CHAPTER- I

EMERGENCE OF THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction:

Any study of civilization is incomplete without studying the status and position of women in it. Women constitute the keystone in the arch of any civilization. One of the best ways to understand the spirit of civilization and to appreciate its excellences and to realize its limitations is to study the history of the position and status of women in it. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income, employment, education, health and fertility as well as the roles they play within the family, the community and society (Mukhopadhyay, 2002).We can only understand the place of women in our society if we go through our history. In the following paragraph the researcher has tried to trace the position of Indian women in different periods.

Women education in ancient India:

Historically, Indian women are equal to men. Indian women are considered as a source of power (shakti) since mythological times, the primitive energy force, finds expression in the famous epic Mahabharata. In this epic, woman is glorified as a "light of the house, mother of the universe and supporter of the earth and all its forests". The Hindus worships goddesses as mothers. But in reality, women occupy a back seat to men. Moreover, they are revered as mothers, sisters and other social bondages. Many poets have imagined women's minds as ocean. The upper layers of their minds, like those of the ocean, have turbulent waves. However the depths are serene and thoughtful. Women's minds are essentially steadfast and strong. The truth is acknowledged in the Bhagvad Geeta wherein Lord Krishna describes his expression in the feminine quality of *Medha* or higher intelligence. In earlier Vedic age, a woman is held high and given an honored position in gender relationship. Manu in his *Manusmriti,* who was the first to codify the laws in India, also writes about this, "Where women are verily honored, there the gods rejoice. Where, however, they are

not honored, there all sacred rites prove useless." In addition, he further declared "In whatever house a woman is not duly honored, that house, with all that belongs to it shall utterly perish." In another epic, Ramayana, when Rama intended to perform the Ashwamedha Yajana in the absence of Sita, the religious norms advised Rama to keep a golden statue of his wife beside him during the ceremony. These epics through ages have become the benchmark with which the status of women is compared. While making comparison it is always said that as women participate equally along with men in the religious rituals so women are equal to men. Another evidence of equality of women at par with men in gender relations was that a woman enjoyed freedom of movement and had the same rights and access to reading Vedas, getting education and having a say in the choice of her marriage partner. Thus, during the Vedic period women actively played a role in the intellectual and social life of the country. The honored status that women enjoyed in the family and society began to undergo radical changes, particularly since the statement given by Manu, the Hindu laws giver, regarding a women's changing position through her life cycle. In childhood a woman is subjected to her father, in youth to her husband and when her husband is dead to her sons, she should never enjoy independence. This lower position of a woman is suited to the man also. In this way, the images of women created by the Hindu law became paradoxical and contradictory to the earlier Vedic, Ramayana and Mahabharata period. She became an essentially weak and dependent creature needing the constant guardianship and protection of man. Marriage, motherhood and service to the husband were the most valuable attributes of the woman. Later Vedic age denied to her reading Vedas and getting education.

In ancient India, the situation of female education was to a great extent better than even to-day. They used to study religion, literature and philosophy. All girls were also eligible to the study of the Vedas. Early marriage of girls and obligatory widowhood were rare in Vedic times. India did much for the education of women at that time when the majority of the parts of the world were in dark. Women of India were provided with all kinds of education. The Mahabharata, Ramayana and other historical records will stand testimony to the valiant deeds and the perpetual glory achieved by Indian women. Education was provided to them in temples, religious fraternities and home schools. In the ancient Vedic literature the names of some distinguished women scholars occur and it is described that they contributed in a

considerable manner to this literature. Such women and even some learned married women are portrayed to have conducted successful philosophical discussions in the Royal Assemblies with the learned geniuses. The great Savitri, the ideal wife Sita, the scholarly Maitreyi and Gargi, the general Laxmibai and Ahilyabai and a host of other educated ladies have made their names perpetual in the history of India.

Women education in medieval India:

