



## ABSTRACT

*"God never made man that he may consider another man as an untouchable".*  
*-Mahatma Gandhi*

The term 'Scheduled Caste' is primarily an administrative category, used in the Constitution of India. They are the Castes identified by the President of India under article 341, and put under a Schedule. The term was used for the first time by the British government in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Shah 2000: 30). The term 'Scheduled Caste' perhaps owes its origin to the Government of India Act 1935. In accordance with this enactment some of the undefined depressed castes were singled out in 1936, and listed in a "Schedule" in order to ensure certain concessions and privileges to them. Because their names have been shown in a "Schedule", they came to be known as Scheduled Castes (Das 1986: 5-6).

According to the census of 2001, Manipur's Scheduled Caste population is 60,037. The Scheduled Castes in Manipur present a rather unique and interesting picture in the sense that they constitute a very small segment of the total population (2.51 percent) and that they live as a part of wider society in a situation where the caste system is almost non-existent. The Scheduled Castes of Manipur have been enlisted under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Amendment Act of 1976, No.108. In Manipur, under the Article 341 (1) of the Constitution of Scheduled Caste Order, 1950, Scheduled Part XI, seven communities are recognized as Scheduled Caste communities. They are: (i) Lois, (ii) Yaithibis, (iii) Namsudra, (iv) Patni, (v) Dhobi, (vi) Muchi/ Ravidas and (vii) Sutradhar (Census of India 2001).

Of all these, the Lois and the Yaithibis are the only two indigenous Scheduled Caste communities of the state. While others are recent migrants coming from outside the state. So, the pure Manipuri Scheduled Caste communities are only the 'Lois' and the 'Yaithibis' and as such are the only Scheduled Castes dealt in this study.

The appellation 'Lois' was first applied to that category of people with reference to their dependent tributary status under the lordship of the Meitei Kings. The objects they paid as tributes were known in history as loi-pot kaba (tributes in the form of goods). It thus appeared in early history first with political connotation. It began to assume its social

meaning as and when the loi villages became penal settlements of the criminals/ offenders from the Panna Meiteis (Hinduized Meitei), whom the Kings used to deport on exile (locally expressed as loi- thaba). Thus, to be a Loi by birth or exile, suffered segregation from the social mainstream. The segregation became more sharpened as it partook of ritual character in the wake of mass acceptance of Hinduism by the Panna Meiteis in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Pamheiba (Garib Niwaj 1709-48), and there developed concomitantly a system of attitudes by which the lois, who remained unconverted, were treated as untouchables or, at least, near- untouchables (Singh 1993: 41).

Yaithibis, in all respects of cultural pattern, are the Meiteis. The Meitei (Hindu/Panna Meitei) also admit the fact that once the Yaithibi belonged to their community. They however do not call them Meitei because, the Meitei refer them to their so called “illicit origin” and “immoral habits”. They now consist of an exiled and socially outcast people on account of their grave offences such as marrying near relatives like sisters, step- mothers, and such other near kin for which they have been ex-communicated. Infact the literal meaning of the term ‘Yaithibi’ is ‘bad luck’ (yai meaning luck, thiba meaning bad). This group of people usually narrate two stories in support of the above view, one related to the resulted illicit relation of a few favoured people of the King with the queen which ultimately resulted into the ex-communication of those favoured people along with their kith and kin. The other version refers to the fight between the King Pamheiba (Garib Niwaj) and the Prince Ajit Shai for intending to marry the same girl. Later Raja Ajit Shai exiled the girl and her relatives ultimately resulting to their present condition (Saha 1994: 63-64).

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

The theoretical approaches employed to carry out this study are the multidimensional approach and structural approach so as to reach to a meaningful analysis and conclusions.

