

**ETHNICITY IN MANIPUR : EXPERIENCES,  
ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES**

**THESIS**

**Submitted In Fulfilment of The Requirement  
For The Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in Anthropology, School of  
Social Sciences.**



**LUCY THOMAS VASHUM  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
North-Eastern Hill University  
SHILLONG.**

**1993**

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## CERTIFICATE

Certificate that the subject matter of this thesis is a record of work done by Ms. Lucy Thomas Vashum, that the contents of this thesis did not form a basis of the award of any previous degree to her, or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis had not been submitted by her for any research degree in any other University.

In habit and character Ms. Lucy Thomas Vashum is a fit and proper person for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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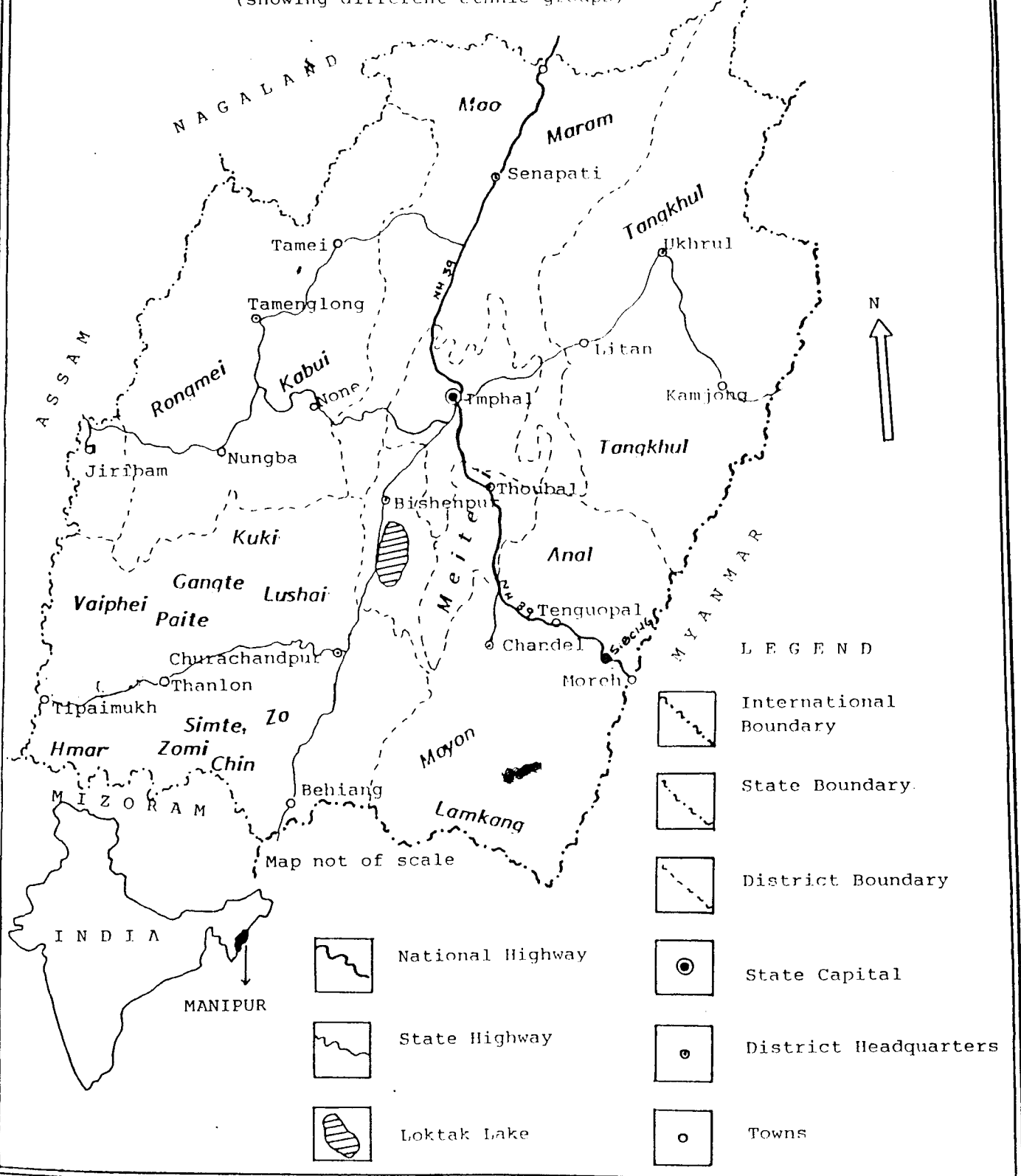


