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Women's Role and Responsibility in the Family: A Manipuri Perspective

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Abstract- A home is a unique place with a 'woman', which gives happiness to all the members of the family. In every home, the woman the mother- the homemaker- is the beacon light. Her special functions are: bringing up children, inculcating proper value in their minds, looking after the comforts of the husband, children, and relatives, and helping them to find fulfilment in the family life. In Indian philosophy, the home is identified with the woman as *'Greeha Laxmi'* of the house. Home is another name for the woman who is mother and wife. In Manipuri society, women are regarded as '*Yumburembi*' (female head of the house) and also *'Emma'* means mother. The various roles of mother, sister, daughters, and wives, played by women in the family and the society for upholding die elixir of life and safeguarding the universal need of nature, deserves lots of appendices. They are the preservers of the cultural customs and traditions in society. The woman can be seen as an ideal wife, an obedient and faithful homemaker, and above all a good mother. They are the key to sustainable development and quality of life. Her role in the family is also to act as – a wife, leader, administrator, manager of the family income, and last but not least an important mother. The importance of women and mothers in a family is proven by the different statements given by eminent personality leaders also. And women are the architect of the home.

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Women's Role and Responsibility in the Family: A Manipuri Perspective

Dr. Oinam Sareeta Devi

Abstract- A home is a unique place with a 'woman', which gives happiness to all the members of the family. In every home, the woman the mother- the homemaker- is the beacon light. Her special functions are: bringing up children, inculcating proper value in their minds, looking after the comforts of the husband, children, and relatives, and helping them to find fulfilment in the family life. In Indian philosophy, the home is identified with the woman as *'Greeha Laxmi'* of the house. Home is another name for the woman who is mother and wife. In Manipuri society, women are regarded as '*Yumburembi*' (female head of the house) and also *'Emma'* means mother. The various roles of mother, sister, daughters, and wives, played by women in the family and the society for upholding die elixir of life and safeguarding the universal need of nature, deserves lots of appendices. They are the preservers of the cultural customs and traditions in society. The woman can be seen as an ideal wife, an obedient and faithful homemaker, and above all a good mother. They are the key to sustainable development and quality of life. Her role in the family is also to act as – a wife, leader, administrator, manager of the family income, and last but not least an important mother. The importance of women and mothers in a family is proven by the different statements given by eminent personality leaders also. And women are the architect of the home. In other words, the woman can be symbolized as the main cementing force to ensure the family is more stable and harmonious. Against the backdrop of these considerations, the paper is an attempt to examine how far all these sayings and expectations are true or applicable with regard to women of Manipur in view of the role they play inside their society.

I. Introduction

Women are the pioneer of a nation. According to a report by the Secretary General of the United Nations, women constitute 50% of human resources next to the man having great potential. Very often we ask each other, what we have achieved in life. At some levels, we have achieved a considerable amount. Each woman whether rich or poor, of upper caste or lower deprived, has at least the seed of a very powerful notion in her mind that she can do. That knowledge of enabling has emerged within her consciousness, whether she is empowered or not, even in the most adverse circumstances. A home is indeed a unique place with a 'woman', which gives happiness to all the members of the family. In every home, the woman the mother - the homemaker- is the beacon light. Her special role is: bringing up children, inculcating proper value in their minds, looking after the comforts of the husband, children, and relatives, and helping them to find fulfilment in the family life. In Indian philosophy woman of the home is identified as *'Greeha Laxmi'* of the house. Home is another name for the woman who is mother and wife. In Manipuri society, women are regarded as *'Yumburembi'* (female head of the house), *'Lal-leima'* (Goddess of Prosperity), and also *'Emma'* (mother). According to ancient manuscripts and legends, the Manipuri women particularly the Meitei's were always held traditionally in high positions.