Part I deals with the overall introduction of the study covering a brief historical profile of Manipur in general and a description of Scheduled Castes in particular, a brief introduction of the selected four districts of Manipur where the study has been conducted, aim and focus of the study and the hypothesis (chapter-I) ; review of literature covering the research studies conducted till now by local, national and international scholars and the justification of the present study (chapter-II); the conceptual framework includes theoretical approaches, methodology, tools and techniques used, the strategy of enquiry with which the issues could be analyzed scientifically and the objectives of the study undertaken (chapter-III).

Part II deals with the relevant data collected from the four districts of Manipur related to the nature of social structure and social stratification (chapter-IV). Both the Loi community and Yaithibi community practiced the nuclear, extended and joint family systems. The scheduled caste community of Manipur practiced patriarchal pattern of authority, patrilocal pattern of residence and patrilineal inheritance and succession. Being patriarchal, the eldest male member's consent always carries more weightage. It is also seen that, contrastingly to the earlier times where inter-caste marriage was strictly prohibited and intermingling strongly restricted, now, as time passes, inter-caste marriage has become acceptable. The practice of clan exogamy and caste endogamy is prevalent. The nature of social stratification covering the issues related to various forms of disabilities, reservation policy, dalit organization, caste and class are also dealt here. The nature of social organization deals with the various socio-economic, occupational, educational, political, religious and legal systems prevailing among the Scheduled Castes (chapter-V). And the nature of social mobility and change among the Scheduled Castes of the selected four districts have been studied (chapter-VI). Geographical mobility among both Lois as well as Yaithibi community has been prevalent. This has been evident by some Scheduled Caste families being shifted to Imphal after achieving stable government employment and sufficient income. Access to children's proper education, transport and

communication, easy availability of requirements etc have been some of the important factors for shifting permanently to Imphal city. Mobility of Scheduled Caste community is also reflected in the achievement of different high profile services. The members of Loi community have achieved more success in capturing some of the high profile positions such as Lecturers, Professors, and Deputy Superintendent of Police, Ministers, M.L.As, Magistrate, IAS, and MCS as compared to the Yaithibi community.

Part III deals with the forces enhancing or restraining mobility and change among the Scheduled Castes (chapter-VII). No doubt the ameliorative and welfare programmes have been responsible to an extent in helping some of them getting a stable job. Various other grants of housing, agriculture, animal rearing and other income generating schemes have been an important source for many Scheduled Castes. Proper implementation of all the government grants and fair distribution to all Scheduled Castes especially targeting the needier among them will prove better result. Further, reservation in private sector will be encouraging and beneficial in improving their conditions. And the interrelationship between Scheduled Castes and other groups is dealt here (chapter-VIII). The Hindu Meiteis share a cordial relationship with the Lois as well as with the Yaithibis. It is expressed that at different times and situations Scheduled Caste members experienced emotional conflict with Hindu Meitei but such situation did not lead to any form of caste conflict.

Part IV deals with concluding remarks along with the suggestions for the upliftment of the Scheduled Castes (chapter-IX). From the available sources of data on Scheduled Castes of Manipur as well as other parts of India, it can be categorically stated that the Scheduled Castes of Manipur are in very many ways different from the Scheduled Castes of other parts of India. Scheduled Castes of Manipur have their own indigenous religion. They are not considered untouchables and no atrocities are found against them. One may not find them totally segregated from Hindu Meiteis in their habitat and one may not find them conclusively in menial jobs.

Considering all the forces enhancing or restraining development of all the Scheduled Castes it can be suggested that the urgent development activities to be considered are the intra-village and inter-village transport and communication facilities. There is also an urgent need for proper educational facilities from primary to higher level

at cost free or at nominal charges. Improvements of basic requirements like supply of proper drinking water, sanitation, hospital etc are a must.

Different policies and schemes will benefit the Scheduled Castes if implemented properly. Agricultural schemes with sufficient irrigation facilities and well equipped aids for animal husbandry, weaving, brewing, etc for generating income will be much beneficial to the Scheduled Castes of Manipur.