

CHAPTER VII

FORCES ENHANCING OR RESTRAINING MOBILITY

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Introduction

While it is true that social mobility has existed in all societies, even the most 'closed' societies such as the caste system in India, industrialization, it has been argued, has significantly increased the rates of social mobility (ESO-14, April 2002: 30). According to one of the pioneers in the study of social mobility, the Russian sociologist, Sorokin (1927), there are certain primary factors that affect mobility in all societies, and secondary factors that are specific to particular societies at particular times. He has argued that no society can be regarded as neither completely closed, denying any mobility, nor can it be completely open, as there are always barriers to mobility. Some of the important forces enhancing mobility are the Constitutional provisions which are carried out through certain legislations and Acts. Protective discrimination is also called as 'safeguards', 'reverse discrimination', 'positive discrimination', 'preferential treatment', 'reservation' or 'affirmative action' (Shah 2000: 29). Political awareness and participation by the Scheduled Castes themselves is also required. Certain social movements have also brought about change and improvement in the life of these people.

VII.I Forces Enhancing Mobility

VII.1.a. Constitutional Provisions

It is true that equality of opportunities is the essence of the Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Constitution of India. But equality of opportunity will have to be examined in the context of the type of social order and social hierarchy we have in the country. This issue was discussed threadbare in the Constituent Assembly and after a protracted and heated debate, the fathers of the Constitution decided, whether willingly or unwillingly, to provide for protective discrimination (Rao, 1972). Thus, though discrimination between citizens is not legal in the normal course, protective discrimination becomes legal in the circumstances that justify its need. "Protective discrimination is but

one of the three ways in which Government attempts to deal with the problems confronting the Scheduled Castes” (Dushkin, 1972: 168). “Reservation”, which is one of the mechanisms of protective discrimination, is a social policy of the State enshrined in the Constitution to ensure a certain amount of participation of the traditionally neglected social groups (Khan 1986: 153).

Equality before the law is a basic Fundamental Right guaranteed under Article 14 of the Constitution. But the ‘principle’ of equality is a double weapon. It places the strong and the handicapped on the same footing in the race of life. It is a dictum of social justice that there is equality only among equals. To treat unequal as equals is to perpetuate inequality. The humaneness of a society is determined by the degree of protection it provides to its weaker, handicapped and less gifted members. ‘Equality of opportunity’ and ‘equality to treatment’ places the weak and the strong on par and to that extent, it amounts to denial of social justice. In fact, it is ‘equality of results’ which is the acid test of society’s egalitarian-pretensions. In a highly unequal society like ours, it is only by giving special protection and privileges to the under-privileged section of society that we can enable the weak to resist exploitation by the strong (Psaricha 2006: 58).

It was in view of these considerations that our Constitution makers made special provisions under Articles 15(4), 16(4) and 46 etc. to protect the interest of SCs, STs and OBCs. In pursuance of Articles 15(4) and 16(4) a number of State Governments made reservations in Government services and educational institutions for OBCs and several petitions were filed before the High Courts and the Supreme Court against such orders.

Article 15

Prohibition of Discrimination on Grounds of Religion, Race, Caste, Sex or Place of Birth.

Article 16

Equality of Opportunity in Matters of Public Employment.

Article 17

Abolition of Untouchability

“Untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with Law. The law to punish such offences took five years to arrive. The Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955 came into force on 1.6.1955 and after a lapse of 17 years it was amended and renamed as the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 in 1976 by making the punishments under this Act more stringent and offences non-compoundable. The machinery for the enforcement of this Act has been suitably strengthened by the setting up of special cells, special courts, mobile squads, provision of legal aid etc.

One of the innovations of the Act is that every year the Central Government will place on the table of each house of the Parliament, a report on the measures taken by itself and by the State Governments in pursuance of the mandate contained in Sec. 15. Such reports have been laid on the table of both the houses. Though the prevalence of untouchability is on the decline, yet its prevalence is still reported, in one form or the other in some parts of the country.

Article 46

Promotion of Educational and Economic Interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Weaker Sections.

The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and, in particular, of Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Annual Report 1997-98).

Special Provisions Relating to Certain Classes

Article 330

Reservation of Seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the House of People:

- (1) Seats shall be reserved in the House of People for: the Scheduled Castes; the Scheduled Tribes (except the Scheduled Tribes in the tribal areas of Assam and Nagaland); and the Scheduled Tribes in the autonomous districts of Assam.
- (2) The number of seats reserved in any state (or Union Territory) for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes under clause (1) shall bear, as nearly as may be the same proportion to the total number of seats allotted to that state (or Union Territory) in the House of the People as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the state (or the UT) or of the Scheduled Tribes in the State or Union Territory or part of the State (or UT), as the case may be in respect of which seats are so restricted, bears to the total population of the State (or Union Territory).

Article 332

Reservation of Seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Legislature Assemblies of the States.

- (1) Seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (except Scheduled Tribes in the tribal areas of Assam and in the Nagaland), in the Legislative Assembly of every State.
- (3) The number of Seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly of any State under clause (1) shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of seats in the Assembly as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the state or the Scheduled Tribes in the state or part of the state, as

the case may be, in respect of which seats are so reserved, bears to the population of the state.

Article 334

Reservation of Seats and Special Representation to cease after Thirty Years.

Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of this part, the provisions of this Constitution relating to-

- (a) the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the House of People and the Legislative Assembly of the States; and
- (b) the representation of the Anglo-Indian community in the House of People and in the Legislative Assemblies of the States by nomination shall cease to have effect on the expiration of a period of thirty years from the commencement of this Constitution;
Provided that nothing in this article shall affect any representation in the house of the People or in the Legislative Assembly of a State until the dissolution of the then existing House or Assembly as the case may be.

Article 335

Claims of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to Service and Posts.

The claim of the members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration, in the making of appointments to the services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a State.

Article 338

National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

- (1) There shall be a Commission for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to be known as the National Commission for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

- (2) It shall be the duty of the Commission: to investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under this Constitution or under any other law for the time being in force or under any order of the Government and to evaluate the working of such safeguards (Pasricha2006:70-74).

Article 341

Scheduled Castes

- (1) 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 of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to the State or Union Territory, as the case may be.
- (2) Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Castes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any caste, race or tribe, or part of or group within any caste, race or tribe, but save as aforesaid a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification (Census 2001).

The First Backward Classes Commission with Kakasaheb Kalelkar as its Chairman was appointed on January 29, 1953 and it submitted its report on March 30, 1955. This commission prepared a list 2399 backward castes and communities in India and 837 of these were classified as 'most backward' (Pasricha 2006: 176).

The Second Backward Classes Commission (Mandal Commission) with Bindeshwari Prasad Mandal as its chairman was appointed on 20th December 1978 and it submitted its report on December 31, 1980 has evolved eleven indicators or criteria for determining social and educational backwardness. They are: (a) Social; (b) Education; (c) Economical.

Separate weightage was given to 'Indicators' in each group. All the Social 'Indicators' were given a weightage of 3 point each. Educational 'Indicators' a weightage of 2 points each and Economic 'Indicators' a weightage of one each point. Economic, in addition to social and educational indicators were considered important as they directly flowed from social and educational backwardness this also help to highlight the fact that socially and educationally backward classes are economically backward also (Reports of Backward Commission). All the 11 indicators were applied to all the castes covered by survey for a particular state as a result of this application, all castes which had a score of 11 points or above were listed as socially and educationally backward and the rest were treated as 'advanced'. Further in case the number of house-holds covered by survey any particular caste were below 20, it was left out of consideration as the sample was too small for any dependable inference.

A large number of castes were identified as backward in each state as a result of socio educational survey. The two supplementary approaches were adopted to prepare complete lists of OBCs for each state. First, state wise list for the 11 groups of primitive tribes, exterior castes, criminal tribes, etc. contained in the Registrar General of India's compilation of 1961 were culled and included in the Commission's list of OBCs. This was done as the social and educational status if these castes and communities were 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 up which could not be covered by the socio-educational survey.

The report of the Mandal Commission has been criticized on several grounds, namely, the Commission seems to have been carried away by its enthusiasm in inviting castes to come forward with such a claim. Otherwise, how is it that between the

Kalelkar Commission and 1978 over 1000 castes have gone “backward”, increasing the number from 2700 to over 3700? The Mandal Commission violates the Constitutional provision prohibiting any discrimination based on caste or religion in recruitment to services and goes against the special provisions for SCs and STs (ibid: 184). The Commission has laid considerable emphasis on ‘castes’ for determining backwardness. A criterion based on ‘caste test’ cannot be easily applied to Muslims, Christians and other non-Hindu communities which do not recognize caste system in the conventional sense of the term (Shanker, 22-10-1990).

The most crucial and perhaps the basic assumption underlying “protective discrimination” was to provide social and economic justice to certain sections of the society which had so far been suffering from social stigma and disabilities. These sections were not only the poorest of the poor but they were also denied certain social and political rights and benefits for centuries, having been “negatively discriminated” against. The deprived sections of Indian society were to be positively discriminated so that they could advance in society and benefit from the process of social change and transformation. Inequality of one kind was to be replaced by inequality of another kind to neutralize the negative impact of the former. A just society should not ignore the differences between the deprived and the other sections of society. The existing institutions were to accommodate these sections. Thus, the policy was based on a new social model, one that recognized asymmetry in social relationships and thus laid the groundwork for an appropriate programme for the uplift of the Scheduled Castes. Therefore, the considerations that governed this policy were not merely economic or political but social as well as cultural (Ahmad 1986: 58-59).