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




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MAP OF MANIPUR  
(showing different ethnic groups)



LEGEND

-  International Boundary
-  State Boundary
-  District Boundary
-  National Highway
-  State Highway
-  Loktak Lake
-  State Capital
-  District Headquarters
-  Towns

**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

- **The Theme**
- **Home Knowledge**
- **Conceptual Knowledge**
- **The scope, the Direction**
- **Geographic - Demographic coverage**
- **The Depth of Investigation**
- **Data**
- **The Direction**
- **The Style**
- **The Presentation**

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### THE THEME

"Ethnicity", this is the broad theme of the present study. Manipur - this is the venue for empirical references. In spirit, the present study may be considered as the product of the refinement of 'home-knowledge' reorganized through reference of 'conceptual knowledge'.

Home Knowledge. The author is an inhabitant of Manipur and belongs to the Tangkhul Naga community, which in Manipur is recognized as a Scheduled Tribe. The Government of Manipur, as we will note later has recognized 29 communities as Scheduled Tribes.) Manipur, as the remaining six other States of the North-Eastern Region is multi-lingual, multi-ethnic. Most of the communities inhabiting Manipur, tribal or other, it appears are

under the experience of some form of flux in regard to the definition of their respective identity. The author as a native of Manipur has lived with such experiences. This provides the initial clue for the present study. In many respects, the author may be considered as a "participant observer" which by definition involves two consequences: "The primary task of the participant observer is to enter into the life of the community being studied. If this task is achieved, there will be two consequences: his subjects will learn to take him for granted and thus to behave almost as though he were not there, and he will learn to think almost as they think". (Madge, 1953, 131).

Conceptual Knowledge. The author, by professional training, is an anthropologist.

One of the initial instructions in anthropology begins with the lesson that:

"Social anthropology may be defined as the investigation of the nature of human society by the systematic comparison of societies of diverse types, with particular attention to the simpler forms of society of primitive, savage or non-literate peoples. . . . . The distribution of peoples on the face of the Earth in recent times and their racial and cultural similarities and differences are the result of an exceedingly complex multitude of events which began when mankind first appeared, perhaps a million years ago, the process has been one of migrations, minglings, and interactions of people, of modifications of racial characteristics and of cultural changes and developments. . . . . It is of course, not possible to draw any sharp dividing line between primitive and not primitive societies. Further, social anthropology cannot and does not entirely confine its attention to the primitive societies." (Radcliffe-Brown, 1958).

Frazer(1908)conceived of social anthropology as the sociological study of "primitive" forms of society, Malinowski(1926) defined the subject as "a branch of Sociology, as applied to primitive tribes". With all such definitions (Frazer, Malinowski) and clarifications(Radcliffe-Brown), the study of the tribes was considered as the mainstay of anthropology.

Anthropology in its scope included the description and comparison of different cultural groups of people. In the early years of the academic discipline, such cultural groups were referred to as races and tribes. The aim of social anthropology was defined as

"to make use of knowledge about primitive societies to establish valid and significant generalization about social phenomena" (Radcliffe Brown,op. cit.)

There appeared a sort of distribution of labour in the subject, with the name of "ethnography" used generally for purely descriptive accounts of a people or peoples, and "ethnology", which goes beyond ethnography, it seeks to provide a classification of peoples by comparing them with reference to their similarities and differences. Radcliffe Brown while referring to peoples we find has used the designation 'ethnic groups' thus:

"Peoples or ethnic groups resemble or differ from each other by racial characters,by language, and by their mode of life and mode of thought from the kind of dwellings they inhabit or the kind of clothes they wear to the kind of beliefs they hold. Ethnologists distinguish between the racial characteristics of a people and their cultural characteristics and between racial and cultural classifications." (Radcliffe Brown, op. cit.).

Ethnographic and ethnological interests among the anthropologists yielded a library full volume of insightful literature, uninterrupted till the closing years of the 1960's. We can note there was a marked paradigm shift among the anthropologists with the publication by Fredrick Barth a collection of essays on Ethnic Groups and Boundaries(1969).The theoretical emphasis shifted from the evolution of tribal identity as a defining feature of social structure to the celebration of ethnic identity as an aspect of social organization. (cf.Jenkins, 1986) Cohen noted the change as one from the Western concern with uncivilized peoples of the colonies, to a more equitable interest in the heterogeneity of all societies. (Cohen, 1978). Jenkins in his essay on "Social Anthropological Models of Inter-ethnic relations" (op. cit.) refers to this under the sub-heading 'from tribe to ethnic groups'.

