

Discussion

Vijaylakshmi Brara: She began with the argument that women in Manipur are not really the *subthemes* in its history but have occupied a prominent place in the history of struggle against the British, not once but twice, called the *nupilans* of 1904 and 1939. At the same time mention have been made of various queens who were warriors in their own right. There are things one can locate, such as their institutions and their spaces which remain in an informal sphere from *immemorials* to the present. In fact it can be stated informality is associated with women and the space of formal economy is mainly handled by the men. Women have been doing well in Manipur on several aspects; they have logistics to deal with economic burdens in the form of *marups*, they have collectives in economic sphere extending to emotional and physical in the form of *ima keithels*, the sacred complexities were resolved by the institution of *Maibies* and political exigencies in the form of *Meira Pabis*, as well as chiefs in the hills (surprisingly and formal!). Lastly the *khutlangs* or the 'women farmer helping hands' are keeping the produce of paddy in a self sustaining mode. These have been the indigenous source of sustenance since time immemorial. In fact *Jhum*, which has been the major source of food security is being labeled as anti environment and the male farmers are being encouraged to bring in cash crops leading to impoverishment of the families. One has to see whether any of these institutions have ever been mentioned in the policy initiatives of the modern governance. Why not? Why don't we have modern institutions metamorphosed and transformed from these traditional intuitions? Non recognition of indigeneity is leading to impoverishment and a move towards marginalisation of the women folk and the society at large.

Women have been known to be the repository of indigenous knowledge systems. One can go through the literature on the mother's wisdom of native American tribes, what we call the Iroquois nations, or Filipino women's understanding of the importance of river sources. Back home a Kuki woman cited a bird to indicate the arrival of rain. The knowledge of rich herbal medicines by the elderly women in this part of region is just waiting to be explored. But where is their place in formulating developmental plans? One needs to focus on human development and not just about bringing in mega structures. And there are alternatives available.