Women education in medieval India further weakened and declined with the coming of the Muslim rule. Medieval India witnessed enhanced dependency of women on men. The Islamic custom of Purdah (veiling of women) forced the public world to be separated from the private world, with women confined to the latter. The purdah system and child marriage became prevalent both among the Muslims as well as the Hindus. Only a few girls acquired some knowledge in their early childhood and women were all together deprived of higher education. Raja Rammohan Roy who was a great leader of Indian Renaissance strongly favored female education and defended the legal right of women education and enlightenment in the country. Women from respectable and high ranking families received some education. But most females learnt only the household works, unlike the present education system. Even though Wood's Despatch recognized women education in 1854, but it could not make any significant progress till 1902 A.D (Dutt, 1988). Gradually, people realized that education of women was essential for the progress of the society and through education their personalities could develop. So, every society should develop the system of imparting education to women in some form or the other. Following its conquest by the Muslims, and fearing unpleasant outcome for its women, a large part of the Hindu women acknowledged the practice of veiling. Through this privatization, Indian women were forced to trade their mobility for safety. Repeated invasions by the Muslims further pushed the Indian women towards inhuman "traditions" such as child marriage, the dowry system, purdah and sati (the immolation of the widow on the dead husband's pyre). The challenge of Islamic belligerence also made Hindu India cynical and reclusive causing a frantic return to orthodox Hindu beliefs and practices and further constraining the status of Indian women. Thus, during the medieval period, Indian women lost their earlier status and were at the lowest ebb. However, women like Razia Begum, Chand Bibi, Tara Bai and Ahaliya Bai Holker, left their grand trajectory of their ruling capabilities. With the advent of Islam, once

again, women like Jahanara Begum, Mumtaz and Noor Jahan enjoyed respectable positions in the country. These remarkable ladies though strict Muslims, publicly administered justice with their faces covered by veils or *burkas.*

Women during the Bhakti movement:

It was during the*'Bhakti Movement'* women education spread all over the country. Women like Mira Bai, Mukta Bai, Jana Bai and others contributed to the spiritual life of the country. Sikhism, which emerged during this period, also believed in the equality of women and men. Guru Nanak the founder of Sikhism says: "Within a woman is a man conceived, from a woman he is born, he is married to a woman and with her goes through life….Why call her bad, she gives birth to kings. None may exist without a woman. Only the one, true God is exterior to woman."

Women education in British India:

The condition of the women education in India invigorated with the invasion of the British in the country and with the dawn of *'Bhakti Movement'*. The colonial period introduced the institution form of imparting learning. Women education in Colonial India witnessed a vital development. The reform movements of India brought a new awakening among the women of all classes. Various movements were launched by different reformers and organizations like Brahma Samaj (1828) by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Arya Samaj (1875) by Dayanand Saraswati, and Ramakrishna Mission (1897) by Vivekananda and individual reformers like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Ramakrishna Paramahans, Keshab Chandra Sen, Maharishi Kare and Gopal Krishna Gokhale who led the fight against polygamy, early marriage, enforced widowhood by emphasizing women's education. Some other leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jyotiba Phule and Periyar also took various initiatives to make education available to the women of lower castes in India. The Britishers along with the Indian reformers raised their voice to do away with the brutal practices against woman, which had placed them at the marginalized position in the society such as female infanticide, child marriage, enforced widowhood and sati. Thus, in order to raise the status of Indian women, the British rule led to a number of socio religious reforms in the country to make women of the country literate. Furthermore, this progress journeyed through the years and influenced the modern Indian education system.

Women education after independence:

With gaining independence in the year1947,women's education got a stimulus as the government started taking various measures to provide education to all Indian women. Since independence, the entrance of women into the prescribed educational structure i.e.school, brought explicit changes in the mind-set and status of women (Thapa, 2009). During the time of independence, India's education system was characterized by regional, gender, caste and structural imbalances. After independence, India's national government introduced some committees and commissions for the development of women education in India, i.e. Radhakrishnan Commission or University Education Commission (1948), Smt Durgabai Deshmukh committee (1959), Smt. Hansa Mehta Committee (1962), M. Bhaktvatsalam Committee, Kothari Commission (1964-66), Resolution on the National policy on education (1968), Report of the Committee on the Status of women in India (1974), Challenge of Education (1985), National Policy on Education (1986), Programme of Action (1986), and (1992) etc. Provision of educational opportunities to women has been an important programme in the education sector since independence. Between 1951 and 1981, the percentage of literacy amongst women improved from 7.93 percent to 24.82 percent. However, in absolute numbers, illiterate women have increased during this period from 158.7 million excluding Assam. Women comprises 57 percent of the illiterate population and 70 per cent of the non-enrolled children in the school stage are girls. In spite of the efforts made so far, the education system has not been able to make sufficient contribution towards women's equality. As a result women's literacy rate given over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 1971 only 22% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2001 54.16% female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 14.87% as compared to 11.72% of that of male literacy rate. The constitution of India guarantees the right to equality to all Indian women without discrimination. The literacy rate before independence was 2.6% rose in 1961 to 15.3% and 50% by the year 2001. And now, according to the 2011 Census, the male literacy rate is 82.14% while female literacy rate is 65.46.

