable offence. This Act has been substituted by the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 (Singh 1986: 31). To reduce the deprivation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the Constitution made certain provisions in various articles of the Constitution known as 'protective discrimination'. They are related to political reservation (Articles 330 and 332), reservations of seats in educational institutions (Articles 15(4) and 29) and reservations of Government jobs (Articles 16(4), 320 (4) and 333 and 335). This facility includes age concession, fee concession, reduction of qualifying marks in examinations etc (Shah 2001: 47-49).

Other welfare schemes include the grant of household sites free or at nominal cost, assistance by way of loans, subsidies and grants-in-aid to local bodies and monetary assistance to co-operative societies especially for the benefit of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The western education also played a dominant role in the awakening of India in general and Scheduled Castes in particular which made them realize the value of freedom and independence from the age-old superstitions and caste rituals (Kamble 1979: 24-243). The facilities and reservations in institutions and Government services and other fields for promoting the socio-economic and political conditions of the Scheduled Castes



have led to an increase of educated Harijans and a relative increase in Government services and other fields. This is seen as an obstacle to Caste Hindus in getting jobs as well as in acquiring other advantages which they earlier had. Anti - Harijan feelings reached their peak on the whole at the end of seventies and early eighties (Yurlova 1990: 174-206).

With the growth of capitalist economic development and the service sector, differentiations within Scheduled Castes have become sharp. A small middle class within Scheduled Castes has emerged and it has been enlarged with availability of benefits through Protective discrimination. This class has begun to articulate and assert its identity as 'Dalits' as 'Ambedkarists' or as 'revolutionists' and their number in white collar jobs, particularly in Government sector, has not only increased but they work as watchdogs to see that reserved seats get filled by Scheduled Caste candidates only. On the other hand, overall educated unemployment has sharply increased affecting mostly the caste Hindu middle class which constitute a large number of educated persons. Thus, resentment against Protective discrimination by Caste Hindus mounted in the seventies which also accentuate conflict between Scheduled Castes and non Scheduled Castes and Tribes leading to various forms of atrocities against Scheduled Castes (Shah 2001: 63-64).

A re-thinking had been going on in the country for reformulating the criteria for determination of the Scheduled Caste status. This was spurred by the emergence of new dominant castes from amongst the Scheduled Castes which no longer suffer from older social disabilities and yet want to be in the scheduling list for preserving their social benefits. The commission increasingly felt that the criteria for special social treatment of specific groups should be secular or economic rather than religious or ritualistic (Singh 1974: 311).

The state protection and adoption of legislative measures in favour of Harijans has undergone change in their nature of participation in social life as a result of

democratic transformation after years of Independence. From a passive object of socio-economic and political exploitation they gradually become an active subject of political struggle. Though caste ideology lost much of its former economic basis caste consciousness continues to remain a significant factor hindering various progresses (Yurlova 1990: 251-254).

The experience of reservation has not always been easy for its beneficiaries; the appropriateness and fairness of the programs are matters of increasing controversy. One of the conventional attacks on the reservation system is that its beneficiaries are overwhelmingly drawn from the most prosperous elements among the most prosperous Scheduled Castes. It may well be true that there is some tendency for the more prosperous castes and, as we have argued, more prosperous individuals within these caste to be overrepresented in the various legislatures throughout India. Given the importance placed by all parties on education the more advanced communities and individuals will naturally be favoured. So, there is some tension between this outcome and the whole rationale of reservation (Meldelsohn & Vicziany 2000: 248-250).

The rift between educated white-collar Dalits and non-Dalits has slowly widened, one for that was rising uneducated unemployment. Another reason was that white-collar employees did not get integrated as middle class but continued to remain divided on caste lines (Shah 2001: 64). It is unfortunate that since the inception of the office of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the establishments of the non-officials organizations which engaged welfare works for these neglected people, their problem has rather swollen and become more complicated instead of elimination which shows a wide gap between the promises and performances (Bharadwaj 1979: 30-31). It is believed that the Scheduled Castes have registered little progress in the last four decades. There has been a quality of ritualistic formalism about many welfare and development

schemes formulated for these people. The financial incentives and educational reservations have bestowed little real benefit to these castes (Ahuja 1993: 376).

In addition to the difficult economic conditions and social discrimination, the Scheduled Castes are facing jealousy and hatred from other Caste Hindus. Instead of encouraging these traditionally down-trodden to improve economically and socially, they have subjected to further hardships. Further the Scheduled Castes are faced with internal problems, where the members of various sub-castes among them are not treating their own community on par with one another which create a hierarchy among them. Those who have availed benefits and improved economic conditions are monopolizing, if not discouraging other Scheduled Castes to have the benefits which may be due to the fear that they may become competitors to the advanced groups (Parvathamma & Satyanarayana 1984: 89-90). Despite all legislative enactments and judicial pronouncements, the practice continues to be permeated by inequality in every sphere. The marks of inequality are visible in every form of collective life. The rural and urban communities are divided and sub-divided into groups and categories that are ranked in elaborate gradation. Distinction among castes and classes, though no longer upheld by the law, are taken into account everywhere. There are numerous barriers between the strata, and they are difficult to cross. The reality of rigid social stratification makes itself felt in the daily lives of the poor and the oppressed in general, and the untouchables in particular (Beteille 1992: 2-3).

The legislation alone is not the proper and permanent remedy to change the human vision and mind, nor it paves the way for removal of social evils. Concisely without mental awakening, self- realization of duty towards society and intellectual elevation no amount of government pressure and policies can succeed in inducing the human beings to transform the sick society into a healthy and prosperous society (Bharadwaj 1979: 49-50). It is true that the Harijans who were at a time the 'People of

God Hari' (Fuchs 1950), 'Broken man' (Ambedkar 1948), now have become 'Vote banks' for exploiting the political leaders. They are not casting their votes, but they are selling their votes and have begun to ask for the provisions and facilities that were given to the Scheduled Castes in Indian Constitution (Rao 1993: 252-253).

The great change in the politics of the untouchables is that over large parts of India they can no longer be taken for granted as dumb vote banks. To a much greater extent than even a decade ago they have begun to shape their own politics (Mendelsohn & Vicziany 2000: 236-237). The situation of untouchable say, in the middle of the nineteenth century, by now amelioration has softened the historic oppression. In many regions of India it is poverty rather than social oppression that presents itself as the principal disability of people from the untouchable castes, and this has frequently led to claims that at least in those regions the very concept of untouchability is no longer apposite. But while it is now possible to imagine a social world that will no longer be disfigured by untouchability, that world is not yet in place. The view argued here is that 'the untouchables' remain a distinctive grouping within Indian society conceived as a whole and they tend to suffer from multiple and severe discriminations and from poverty (ibid: 11-12).