An important underlying implication of this policy was that education would be an important avenue for providing improved and better life chances. Therefore,

the deprived sections were to be provided equal opportunity or chances to enter the portals of educational institutions at all levels. This understanding was based on another assumption that there was a direct link between education, particularly higher education, and employment opportunities and jobs in the expanding administrative, executive and judicial setup. However, equal educational opportunity or equal access to admissions in educational institutions was not sufficient. Several studies have brought out that various factors hamper their entry into and, later on, their continuation in the educational system. However, the policy had also assumed that unless the educated members of the Scheduled Castes achieved parity in terms of jobs with their counterparts from the high castes, the provision of equal educational opportunity would be meaningless. Therefore, certain jobs were to be reserved for them in the public sector (ibid: 59-60).

In the political field protective discrimination takes the form of reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Parliament) and the Vidhan Sabhas (State Legislatures). Reservation of seats was conceived as a protective measure in the absence of which it was feared that Scheduled Castes might be unable to secure adequate or even any representation in the elective bodies. As has been clearly recognized, representation in the Lok Sabha (as also in the Vidhan Sabhas) is of vital importance and significance (Narayanan 1986: 67).

The selection of Scheduled Castes has been on the basis of ritual standing, supplemented by social and economic criteria. No uniform tests have been used. Pollution and impurity in the local scale are important tests, but considerations of varna as such played a minor role in the process of selecting these castes. The provisions for “protective discrimination” extend not only to Untouchables but to “other socially and educationally backward classes”. Although the Constitution refers to backward classes, caste groups have commonly been the units selected as backward. Low standing in the ritual order was

clearly one of the bases upon which caste groups have been deemed backward (Singer and Cohn 1968: 316).

It is true that in the given economic and political context, one's birth in a particular family, by and large, determines one's chances in life. Not only have the so-called upper castes enjoyed control over resources for centuries, but they have also dominated the culture of the masses. It created the superiority of the twice-born (upper castes) and inferiority of the backward. The leaders of the backward classes point out that the Brahmins have stayed at the top for centuries and how this has helped them in acquiring certain progressive values. Although the lower castes are now determined to rise higher, the upward movement is much too slow. The Brahmins and the other upper castes people have thus a cultural advantage which helps even the poor among them in striving for worth while goals. This type of mental horizon and social make-up is not available among the backward classes. Reservation, therefore, is the only remedy for social and educational backwardness (Pasricha 2006: 220).

According to the leaders of the backward classes, one's merit is a product of the socio-economic conditions of one's family. The children of socially superior and prosperous parents do well in education and in the job market. The socio-economic condition of the backward castes has not improved. They are, therefore, entitled to reservation. Reservation, they declare, does not lead to any decline in administrative efficiency. On the other hand, it integrates the political and social systems and ensures social quality. It strengthens the faith of the backward classes in the political system. This, in its turn, promotes national integration (ibid: 222).

The policy of protective discrimination, evolved towards the end of the last century, is an official discrimination adopted and practiced in favour of the most 'backward' sections of the people, namely, Scheduled Castes, scheduled tribes, and other

backward classes. It grants concessions to Scheduled Castes in three major areas of progress: education, employment, and political representation in Parliament and State assemblies, where certain proportions of the opportunities are reserved for Scheduled Castes (and also tribes) (Nandu Ram 1988: 113).

The important ones are, abolition of untouchability, protection from social injustice, admission to educational institutions, grants out of state funds, reservation in services and in promotion to higher positions, special representation in the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha etc.

And some of the important centrally sponsored schemes launched for their welfare are, coaching and training for their various competitive examinations (IAS, IPS etc) to improve representation of the Scheduled Castes (Scheduled Tribes) in various services; post-matric scholarships for providing financial assistance for higher education; hostels for providing residential accommodation to Scheduled Caste boys and girls in schools, colleges and universities; financial assistance to reputed social science research institutions for research in development and problems of the Scheduled Castes (& Scheduled Tribes); providing textbooks to the Scheduled Castes (Scheduled Tribes) students in medical/engineering courses; scholarships and passage grants for higher education outside India.

Regarding the awareness of constitutional provisions, 14 (3.5%) respondents from all the four districts have no awareness of the constitutional provisions provided by the government. While the majority of 386 (96.5%) respondents are aware of the provisions like reservation in government services and admission, scholarships, different grants like housing, agricultural, piggery and poultry, horticulture, knitting machine, weaving shuttle, carpentry, etc.

All the respondents of Kakching (Thoubal district, urban) expressed that the Scheduled Castes of Kakching are benefited only with scholarship and reservation in educational institutions and employment but are deprived of all the other state grants and provisions which are being provided to other Scheduled Castes of Manipur by the Directorate of Scheduled Tribe / Scheduled Caste and Minority Welfare. A middle aged man among them added that any four members can get a loan of one lakh rupees mainly for the purpose of opening grocery shops and one power tiller to any one of the members who apply for the provision. The selection of the beneficiary is done by the Representatives of Loi (ROL) with the main objective of benefiting the poorer of the poor first.

When asked regarding the knowledge of provisions, 3 (0.75%) of them who have been village / municipal political members responded that they came to know about them only after being a member of the Panchayat / councilor of the area respectively. While a large majority of 397 (99.25%) respondents from all the four districts have gained the knowledge from their friends who have got the benefits, from members of Panchayat, councilor, local M.L.A., media, books, etc. Among them two young and three middle aged men of Imphal West (rural) expressed that an amount of one thousand six hundred (1600) for non-hostellers and one thousand seven hundred (1700) for hostellers annually are given. The amount of money varies according to the subjects offered, for instance, the technical stream or those in Science stream are given more monetary benefits than those who opt for Arts stream. But they are not able to pronounce how many of them are availing it currently.

A small minority of 12 (3%) of them from Bishnupur, Imphal West, and Thoubal (urban) felt that the provisions would be adequate if properly implemented by the workers. They further stated that those who are more aware of the provisions and who can

give bribes are more benefited in the name of the poor. An old aged female have not got her old age pension though she has been trying hard for long. While all the other 387 (96.75%) from all the four districts irrespective of the criteria given, expressed similar attitude of the inadequacy of provisions and poor implementation of the policy.

As they consider the provisions to be inadequate they all wanted the Constitutional provisions to be extended for more years. They feel that the reservation policies are helping them to some extent in one or the other way though every one of them has not got the facility.

Relating to the issue of improving or increasing the different provisions, only one (0.25%) middle aged man of Imphal West (urban) has a feeling that the existing percentage of reservation is sufficient. While 182 (45.5%) from Bishnupur, Thoubal (urban) and Imphal West districts wanted the percentage of reservation in government services and in educational institutions to be increased especially in medical and technical institutions. They also expressed that there is a need for developing residential schools from primary to higher secondary level. And wanted the number of grants to be increased, especially the housing grant should be given to all. A remarkable number of 217 (54.25%) respondents of Bishnupur, Thoubal (rural) and Imphal East wanted all the facilities and grants especially housing grant and agricultural grants to be increased with improvement in their implementation. Because, according to them, getting a proper shelter is a basic need and agricultural schemes and educational provisions are the factors which act as root cause for survival and improvement in one's status.

From among the four hundred respondents, 205 (51.25%) of them have not been benefited by any of the government facilities. And the reasons they attribute for not getting the facilities are, due to bias and partial treatment by the agents or mediators towards their relatives etc; while some among them are government employees (self or

any other member of the family) or are well-off than others as a result they are not given the benefits. While 195 (48.75%) of them have been benefited from the provisions by themselves or by their family members in one or the other way by getting scholarships, reservation in services and institutions, availing different grants in cash or kinds such as housing, agricultural, sewing machine, piggery etc. Thus, generally all of them feel that provisions of the Constitution have been an important factor in improving their status to an extent.

Regarding the issue of any special government provision for the upliftment of Scheduled Caste women, 2 (0.5%) middle aged men of Imphal West (urban) pointed out that one seat is reserved for woman in Nagar Panchayat election. Except for that all the 398 (99.5%) respondents of all the four districts responded that no special facility is provided for scheduled caste women but grants like sewing and knitting machine, weaving shuttle are mostly given to women.

Almost all of them are aware of the constitutional provisions provided by their government through their local political members as well as friends and media. Provisions like housing grant, agricultural grants, piggery etc are more desired by majority of them as they are income generating. The desire of increasing in the percentage of reservation in government services and educational institutions is seen among the properly educated respondents who want their children to advance further. The provisions are inadequate as majority of them have not been benefited. Many of them are not properly aware of the whole procedure of availing the facilities and the facilities given due to which they are deprived of it. The educated and well off individuals are enjoying the benefits more than the poor and less educated ones.

VII.1.b. Government Policies

The policy of compensatory discrimination (Galanter 1984; 1989) has been in vogue for ameliorating the lot of the SCs, the STs and the OBCs with a view to enabling them to compete with the upper castes and classes. In an unequal society, this was considered as the most effective method of providing equality to the depressed sections of Indian society. Extra facilities, reservation of seats in legislatures and educational institutions, provisions for special protection against untouchability, etc., have resulted in the weakening of the traditional rigidity of status-hierarchy (Sharma 1997: 108).

The Department for Development of Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Manipur is working in a three dimensional approach viz, (i) Protection of the SC/ST people from atrocities through provisions of the PCR Act, 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, (ii) Promotion of socio-economic condition of the SC and ST people through the implementation of various developmental programmes funded under (a) State plan, (b) Special central assistance to Tribal Sub-plan/Scheduled Castes Sub-plan, (c) Special Development Programmes of Article 275 (I) of the Constitution, and (d) Centrally sponsored schemes, and (iii) Preservation of rich cultural heritage of the SC and ST people through systematic preservation, documentation and allied research works (Annual Plan: 2008-2009:1).

All the four hundred (400) respondents of all the four districts irrespective of the various differences responded that the post-matric scholarship is given on income basis until one continues his or her studies. They cannot specifically make out the number of the students availing the scholarship.