The effort in the present study is to systematize and reorganize the 'data' from Manipur by drawing from the conceptual perspectives available with anthropology, and also the other relevant social science disciplines.

#### THE SCOPE,THE DIRECTION

The definition of the scope of a research exercise involves a set of definitions, those of:

- (1) Definition of the geographic and demographic coverage of the investigation.
- (2) Definition of the depth of the investigation.
- (3) Definition of the conceptual orientation and perspective for the investigation.

Geographic-Demographic Coverage. As mentioned in the outset, and as we can find from the title of the study, Manipur is the venue for empirical information.

The present exercise on ethnicity, as part of the doctoral programme is a continuation of an exercise which was undertaken as part of the M.Phil. programme earlier, by the investigator. The effort there was to compile a comparative profile of the broad ethnographic features of the tribes inhabiting Manipur. One important section of the work for M.Phil. was on the classification of the tribes inhabiting Manipur and defining the diacritics relating to the distinctive identity of the different tribes in Manipur.

As part of the M.Phil. programme the scope remained confined attention to the tribal section of the population of Manipur, namely, the population inhabiting the hills. For the present doctoral exercise, the scope has been extended to include two set of experiences : those from the tribal as well as the non-tribal sections of population of Manipur. The two experiences of how the Meitei, the Bishnupriya and the tribal population of Manipur

were involved with defining their identity, these appeared to provide a good opportunity for comparative analysis. In view of this, the scope of the present study was extended to cover the two sections of population of Manipur, both the tribal as well as the non-tribal sections of population. Such an extended scope of the study we felt will provide a suitable opportunity for comparative analysis between two category of population, the tribal and the non-tribal sections of population.

#### The Depth of Investigation.

Research is the product of 'facts', 'ideas' interface. In social research, this suggests attention to two questions,

- (a) What questions to ask, i.e., what data to include for the study.
- (b) How to order the data, i.e., what will be the analytical framework for ordering and interpreting the data.

In terms of the depth of investigation, studies could be (i) descriptive, (ii) analytical, or (iii) explanatory, or a variety of combination of these. A decision in relation to this have a direct bearing on the nature of issues relating to both data as well as the analytical framework that may form the scope of a study.

The present exercise for the doctoral programme, we may recall as mentioned earlier, is an extension of the exercise initiated as part of the M.Phil. programme. As part of the

M.Phil. programme the focus was confined to ethnogenesis, the origin and the formation of identities of the Naga and the Kuki, the two main tribal communities inhabiting Manipur. The exercise stopped at historical analysis. At the doctoral level now, we have extended to (a) analysis of contemporary experiences, and (b) those relating to both the tribal and the non-tribal communities inhabiting Manipur.

The different communities inhabiting Manipur are as much engaged with issues relating to projecting and organizing their distinct ethnic identity as we can find for other parts of the country, even in other countries beyond India. Such situation in Manipur have involved the tribal section of the population as much as it has involved the non-tribal sections of the State. Between the different experiences in regard to this which can be found in Manipur, for the purpose of the present study we identified six experiences. A close analysis of facts in regard to these formed the source of data for the present study.

The following six experiences formed the 'sample' for the data.

(1) The Government of Manipur, Directorate for Development of Tribals and Backward classes, has published a small folder containing some information relating to the scheduled tribes of Manipur. According to the folder, the Government of Manipur recognizes 29 scheduled tribes, and these have been put into three categories. It mentions:

"According to the Constitution of India, there are 29 recognized tribes in Manipur. . . . . All the tribes can be divided into Naga group of tribes, and Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes with some smaller tribes intermediate between these groups as some transformation is in the process. Traditional chieftainship is not similar among all the tribes. . . . Among the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes, chieftainship is hereditary, but it is not always so among the Naga tribes. The tribesman among the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group in Manipur (total 8 tribes) can converse with one another in respective dialects unlike in the case of the Naga group of tribes (total 6 tribes). Linguistic difference is much among the Naga than among the tribes of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group. . . . Intermediate between the two groups of Naga and Chin-Kuki-Mizo groups of tribes linguistically nearer to the latter than the former are (i) numerically smaller tribes. . . . As such they are also known as old Kuki in anthropological literature." (Govt. of Manipur, 1981).

According to the official list,

The Naga group of tribes-

- (i) Kabui, (Rongmei and Puimei) (ii) Kacha Naga (Liangmei and Zemei), collectively known as Zeliangrong, (iii) Mao, (iv) Maram, (v) Tangkhul, (vi) Maring.

The Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes -

- (i) Gangte, (ii) Hmar, (iii) Lushai (Mizo), (iv) Thadou (Kuki), (v) Vaiphei, (vi) Zou, (vii) Paite, (viii) Simte.