1.2. Rationale of the study:

Swami Vivekananda, the famous Indian social reformist had advocated the significance of women education for the development of the world. He said that "there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly only with one wing." At present, education became a torch light for women, with the help of which they can come out of the four walls of the homes and take active part in various social activities (Gupta, 2000).The women of any country have an important contribution in the progress of that country. It is the women who are capable of building such children who may lead the country to the path of progress and prosperity. Educated women make the family and the society cultured (Sonowal, 2013). From the above discussion, it has been found that in ancient Indian society, status of women was to a certain extent satisfactory. In recent years, the role of women has undergone some drastic changes due to globalization and commercialization. Education is one of the most important milestones of women empowerment since it enables them to retort to the challenges, to deal with their long- established role and revolutionize their life. Education is important not only for over all development of one's personality, but also for the sustained growth of a nation. It helps men and women to claim their rights and realize their potential in economic, political and social areas. It plays even more important role as it provides a strong basis for a girl's development towards adult life. It, therefore, should be a fundamental part of any strategy to address the gender based intolerance against women and girls that remain prevalent in many societies. In fact, education is the most potent instrument of modernization, as it directly seeks to persuade knowledge and skills, both found obligatory for furtherance of goals of modernization (Dube, 1974).

Education has been perceived to be a significant instrument in improving the status of women and consequently, there are efforts to improve the access towards girl's education. They have contributed significantly towards the making of a nation. The Indian constitution has granted equal right and status to all irrespective of caste, creed and gender. But in practice, women have been deprived of their constitutional

rights in various ways. They are becoming victims of various social injustice and they are not being able to enjoy their due right and status in society (Sonowal, 2013).

In fact it is a fundamental prerequisite for participation in the various developmental activities of society. The level of acknowledgement of women is reliant upon societal anticipation of women's position. It is education that helps in upgrading the status of women in four ways. Education helps a woman to earn an income in later life, to participate actively in public life, to determine her own fertility and to achieve personal autonomy. Women are the agents of change and have contributed to the progress of humanity in every age (Chatterjee, 1993). For a country that accepts the goal of a democratic, egalitarian society, for them, encouragement and development of women's education is an inevitable obligation. For modernizing India, high hopes have been pinned on education as a significant determinant of aspiration, technology productivity and mobility.

India has a history that goes back to approximately 500 B.C. But the history of women's movement in India was set in a motion much later. In India, women live and grow up in a male dominated society. They were never considered part of civil society and were deprived of their rights. The Government of India in 1975 by forming "Committee on Status of Women" took up issues relating to women. Different approaches are adopted to examine the position and status of women in any given social structure. The Preamble to the Constitution of India declares equality of status and provides equal opportunities to all citizens, thereby making no difference between men and women. But most of the women could not enjoy the benefits of the Articles of the Constitution due to tradition bound social evils in the society (Kipgen, 2010). In every society like Assamese, Naga, Mizo, Meitei Pangal, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Manipuri (Meithei), etc. women have to face lots of difficulties relating to their personal as well as family life. Education is the only instrument which helps them to overcome from such difficulties. The role of women in every family as well as in every society is same. The difference is that those women, who have education, can face their difficulties or overcome their situations easily but those who are not educated can't find their solution to their problems easily. As a consequence to this most of the time, they are exploited by their family members or by their society. This is only due to lack of education that they are not able to help themselves out of these situations. Even the most successful women today, who are example for us in

different fields have also faced lots of problems like social customs and traditions, superstitions, economic problems etc. in their lives. But at the end of the day, their knowledge, strong determination to do things and courage have helped them to overcome those difficulties and reach their destination. In every society, be it in urban or rural we can find many examples of such women.

The society of Assam though fundamentally akin to that of India has retained its distinct entity due to the incorporation of both Aryan and non-Aryan cultures. According to contemporary and subsequent historian's accounts, the women of Assam possessed great freedom at work and movement due to the predominantly non-Aryan culture. It must be noted that education was limited to the Brahmins and equitant castes. No formal education was given to the girls. Though throughout ages, women played a very important role in Assam and contributed much to the advancement of the state, its people and the economy. Despite their contribution, they continue to be severely disadvantaged and discriminated (Phukon, 2009).

Nagas are one of the indigenous tribes of North East India. Naga society as found in its villages was a well knit society where rigid customs and discipline were observed. As the village was an independent unit, customary laws were supreme and dispensation of punishment was very fast and quick. In Naga society, family is the basic social institution. Naga society is also both patriarchal and matrilineal and thus, descent is traced from father's side. This proves that women are not equal to men in status concerning certain aspects. Women are considered physically weaker than men which are the reason why the Naga men feel responsible towards women. As a daughter, wife and mother, a Naga woman plays a significant role. They are again given full authority regarding the domestic affairs. Men keep themselves away from the domestic affairs since they consider it below their dignity to indulge in such activities. As can be seen, women were taken for granted that a particular set of jobs were solely preordained for them and they do not try to change things for the better even though, sometimes some things are a shortcoming to them (Kipgen, 2010).