Regarding the consideration of percentage in academic institutions 9 (2.25%) respondents of Imphal West (Sekmai urban) asserted that though financial assistance and reservation in education are useful but at times such considerations lead to

negligence and a lack of competitiveness among the students as they have a feeling of being considered through reservation. So, reservation should not be a must. To them, the system of reservation should be modified in such a way that the more qualified Scheduled Castes be given opportunity to be selected from the general category so as to give accessibility of reservation to the less qualified ones among them. While contradicting to the above response a majority of 391 (97.75%) respondents of all the four districts are of the opinion that consideration of percentage and reservation in academic institutions is good and useful for the encouragement and improvement of the students. And thus, reservation is a must for all of them.

Relating to the question of provided facilities accelerating students' enrollment in educational institutions, 56 (25.46%) rural respondents of all the four districts shared the view that people's realization of the importance of education and its utility in modern times has accelerated student's enrolment in learning institutes rather than simply the facilities provided. Similarly 50 (27.78%) urban respondents expressed that facilities provided are not the only factor resulting to acceleration of enrollment in institutes. According to them people of Kakching are comparatively better educated from early times than the others, hence, they have started realizing the importance of education and its requirement in the modern society. While 130 (72.22%) from the urban and 162 (73.63%) of them from rural agreed that the facilities provided have led to an increase in student's enrolment in institutions to some extent. And 2 (0.91%) respondents from Imphal East (rural) have not commented (Table VII. 1).

The government provisions are more effective in urban areas according to the opinion of 112 (28%) respondents in all the four districts. According to them the urbanite are more educated and informative of the procedure. Above that the people in urban areas enjoy proper transport and communication which make things accessible.

While a group of 136 (34%) feels that the government provisions are more effective in rural areas because the grants and facilities are more applicable and suitable for rural settlers and thus, more helpful for the rural people. But the government provisions are equally effective in both rural and urban areas for 98 (24.5%) of them as provided equally according to the requirements and population of the respective areas. While 54 (13.5%) of them from Imphal West, Imphal East and Thoubal districts have no proper knowledge of their effectiveness.

Table VII.1
Respondents' opinion regarding the acceleration of their enrolment in educational institutions due to provisions

The facilities provided has accelerated their enrolment in educational institutions	Rural (n=220)	%	Urban (n=180)	%	Total
No	56	25.46	50	27.78	106
Yes	162	73.63	130	72.22	292
No idea	2	0.91	0	0	2
Total	220	100	180	100	400

The Scheduled Castes from all the four districts (Lois & Yaithibis) are of the opinion that the government's policies of providing grants and other provisions such as post-matric scholarship and reservation in government services and educational institutions are a must. It is believed that facilities provided in educational institutions are responsible for accelerating enrolment in educational institutions but along with that, they also have the awareness of education being the most important means of socio-economic mobility. Such provisions are very useful in upgrading their status and thus, they have a desire of increasing the number of grants in their favor. According to them educational provisions should be given more emphasis seeing their crucial role in the modern times. Some educated people among them shared the opinion that the government should modify the reservation system in such a way that the efficient Scheduled Caste candidates be

categorized among the general category so that the less efficient ones among them enjoy the opportunity of being selected on reservation basis. Though majority feels that the facilities are more effective among rural inhabitants, the urban beneficiaries are also equally benefited.

VII.1.c. Ameliorative and Welfare Programmes

Of the various facets of protective discrimination, the one to have got maximum prominence is education. Education is expected to equip the Scheduled Castes to overcome their caste-defined confinement to low status occupations by promoting occupational mobility among them and improving their standard of living. Educational institutions are expected to function as melting pots for caste differences and to facilitate the cultural integration of the Scheduled Castes with upper caste Hindus. Moreover, education is expected to generate a climate for change by changing their attitude and aspirations on the lines of liberalism and humanism. In brief, education is regarded as both the foundation and the vehicle for the emancipation of the Scheduled Castes (Jayaram, 1986: 89).

The Scheduled Castes have been benefited by the constitutional provisions and various developmental schemes launched for their welfare. But a small minority and that too really not the needy one has been benefited by these provisions and schemes, hence new imbalances and criteria of social ranking within the ranks of the Scheduled Castes. The distributive disparities affecting the Scheduled Castes are found at three levels: (a) between the Scheduled Castes and the rest of the population, (b) between the Scheduled Castes, and (c) within the Scheduled Castes (Sharma 1980: 183-92; 169-81).

The most useful welfare programmes according to 19 (8.64%) rural respondents are the income generating schemes such as agricultural schemes, provision for rice mill, piggery etc. are more beneficial but above all proper distribution according to the

requirement is even more important. 25 (11.37%) rural and 37 (42.78%) urban respondents expressed that the welfare programmes on educational facilities like scholarships, reservation in educational institutions and in the government services are very helpful. While a good number of 60 (27.28%) respondents from rural and 39 (21.67%) of them from urban consider the facility of housing grant as most important and useful because having a proper shelter is one of the basic need. Above that as it is given in kind (tin sheets) the chances of corruption are less. While all the given welfare programmes such as reservation in government services and institutions, all grants of housing, agriculture, weaving, animal rearing etc. which can be used both for personal and commercial purpose are most useful to all in the opinion of 112 (50.90%) rural and 104 (57.78%) urban respondents of all the four districts. And 4 (1.81%) of the rural respondents have not commented on the issue (Table VII.2).

Table VII.2
Respondents' opinion regarding the importance of various Government provisions

The importance of various Government provisions	Rural (n=220)	%	Urban (n=180)	%	Total
Income Generating Schemes	19	8.64	0	0	19
Educational Facilities	25	11.37	37	42.78	62
Housing Grants	60	27.28	39	21.67	99
All the Provisions	112	50.90	104	57.78	216
No idea	4	1.81	0	0	4
Total	220	100	180	100	400

All of them agreed that such welfare programmes are helping them in improving their status. Reservation in different sectors of service and institutions has helped many in getting stable income and has inspired many for better educational and occupational achievement. Various grants of housing, agricultural, animal rearing schemes, weaving etc. has made easy for earning a livelihood and for generating income

from petty business in a way are helping them in improving their living condition to an extent.

The major means in changing the status of 113 (28.25%) respondents of all the four districts is their education and job which some of them have got on reservation basis along with their hard work. While 282 (70.5%) respondents of all the four districts responded that their labour in agriculture, animal rearing along with the facilities provided by the government has sustained them so far but they have not improved their status due to lack of proper source of income. And 5 (1.25%) of them from Imphal West (urban) have not commented anything.

Regarding the distribution of benefits, a majority of 181 (45.25%) respondents of all the four districts stated that the benefits are equally distributed according to the population, and the village committee or the concerned people decide on the matter in which preferences are given to the poorer of the poor first. Disagreeing to the above response, a group of 62 (15.5%) respondents reveal that though benefits are distributed but there are defects in distribution by the agents or the concerned individuals as they are sometimes biased and corrupt also. While 157 (39.25%) of them have not commented their opinion as they have no proper knowledge of the issue at question

Only 3 (0.75%) of them i.e. one young and two middle aged men of Imphal West (rural) mentioned that there are few coaching centers for computer education but all the remaining 397 (99.25%) respondents have not heard of any training or coaching centres for Scheduled Castes.

All the welfare programmes, particularly educational facilities, scholarships, housing grants are very useful for them. Provisions in the form of kinds like getting tin sheets in housing grant, pigs, machines etc. are more easily acquired. Many a times they have to request and sometimes bribe the local agent / member to get their

names included in the list of beneficiaries. The provisions have been helpful in sustaining the lives of many but have not been able to bring a substantial change in their economic status. A government job is the most important means of socio-economic upliftment. The benefits are distributed accordingly to the village population and the poor among the poorest are to be given first but this is not much experienced by the majority of them especially belonging to the rural interior villages. Though few volunteers of the Scheduled Caste Association have mentioned about computer coaching centre at Imphal the unawareness of the majority shows that the information has not been properly disseminated.

VII.1.d. Probable Strategy and Scheme

To avail the facilities provided by the government the councilor / pradhan or members of the panchayat are to be contacted is the collective response of 391 (97.75%) respondents. For availing reservation in job and educational institutions the concerned departments have to be approached and for grants and other facilities the Directorate of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Welfare have to be contacted with a proper recommendation of the pradhan or councilor of the respective area. And all of them believed that they can improve their condition through proper implementation of such provisions. While 9 (2.25%) of them from Imphal West and Thoubal (urban) have no proper knowledge of availing the facilities.

Regarding the extension of reservation in private sector, one middle aged man of Imphal West (urban) feels that it would not be useful if not implemented properly. While the remaining majority of 399 (99.75%) respondents from all the four districts express a collective desire for the extension of reservation to private sector also.

The Pradhan or the councilor of the respective area has the authority to recommend whom to be selected as beneficiaries for the state grants. So it is totally at the will

of the political agent in the village or in the municipal area to whom it should be given though the norm is to give first priority to the poorest.

VII.1.e. Nature of Reservation Policy

After independence, the Constitution of India prescribed protection and safeguards for the Scheduled Castes (also Scheduled Tribes and OBCs) with the object of removing their social disabilities and promoting their varied interests. The important ones are abolition of untouchability, protection from social injustice, removal of restrictions on access to shops, roads, wells etc, giving grants, reservation in services including promotions, special representation in the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabhas etc.

Most of them are aware that some percentage of reservation are given in Government services and educational institutions along with other benefiting schemes like housing grants, agricultural grants, post-matric scholarship and so forth. But very few could properly and exactly say anything about the actual percentage of reservation or their implementations.

According to the knowledge of 19 (8.63%) rural and 27 (15%) urban respondents 1% is the seats are reserved for the Scheduled Castes. Whereas 27 (12.28%) rural and 45 (25%) urban respondents expressed that 2% are reserved for them. And 3-10% are the seats reserved according to 22 (10%) rural and 11 (6.11%) urban respondents. While a majority of them that is 152 (69.09%) and 97 (53.89%) respondents from rural and urban areas respectively could not say the percentage reserved for them (Table VII. 3).