Women have been everybody's focus of attention in every family and society of every age. The various role of grandmother, mother, sister, sister-in-law, daughters, daughter-in-law, and wives, played by women in the family and the society for upholding die elixir of life and safeguarding the universal need of nature, deserves lots of appendices. They are the preservers of the cultural customs and traditions in society. The woman can be seen as an ideal wife, an obedient and faithful homemaker, and above all a good mother. She has to take care of the needs and comforts of the in-laws, husband, children, and other members of the family and she also acts as a creator and promoter of peace in the family and the society. So, we may say that the life of women is multifaceted. Unlike men, women have to handle different aspects of life. They are primarily associated with home and men with the outside world. Women as housewives and mothers are always confined to the home as service providers to other family members according to their interests and abilities and provide resources in terms of equipment and materials to accomplish the job. Making a home happier and healthier depends very much on the woman of the family. She is concerned with the daily lives of the all-family members. She has to prepare the food they eat, clean the houses in which they live, the clothes they wear, look after the family relationships and bring up children, and also see to it that resources of the family are use to achieve maximum benefit of the family. Above all women everywhere have to discharge complex and diverse roles. Not only do they cope with the responsibility for childbearing and child-rearing and meeting the daily requirements of the family by cooking, cleaning, collecting fuel, and fetching water but they also help to look after poultry cattle, raise crops, and often contribute to family income. They are the key member of sustainable development and quality of life. Her role in the family is also to act as – a wife, leader,

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administrator, manager of the family income, and last but not least, an important mother. How much important is woman or mother is in a family is proven by the different statements given by eminent personality leaders also. Gandhi said, 'Women are God's greatest gift to humanity'. She has the power to create. Kalidas and Tulsidas became great poets because of their wives. Gandhi too became 'Mahatma' because of his mother 'Putalibai' and wife 'Kasturba'. There is a saying that behind every successful man there is a woman. Women are the architect of it. In other words, the woman is also symbolized as the main cementing force to ensure a more stable and harmonious family. They are man's helpmate, partner, and comrade. She sacrifices her pleasure and ambitions and maintains peace in the household.

In Manipur, women are engaged in different areas such as doing small trades and business in the market, weaving, engaging themselves in handloom and handicrafts, pottery, mat making, construction work, cultivation, etc. In course of time, there are also many women working in Government and Semi-Government services. But all of them may be described as home-maker in the sense that their basic duty and responsibility always lie at home, providing positive services to other members of the family. The primary job of the women is to look after the infant and all the domestic activities. Their duties include Kitchen work, cooking, serving, and also engaging in the activities like, pounding rice, cleaning the house, and utensil, and washing clothes. In the cultural understanding of the people, homemaking is like childbearing and child-rearing. Even though women enjoy the freedom to choose occupations as per their choice they can't escape from household work. Therefore, it may be said that no family and no society can sustain itself without women. Their care and caresses cater to the needs of preserving the cardinal virtues and values which provide human life with meaning and purpose.

Women always remained busy in different roles as mothers, housewives, daughters, and so on. They perform all household chores to keep their families in order. She also partakes an important role in moulding the future of her child including her daughters and in-laws. In another word, the women have to take more care to maintain peace, harmony, and understanding among the family members. Because family is the first unit of society. And if a woman takes care of her family she could contribute to the creation of a healthy society. We used to say that – "The family is where the future is". Mahatma Gandhi also said that 'the betterment of the future, the household, the workplace, and the society is with women'. Because women are the seedbed of the nation; the house is the nursery and the country gathers the harvest. The hand that rocks the cradles rules the world - so goes the saying. And the child imbibes all personality traits from its mother. The roles played by the women are:

Women as Mediators: Generally, in Manipur society, the woman has to play a pivotal role as a mediator among the family members to make a happy and peaceful family. The day-to-day activities of a family are solely dependent on the woman who would act in the role of mother, grandmother, mother-in-law, or even housewife, daughter, and so on. For instance, a grandmother as a senior member of the family acts as cementing force for the members of the entire family. Besides looking after the well-being of the rest of the family members, they would extend all their knowledge and experience to keep the whole affairs of the family in harmonious condition. As a true communicator and mediator, there had been a long tradition of telling folk tales and fables having moral value by the grandma to the young children as a means to build up their characters. Women also act as a motivator to console and motivate all the members silently and peacefully. She acts as an extension worker, teaching to bring out what to want (i.e converting unfelt needs to felt needs), as well as how to work out and bring about desirable changes in the knowledge, attitudes, and skill of people.