## **I.5. Origin of the Scheduled Caste in Manipur**

### **I.5.a. General Origin**

The people of Manipur with their long stories of migration from the varied directions of China, Thailand, Mongolia, Tibet and Burma, and after sustaining a series of invasions by the Aryans, Chinese, Shans and the Burmese, can hardly claim any racial purity. Secondly, the shared belief and the scientifically justifiable legend that the present valley, in the pre-historic days was under water leaves reasons to assert the probability of human habitation in the waterlogged area. It can also be discernible from the second factor

that all the people had shared a common fate of the subsistence economy in the hills. Folk-belief has, therefore, crystallised that all the people of the land are from a 'common ancestor'. Both Col. Mc Culloch and Hodson examined remarkable commonness and found reasons to consider the Meitheis as the descendents of the surrounding hill tribes (Pakem 1990: 267-268).

Captain Dun wrote in his Gazetteer of Manipur (in the foot note, pp.6) "there can be no reasonable doubt that a great Aryan wave of very pure blood passed through Manipur into Burma in pre-historic times. The Hinduism of those remote times was probably free from caste prejudices and very different from what it is now; but I think it extremely probable that a tradition of it remained when the missionaries from Bengal arrived. These, latter, for their own purpose, distorted the history of Manipur. The Burmese invasion put the finishing touch and killed the old tradition" (Singh 1987: 14).

The hill dwellers who were depending mainly upon subsistence economy could only sustain them but never led to any production of surplus and capital formation. But as "the adoption of wet-rice cultivation guarantees surplus", there started a ceaseless struggle for supremacy among the various tribes over the control of the valley. The result of all such quarrels was the emergence of seven (some say ten) major *Yeks* (clans) in the valley- *Ningthouja*, *Kumul* (khuman), *Luang* (Luwang), *Angom*, *Moirang*, *Khaba-Nganba*, and *Chenglei*. Each of them occupied different areas at different periods and dominated the parts of the valley. It may be mentioned that in the valley Moirang village of the Moirang clan was one earliest independent consolidation as far back as in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and even before that, the *Kumul* appeared to be the most powerful (Pakem 1990: 268-269).

But the Ningthouja, the royal clan and the progenitor of the royal line subdued all other rival clans and established political authority over all other clans under

the generic term Meithei in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, a new Meithei identity started to emerge. The hill people failed to make a permanent hold over the valley and had to continue with the subsistence economy and finally became tributaries to the Raja (ibid: 269).

During the earlier period migrants were in general assimilated but their origins were remembered however in their family names, and by the terms *nongchupharam* (migrants from the west) and *nongpokharam* (migrants from the east). Subsequent immigrants mainly Brahmins and Bishnupriyas (low-caste Hindus) became to some extent integrated into the Manipuri community but were not assigned to a *yek*. The *yek* was subdivided into *sageis* or *yumnaks*. These were basically clan groups which traced descent from a common ancestor and bore the family name. The whole state was subdivided into four panas which were the geographical divisions of the Valley. Each pana was obliged, when its turn came, to provide an unpaid labour force to the king during the eleventh century A.D. (Paratt 1980: 3- 4).

The impact of Hinduism further deteriorated the situation, by preaching that the Ningthouja clan had originated from Babru Bahan and by making an amorphous connection of its remote origin from Brahma Dev. In the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century Raja Gharib Niwaj alias Pamheiba proclaimed Hinduism as the official religion and the latter consolidation of Hinduism took place in the valley during the reign of Chandra Kriti Singh in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The surrounding hill men came to be treated as downgraded and untouchable stock (Pakem 1990: 269-270).

Rejecting the claim of Hindu descent Pemberton concludes that the Meithei are the descendents of the emigrants from Tatar colony who came through North-West border of China (1966: 37-38). British administrators and scholars like Mc Culloch (1859) Damant (1877) Hodson (1908) Pemberton (1966) Brown (1975) are inclined to trace the

origin of the Meitei in Manipur from an agglomeration of Naga-Kuki tribes to Burman speaking tribes while others find an Aryan admixture in the Meitei community (Saha 1994: 57-58).

According to Hodson (1908: 10) the group name “Meithei” has been derived from *mi* = man and *thei* = separate. Hodson expressed the view that in the ‘Moitay’ of Manipur there is a combined appellation of the Siamese Tai and the Kochin Chinese ‘Moy’.

The system of caste in Manipur is less prominent in comparison to other Hindu states. It can be rightly said that in the earliest Meitei society of Manipur, caste is non-existent, but it cannot be so sure about the class system. There was class distinction among the clans, namely, *Angom*, *Ningthouja*, *Moirang*, *Khuman*, *Khaba-Nganba* and *Chenglei* with their own status, dignity and prestige in the society. With the advent of Hinduism during the reign of Pamheiba (Garib Niwaj 1709-48) the Meiteis began to imitate caste system of the Hindus and the idea of touchability and untouchability came to the minds of Hindu Meitei (Devi 2002: 10). A strange custom prevailed in Manipur by which a man of low caste marrying a woman of high caste is adopted into her tribe, and the children, are considered a full-blooded members of the mother’s caste. Caste of this kind is often seen where a man in favor with the Raja makes his way rapidly to the top of the tree (Dun 1981:14).

On the basis of one’s religious belief system the Meitei are divided into two groups; the Gouriya Meitei, that is, the follower of Vaishnavism and the Sanamahi Meitei, that is, the followers of indigenous Meitei religion. The Meiteis use major lineage (Sagei) name as their forename. They have an elaborate system of social etiquette showing regards and respect to their seniors in every respect of behavior (Saha 1994: 68).

The Gouriya Meitei employs Brahmans for worshipping Vaishnava deities, and conducting various ceremonies, and also for cooking in communal feast. The ritual practices among the Gouriya Meitei reveal that the Vaishnava Gods as well as traditional Meitei Gods are being worshipped. Every morning and evening they worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses including Brinda Devi (tulsi), the Meitei God Sanamahi and Goddess Laimaren with lighted lamp, incense and flowers. The old take bath every morning put sacred marks of chandan before taking meal. And during ceremonies, every person, irrespective of sex and age puts sacred marks on his or her forehead. The life cycle rituals of the Gouriya Meiteis are always marked by a series of *sanskritana* (community singing devotional songs) and use Sanskritic prescriptions (ibid: 69).

The Bamon Khunthok, which is probably a fairly accurate record of Brahmin migrations, records that the first Brahmin settlers came to Manipur during the reign of Kyamba, and a fairly steady stream entered the state from various parts of India after that, presumably with the connivance of the Rajas, for they were allowed to settle. Many were allotted clan (*sagei*) names, which they bear today, and were absorbed into the Meitei community (Paratt 1980: 133).