The reservation policies are not properly implemented according to 32 (14.55%) rural and 46 (25.56%) urban respondents from all the four districts. But 65 (29.59%) and 58 (32.22%) of them from rural and urban areas respectively felt that the policies are properly implemented. While 123 (55.90%) rural and 76 (42.22%) urban respondents have not commented anything on the issue as they had no proper knowledge of it (Table VII. 4).

Table VII. 3
Respondents' knowledge about the SCs reservation quota

Knowledge about the SCs Reservation Quota	Rural (n=220)	%	Urban (n=180)	%	Total
1%	19	8.63	27	15	46
2%	27	12.28	45	25	72
3-10%	22	10	11	6.11	33
No idea	152	69.09	97	53.89	249
Total	220	100	180	100	400

Table VII. 4
Respondents' opinion regarding the implementation of the Reservation Policies

Implementation of the Reservation Policies	Rural (n=220)	%	Urban (n=180)	%	Total
No	32	14.55	46	25.56	78
Yes	65	29.55	58	32.22	123
No idea	123	55.90	76	42.22	199
Total	220	100	180	100	400

In Thoubal district 4 (1%) of them wanted an increase in the percentage in reservation in medical college. They felt that the given policies will be sufficient if properly implemented. And 60 (15%) respondents of Imphal West expressed the desire for the increase of percentage of reserved seats and its proper implementation as well. They also wanted the scholarship to be given from primary level, an election of a scheduled caste MP, and a formation of a scheduled caste autonomous district council etc. And 267 (66.75%) of the respondents from all four districts wanted an increase in percentage of reservation, in accordance with the increase in population, in Government services and educational institutions as well as proper implementation of policies and promotional schemes of

scheduled caste. While 69 (17.25%) of them from all four districts did not comment on it as they have no proper knowledge of the reservation policy.

Regarding the requirement of proper informer of policies various opinions were given, 14 (3.5%) of Thoubal (urban) felt the least need of an informer as according to them almost all of them were well aware of the policies. Above that “Representatives of Loi” and the councilor provide them with required information whenever needed. While 6 (1.5%) of them from Bishnupur and Imphal East (rural) did not require informer for a different reason, they felt that the informer will also be the same as any other corrupt and biased politician or agent. In all the four districts, 344 (86%) of them have commonly expressed the requirement of an informer to organize meetings and educate them about policies and provisions, to guide them in availing the benefits properly and to assist the Pradhan / Councilor in working efficiently. They added that though the Pradhan / Councilor provide them with information sometimes they are not efficient in their work as they are not well-educated. And this gap can be filled by a qualified and honest informer. But the most important requirement is that the informer should be someone from their own respective villages. According to 36 (9%) of them from Bishnupur, Imphal East (urban) and Imphal West, an informer is not needed as their Pradhan / Councilor and media as well are providing them with the required awareness.

From among all the four hundred respondents, 11 (5%) of them from rural and 19 (10.56%) of them from urban have heard of Mandal Commission Report. To them, it is a commission to survey for assigning status depending on the economic condition and backwardness of a community, while 209 (95%) rural and 161 (89.44%) urban respondents have not heard or have any knowledge about it (Table VII. 5).

Table VII. 5
Respondents' knowledge about the Mandal Commission

Knowledge about the Mandal Commission	Rural (n=220)	%	Urban (n=180)	%	Total
Yes	11	5	19	10.56	30
Not heard	209	95	161	89.44	370
Total	220	100	180	100	400

Increasing in the percentage of reservation in the government services and in educational institutions is the prime need of the time. Facilities in education starting from primary education will prove very helpful in the long run. The promotion system in the office is problematic as the senior can delay it if he does not want which is not always a caste related issue. Though the respective village organization is helping in availing the facilities, a majority of them need a proper informer who is efficient, well educated and honest and most importantly someone from their respective villages. This is because they feel that political representative from their own village can be accessible than those of other villages when required.

VII.1.f. Impact of Dalit Reform Movements and Dalit Identity

Social movements are specific goal-oriented plans of fast actions with involvement of a specific section(s) of society. When the people are oppressed, suppressed and exploited, they organize themselves by launching protest movements. Likewise, people organize reform movements to discard their dysfunctional and obsolete activities, to adopt or imitate the life-styles and cultural ethos which would accord them higher status in the society (Sharma, 1997:170). Based on the socio-economic characteristics and the issues involved, Ghanshyam Shah classifies social movements (1990: 27-28) into eight categories comprising the peasants, tribals, dalits, backward castes, women, students, middle classes and industrial working class clearly indicating the efforts by each of these

groups, through their respective movements, to improve their position in the wider society

Sociological theories distinguish social movements along two axes, whether they seek radical or limited change, and whether they focus on the entire society or on specific individuals. Alternative social movements see limited change among specific individuals, largely through remodeling lifestyles and behaviour (e.g., the hippie movement). Redemptive social movements try to change certain spheres of society (e.g., religious conversions). Reformist social movements attempt to change the entire society, but in limited ways, while revolutionary social movements, finally, attempt radical change in the entire society (Macdonis 1995).

In terms of this paradigm, the anti-caste movement, which began in the 19th century under the inspiration of Jyotiba Phule and was carried on in the 1920s by the non-Brahman movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu and then developed under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar, had characteristics of all four types of social movements though at its best it was revolutionary in terms of society and redemptive in terms of individuals. In partial context, the 'post-Ambedkar Dalit movement' has had revolutionary practice. It has provided alternative ways of living, at some points limited and at some points radical and all-encompassing, ranging from changes in behaviour such as giving up beef-eating to religious conversion. It has focused on changes in the entire society, from radical revolutionary goals of abolishing caste oppression and economic exploitation to the limited goals of providing scope for members of Scheduled Castes to achieve social mobility (Omvedt 2001: 144).

The Marathi word '*dalit*', like the word Black, was chosen by the group itself and is used proudly; and even in the English press, the unfamiliar Marathi word had to be used. None of the normal words- Untouchable, Scheduled Castes, Depressed Classes, Gandhi's euphemism, *Harijan*- had the same connotation. *Dalit* implies those

who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, karma, and justified caste hierarchy (Zelliot 2005: 267).

'Dalit' which, as shown earlier, means ground down, downtrodden, oppressed, is now being used by the low castes in a spirit of pride and militancy. The name *'Dalit'* is not merely a rejection of the very idea of pollution or impurity or 'untouchability', it reveals a sense of unified class, or a movement towards equality. It speaks of a new stage in the movement of India's Untouchables which is now a century old. Dalit self-assertion manifests itself today in a debate on several contrapositions: Gandhi vs. Ambedkar, Harijan vs. Dalit, Varna vs Jati, Manuwad vs Casteless society (Michael 1999: 27-28). The word *'Dalit'* in Sanskrit means 'broken', and 'downtrodden'. It is a descriptive word evocative of bondage and agony, the anguish and frustrated aspirations of a vast victimized section of the Indian population right down the ages. The word as such was first used as far back as 1931 in journalistic writings. Following this, the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra in the early 1970s gave currency to the concept of the word *'Dalit'* to highlight the sufferings and struggles of the Untouchables to begin with, but later extending it to include all the oppressed groups, namely the Scheduled Castes, the tribes, the workers, landless labourers, small farmers and other poor, and also the neo-Buddhist converts. However, more recently, the Scheduled Castes (earlier called Depressed Classes under the British and Harijans by Gandhiji) prefer to call themselves *'Dalit'* or 'the oppressed', while the tribals prefer to call themselves *'shoshits'* or the exploited (ibid: 99).

The Marxist, however, would define Dalit in terms of class, generally including women, tribals, workers and agricultural laborers. There is a Marxist impact on the Dalit school: two of the best known writers are Communists, not Buddhists: (the late

Annabhau Sathe, an Untouchable Mang by birth, is usually counted among Dalit writers, while Narayan Surve, an abandoned orphan and hence, casteless, is more often thought of as a proletarian poet than a Dalit writer, but his tone is much the same as that of many Dalit poets) (Zelliot 2005: 269).

The so-called untouchables who were originally outside the caste system came to be known as 'out-caste' and formed the lowest caste, whose touch, even sight was treated as despicable to the caste Hindus. They were the most exploited and oppressed people in India. Surprisingly enough this non-egalitarian social structure had religious sanction. However, the Broken Men who were deliberately degraded as untouchables by the Brahmanic forces had never accepted their position. They had started protesting against it from the beginning itself.

At the first, their response to untouchability came to the fore in the form of the 'Bhakti' cult. The Bhakti cult which originated in the 12th century was an antithesis of the Vedantic philosophy propounded by Shankaracharya. The untouchable saints like Ravidas, Chokhamela, Kanaka, Nandnara and many others were attracted towards the Bhakti cult. It is said that Shri Ramanujacharya opened the Narayana temple in Yadavgiri for the untouchables. The temple of Jagannath at Puri was also opened for the untouchables at the instance of Chaitanya. However Chokhamela and Kanaka, the untouchable saints were not allowed to enter the temple of Vithal at Pandharpur and Krishna temple at Udupi. Thus, they had tried to assert their rights of spiritual equality, but in vain (Kshirsagar 1994: 31-32).

It is a fact that the Bhakti cult could create a philosophical base for social equality. However, they could not bring about any substantial change in the existing social structure. Even the right of the untouchables to spiritual equality could not go beyond the singing of Bhakti songs. The sporadic armed upsurges also proved to be of no use. The

untouchable warrior could bring about change in the authority, but not in the social values and social structure. Neither the Muslims nor the British gave them any share in power. They could at the most change the master, but not their own future.