Women and Religion: Manipuri women participate freely in all social and religious functions in larger numbers, and are greatly responsible for creating a peaceful harmonious society. As far as religious rites and rituals in the family, they are basically concerned with women. It is always the womenfolk who observed rituals, perform *Varta* (fasting), *Pujah* (worship), visited temples, etc., for the welfare, prosperity, and protection of their husband's children from evil spirits and difficulties. On the home front also women do *pujah* and daily rituals in the morning and the evening. The women of Manipur always enjoyed a special status in Manipuri society in the past and present. During the sacrificial *pujah* of *Umanglais*, the fountainhead of the *Lai-haraoba* tradition of Manipur, women as priestesses or *Maibi* take the lead role in performing rituals associated with the great festival. Women are always treated with respect and honour without any bar to their participation in any kind of ceremony and social congregation. As an ideal wife, she is devoted to her husband, and is willing to share shoulder to shoulder all the responsibilities of her husband in the face of kinds of adversities. In that nature, Gandhi regarded women as the 'companion of man'. It may also be noted that as per tradition she gives up cosmetics when her husband is away.

Women as Motherhood: A woman as a mother is the protector, disciplinarian, and friend of the family. She is a selfless, loving human who sacrifices many of her wants and needs for the wants of their children and family members. She is also a hard worker to make sure their child is well equipped with knowledge, skills, and

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abilities to make him a competent human being. As a wife and mother, the woman carries the infant and feeds it for nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved. What can be compared to the pangs of labour? But she forgets them in the joy of creation who again suffers daily so that her baby may wax from day by day. Women suffer without any expression and discontentment. With such extraordinary qualities of women, Gandhi regarded women for their proud position by the side of men as a mother, guardians as silent leaders, and even peace promoters as well as messengers to teach the art of peace. She is the first teacher of the child. She transmits social heritage to the child. It is from the mother the child learns the law of the race, the manner, moral code, and ideals. The life of a woman in motherhood is multi-faceted. Unlike men, women have to handle a different aspect of life. There are women's issues that they need to attend to such as their spouse, family, career, business, education, health and fitness, and raising kids. Women are blessed with the power that enables them to handle numerous women's affairs at the same time.

Women as Caretakers of Health: Women are responsible for several activities connected with the maintenance of good health: purchasing, preparing, and serving food, providing a clean and safe environment, water supply, and personal hygiene (e.g. bathing and hand washing), and procuring preventive and curative health services. They are the crucial link between the family with the traditional and modern health system. Women are expected to implement the child survival effort by – ringing children to be immunized timely. Breastfeeding their babies on demand day and night, until the child is six months to two-year-old, and processing and feeding proper weaning foods in frequent meals to small children. She is the one who prepared the food and provide nursing care accordingly to suit the need of the family members both young and old, sick, disabled or normal, and for herself too. We may call the mother a 'Family Health Officer'. Because, nutrition is an important parameter for the development of family, society, and nation; and women play a very important role in securing for the family. To achieve food and nutrition security, adequate care is necessary for all members of the family. Proper breastfeeding for the infant, proper immunization, health care during illness, feeding home-based supplementary diets, encouraging children and adolescents not to consumption of junk food or fast food, dietary diversification through consumption of protective food, nutritionally enriched foods among family members, and reproductive health care, etc. are all major responsibilities of women. They also provide nursing care to the old, sick, and disabled.