The Mizo society is like most societies, patriarchal whereby women are by nature considered inferior to men. In the olden days, the status and position of women in the society were not only lower but far more insecure than their male counterparts.

The same was the case of the Mizo women in the polity of early Mizo society too (Lalneihzovi 2009).

Bishnupriya Manipuri, constitutes microscopic minority, living mainly in parts of Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Bangladesh and mostly resides in villages with negligible number of families residing in towns and cities. The culture of the people is almost identical with that of the Meiteis, with the exception of a few folk practices which are prevalent among the Meiteis. The Bishnupriya Manipuri society is patriarchal and believes in the traditions of joint family in which the male holds for all practical purposes more influential positions in the family and society. In the early Bishnupriya Manipuri society, education for a male child was given more importance than that of the female child. The girls used to look after the domestic works and also look after the younger siblings as both the parents used to work on the field. This was also due to lack of proper facilities, poverty etc. Generally, girls were allowed to study only up to class VI or VII or just enough to write letters and able to read (Sinha, 2013).

The Manipuri Muslims are known as *Pangals.* They are also a part of the Manipuri society. They are influenced by Meitei culture and Islamic ideology. They are mostly soldiers, cultivators. Their social structure is patriarchal. Their lifestyle is basically family centered and has a strong sense of community. For the Muslims, education means a girl has to know how to recite the holy Quran, how to be a devoted wife and excellent future mother with expertise in household work and above all punctuality in the religious duties. Therefore, their status in education has not improved in any significant way (Kipgen, 2010).

Manipuri society is a rural based agrarian society, agriculture, being the main occupation of the rural people, and the Meeteis in the Barak Valley are mostly dependent on it. In general, the Manipuri women are found engaged in household work. The participation of Manipuri women in different socio economic activities and their role and responsibilities towards the family members as girl, adult, sister, daughter, and wife are clearly demarcated. The socio economic setting of the Manipuri women in the state is strikingly rural based who still subsists on the age old agro oriented pursuits. There are a very little percentage of Manipuri women found in service sectors or so-called salary earning groups in Cachar district and again this

percentage is mostly restricted to educational sector. As the number of professionals are few and Manipuris are not widely absorbed at industrial hands, their thrust is mainly on agriculture. However, the overall share of Manipuri women in white collared jobs is a negligible one. Merely, a small portion of the Manipuris are in the government sector, while the remaining population is engaged in various categories of low profile, informal or unorganized economic activities like weaving, tailoring and embroidery etc. Traditionally, Manipuri women in rural areas are required to learn the skill of handloom weaving, tailoring, and embroidery. These skills are the part and parcel of the preparation for grooming them for marriage. They are duly restricted within the four walls and enjoy a positive freedom of movement in a patrilineal society in contrast to the restricted movements on women elsewhere. The political role of Manipuri women by and large is passive but they are socially active. Moreover, the society at large is still conservative and clings unfalteringly to the traditional role of women as home makers.

Agriculture is the major source of livelihood of the Manipuris in the rural areas. It is the women who contribute equal labour in agricultural activities. Manipuri women perform excellent work in gardening. They can sell their local product to a nearby market throughout the year. While the husband is the bread winner, the wife is the best housekeeper. However it is also her duty to help her husband for the sake of establishing an economically independent family by doing domestic works of economic importance. In respect of vegetable cultivation, it is the women who take the lead for producing marketable vegetables such as potato, tomato, brinjal, cauliflower, cabbage, mustard leaves, carrot, radish, chilly, cucumber, pumpkin etc. Almost all the activities such as vegetable cultivation, weaving, arrangements for the disposable of the marketable goods at the local markets are carried out by the Manipuri women. The percentage of literacy did not augment to the desired level essentially because of the lack of communication facilities and various other social factors such as lack of initiative and enthusiasm amongst the villagers. The L.P schools M.E schools and High schools were not set up in the interior Manipuri villages in this valley (Singh, 2005).