Conversion to Islam and Christianity proved to be good, but only in a limited sense. Muslim community included two classes, namely, Ashraf and Ajlaf meaning high caste Muslims and low caste Muslims respectively. Even therein existed one more class in the Hindi speaking regions namely Arzal who were involved in filthy occupations and they were treated as untouchables. Even among Indian Christians there existed two classes, one converted from higher castes and the other from lower castes. These movements could provide the probable means and ways of protesting against Hinduism for future generation of dalits. The same currents of thoughts of Bhakti, armed upsurges and conversions were rejuvenated in the form of new waves respectively of Sanskritization, political aspirations and conversions in future. It can be stated that the pre-rebellion Dalit movement could not be virtually successful only because it had a premature birth but it generated a new hope that there could be conception in future provided some precautions were taken. Thus the Dalit movement was inherent in the origin and growth of untouchability itself (Kshirsagar 1994: 34-36).

The Lois and Yaithibis in Manipur have so far witnessed only one movement which was organized by the Scheduled Castes against the administration of the State. This protest movement was organized in the year 1987 and the main reason behind the movement was to protest against the selection of a non-Scheduled Caste in the reserved Scheduled Caste seat. By such movement they express that they are united to fight for their cause. Other than this the Lois and Yaithibis in Manipur have not experienced any movement organized by them or against them.

VII.1.f.i. Dalit Reform Movements

A new awareness seems to have been spreading among the Dalits since the latter half of the 18th century. Prominent amongst those who could bring a new awareness to the Dalit through their institutionalized movements included:

Ramdeo Panth: It was founded by Shri Guru Ramdas. He established the headquarters of the Panth at Khedapa in Marwad region of Rajasthan. This sect reflects the acute protest against the orthodox Hinduism. It became popular amongst the untouchables in Rajasthan.

Satnami Panth: Satnami movement was founded by Guru Ghasidas. He apparently laid more emphasis on the strong organization of the downtrodden people. His new faith became popular amongst the untouchables living in Chattisgarh region of Madhya Pradesh (Micheal 1972).

Naval Dharma: Naval Ram began his religious activities among the Bhangis. He set up the headquarters of his sect at Bai-ji-ka-talao in Jodhpur and served the community for near about hundred years.

Warkari Panth: It is a prominent Hindu religious movement in Maharashtra. Chokhamela was a Warkari saint poet from the untouchable Mahar community. The Warkari Panth had been in existence since then even among the untouchables.

Kabir Panth: Kabir Panth is a prominent religious reform movement which spread in most of the northern part of the country. Kabir (1398-1494) is said to have belonged to a lower caste known as Julaha. He preached spiritual as well as social equality.

Narsaiah Sect: This sect was founded by Shri Narsaiah from Andhra region. He had faith in Islam. His sect became popular among the Madiga untouchable community living in Vinukonda and Narasoraopet in the present Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh (Ramakrishnan 1983: 47).

Matua Sect: This sect was founded by Shri Harichand Thakur who was a Namsudra untouchable from Bengal. After his death in 1879 his son Shri Guruchand Thakur ably continued the Namsudra movement in Bengal (Kumar 1982: 6-7).

These sects were apparently the natural reactions to the orthodox Hinduism. The founders and propagators of the various sects have played a great role in bringing about a new awareness, separate identity, self pride and self confidence amongst the Dalit masses. They had tried to introduce radical changes in the Hindu social system and became successful to a great extent (Kshirsagar 1999: 43).

Dr Ambedkar's Movement

Babasaheb Ambedkar made his entry into the political and social life of India in the period immediately after the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Though Ambedkar organized and led the movement as an autonomous movement for Dalit liberation, rejecting the leadership and ideological hegemony of non-Dalit socialists, he was influenced by Marxism throughout. His own theory which begins from the heritage of indigenous radicalism and stands in the tradition of Phule's revolutionary challenge can appropriately be compared to it (Shah 2001: 145).

After Ambedkar: The RPI and Buddhism

In the last year of his life, Dr Ambedkar gave a beginning to two institutions he saw as necessary for the liberation of his people and the welfare of the country: Buddhism and the Republican Party, a spiritual force and a political platform more than the vehicles of the ex-untouchables. The creative and transformatory potential of the Dalit movement, however, was shown by the fact that it took only a little over 10 years after Dr Ambedkar's death for the stalemate to be shattered. Following the stagnation in the first decades of independence, about the same time as the upsurge of

Naxalism in the 1960s, came the beginnings of a powerful poetry of protest in Maharashtra, the Dalit Sahitya Movement.

The Dalit Panthers and the New Dalit Movement

‘We don’t want a little place in brahman galli, we want the rule of the whole land... our revolution will flash like lightening’ So proclaimed the 1972 manifesto of the Dalit Panthers, born in the slums of Bombay but spreading to cities and villages throughout the country, proclaiming revolt. *The Manifesto*, the Dalit Panthers’ intervention in electoral politics to help the defeat of Congress and their readiness to engage in street fighting against the Shiv Sena, hurled them into fame. It was defining a moment of the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement in India, a moment that was an upsurge giving inspiration to all of India (Shah 2001: 149-151).

Hindu reformers:

Frightened by the horrors of superstitions, graded inequality, abject poverty and political subjugation of the oppressed classes, the thinkers from Hindus came out to criticize the Hindu society and tried to reform to a great extent. Prominent among them was Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) who founded the Brahmo Samaj on 20 August 1828 in Calcutta. Hindu literary society was founded in 1830s in Madras by Enugula Veeraswamiah (1780-1836) with the help of P. Srinivas Pillai and others. Its aim was the spread of English education, encouraging widow remarriage, female education and the uplift of the Depressed Classes, and to generate political consciousness among the common masses (Kshirsagar 1999: 51-52).

The Scheduled Castes of Manipur have not experienced any kind of Dalit movement, or reformed movements as experienced by the Scheduled Caste in other parts of India. Their associations like “All Manipur Scheduled Castes Welfare Association”,

“All Manipur Scheduled Castes Students Union” etc. have been struggling to uplift their Scheduled Caste identity.

Various reasons have been attributed for the absence of the anti-reservation movement by Hindu Meiteis. According to 202 (50.5%) respondents from all the four districts, the Hindu Meiteis still consider them as backward educationally, socially, economically etc for which they feel that the Scheduled Castes require the provisions to develop and thus, they do not agitate against it. And 115 (28.75%) of them from all the districts except for Imphal East (rural) reveal that, though the Hindu Meitei may be jealous of their facilities but as it is a right given to them by the government and legally sanctioned by the Constitution of India, they are helpless. Above that the meager percentage of reservation is negligible to affect the Hindu Meitei. While 83 (20.75%) respondents have not given their opinion on the issue as they have no knowledge of it.

According to 3 (0.75%) men of Imphal West (urban) the reason for less Scheduled Castes population in Manipur is due to their conversion to Hinduism and Christianity. While 218 (54.5%) respondents from all the four districts narrated that the formation of Scheduled Caste is mainly due to the rebellious nature of a small group of people. This group has practiced their indigenous culture as against the King's order for which they were driven to far foothills and later became Scheduled Castes. And originally only seven villages that are Phayeng, Sekmai, Khurkhul, Andro, Kwatha, Leimaram, Tairenpokpi were recognized as Loi villages and as a result the population of Scheduled Castes is low from the origin itself. Very differently to the above given response 49 (12.25%) of them from all the districts except for Imphal East (rural) believed that the defect in enumerating the Scheduled Castes population is the main reasons. According to them the census enumerators do not record the data properly on one hand and the respondents' lack of awareness or because of being ashamed to be called 'Scheduled

Castes' on the other hand can also be an important reason. While a group of 130 (32.5%) respondents from all the districts except for Imphal West (urban) have no knowledge of the reasons behind their caste formation.

The absence of anti-reservation movement by the Hindu Meitei is due to their indifferent attitude towards reservation. They have not considered the Scheduled Castes to be a threat to their status. Many of them are not even properly aware of the Scheduled Castes as a whole. Manipur being somewhat isolated in its location from the mainstream have not received the right opportunity of knowing and experiencing such anti-reservation movements in other States of the country. The same is the case among the Scheduled Castes in Manipur who have no knowledge of Dalit movement or religious movement prevailing in other States. There is a lack of proper knowledge and communication with the outside world from which they can be influenced. The population of the Scheduled Castes in Manipur is low from the origin itself.

The awareness of Dalit movement is absent among all the 395 (98.75%) respondents except for the three middle and two old aged men (1.25%) of Imphal West district. In their opinion, their unawareness of such movement is due to their lack of education, exposure and communication with the outside world.

VII.1.f.ii. Dalit Identity

The term Harijan has been widely used by caste Hindus as a substitute for *achchuta*, i.e., untouchable. Many SCs also began to call themselves so hoping that the caste Hindus would change their behaviour towards them. But the new category hardly enthused most SCs except a few who followed the path of Sanskritization to cultivate the virtues of upper castes. It did not provide a new world-view, symbol or path to attain equal status, which they began to demand during this period. Though Dr Ambedkar did not popularize the word 'Dalit' for untouchables, his philosophy has remained a key source in

its emergence and popularity. In a way, the word Dalit is of a relatively recent origin-of the 1960s- in public discourse. Marathi - speaking literary writers, neo-Buddhists by persuasion, began to use the word Dalit in their literary works instead of Harijan or *achchuta*. Following Dr Ambedkar's ideology, some Dalit intellectuals stress the history of their separate identity in the philosophical postulation developed by the Lokayats and Buddhism. According to them, the world view of Dalits is based on materialist philosophy which is essentially different from the world-view of Brahmanism.

The new identity has evolved through the political process, cutting across religious, regional, linguistic and caste boundaries. The image of Dr Ambedkar who led and provided an ideology to Dalit movement, argues Eleanor Zelliot, is more widely known today and, in some ways, more important than it was during his lifetime (Shah, 2001: 21-24).