The Intermediary groups

- (i) Aimol, (ii) Chiru, (iii) Koirang, (iv) Kom (collectively called Komrem), (v) Anal, (vi) Chothe, (vii) Lamkang, (viii) Koirao/Thangal, (ix) Purum, (x) Monsang, and (xi) Moyon.

### 'Non-Local Tribes'

(i) Angami, (ii) Ralte, (iii) Sema, (iv) Sukte.

(2) The other experience relates to the Purum. This name is well known among the Indian anthropologists, and to great extent among the classical structural anthropologists world round. In 1931, T.C.Das, a senior teacher from the Department of Anthropology of the Calcutta University visited Manipur with the intention to conduct the annual exercise of field work essential for the post-graduate students in Anthropology. This team under the guidance of T.C.Das decided to conduct their field work among the Purum. This marked the beginning of the interest of T.C.Das about the Purum. He revisited the Purum a number of times in later years, for intention of a more comprehensive study of the Purum. In 1935 T.C. Das published his monograph on the Purum. We find from this monograph that the population of the Purum according to census of 1931, was about 300. Forty years later, according to the Census of 1971, the population of this tribe was given as 'not available'. The immediate question to flow from such an observation was to find an explanation to the rather sudden 'non-availability' of the Purum within a period of forty years. The probable explanations could be (a) the tribe had vanished, in more clear terms, become extinct within the last forty years, or (b) there is some error in the census enumeration, either in 1931 or 1971, or (c) within a period of

forty years the Purum have adopted a new designation/identity for themselves.

(3) There was a third experience, a very obvious observation for others otherwise, that relating to the Zeliangrong. In the history of the freedom struggle of India, we find a list of many prominent names who contributed to the struggle during the 20's and 30's of this century. There is one name from Manipur which needs to be added, the name of Rani Gaidinlui. In fact, her name should be put above many, in the list of the freedom fighters. Between all the freedom fighters in the country this far, she has remained in prison uninterrupted for the longest number of years, nearly forty years. She was imprisoned by the British in the early thirties and was able to get her release only in 1952, five years after the British had already left. Her release came only through the personal intervention of Nehru, who was informed about her still languishing in jail. It appears that in the din and hubbub of the newly attained Independence, and all that followed, it got forgotten that Gaidinlui who was imprisoned by the British in 1931 as the young girl who had revolted against the British administration, was still behind bars. In fact she got her release through the intervention of Nehru, who got a chance information about this female freedom fighter. She entered the jail as a youth and came out as one who had now come of age.

Rani Gaidinlui symbolizes the Zeliangrong movement. This movement combines in fact two streams of objectives. She was

fighting for the cause of the Zeliangrong tribe, which the British considered as a 'liberation' movement. In essence the movement is about the Zemei, the Liangmei, and the Rongmei tribes of the Naga group engaged in efforts to forge, stabilize, and project a common Zeliangrong identity. By some twist of events, the British perceived this as a sedition and revolt against the British. The movement today, in essence is one in which the three numerically less tribal groups, the Zemei, the Liangmei and the Rongmei are involved in redefining their identity in terms of a common identity of Zeliangrong.

(4) The Thadou Experience. The Thadou is one of the Kuki group of tribes. In terms of number, the total population of the Thadou is highest between the 29 tribes inhabiting Manipur. The Thadou, in terms of their level of education, and through the new occupations, mainly white-collar, in which the Thadou have entered, this can be considered as one of the most 'progressive' tribes of Manipur. The Thadou, as such belong to the Kuki group of tribes. As of recent years, it is noted, the Thadou are involved deeply in defining their identity.

When the Bible was being translated into local tribal languages in Manipur, between the different Kuki group of tribes, the first translation was made in Thadou language. Somehow, the early Western Evangelists who were involved with Bible translation, they designated the Thadou version of the Bible as

the Bible in Kuki. In course of time, due to a sequence of reasons, the other tribes of the Kuki group, specially the Gangte, the Hmar, resented this. Such resentment has become more pronounced after the Gangte and the Hmar, the late starters in education among the Kuki group of tribes, have prepared their own language version of the Bible.

The controversy between the Kuki group of tribes, on account of this, comes through the designation which needs to be given to the Bible in the Thadou language. While the Thadou would like it to be referred as the Kuki Bible of the Thadou Kuki Bible, the other tribes of the Kuki group want the Bible to be referred as the Thadou Bible rather than adding the Kuki appellation. They explain that any such name, such as Thadou Kuki gives the impression as if the Thadou are the main representatives of the Kuki group of tribes.