Due to the inadequate educational environments in rural areas during the first few decades of independence, the Manipuri woman failed to enter the arena of higher education. However with the introduction of Manipuri language as a medium of

instruction in the primary and secondary schools, the number of school going Manipuri girls has increased since the early 70's twentieth century. The gradual establishment of schools and colleges in the rural areas has attracted the Manipuri women to pursue further studies. As the educational institutions are now within the reach of rural people the Manipuri women now have easy access to primary and secondary education. The scenario has changed with regard to their presence in the higher education. Usually the Manipuri women prefer their sibling (brothers) for higher education while they are confining themselves for supporting them. The Manipuri women help their parents in their domestic work as well as in earning bread for their family. Like other societies, the status of Manipuri women in Manipuri society has also changed. Here too, the revolution of women's image in Manipuri society has been mainly due to the influence of education. Manipuri women on the whole are docile and submissive, but on any social issue they are assertive at collective level.

The impact of modern education is felt in the Manipuri society. Modern education is one of the factors emancipating Manipuri women in the society. Manipuri women are known for their active participation in the social, economic and cultural life of the community. They are found to be independent, courageous and assertive. The availability of education by the Manipuri women has enhanced these qualities. These qualities of the Manipuri women may be traced back to the mythological figure like Emoinu (The goddess of wealth), Panthobi (a woman in the mythology of Manipur), etc and legendary figures like Thoibi (a legendary figure was a princess of Moirang) Pidonu and Tanu Laijing Lembi (Legendary character of Manipuri epic).

The universalization of elementary education has brought education to the nook and corner of the rural areas including the Manipuri inhabited areas. As a result, literacy among the Manipuri women is now-a-day's greater than ever. At the same time, school dropout among them is very low and found to be almost nil. On the other hand, college dropouts are found at a higher rate among the Manipuri women. The shift of medium of instruction from Manipuri to English in the higher educational institutions distracts many Manipuri women from continuing education. Those families who migrated from rural to urban areas provide higher education to their siblings. Manipuri women of Cachar district are also found trying their best to occupy

a position in the society. Most of them have become aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities. They have made tremendous progress in all walks of life. Various studies have been conducted by different researchers in different places to know the different aspects and role of Manipuri women in their society. Researches are also conducted to study the educational status of Manipuri women. But no such research has been conducted in Barak Valley so far educational status of Manipuri women is concerned.

1.3. Research questions:

Keeping in view the educational status of Manipuri women, the researcher has felt the need to know-

1. What is the condition of Manipuri women in the field of education in rural areas of Cachar district?
2. What are the problems faced by them in receiving education?
3. What is the socio-economic condition of Manipuri women in relation to their education?
4. What is the attitude of Manipuri women towards education?

The present investigation is designed to answer the above questions.

1.4. Title of the study:

Educational Status of Manipuri Women in Cachar District.

1.5. Objectives of the study:

The objectives of this study are as follows-

1. To find out the educational status of Manipuri women at present in Cachar district.

2. To compare the educational status of Manipuri and Non-Manipuri women in Cachar district.
3. To study the socio-economic status of Manipuri women in Cachar district.
4. To compare the attitude of Manipuri and Non-Manipuri women towards education.
5. To study the problems faced by the Manipuri women in getting education.

1.6. Operational definition of the terms used:

Status:

The term 'status' refers to a position in a social system or sub-system which is distinguishable from and at the same time related to other positions through its designated rights and obligations. 'Status' is a rank or position a person occupies. It is also defined as position in a social group in relation to other positions held by individuals in the same group or grouping. In this study the word status mainly refers to the educational attainment as well as socio-economic condition of Manipuri women.

Educational Status:

Educational status or educational attainment or level of education refers to the highest level of education that a person has attained. At the primary and secondary school level, educational attainment refers to the number of grades completed. At the post-secondary level, it refers to institutions attended and certificates, degrees or diplomas obtained. In this study educational status mainly refers to the educational attainment of Manipuri women in Manipuri community.

Socio-economic status:

Socioeconomic status can be defined as by and large a person's social position to which attainments in both the social and economic domain contributes. In this study socio-economic status refers to Manipuri women's achievements in employment and

occupational status; income and wealth; household possession; decision making process. Socio-economic status may therefore also be linked to family configuration.

Attitude:

Attitude is a mental position or emotional feelings about products, services, ideas, issues and institutions. It is a way where a person views something or tends to behave towards it, often in an evolution way. According to Collins English dictionary it is a complex mental state involving beliefs and feelings and values and dispositions to act in certain ways. In this study the term attitude refers to the feeling of Manipuri and Non-Manipuri women towards education.

1.7. Delimitation of the study:

The present study is delimited to the rural areas of four blocks namely Sonai, Lakhipur, Udharband and Narshingpur of Cachar district of Assam, which are thickly populated by Manipuri people.