Women as a Manager of Family Income: Women act as the humble manager of family income. Women of Manipur playing a vital role in household activities since time immemorial are well known. They have worked as one of the wheels of the family bullock cart and tried to put the household's economy on a sound footing. In the context of Manipuri society, in recent times, women make an important contribution to family income. There is a Manipuri Proverb, "A man who does not go to *Loishang* (Office), and a woman who does not go to *Keithel* (market) both are worthless". The three *Emma Keithels* or Women's Market of Manipur is a glaring example that women took a vital financial role in the management of income. There is a saying that fruits of knowledge are from father and grandfather; and the reserved wealth is from mothers and grandmothers. It shows the women's responsibility in the socio-economic position in the family as well as in society. The lower the economic level of the family greater the economic contribution by the women. Another striking characteristic of Manipuri women is the readiness to work in any economic field to support the family. It was proved by 1904 and 1939 *Nupi-Lals* of Manipur (Women's war). On the other hand, weaving took place a big role in maintaining the family expenses. It fully supports the need of the family like - food, lodging, and education as well. In India, 78% of women form the most important productive workforce in the economy and are major producers of food in terms of value, volume, and number of homework. Almost 50% of rural female workers are classified as agricultural labourers and 37% as cultivators. Most of the women engage themselves, in the cultivation of vegetables, and kitchen gardening, including themselves in Self Help Groups, etc., helping them in achieving food and nutritional security as well as enhancing family socio-economic status. Women understand the value of accountability more than the rest, and while leading a family they come forward to shoulder the accountability for any disruption to keep family bonding intact. Thus the role of Manipuri women is to act as co-partner of men in promoting the home economy.

Women as Leaders of Household: Women play multiple roles in a family as well as in society. They started entering erstwhile male-dominated leadership positions. Women are gradually making their leadership presence felt in entrepreneurship, administration, education, health, etc. in general. A woman as a mother, mentor, teacher, or leader is a person who influences and encourages her children and member of the family to work towards the realization of goals. We treated women as the leader and first Gurus of their children. She can influence children and others towards accomplishing goals and for future betterment. As Chester Barnard defines "Leadership is the ability of a superior to influence the behavior of a subordinator or group and persuades them to follow a particular course of action". Although leadership skills are acquired and shown by both men and women leaders, men and women show

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distinctly different styles of leadership. Women leaders are more transformational than men; they function as a role model for their subordinates. Women inspire their children, encourage their work performance, teach repeatedly to be understood, upgrade skills, etc. Women always care for personal development. Their authentic communication is the key to success. Women expect to transform their followers into better people. They teach to promote co-operation and collaboration around the family. As a mother and sister help to use their skills and expertise to complete their work. Her feminine qualities help to build up a more promising future. Leadership by women is vital to increase the pace of societal transformation at home and in the workplace. Women leaders are likely to provide integrated views of work and family resulting in an engaged and promising personal and professional future.

Women as Collective Force: Women of Manipur have emerged as a strong collective force in many situations to safeguard their children as well as their customs and traditions. Time and again, it has proved how women are coming out from the tight household core to promote peace for family and society. Some of the remarkable incidences of Manipur will the history of tomorrow. They are:

First Nupilal, 1904: The revival of the *'Lallup'* system, made the male members of the family not to be present at home most of the time. This meant the responsibility for looking after the social, economic and domestic affairs of the state was left mainly on the shoulders of the women. The first Manipuri women's movement broke out in the1904 against the Political Agent who ordered the men-folk of Imphal to collect bamboos, thatches, reed, and other materials from Kabow (Manipur Burma Border) for constructing British Officer, Assistant Superintendent Residence. Due to the pressure of the women, the British could not implement the order, and ultimately had to revoke it.

Second Nupilal, 1939: The women's movement was against the scarcity of rice in Khwairamband Bazar, the main market of Imphal because of exporting rice outside the state. The sudden outburst was a reaction to famine and economic problems faced by them. Their movement could change the/ policy of the British and stop rice export.

Nisha Bandh Movement: Women of Manipur have been victims of humiliation, torture, and exploitation in the family and society. The crime against women in Manipur became steadily increased day-by-day. In particular, women used to suffer a lot in the hands of their alcoholic husbands. They experience not only physical violence from them but the entire family also suffered because the alcoholic men inside the family. Not only has that it affected the family economy too. The women-folk, the housewife of the family collectively started the movement against the intoxication, fining both the consumer who disturbed the family day and night; and also tried everything they could do to stop the making of *yu* (local rice beer) and close down the liquor vendors. This movement they started came to be popularly known as *Nisha Bandh* Movement and they came to be known as *Nisha Bandhis*.