In the Meitei dharma (the Sanamahi religion) the Funga (sacred fireplace) located in the central part of every house is considered as the abode of God Sanamahi and abode of Goddess Laimaren and it is supposed to be on the north of Funga. Every village /area has a village deity Umanglai (traditional deity believed to exist in the forest), a prime deity of their Pantheon. Their supreme God is Gurusidabamapu and they consider the Goddess Laimaren as mother and the God Sanamahi as the father. Neither in their life cycle rituals nor in their communal feast the Sanamahi Meitei employs Brahmans but a *maiba* (local priest) is employed to officiate in their ceremonies. They use hymns in their own language based on folk tales instead of Bengali or Sanskrit. The daily life cycle and



other rituals of the Sanamahi are same as those of the Gouriya, excepting the Vaishnava elements (Saha 1994: 72).

### **I.5.b. Lois**

The Lois are also known as the Chakpa. The term Loi refers to people who were banished to penal colonies for violation of kinship norms. They are distinct from other local communities because they eat pork, profess a form of religion that is described as pre-Hindu and pursue their traditional occupation of distilling liquor, silkworm rearing and pottery.

The Loi / Chakpa are considered as an indigenous people. Like the Meitei their title is Singh; they use lineage (sagei) name as their forename. Although some of them have accepted Vaishnavism in their lifestyle, the Gouriya (Hindu) Meitei do not consider them as pure Vaishnava and Brahmans do not serve them. A great social distance has been created between the Loi / Chakpa and the Meitei since the latter accepted Vaishnavism. Their life cycle rituals are more or less the same as those of the Meitei, of-course, without Vaishnava elements. It may be concluded that the Loi / Chakpa practice the Meitei culture although with a distinct ethnic accent of their own (the one followed by the Lois) (Saha 1994: 74).

The division of seven clans of Meitei society later merged together to form a new race Meithei under the leadership of Ningthouja clan in which the king Pakhangba and other royal administrators belong. The Lois believed that they belong to the eighth clan and they had good administration set up during ancient days. The deportation to Loi villages as punishment by Meitei kings started during the reign of Khagemba sometime around 1645 A.D. This process of punishment continued thereafter and present stock of Lois may be a mixture of original Lois, who were defeated in the war against Meitei power to surrender their republic, and those who were banished to penal colonies. The

Lois identified themselves as Hindus but in practice they do not have much Hindu influence. The original Meitei religion which in other words known as Sanamahi cult is still preserved by the Lois though with distinct ethnic ways while in case of Meiteis it was almost destroyed or adulterated due to the influence of Hinduism (Dun 1981: 193 -95).

The factors governing the hill-valley division also apply to the Meithei-Loi division. Like the hill people, the Loi people are the antique people of the land. They are distributed over a few villages, viz Sengmai, Androlai, Chairel, Sugunu, Kokching, Lai Maram, Khurukhul, Susakameng, Koutruk, Yairipok, Kameng, Chikkhong etc. These people were disposed of their fertile land by the tribes of the Meithei confederacy. As with the case of the hill people, so also with the Loi people, Hinduism has acted as a fissure line. Under the aegis of Hinduism the Lois were relegated as untouchables and they had to practice all sorts of inferior industries like salt-manufacturing, rice- beer making, iron smelting, etc.( Pakem 1990: 270-271).

According to the Lois of Sekmai villages situated on Imphal-Kohima road believed that they had moved from the south to the north of the valley, now called Awang (north) Sengmai. The Lois of Fayeng village said that they once occupied the site of the Konung or the Kangla or the fort from where they were driven out by Pakhangba which means beginning of the rise of Meitei power. The Lois of Andro villages claim the same origin as that of Fayeng. According to the Lois settled in Kakching which is situated in the north eastern corner of the valley believed that they were once under the rule of the Heirol King, whose domain stretched from Kakching to the Imphal river. The Leimaram Lois claim the same as Kakching people and the Lois of Khurukhul believe the same story as Sekmai Lois. From the chronicles it appears that the Loi villages possess considerable antiquity for it is stated that they were founded by Airaba whose, reign is dated about 1000 A.D. that is in the period before history of real authenticity begins (Ghosh 1992: 193-194).

According to Singh (1985: 13) the Loi groups can be distinguished from the Meiteis by their use of yu (rice beer), poultry, piggery and by their physical traits such as dark skin and snub nose. There have been infusions of Meitei bloods in their families by inter-marriage and other methods such as Loi by royal punishment, Loi by voluntary marriage and Loi by purchase. From chronicles it is clear that Chairel, Kumbi, Thanga, Sugunu etc were the places for penal settlements to which all classes of political offenders were sent by the rulers of Manipur. King Pamheiba alias Garib Niwaj (1709-1748 A.D.) who with the connivance of Shantidas Adhikari, a Ramanandi preacher from Sylhet in East Bengal introduced revolutionary changes and prosecution in religion. A great number of people who opposed his regime and change of belief were ordered to go into exile to the Loi villages for the rest of their life. By the time of King Joi Singh (1759-1798 A.D.) members of different groups were forbidden to intermarry, eat together or associate freely and the higher castes could not even dine together or eat food prepared by a person of lower class / Sagei. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such rules were observed with particular punctiousness by the Rajkumars, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and persons of higher strata and was later ritually.

It may be mentioned that the Meiteis embraced Hinduism as early as the eighteenth century and superficially imitated the social stratification of Hindu caste system. Eventually, the regular social relation which existed between the Meitei and tribes became gradually restricted. The tribes of the hills who remained outside the pale of Hinduism were relegated to the 'degraded heathens', As one local historian puts, "they (the Meitei) began to adopt a holier-than-thou attitude towards the hill peoples" (Lal 1984: 39). When the Meiteis were non-Hindus they maintained better social contacts between the societies (Sanajaoba 1987: 86-87).

With the advent of Hinduism, there was a time in the Meitei society when the Meiteis degraded some Meitei who did not adopt Hinduism and they did not mix, eat and sit with them. “Lois” are such communities who do not adopt Hinduism. The origin of Meiteis including Lois is obscure; there are no historical records of where they came from or when they settled in Manipur. Scholars have different views as some traced their origin to the Mahabharata, some to China, some to south east Asia, and some scholars try to prove that the Meiteis were the Hindus from the pre-historic time there by claiming to be of Aryan blood (Devi 2002: 10).