Dalitism as an expression of the consciousness of the downtrodden has been a notable feature since the beginning of the eighties. Dalit protests, Dalit writers, critics and literature have become an instrument of the educated middle class from among the Dalits. Despite sharpening of contradictions and changes in values in the countryside, violence and massacres have remained unabated (Chaudhary 1988: 51-56; Prasad 1987: 847-52).

VII.1.g. Impact of Dalit Art and Literature

Dalit literature, that is, writing which is considered genuine literature rather than folk-protest poetry and "movement" literature. Such literature may be said to have begun in the late 1950s with the short stories of Shankarrao Kharat, who wrote movingly of his childhood as a village Mahar. Such short stories are considered as genuine evidence of creativity in the strong Marathi literary tradition. Since that time, a fairly steady flow of short stories and poetry and a series of Buddhist and Dalit Literary Conferences have

resulted in what must be called a significant new school of Marathi writing, that of Dalit Literature (Zelliot 2005: 211).

Short stories, novels, poetry, critical essays, autobiographies, plays, etc. provide critical insights on the question of Dalit identity. Emerging as a special stream in a literary landscape, it tends to cover a wide range of ideas and insights governing the social mindset of Dalits. It also contains a critical evaluation of the prevailing social and cultural practices. The authors are mainly Dalits and include men, and since 1970s women, from the urban and rural areas of Maharashtra (Mane 1974).

Dalit writers themselves are either victims of or witness to social inequities and violence. Some have direct or indirect links with social, political and cultural organizations of Dalits. A few among them are staunch social activists and often use literature as a vehicle to propagate their view on Dalit identity and the prevailing social consciousness. Dalit literature does not constitute a homogenous or unified entity. There are divergent currents and tendencies. Its call for self-identity and freedom is governed by different theoretical and philosophical streams. They consider caste as a powerful force conditioning the social mindset of Dalits. Writing in this genre are found projecting all experiences and perceptions from the standpoint of cultural angle, using the ensemble of caste and its status and power-determining capacity (Punalekar 2001: 214-215).

The entire hundred percent respondents expressed that there are books and other literary material about the history of Scheduled Castes but they have not come across any literature or journal on Scheduled Castes depicting disabilities and protest. Among them, two men (0.5%) responded that there may be some historical literature/ Chakpa chronicles etc which play an important role in creating awareness among the people but not many are aware of them due to their unavailability. According to them, either literate or illiterate, they mostly gain their knowledge through oral tradition from their elders.

They have no special art/crafts exclusively for themselves but some products like silk of khurkhul, pottery of Andro, liquor of Sekmai and Andro etc are known by all because of its fineness and quality.

The Scheduled Castes in Manipur have not heard of Dalit literature and the above mentioned reasons can be applied here. Though there is historical literature, it has never been presented or popularized as Dalit literature in Manipur highlighting the different issues. The importance of such literature has not been felt by the Scheduled Castes as the Scheduled Castes in Manipur are not subjected to harsh form of atrocities, crime, violence or ill-treatment as experienced by the Scheduled Castes in other parts of India.

VII.1.h. Issues Related to Dalit Organization

The Dalit consciousness that had been brought about by various factors existing in the pre-Mutiny period could get a momentum in the post-Mutiny. It was properly institutionalized and formed into a mass-based movement which could be reckoned with as a force. It was, however, necessary to form organization to raise the upward mobility of the group as a whole. In the caste-based society individual qualifications and achievements have no significance as such. Hence, the Dalits had to survive to elevate their collective status by forming organizations and raising the moral and material status of their brethren.

The Dalits who were determined to regain their human personality and human rights had to ceaselessly struggle against the traditional social order and the unsympathetic attitude of the government. They had to go through the process of dialecticism. Thus, they felt the necessity of organizing mass satyagraha for temple entry, access to watering places and roads, educational institutions to spread education among themselves, and the conferences to press their demands for employment in civil and

military services, certain concessions and statutory safeguards. Thus, during 1857 to 1956, in this decisive phase of Dalit liberation movement, several organizations came into existence to strike squarely at the decaying institution of untouchability and liberate their brethren (Kshirsagar 1999: 69-70).

The Scheduled Castes in Manipur are not aware of Dalit organizations prevailing in other states. They are aware of "All Manipur Scheduled Caste Student's Union" and "All Manipur Scheduled Caste Association". No voluntary organization or Scheduled Caste organization is working except for the local youth clubs and local associations in all the municipal areas as well as in the villages. Very few among them have heard of Leirik Memorial Computer Training Center, an organization for providing free computer education to Scheduled Caste students. Due to lack of proper exposure the people here are not much acquainted with Scheduled Caste uplift movement and rely mostly on to the "All Manipur Scheduled Caste Association" for any collective cause or problems of the people.

All the four hundred respondents from all the four districts responded that the Scheduled Caste Association helps them in solving common problems though they cannot help in individual problems of every person. They are all interested in participating Scheduled Caste protest movement either physically or emotionally as such movements if organized properly will surely enhance their identity.

None of the four hundred respondents had any proper knowledge of "All Manipur Chakpa-Speaking Loi Association" though some of them have heard of it.

Bishnupur,

Liemaram- Some of the local clubs are "Scheduled Caste Student's Union", "Leimaram Yaipha Lamjing Lup", "Leimaram Women Development Association".

Waroiijing- "Waroiijing Youth Development Club", "Waroiijing Chanura Yaipha Lamjing Lup".

These organizations are working at local level by organizing sports, meetings for community development etc. But they fail to mediate with the Government properly. So far, they have not heard of any non- scheduled caste organization or N.G.O working for their development.

Imphal East,

Andro (urban)- “All Andro Youth Club Association”, “Andro Development Association”, “Andro Pureiromba Women Coperative Society”, “Andro Gram Panchayat Level Multi-Purpose Coperative Society Ltd”.

Andro Kunou Torangthel (rural) - “Andro Khunou Torangthel Youth Club”, “Yambem Khunou Youth Club” etc.

There is no N.G.O. working in these places. These local clubs help in bringing up sports awareness, getting loans, and other developmental work of the respective community as a whole. Some of them are functioning effectively while some are for name sake only and cannot bring much change. Above that they are working in local level and the resources are inadequate.

Imphal West,

Sekmai (urban) - Village level- “Sekmai Development Committee”, “Women Welfare Association”.

State level- “All Manipur Loi Association”, “All Manipur Scheduled Caste’s Student Union”.

According to two men two N.G.Os namely, “Human Development Organization”, and “Labour and Contract Society” were working in their area.

There are some spontaneous changes like development and construction of inter-village roads etc. from the funds raised by the local clubs. Association like “Scheduled Caste Student’s Union” “Loi Association” and “Sekmai Development Committee” are working actively to some extent.

Phayeng (rural) - "Progressive Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development Organization", "Chingu Paganba Social Welfare Association".

Sekmai (rural) - "Sekmai Development Committee", "Women Welfare Association" etc.

Khurkhul (rural) - "Scheduled Caste Employer Union", "Khurkhul Youth Development Association",

N.G.O- "Rural Environmental and Social Economy Development Organization" in khurkhul.

"Adim Jati Siksha Ashram" is a hostel for Scheduled Castes and scheduled tribes situated at Imphal.

They expressed that though these associations are working actively for some common problems but their progress is very meager as these associations are all at the local level and thus lack in many ways.

In *Sangaithel*, *Tairenpokpi* and *Koutruk* there are no scheduled caste organizations except for some very small youth clubs. But these villages have a member who represents them to the "All Manipur Scheduled Caste student's Union" and "All Manipur Loi Association".

Thoubal,

Kakching (urban) - "Representatives of Loi" (ROL), and some local Youth clubs. So far no N.G.O has been established.

Thoubal Khunou (urban) - has few local clubs.

According to them the "ROL" has been dealing in both collective as well as individual issues by delivering scheduled caste certificates, distributing scholarship and other beneficial claims for Lois of Kakching and other scheduled caste villages also. Local youth clubs organize sports; meetings etc and thus, connect the masses and the Government agents to an extent.

Thongjao (rural) - Local organizations like "Thongjao social Developmental Organization", "Thongjao Union Club", "Thongjao Pottery Cooperative Society".

Thoubal Khunou- Local clubs such as, “Scheduled Caste Development Committee”, “Thoubal Khunou Wangmathaba Youth Club” etc. are dealing in developmental work of the community.

In all the four districts, 76% (304) have experienced two protest movements against the Government. One was for the use of fake scheduled caste certificate by a general caste Hindu Meitei to get through Manipur Civil Services. And another is a protest by other Scheduled Castes against the Lois of Kakching for their inclusion as a Loi and claiming scheduled caste facilities, while 24% (96) have not heard of any form of protest movement.

VII.1.i. Change in Status

The concept of status simply means the position which a person occupies in the social structure. It is often combined with the notion of social role to produce the idea of a status-role. In its stronger meaning, it refers to a form of social stratification in which status groups or strata are ranked and organized by legal, political, and cultural criteria (Marshall 1998: 638-639).

Some of the important means in changing status in the opinion of 2 (0.5%) old men of Imphal West (rural) are education, constitutional provisions, and imitation of higher caste as well. But according to 82 (20.5%) respondents of the same district, education is the only important means of change as it is the root cause of everything while other factors are resulting effect of it. And 316 (79%) from all the four districts stated that education along with constitutional provisions play crucial role in changing their status. They further explained that only through education one can achieve knowledge and the capacity of achieving a stable occupation/job and earn a reasonable income and lead a dignified life. This will improve the standard of living and broaden one's outlook. And the condition becomes more favorable when it is supported by the constitutional provisions. Reservations and relaxation in government services and institutions act as a support in

getting into a good service and thus, contributing in changing one's status. Other grants are also helpful in sustaining and improving their condition if properly utilized.