Meirapaibee: The *'Meira Paibee'*, (Woman Torch Bearer) is another women group that plays a significant role in protecting the people from social evils like violation of human rights, drugs, rape, murder, etc. They are human rights defenders. They played an active role against the access committed by the law enforcement agency. The emergence of this strong women's force was initially to safeguard innocent souls against the excess of the State Security Forces in the name of counter insurgency, under the Armed Forces Special Power Act, 1958. Later, the movement gave attention to other social problems caused by consumption of alcoholic drinks, drugs, etc. as well thereby trying to promote peace and security inside the society.

Fast-unto Death: Malom incidence of the killing of 10 civilians including 3 students at bus stand by CRPF personal on 2nd November 2000 extremely outraged public sentiment. As a result of that Irom Chanu Sharmila, 32 years old woman sat on the Fast-unto Death, from 4th November 2000 till 6th August 2016 demanding immediate withdrawal of AFSPA, from the state. Her resolve, courage and efforts attracted attention of the media all over the world.

June Uprising, 2001: Women of Manipur played a very important role during the Ceasefire Extension negotiation between the India Government and NSCN (IM). All Manipur *Nupi Marup*, *Meira Paibies*, and other women organize a rally in which the security personal opened fire to disperse the mob and killed eighteen innocent people on the spot including one woman. After that the All Manipur *Nupi Marup,* submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, not to extend Cease Fire Agreement in the territorial jurisdiction of Manipur.

Kangla Fort Incidence: 'Thangjam Manorama', who was arrested on 10th July 2004, by the 17th Assam Rifles from her house at late night by issuing arrest memos to her family members. Then she was raped and killed indiscriminately by the security forces. Outraged situation of this, various women bodies including *Nisha Bandhis, Meira Paibies,* and Women Vendors of Khwairamband Bazar protested against the killing. A group of elderly Meitei Women, stripped off their clothes and stood naked at the main gate of Kangla Fort and shouted by holding two screaming banners –"Indian Army rape us; Indian Army takes our Flesh;".

This shows how much women love peace and their motherland. As a mother, as a sister, as a wife – they never remain as silent spectators whenever

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problems concerning not only women themselves but the entire people of the state as a whole are faced with serious problems.

II. Conclusion

Women of Manipur are the epitome of strength; love sacrifice and courage. The role of women in today's world has changed significantly and for the better. Women are now self-sufficient, well aware, and financially independent. They have attained immense success in every field, side by side with men, in every walk of life. Earlier they were under the shadow of a husband or father, but now they have established their own identity and are independent. They are no longer unfit or weak. Their role has changed tremendously and they have been able to create a positive impression in the family as well as in society. From housewives many of them have evolved to Ministers, MLAs, Professors, Scientist. Their achievement in the field of Sports has been great in particular. Achievements of Kunjarani Chanu, Merry Kom, Mirabai Chanu, Sarita, etc. bear ample testimony to this. Overall women of Manipur are not only adorned with patience and perseverance which has helped them to attain the pinnacle of success but are also masters of multi-tasking, and at the same time greatly contributes in building a healthy, strong and peaceful family and society in Manipur thereby shouldering their share of responsibility in the promotion of peace and security of the nation and that of the world.

The hand that rocks the cradle

Is the hand that rules the World!

As a woman, we should not be considered ourselves as the weaker and inferior sex. If we cease to be inferior, men cannot be their superior. We all know that; 20th Century has been the bloodiest century that witnessed two World Wars fought in the name of Peace and succeeded in inventing the 'Atom bomb' and using it. At present, there can be no lasting peace without the development of peace spreading to all sections of society. In such a situation women can play a significant role and share a relationship based on mutual respect and equality. An attempt should be made to build up the path that will allow children to blossom and young men and women to fulfil their dreams. At lastly but not least, the message of the paper would like to invite to all "WE WOMEN must open 'INDUSTRY' in every house for making 'PEACE BOMB', for creating peaceful family, society, nation, and world as well." For that woman knows very well- as a role model of the good mother, teacher, administrator, labourer even more as a social activist, that has to play a pivotal role for the good mediator.

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