The origin of the word ‘Loi’ is vague even though it was popularly known as banished group. A manuscript from the custody of Khelchandra Singh refers to the establishment of the fifteen “Loi” villages by Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33-154 A.D.), and these fifteen “Loi” villages were Chakpa, Andro, North Sekmai, South Sekmai, Phayeng, Koutruk, Leimaram, Thongjao, Kakching, Shikhong, Chairen, Ningel, Tinsang, Leisangkhong, and Thoubandong which were recorded as leading Lois. The reign of Kongyamba during 1324-1335 A.D. marked the establishment of “Loi” villages of Heiyen, Hankul, Phoubakchao and Waikhong, and during the time of King Ningthoukomba (1432-1467 A.D.), the Loi villages of Thanga, Moirang, and Kamang were established. The reason for applying the term Lois to them might have been related to the occupations of the people. Kakching was famous for melting iron ores, Andro, Chairen, Thongjao etc for potteries; Thanga, Moirang etc for fishing; Shikhong and Ningel etc for manufacturing salt (Pramodini 1995: 10-11).

Hodson (1908) remarks that Lois are either earlier settlers or direct descendants of Meiteis banished to Loi regions as a punishment. According to Pramodini (1995: 13-14) the modern concept of “Lois” has the significance that these communities were outcaste groups. In fact the concept is derived from their banishment to somewhere

by the royal decrees as a punishment for their anti-royalist activities. There is not even a single reference about the norms of 'Mangba' (unsacredness) and 'Sengba' (sacredness) in Pre-Hindu period. It might have a Pro-Hindu convention and obligation. The adoption of Hindu cult in Manipur was the watershed of Manipur history. Many conflicts came into existence between the forces of the Hinduism and those of the traditional cult. Almost all the 'Loi' villages which were far away from the palace have been declared outcaste for their refusal to conversion to Hinduism.

The Loi is not recognized as a pure Manipuri, they appeared to be descendants of the former inhabitants of Moirang, one of the original tribes who formerly occupied the valley to the south and were formerly independent. But were reduced ages ago by the Meithei; hence the name Lois or "subdued" which was given to them after a subjection. They profess to be Hindus, but are not recognized as such by the orthodox. The Loi caste seems a sort of "Limbo" for nondescripts of all descriptions. Manipuris are frequently degraded to Loi as a punishment, which it usually is after a time, descends to wife and family of the culprit who become Lois (Brown 1975: 14).

According to Singh (1985: 13), "Loi means subdued, dependent, outcaste, backward and to complete or to be completed." This is obviously connected with the degraded and subdued groups of outcaste and low caste people.

According to Meities' beliefs, the Lois were criminals or prisoners of wars who were deported to these villages as a punishment. But Lois story says a different version which varies from village to village (Ghosh 1992: 193). Another version propagated by the Meitei is that Lois are the original Meiteis in custom and behavior. With the pass of time the Meitei have become more and more Hinduized while the Lois have still preserved most of their indigenous traditions. To separate Loi from them the Meitei very often attribute certain assigned occupations such as poultry, farming, distillation, silk

rearing etc. to the Loi / Chakpa. They are also regarded by the Meitei as tributary group who use to pay tribute to the Meitei kings during their rule (Saha 1994: 62-63).

Parratt (1980: 4) mentioned that outside the Manipuri community, were the villages of Loi, who may have been the aboriginal inhabitants of the land prior to the arrival of the Meiteis. The Lois have generally resisted the advance of Hinduism. Although the Lois have generally been subjected people to the Meiteis, some of their customs are very similar, and the possibility of common origin cannot be ruled out. The Loi community has been enlarged by migrants of various ethnic origins (especially Mayangs or Westerners) and hill people. Exiles to Loi villages either temporarily or permanently were a traditional punishment for Manipuris who had committed crimes against the king and state and in later times became roughly equivalent to outcasts for Hindu Manipuris.

It is rather very rare to come across any book where the Lois are treated separately. Rather in most of the books it is found that this group of people is considered as part of Meiteis. In other words they are only considered as lower caste Meitei speaking a slightly different dialect which has close similarity with the Meitei language. The dialect spoken by the Loi is known as Chakpa dialect (Ghosh, 1992: 193). Singh (1980: 20) has mentioned that the degradation in the social status of Lois and Yaithibis is not due to their occupation but due to their mode of eating, living and clothing. Their pronunciation is a little different from the Meiteis.

Literally, Loi has double meaning; it may mean one who pays tributes to the king (Loipot) and one who is put into exile (Loi thaba). Actually, there were three types of Lois, namely-- '*Lanngam Loi*' (conquered one), '*Lanpha Loi*' (captured from war and rehabilitated by the king) and '*Loi thaba*' (those who were sent into exile as capital punishment) (Devi 2002: 17). Perpetual degradation of a prince or a commoner to a Loi

group may be caused by trifling matters such as negligence of an official duty, practicing black magic, and attempt for throne or any unapproved act known to the King, the offender is outcasted and treated as Loi. The defeated armies of the revolting princes were sometimes commuted to exile in Loi village instead of killing. Thus, the increase in population is ascribed to the penalties of the King when the obstinate Meiteis violate the rules of customary rites and scriptural injunctions (Singh 1985: 14).

It is a fact that any person belonging to a Loi community will be regarded as high caste Meitei as soon as they embrace Hinduism and thus, their status will be equivalent to the high caste Meitei after undergoing the process of purification called 'Panathokpa' (Devi 2002: 19).

The Loi is considered so inferior that the name Meitei is not given to them. Indeed, so much have the Loi been looked down upon, and kept apart that many of the Loi villages have preserved languages of their own; the Loi population is exceedingly useful. Among them there is another group who pays tribute in "Sel", the coin of the country. Of the Loise the "Sel Loi" is considered the lowest (Mc Cullough 1859: 13-14 & Hodson 1908: 10) also admits that the Loise are perhaps the most hard-working and useful people in the valley. All the men are employed in different economic activities and allowed to practice industries which are denied to the Meiteis, whom, however to the neglect of their temporal advantages, they are anxious to follow into the respectability of Hinduism.

During the native rule the service relationship of the people with the king was developed by the king himself to strengthen the pattern of settlement already developed. The code comprised of three types of services, namely, *famnaiba*, *lalupkaba* and *loipotkaba* which can be classified into prestigious, essential and dishonorable. The *famnaibas* are the prestigious services which include the high officials in the customary

laws, judiciary, administrative and military services. The Vaishnavite Kings added the ritual services of the Brahmin to it (Saha 1994: 140).

The *Lalup* is the essential service performed by every common Meitei between the age of sixteen to sixty. This service was due to the state and each individual who performed *Lalup* was entitled to cultivate one part of land for his sustenance but on the condition that he would make the payment of regular tax in kind (Brown 1975: 83).