All the respondents agreed education to be the most important means of changing status. It widens one's outlook and is the source of knowledge and income as well. And it is due to modern education that the attitudes of both Hindu Meiteis and the Scheduled Castes have altered to much extent.

They all responded positively that with mobility status changes and that will make them at par with Hindu Meiteis.

VII.1.j. Political Participation

Voting provides the most important opportunity to the common electorate to exercise its choice over the kind of government it wants to install in parliament and in the assemblies. Theoretically, voting is the occasion when political parties try to woo voters with their policies and programs of the parties. In practice, as Weber puts it, once voting is left out of consideration, the number of individuals and social groups with additional channels of influence over the decision-making process falls substantially (Gerth and Mills 1978, and Verba and Nie 1972). Scheduled Castes would virtually have none. Many empirical studies in the past, particularly in the initial decades after independence, show that Dalits lagged behind upper castes in terms of exercising their franchise for various reasons, the most important being denial of voting opportunity by the upper-caste men and fear of backlash whenever their candidature preference seemed to come into conflict with upper caste.

Conditions have begun to change now. The voting percentage of the SCs has steadily gone up. This is indicative of the strong political aspiration on the part of Dalits and their effort to assert in a democratic polity by utilizing the electoral process (Pushpendra 2001: 317).

There has been a remarkable new development in politics. Kanshi Ram, a Ramdasi from Punjab, highly educated and a former high level government servant, formed the Bahujan Samaj Party, which in concert with the Samajwadi Party of Mulayam Singh Yadav won the vast province of Uttar Pradesh from the right wing Hindu control of the Bharitya Janata Party. With a controversial Dalit women, Mayawati, as his right hand, Kanshi Ram attempted to keep Dalit and Muslim voters in an alliance with the "Other Backward Castes" led by Mulayam Singh. Most press releases indicate constant friction, but an article in the prestigious Economic and Political Weekly by Anil Nauriya bears the title: "Dalit Intermediate Caste Alliance: A Call to Greatness" (XXXIX: 27, 2 July, 1994: 1640-1643).

Among the Scheduled Castes in India, the Mahars of Maharashtra have used political means most consistently and unitedly in their attempt to better their condition. The term "political means" covers both early efforts of scattered groups to secure governmental benefits and representation on legislative and political bodies, and later more direct efforts in the form of political parties that secured representation of their special interest, agitated for constitutional guarantees, and created for themselves a firm electoral base (Zelliot 2005: 86).

All the four hundred respondents collectively believed that political participation is an important means for upward mobility. According to them casting vote and selecting a good candidate is also a form of participation.

Among them, 13 (3.25%) respondents of Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West and Thoubal rural have been members of Panchayat, Khullakpa (village head), Councilor, or Secretary of village development association etc of their respective areas. They expressed that being in such a position they have not gained much monetary benefits or financial status but received respect from others. Above all exposure and acquiring

knowledge of different things is also a form of status enhancement according to them. They are all treated respectfully by the Hindu Meitei and Brahman political leaders. The remaining 387 (96.75%) have not commented as irrelevant to them but feels that becoming a political or village leader will lead to financial and status enhancement.

VII.2. Forces Restraining Mobility

The heirarchy of traditional caste structure, caste conflict and community conflict between different caste groups hampers the access of mobility. The failure of the proper implementation of the constitutional provisions also adds to the problem. Other important factors restricting mobility among the Scheduled Castes are their ignorance, illiteracy and their low economic condition.

VII.2.a. Caste Structure / Social Structure

Caste structure does not prevent mobility according to the opinion of 12 (3%) of them from Imphal West (rural). Unlike earlier times it does not restrict people on various matters on the basis of being belonging to a lower caste. This has been supported, but with a different reason by 10 (2.5%) of Imphal West (urban) respondents. They believed that, if a person is highly qualified with good occupational position and financially sound then the person is automatically mobilized and his caste would be given very less importance and thus, caste cannot hinder mobility. And 11 (2.75%) of Bishnupur and Thoubal (urban) respondents have given the similar opinion that the caste system has not prevented mobility. To them, such structure has been an integral part of the society which has existed since early times and does not hinder the progress. While a majority of 367 (91.75%) of them from all the four districts felt that the existence of caste structure has created disparity, a feeling of superiority and inferiority among them leading to lack of cooperation and unity. As a result such feeling hinders the path of overall development of the individuals and society at large. Some of them added that earlier the Scheduled Castes

were restricted education on the basis of caste which has resulted variance in the levels of development of different groups.

The most responsible reasons for restraining mobility according to the opinion of various respondents are;

Illiteracy, ignorance and poverty are responsible according to 104 (26%) of them from Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal (West) rural and Thoubal districts,

Illiteracy, low economic conditions and poor implementation of government policies are responsible according to 127 (31.75%) from all the four districts,

Illiteracy, ignorance, poverty and low economic conditions are responsible according to 32 (8 %) from Bishnupur and Thoubal rural districts,

Illiteracy and caste structure are responsible according to 16 (4%) from Imphal East and Thoubal (urban) districts.

All the above mentioned factors are equally responsible according to 121 (30.25%) respondents from all the four districts.

Even though Manipur does not follow a clear cut caste system it has succeeded in creating a feeling of superiority among the Hindu Meitei and inferiority among the Scheduled Castes which is still visible though not manifested. This surely has created disunity and lack of cooperation between the Hindu Meitei and the Scheduled Castes and even among the Scheduled Castes themselves, for instance, the present issue between the Kakching Lois and other Scheduled Castes. Such disparity becomes an obstacle in the path of mobility. Again illiteracy, low-economic conditions and poor implementation of the government policies are other important factors responsible in restraining mobility.

VII.2.b. Caste Conflict or Community Conflict

Regarding the matter of caste conflict or community conflict all the four hundred respondents regardless of the criteria given responded similarly that there has been no major occurrence of conflict between the Scheduled Castes of their villages with either Hindu Meiteis or others or among the Scheduled Castes themselves.

21 (5.25%) respondents of Imphal West and Thoubal (urban) asserted that so far there has been no occurrence of outward conflict but some form of disagreement between the Scheduled Castes of Kakching (Thoubal) and Scheduled Castes of Phayeng, Sekmai, Andro etc has been prevalent. The reason of the disagreement between them is because of the protest against the Scheduled Castes of Kakching by other Scheduled Castes for their claim of Loi status and related facilities after being upgraded to the status of Kshatriya long time back. One middle aged man of Kakching supplemented that some people of general category mostly from Imphal are also jealous of their facility and thus, help those Scheduled Castes who are protesting against them. While 379 (94.75%) from all the districts expressed that they have not experienced conflicting situation between them or between Scheduled Castes of other villages.

They all share the opinion that there has been absence of caste conflict within the same caste or between the different castes.

Three young and four middle aged men (1.75%) of Imphal West have the feeling that the Hindu Meiteis are jealous of their provisions though not expressed overtly. But such feelings do not lead to any kind of emotional conflict between Scheduled Caste and Hindu Meitei. The remaining respondent of 393 (98.25%) have not experienced conflict with Hindu Meiteis for any reason.

The absence of conflict may be due to the indifferent attitude of the Hindu Meitei towards the Lois and Yaithibis or may be due to the normal relations which they share between them.

VII.2.c. Low Economic Status

The prime importance of having a good economic status for achieving upward mobility is supported by all the respondents. They also accepted that with educational and occupational upward mobility a person is directly related to high economic status.

The various reasons for low economic condition of 352 (88%) of them in all the four districts are due to lack of various sources of income, unemployment, lack of education, poor infrastructure and dependency on traditional means of production, heavy daily expenses and no property to inherit etc. while 48 (12%) respondents of Imphal West and Thoubal districts revealed that at least they themselves or someone in their family are earning because of which they are self-sufficient in maintaining their family.

VII.2.d. Failure of Implementation of Government Policies

The policy of preferential treatment of Scheduled Castes has been in practice for over two decades, but has barely scraped the surface of the problem. Even in the urban areas only a fraction of the posts in the administration which are reserved for them are actually filled. In regard to educational opportunities for the Scheduled Castes, Premi observes that new inequalities are creeping up among the Scheduled Castes themselves. She writes "Mere existence of facilities does not ensure their optimum use. Awareness and acceptance are essential for utilization. To maximize the use it is necessary to generate better awareness. More publicity is needed to ensure the wider use of the facilities and to find out the reasons for the poor use" (Premi 1974: 1902-1910).

Regarding the proper utilization of government facilities, 55 (13.75%) respondents from Imphal West and Bishnupur asserted that the benefits are misused both by the Scheduled Castes officials, agents and by the beneficiaries themselves. The Scheduled Caste leaders and agents are sometimes corrupted and give more preferences to their relatives who may be less skilled neglecting the more deserving applicants. Above that the lack of proper knowledge and training centre lead to gradual loss of interest in other fields and compel them to involve in easy earning like brewing which needs no formal education or training. In the opinion of 10 (2.5%) respondents of Imphal West (urban) facilities like scholarship, reservation and housing grants etc are properly used while facilities like sewing machine, fly-shuttle, knitting machine etc are sometimes misused by some beneficiaries. They sell them due to shortage of money and lack of skill to utilize them. According to 72 (18%) of them of Imphal East, Imphal West (rural) and Thoubal respondents the question of proper use or misuse also depends on the types of grants provided and the required skill of the beneficiary. They further stated that those beneficiaries with proper knowledge and capacity are properly using the facilities by starting petty business for proper source of income. And on the other hand some of them are also misusing it due to lack of required skill to use it accordingly and by selling it at times of emergency or financial problem.

Quite differently to the above responses 231 (57.75%) respondents from all the four districts feel that all the facilities are properly utilized for earning income and for their improvement in different ways. And 32 (8%) of them from Imphal East, Bishnupur and Thoubal have not commented on the issue.