*Loipotkaba* are the dishonorable services. These include Loipot that is paying tribute to the king and also performing heavy duties which they were asked to perform. The degraded section of the Meitei, the Loi, Bishnupriya and the Yaithibi performed Loipot services. They did not perform *Lalup* and were generally called *Loi*, people of low status. The King had a clear economic policy which was differentially applied to his favorites and disfavoured. The disfavoured that is, the degraded ones have the burden of heavy duties attached to them in the form of loipot services while the favorites who have royal connection had the supervisory work of the offices in palace. The job opportunities of the degraded were however limited and closed and for the commoner unlimited and open (Saha 1994: 143-144).

The allotted specific occupations of the Loies are brewing liquor which was the work of Sekmai and Andro, Sericulture was job of Leimaram and Khurkhul. Andro also perform pottery work. Phayeng had to produce Laishen phee (silk cloth). Black smithy was the work of Kakching Loies and the Sugunu Loies were to perform carpentry, cutting beams and in particular boat making (Brown 1975:14).

Gradually it was observed that the Meitei villages were aware of at least two ethnic groups namely the Loi (the low) and the Yaithibi (the very low) holding lower position than themselves (Saha 1994: 155). In common parlance, all of them use the term Meitei for those in higher position and Loi for those in lower position. Since independence



the movement of going back to the original indigenous Meitei religion also started. The king has no political power. The notion of pollution and purity which was once brought by the Brahman was highly valued by the Meitei and has left an impact especially on the minds of the high status Meitei (ibid: 179-180).

### **I.5.c. Yaithibis**

Yaithibi is a term used for those who were expelled from the Meitei society for violating the rule of incest. At present, they are referred to as Thoubal Khunou. It is also the name of a village which is located on the Imphal-Moreh road, five kilometers east of Thoubal Bazaar. They trace their origin to Haiyutomba of Laishram lineage (sagei) of Meitei, the secretary of the erstwhile king Garib Niwas. Earlier, marriage within the same sagei was in practice. They profess both the traditional Sanamahi religion and the Gouriya sect of Vaishnavism (Singh 1999: 1300-1301).

The Yaithibi are originally exiled Meiteirs. The literal meaning of the term Yaithibi is 'bad luck' (*Yai* = Luck, *thiba* = bad). Some British writes particularly Brown (1975: 13) mentions that the "Eithibee" (Yaithibi) are the exiled people and they use to perform the scavenger's job in the palace only for the Raja and his family. Like the Meitei their title is Singh and they use lineage (Sagei) name as their forename. There is no apparent difference between the Meitei and the Yaithibi but the former do make some distinction by saying that the latter are not "neat and clean" and their language is "crude" (Saha 1994: 64-76).

Yaithibi, in all respects of cultural pattern are the Meitei. The Meitei also admit the fact that once the Yaithibi belonged to their community. They however, do not call them Meitei because they now consist of an exiled and socially outcaste people on account of their grave offence such as marrying near relatives like sisters, step-mothers, and such other near kins. The Yaithibi conceded that they are the outcastes but do not

accept the Meitei's version of the reasons of their ex-communication. They usually narrate two stories in support of the above view, one related to the resulted illicit relation of a few favoured people of the king with the queen which ultimately resulted into the ex-communication of those favoured people along with their kith and kin. The other version refers to the fight between the King Garib Niwaj and the prince Ajit Shai for intending to marry the same girl. Later prince Ajit Shai exiled the girl and her relatives ultimately resulting to their present condition (Saha 1994: 63-64).

During the native rule, the Yaithibis were "untouchables" and were not allowed to move freely on all roads and streets. Even their shadows were not to be touched by the Meitei. When they move out of their houses they had to wear 'higokmachufi' (blue colored cloth) turban so that people could easily identify them from a distance. It is said that they were then employed as sweepers in the palace though there is no such proof (ibid: 74).

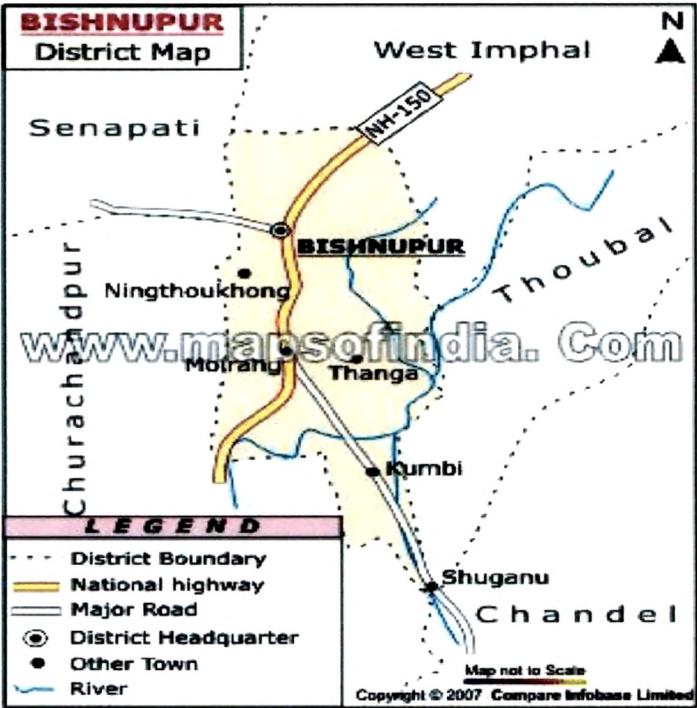
## **I.6. District Profile**

For this research work the following four districts namely, Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West and Thoubal have been selected taking into account the predominant habitation of scheduled caste population in these particular selected districts.

### ***Bishnupur District:***

Bishnupur district is located at a distance of 27 km from the State capital and lies between 93°30' East and 94°0' East longitudes and 24°15' North to 24°45 North latitudes. This district is bounded by Imphal district on the north, Thoubal and Imphal districts on the East, Churachandpur district on the south and west by Churachandpur and Senapati districts. The old name of Bishnupur was Lamangdong. Both the names are still used by the local people. The total population is 208,368 with Scheduled Castes population of 1,727 (0.8%) (2001 Census). Livestock is the chief wealth next to

agriculture to the predominant population of the district. The district is referred to as rice bowl of the state. Roads transportation and communication facilities of this district are not adequate but there has been some improvement since 1981. Imphal Tidim Road passes through the heart of the district. The inhabitants of this district are of different ethnic groups. Besides the Meiteis who are the predominant community of the district, there are Muslims, Kabui, Naga, Zou, Kom, Vaiphei, Gangte, etc.

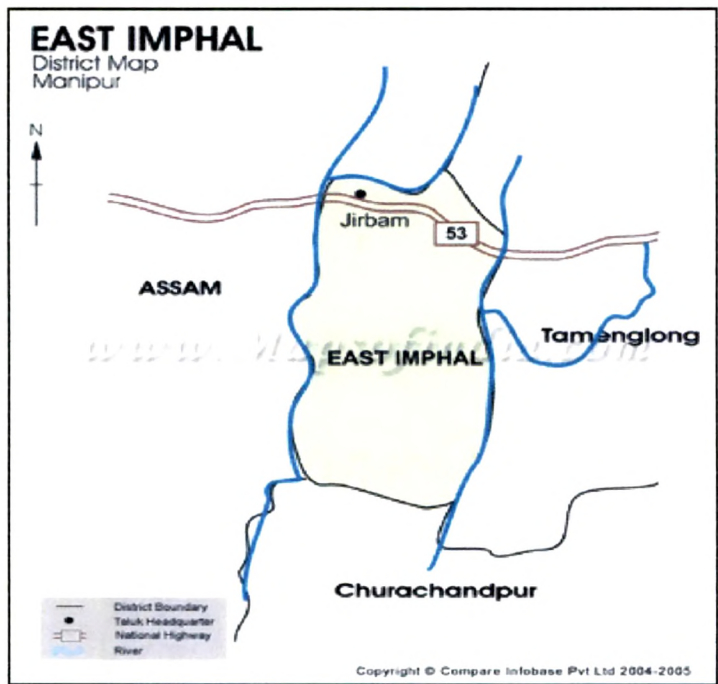


Map I.3 Map of Bishnupur District

**Imphal East:**

The district of Imphal East is divided into three sub-divisions namely, Imphal East I and Imphal East II with a longitude of 93°45' East and 94°15' East and a latitude of 24°30' North and 25° 0' North. The remaining sub- division namely, Jiribam is geographically isolated from the mainland by a distance of about 75kms. and 226 kms. from Imphal. The districts of Tamenglong and a part of Senapati separating the two portions, Jiribam which is mainly a continuation of the Cachar valley of Assam falls

within 93°0' East and 93°15' East longitude and 24°30' North and 25°0' North latitude. Although Jiribam is a part of Imphal district the region lies as a detachable portion of land attached to the south-western corner of Tamenglong district. The total population of the district is 394,876 with a scheduled caste population of 10,409 (2.6%). (2001 Census). Agriculture and animal husbandry are the most important sectors of economy. Although the district is land-locked and surrounded by hills it has a good and an adequate system of transport. Imphal-Jiri-Silchar Road is the national highway connecting the neighboring state.

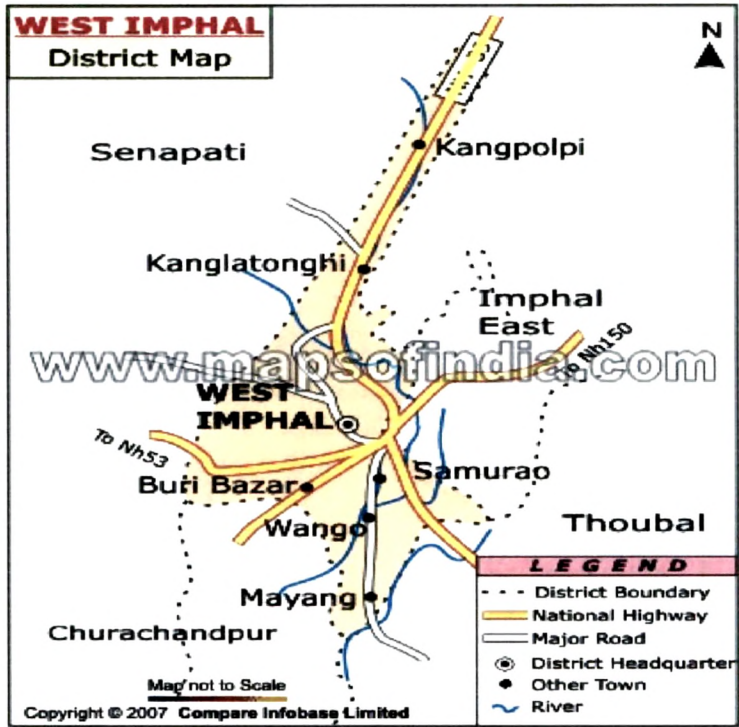


**Map I.4 Map of Imphal East District**

***Imphal West:***

The Imphal West district where the State capital also lies is composed of two sub-divisions namely, Imphal West I and Imphal West II with a longitude of 93°45' East and 94°15' East and 24°30' North and 25°0' North latitude. The average elevation of Imphal West valley is about 790 meters above mean sea level. The total population of the district is 444,382 and within which the scheduled caste population of

Imphal West is 13,276 (3.0%) (2001 Census). Agriculture is the most important sector of the economy of the district. Rearing of silk worms and production of silk yarn were once mainly concentrated in the Scheduled Castes villages of Khurkhul, Leimaram, Phayeng and Thongjao under royal patronage. Although these villages still continue to be the major centres of silk production, the industry has now been diversified to a number of villages. Every part of the district is connected by either pucca or kutcha roads. The Imphal-Dimapur Road is the national highway which connects Imphal with the neighboring states of Assam and Nagaland.



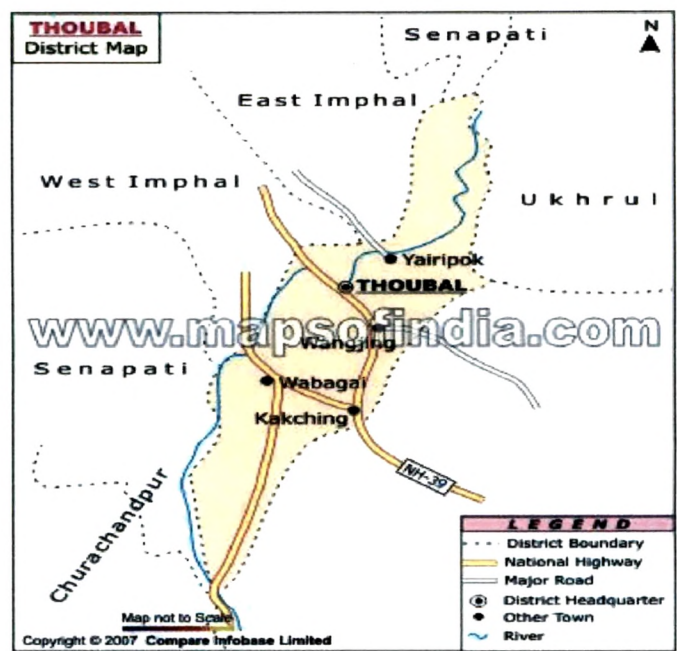
**Map 1.5 Map of Imphal West District**

***Thoubal District:***

The district occupies the bigger portion of the eastern half of Manipur valley and lies between 23°45' North and 24°45' North latitude and 93°45'E and 94°15'East longitude. It is bounded on the north by Imphal district, on the east by Ukhrul and Chandel districts, on the south by Chandel and Churachandpur districts and on the



west by the districts of Imphal and Bishnupur. The district has an area of 514 sq. km. Its average elevation is about 790 meters above the mean sea level situated at a distance of 22 km from Imphal and the total population is 364,140 in which Scheduled Castes population is 33, 969 (9.3%) according to 2001 census. Agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing provide the most important occupations for a large number of people in the district. The most important trading centres in the district are Thoubal and Kakching. The district has a fairly developed system of road transport and some big villages in the district are connected either by the National or state or district or village roads.