According to 78 (19.5%) respondents of Imphal West and Thoubal (urban) some of the politicians mostly the ones elected from their areas are working for their upliftment more than other politicians. Late Kh. Chaoba (ex-Minister), Kh. Chandra (ex-

MLA) has been elected from Sekmai and Kh. Leireijao (ex-MLA) from Khurkhul. The 103 (25.75%) respondents from Bishnupur, Imphal East, and Thoubal (rural) feel that the politicians are working for them to some extent. Some of them further stated that though the politicians are struggling for them but they cannot achieve much as the number of representatives is very less. While a group of 197 (49.25%) respondents from all the districts shared the view that not much has been done to their improvement though the politicians must be working for their own constituency. But 22 (5.5%) from Bishnupur, Imphal West (rural) and Thoubal have no knowledge of it.

The upwardly mobile Scheduled Castes do not monopolize the benefits according to 150 (37.5%) respondents from all the four districts. Disagreeing to the above response 250 (62.5%) of them feel that the upwardly mobile Scheduled Castes and the authority are somewhat biased and give preferences to their relatives and to their near ones. They also stated that the more advanced and developed groups among them are getting the benefits in the name of the less developed and less aware groups. And it is but natural to take more advantage by the stronger one than the weaker one.

The government policies are implemented to some extent according to 98 (24.5%) respondents from all the four districts irrespective of the criteria given. While in the opinion of 276 (69%) policies are not deliberately implemented by the government agents though not by all but by some corrupt and biased agents. They feel that the implementation of policies lack transparency and efficiency only to fulfill their own benefits 26 (6.5%) have not given their opinion in this matter as they have no proper idea of it.

VII.2.e. Ignorance

According to 12 (3%) respondents of Imphal West (urban) and Thoubal (urban) districts, their low status is not totally due to their lack of awareness but rather

due to the earlier social structure in which they were suppressed by the Hindu Meiteis. While all the remaining 388 (97%) have agreed that their lack of information and awareness, if seen generally, are the reasons for their low social status. Though some of them are highly qualified and properly aware, the majority of the people are less informative regarding many things.

The various reasons attributed to their low progress are -

Lack of leadership according to 67 (16.75%) respondents from all districts except Thoubal urban; Lack of leadership and lack of awareness according to 116 (29%) from all the four districts; Lack of awareness is the main reason according to 22 (5.5%) of Bishnupur, Imphal East (urban) and Thoubal (urban); Lack of protest movements according to 11 (2.75%) of Thoubal (urban) and contradicting to the above opinions one young man and a young female (0.5%) of Thoubal (urban) express that there is no low progress in their area.

And a majority of 182 (45.5%) from all the four districts explain that only a single factor cannot be attributed but, all the above mentioned factors are interrelated and equally responsible for their low progress. They further added that disunity and lack of cooperation among them is also an important reason. They also pointed out factors like poor transport and communication and being located in a rural setting are also non-negligible reasons for it.

They all believed that there is lack of transparency in government policies by the agents and that they would be much benefited if properly informed about the various facilities provided along with its proper implementation.

VII.2.f. Illiteracy

Illiteracy is the main cause for one's low social status in the opinion of all the four hundred respondents. Only high educational qualification can lead a person to high status according to 270 (67.5%) respondents from all the districts. And a group of

130 (32.5%) of them believed that both educational qualification and some amount of luck is required for status achievement but education is always more important. They agree that with good educational qualifications one can achieve the same status with that of a Hindu Meitei.

With the required qualification and efficiency one can get any kind of job is the strong feeling of 119 (29.75%) of them from all the four districts. But according to 281 (70.25%) respondents, in the present situation one cannot get a job easily. Even with required qualification availability of vacant post is also necessary and above all the percentage of qualified persons has increased along with increase in corruption.

Illiteracy is one of the main causes of low socio-economic status. Only a proper high educational qualification is measured and evaluated for a highly qualified position in any society. Similarly in this society also illiteracy is one important factor restraining their mobility.

CASE STUDY

Heikham Lokhon Singh
Male, Age- 54, Married
Higher secondary, social worker
Khurkhul,
Imphal West

His father narrated to him that he was purified by the king's men through the process of purification rites called '*Panathokpa*' meaning becoming a member of Hindu Meitei section. It is also known as '*laimung loubu*'. He personally has not experienced this process but his whole family is considered purified as his parents have gone through the process of panathokpa. But contrastingly he still follows some of his indigenous traditions which he believes, needs to be preserved even though adopted to Hinduism. Panathokpa group consider themselves as higher than non-panathokpa group in the village. While on the contrary, the non-panathokpa considers the panathokpa group as even lower group for discarding their own religion. He expressed that there is a great difference in eating habits, living style, way of speaking, ritual practices which have created the differences between the Hindu Meitei and the scheduled caste. But unlike earlier times, the Hindu Meitei youth have started eating non-vegetarian foods and even beef meat. On the other hand the scheduled caste group has reduced such habits to adjust to the majority culture of the Meitei and thus, eventually a balance has been created between the two groups. He recently experienced a boy of Khurkhul marrying a girl from

Imphal (capital) in which the girl demanded the groom's side to bring chicken momo (an eatable) in her heijingpot (a ceremony one day before the actual marriage) along the other sweetmeats.

Even though he being a scheduled caste is a pure vegetarian as he likes it. Above that, he suffers from asthma so he cannot take meat. To him, they all are still very backward not only in speaking but also in other matters. Even after adoption to Hinduism many still practice using of 'yu' (liquor) and meat in ceremonies or functions because of which the Hindu Meitei still prefer to keep enough distance from them though they do not say directly.

He felt that the lack of proper income, improper transport and communication, poor irrigation system, heavy field work etc has hindered their development in many ways. He could have continued his study further had he not faced the financial problems. Lately some changes have been occurring in his life due to imitation of the Hindu Meitei in different spheres of life. He is the general secretary of "All Manipur Chakpa-Lois Scheduled Caste Development Association", a voluntary organization which could not function properly due to shortage of funds. He believed that such association will help in giving awareness and enhancing their identity to an extent.

VII.3. Conclusions

They are aware of the different government provisions available for them. They got this knowledge from their respective political agents of their areas or from those who have already benefited from the grants. As majority of them are poverty stricken and vastly engaged in agriculture, they find the grants of housing and agriculture as more beneficial. And those educated few who have experienced slightly better socio-economic status in life also consider all the provisions as useful but they have shown more inclination for an increment in those provisions dealing with the educational facilities and reservation in government services. They wanted the best among them to compete in general category and the less efficient ones among them be given the chance of reservation. This will help in the over all improvement of the scheduled caste. The reasons for inaccessibility of the majority of the scheduled castes in the available opportunity structure are improper implementation of various existing provisions, the lack of education and consciousness among them, and lack of encouragement and generosity shown to them by the better-off sections of the scheduled castes.

The government's policy of providing grants and other provisions such as post-matric scholarship and reservation in educational institutions and government services are a must for them to develop. To an extent facilities provided in educational institutions are responsible for accelerating enrolment in educational institutions but along with that, they also have the knowledge of required education being the most important means of upward socio-economic mobility. Those who have realized the benefits of education are engaging in educating their children and improving the socio-economic status of their families. Reservation in different sectors of service and institutions has helped many in getting stable income and has inspired many for better educational and occupational achievement. Various grants of housing, agricultural schemes, animal rearing schemes, weaving, sewing, etc. have helped in earning a livelihood and for generating income for some of them. Getting more benefits by being in rural or urban area is not relevant as all the provisions are given equally according to the population of the respective places.

Being a political member or agent is in itself a kind of status enhancement. As the Pradhan / Councilor of the area are vested with the power to select the beneficiary for different schemes, many a times they are biased also. The political agents are biased towards their near ones or those who are well-off leaving the less aware and poor ones among them. Such kind of poor implementation leads to deprivation of the most needed beneficiary though the norm is to give first priority to the poorest of the poor. Again, it becomes the duty of the political agent to properly check the detail information about the beneficiary to whom it is to be given in order to avoid misuse of the grants. It can be either be a case of less efficiency in the part of the Scheduled Caste politicians or the agents who are responsible for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes or lack of interest or consciousness among the fellow Scheduled Castes themselves that a useful facility like computer

coaching is not known to majority of them. They lack awareness in different matters. Except for the few, the majority have not heard of Mandal commission. Besides their Panchayat members and councilor, they need a well educated, efficient, honest and most importantly a person from their respective areas will help in giving proper awareness regarding different matters.

Manipur being isolated in its location from the mainstream have not got much opportunity of knowing the conditions of the scheduled castes in other parts of the country. They have no knowledge of the different Dalit movements or Dalit literature prevailing in other states. But it should be mentioned that the scheduled castes in this state have also experienced a movement against the state government when a non-scheduled caste forged scheduled caste identity for a civil service post. Presently there is some disagreement relating to the issue of not accepting the Kakching Loi as Scheduled Caste by the other Scheduled Castes of the state. The absence of any form of movement either by the Hindu Meitei or by the Scheduled Caste can be a result of lack of exposure or the prevailing normal relationship between Scheduled Castes and other caste groups.

Except for some local youth clubs there is no governmental organization or non-governmental organization working for the upliftment of Scheduled Castes. For any small or big issue they have to rely on to the “All Manipur Scheduled Caste Student’s Union” and “All Manipur Loi Association”. And Kakching Lois have “Representative of Lois” to deal with them.

The nature of caste system in Manipur is obscure but it has succeeded in creating high caste and low caste among the people. Such differentiation has no doubt created disunity restricting in the path of mobility. But again the caste issue has not been able to instigate community conflict or caste conflict between these communities. The Backwardness of the Lois and Yaithibis can be associated with various factors like

illiteracy, low-economic condition, lack of proper awareness and leadership, improper transport and communication, poor implementation of the government policies etc. which are some of the important factors hindering towards their mobility.

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