**Map I.6 Map of Thoubal District**

**I.7. Concepts of Social Mobility and Social Change**

**I.7.a. Social Mobility**

Social mobility is the movement of individuals, families and groups from one social position to another. It is a movement, either upward or downward, between higher and lower social classes; or more precisely, movement between one relatively fulltime, functionally significant social role and another that is evaluated as either higher

or lower. This movement of individuals occurring over time moving from one role and social class position to another because of what they have done or what has happened to them in various kinds of social interaction, such as in their family or in their work organization etc. The other factors and social conditions that may affect the processes of movement from one position to another are educational organizations, wealth, immigration, political influence, and symbolic justification though each of these may work in somewhat different ways in different societies (Barber 1957: 356-357).

According to Sorokin (1927) the shift of position may be undertaken by an individual or social object or value. That is to say, anything that has been created or modified by human activity can experience social mobility. Any change of position in society experienced by an individual or a group has its impact not only on the individual or the group, but also on society at large.

The changes in social position that interest the theory of social mobility are primarily variations in occupations, prestige, income, wealth, power, and social class. A high or low rank in one of these values is often associated with a roughly corresponding rank in most of the other values, and more especially a constellation of them, provides a measure of what in many societies is viewed as success in life (Encyclopedia of Sociology 1974: 429).

Change of position may take place either along a *horizontal axis*, or a *vertical axis*. Horizontal social mobility means movement by individuals or groups from one position to another in society which does not involve a shift into a higher or lower stratum (ESO-14 2002: 6). To Sorokin (1927) horizontal social mobility means the transition of an individual or social object from one social group to another situated on the same level. Vertical social mobility simply put an upward or downward change in the rank of an individual or group. Essentially vertical mobility involves a movement which

ensures enhancing or lowering of rank. It is important to remember that some movements may be both horizontal and vertical at the same time.

Anthony Giddens (2004: 300) refers to vertical mobility as movement up or down the socio-economic scale. According to him, those who gain in property, income or status are said to be upwardly mobile, while those who move in the opposite direction are downwardly mobile. Giddens comments that in modern societies vertical and horizontal (lateral) mobility are often combined. Often one form of mobility leads to the other. For instance, an individual working in a company in one city might be promoted to higher position in a branch of the firm located in another town, or even in a different country.

There are two ways of studying social mobility. Either, one can study individual's own careers- how far they have moved up or down the social scale in the course of their working lives. This is usually called *Intragenerational mobility*. Alternatively, one can analyze how far children enter the same type of occupation as their parents or grandparents. Mobility across the generation is called *Intergenerational mobility* (ESO -14 2002: 8).

Social mobility refers to the change in status of individuals or groups in relation to a given system of social stratification. This change manifests itself in two forms, either as threat to the contiguous system and ultimately its displacement by the emergence of a new criterion of status- evaluation (vertical mobility or structural change) or through changes within the parameters of the system (horizontal mobility or positional change). Studies have highlighted positional change in the form of Sanskritization and Westernization (Marriott 1955; Rowe 1968; Silverberg 1968; Srinivas 1987) emphasizing mobility at the group level while undermining the other levels of social mobility, namely, family and individual (Sharma 1974). The concept of structural change has been



emphasized in some recent studies (Bhadra 1989; Breman 1979, 1985; Harriss 1982; Omvedt 1982; Singh 1988)

Social mobility within the caste system is dependent upon the manner upon which caste is perceived or on functioning of the caste system at a given point of time, in a given context. Dipankar Gupta (1986: 63-78) is of the view that castes are discrete categories, hence do not constitute continuous hierarchies. Mobilizations, movement and social mobility could accrue from continuous hierarchies based on for example, income, property etc., and from discrete categories like caste, nation and language. A.M. Shah and I.P. Desai (1988) uphold the principle of division more than principle of hierarchy. It is the divisions between the groups (castes) and with the castes which have created both horizontal and vertical status distinctions throughout the history of the caste system (Sharma 1997: 161).

Although the amount of social mobility, that occurs in different types of societies vary considerably, there seems to be no society in which there is not at least a little social mobility. Davis (1949: 378) has shown that even in Hindu India "there is considerable mobility up and down the social ladder despite the ideal of fixity". All societies seem to share a set of structural conditions and requirements that lead to the occurrence of at least a small amount of mobility. There seems to be no society which does not experience a certain amount of social change as a result either of internal social processes or of the impact of external social or physical forces (Barber 1957: 423).

Srinivas (1966) formulated and contributed immensely to the concept of Sanskritization as a process of mobility in caste. He refers to Sanskritization as a "process by which a Hindu caste or tribal or other groups, change its customs, ritual ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently 'twice born' castes". It has been used as mechanism to bridge the gap between secular and ritual rank. Whenever a caste

achieved secular power it tried to legitimize its status by acquiring traditional symbols of high castes by adopting their customs, rituals, beliefs and ideas such as vegetarianism and teetotalism. Besides, they tried to obtain the services of Brahmin priests, visited pilgrimage centers and acquired knowledge of sacred texts (ESO -14 2002: 19).

Srinivas defines (1966) “Westernization as the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, the term subsuming changes occurring at different levels technology, institutions, ideology and values”. Westernization is therefore a vast, multidimensional and a complex process which impinged upon various domains through a number of institutions and hence had a significant bearing on caste mobility.

Acquisition of education opened avenues for individual and group mobility. The under privileged castes consolidated themselves against the upper castes in the form of Caste Sabhas, the anti-Brahmin movement date back to 1870's in Maharashtra and were led by dominant castes such as Kammas, Reddis, Nayars etc. The backward sections have found opportunities for upward mobility on account of ‘protective discrimination’ which involves reservation of seats in educational institutions, freeships and scholarships, besides there are reservation in jobs and legislative bodies (ESO -14 2002: 22-23).

Weber suggested that the stratification system must be thought of as containing a number of hierarchies which differ with each variation and combination of the basic stratification factors; status, classes and authority. In every society social mobility may result in discrepancies among the different positions one person may hold in each of these hierarchies. Srinivas points out, “not only do the various castes form a hierarchy, but the occupations practiced by them, the various items of their diet, and the customs they observe, all form separate hierarchies” (Lipset & Bendix 1959: 225-267).

### **I.7.b. Social Change**

Social change is such a prevalent and often disturbing feature of contemporary life that both the specialist and the layman may be tempted to suppose that it is peculiarly modern. Certainly the extent and rate of change in the modern world is greater than in most past periods, but the static qualities of primitive cultures or archaic civilizations are easily and commonly overstated. Change at some level and degree, is as characteristic of man's life in organized systems as in orderly persistence.

Social change is the significant alteration of social structures that is, of patterns of social action and interaction, including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms, values, and cultural products and symbols (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences 1974: 365-66).

Sociological interest in explaining and predicting patterns of change can be dated to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the social upheaval that accompanied the industrial revolution and the political revolutions that surrounded the development of democracy. In a basic sense, attention to social change is inherent in all sociological work simply because social systems are always in the process of change. In other words, to understand how social systems work or hold together, we must on some level understand how they change or fall apart (Johnson 2000: 255).

The Indian caste system is often taken as the prototype and as the most unchanging of all caste systems. Recent field studies however, have begun to alter this view of the Indian caste system. They have shown it to be subject to dynamic change and internal group mobility. Barber (1968) has summarized these developments and shown how the old view of the Indian caste system was based on philological and textual materials. This textual view is giving way to a contextual view based on empirical case

studies. These new case studies often point out that there is a peculiar dynamic process of change in the Indian caste system known as Sanskritization (Lynch 1969: 4).

In Manipur the Hindu Meiteis are quite flexible and adoptive in their notion of inter ethnic hierarchy in terms of specific situation. During pre-Vaishnava period the kings sponsored the pandits and the hierarchical distance of the various groups was maintained by the service, religious and judicial relationship of the people with the king. During the present period since independence the movement of going back to the original indigenous Meitei religion also started. Now the institution of kingship has been abolished. The king has no political power. Previously the institution of kingship served as the medium of communication among ethnic groups, villages and the king's capital and palace (Saha 1994: 175-179).

In these days of democratic set up of social life the ethnic nomenclature 'Lois' should have been done away within its derogatory meaning as was so historically held. Yet, if the appellation is to be retained to mean a specific group of people of this state in consideration of their actual lower position in the local social hierarchy, it may now rightly be concluded that this group has two distinguishable classes; (a) that of the Lois of Chakpa ethnic background and those of Khurkhul village, and (b) that of the other Lois than those of the former class. As regards the distribution of the latter class of Lois, it should be pointed out that in quite a good number of the villages of their settlement recorded in the historical books the people thereof have now got mixed with the Meitei of the privileged group or some other ethnic groups leading to the extinction of their Loi identity though earlier names of the Loi villages are still retained in their present settlements (Singh 1993: 43)

The idea of "purity and pollution" which was once brought by the Brahman and was highly valued by the Meitei and others who accepted Vaishnavism is now not

observed so widely. Now there is a tendency of mobility amongst different groups of people with a view to getting rid of this social stigma and to acquire high status. Thoubal Khunou is traditionally known as the Yaithibi. Their ethnic name Yaithibi is associated with a sense of untouchability as well as people of supposedly 'illegal origin' and 'immoral habits'. As the ethnic and village name has been stigmatized with a sense of very low status, they left their original place and also changed their village name as Thoubal Khunou. In common practice they try to identify themselves as Meitei but officially they identify themselves as Thoubal Khunou not to lose the scheduled caste benefits (Saha 1994: 180-181).

Similarly the term "Loi" has a derogatory connotation and implies low status. Some of the Lois in Andro (Imphal East) have a tendency to erase the stigma of "Loi" identity and to seek Meitei identity. So they adopted Gourism (Hindu Ways) and settled at a particular portion of Andro village. Some of the "Lois" in Phayeng and of other villages also want to remove their 'Loi' identity. So they call themselves Chakpa. The reference group for the low status people is the Meitei. So the upward movement of the low status people may be said "Meiteisation". For this purpose people are to leave all the traits that point to low status identity. As the process of "Meiteisation" has been increasing, the differentiation between the high status and the low status group has been decreasing. The cultural traits by which the high status Meitei could once differentiate themselves from the other low status groups are thus proving inadequate (ibid: 183).

A very significant development in the case of the Loi has been the formation of a formal association named "All Manipur Chakpa-speaking Loi Association" by the educated leaders to protect their rights as a Scheduled Caste group. The Association was established in the year 1951 under the leadership of Kh. Chaoba, who became the first President. This organization is the main organ inducing political mobilization among the

Loi. It also signifies the emergence of an identity, which passes beyond the village to encompass all the Loies of Manipur. The Loi population of a number of villages like Sekmai, Khurkhul, Phayeng, Koutruk, Leimaram Khunou, Andro has come within its jurisdiction (Das 1985: 29).

The granting of Scheduled Caste status to the Loies in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes' amendment list of 1956 has had certain far reaching socio-economic consequences among the people. Since then, they have been guided by a desire to bring about economic changes and to enhance the economic conditions of the members of the community. By invoking in the people a sense of common deprivation and by introducing a new socio-political identity, the Association has tried to attain a position of strength so as to put their claim of economic equality (ibid: 30).

### **I.8. Aim and Focus of the Study**

The primary aim of this research study is to sociologically analyze, explore and understand the social mobility and social change experienced by the Scheduled Castes of Manipur. The study also intended to sketch a brief account of the social structure and stratification, and social organization that prevailed in earlier days and its continuity till the present time. An attempt is made to understand the various forms of disabilities and the socio-economic and political positions of Scheduled Castes. The position and the role of women in the Scheduled Castes society are also briefly discussed. The study also aspires to contribute some urgent developing strategies as well as checking the nature and extent of distribution of benefits.

An emphasis has also been given on various forms of changes that are taking place among the Scheduled Castes. Besides constitutional provisions as an important force enhancing mobility other factors like socio-religious reforms, sanskritization, westernization as well as geographical mobility are also considered as

factors responsible for social mobility and change among the Scheduled Castes in Manipur. The nature and extent of the practice of untouchability, the interrelationship between the scheduled caste and other groups, social prejudices, cultural problems and the span of constitutional provisions benefiting these depressed groups in uplifting their socio-economic and political status has also be taken into account.

### **I.9. Hypothesis**

The social mobility and change among the Scheduled Castes of Manipur, to some extent, is mainly due to constitutional provisions, socio-religious reforms and social movements. Sanskritization as well as westernization also plays their prominent role in enforcing mobility in different parts of their life. But the provisions of the government are not equally distributed to all the categories of the Scheduled Castes but have been benefiting only the upwardly mobile section of Scheduled Castes depriving the more needed masses.

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