(5) Very similar to this is the Bishnupriya experience. Bishnupriya is a non-tribal community which concentrates in the Bishenpur district of Manipur. Beyond Manipur, the people of this community inhabit parts of the Cachar district of Assam and some parts of Agartala district of Tripura. The distribution of the Bishnupriya to three states, Manipur, Assam and Tripura is due to some historical reasons, dating back to about two hundred years ago. Today we find that a sharp controversy had developed on the identity of the Bishnupriya. Much of this controversy has its origin in happenings outside Manipur. what concerns our

attention for the present study is how the controversy involved with the identity of the Bishnupriya has shaped itself in Manipur.

The Bishnupriya inhabiting the Cachar districts of Assam and those in Tripura prefer to be designated as the Bishnupriya-Manipuri. The Meitei in Manipur strongly resent this. According to them the Bishnupriya should be referred to by the single word, Bishnupriya rather than add the suffix 'Manipur'. Any such usage is likely to give the impression that the Bishnupriya represent a section of the Manipuri people, which in fact they do not. The Bishnupriya inhabited outside Manipur, in Assam and in Tripura, justify their use of the appellation 'Manipuri' as they claim to be one of the original inhabitants of Manipur, and share many common cultural traits with the Meitei.

In sharp contrast to this, in Manipur, the Bishnupriya inhabiting Manipur prefer to be identified as Manipuri Meitei, rather than as Bishnupriya. The Meitei however are not agreeable to this. They would like to distinguish the Bishnupriya people rather than accept them as Manipuri.

The Bishnupriya-Manipuri and the Thadou-Kuki, analytically, represent many similarities, it is the second part in each of the two hyphenated names which introduce now issues of controversy. The history attached with each of the two names has brought in a sequence of factors and interpretations which have provided full

stories of definition and redefinition of identities in each of the case. In each of the two cases, while the first part of the designation is the indigenous identity, the Bishnupriya or the Thadou, the second part of the designation is the name adopted (Nee, assigned) by the communities by the British. Factors like (a) in history, what implies the generic designation of Manipuri or Kuki, (b) when was it introduced and with what understanding, and (c) over period of time, during the colonial period and after, how have these been defined and re-defined, involved the full story with reference to each of the two experiences.

(6) The Meitei experience. The most popularly known and the most populace community inhabiting Manipur are referred to as the Manipuri. The people involved are locally known as the Meitei. There is the general understanding that the Meitei are the Hindu. This interpretation has now become a subject of controversy as the Meitei, this long known as to be Hindu, would like to be identified as Sanamahi, the name of indigenous religious faith. According to some analysts this represents a process of religious revivalism. On a close look we find that a complex set of political and cultural issues are involved, most of which have emerged during the post-colonial period.

The six experiences (only briefly narrated above) gave sufficient indication of the complex nature of data that will need to be handled. As indicated earlier, in terms of depth of

investigation, a study could be (i) descriptive; (ii) analytical; (iii) explanatory, or a combination of these. A review of the available literature on the theme 'ethnicity' (a detailed presentation on this can be found in the next chapter) presented only one message "there is a need to formulate a comprehensive analytical framework on ethnicity". In view of all this, we decided that the present study can at best be an analytical exercise, attempting a comparative analysis of the different empirical situations as obtained in Manipur.

Social research as we know involves the contrast of 'facts' with 'ideas'. In the course of the investigation, more precisely, at the time of the preparation of the research design, the exposure to the available theoretical efforts on the subject (the review of literature) emphasized that the immediate need is of:

- (a) Precise identification of the different elements that can be considered to be involved with the phenomena of ethnicity. In research methodology, such exercise is referred as disaggregation of factors and variables.
- (b) Attending to theoretical issues in relation to such identified elements (factors/variables/processes). The conceptual issues relate to obtaining conceptual clarification, that of providing precise definitions.
- (c) Attending to methodological issues, precisely those relating to classification and systematization.



In view of such tasks which warranted first attention, it was felt that the present exercise in terms of its depth of investigation will have to remain a descriptive-analytical account.

The study has been sub-titled as "Experiences, Issues and Perspectives". The first part of the exercise is to make a descriptive narration of each of the experiences. The second part, flowing from this is the formulation of an analytical questions which helped to outline the dimensions and facets of each of the experiences. The study began with a simple description of the six experiences selected for the present study.

The second part of the exercise involved finding relevant categorization and ordering for the observed facts. The conceptual clue from review of literature helped us in this regard. Through a process of deductive approximation we tried to organize the elements of process of ethnicity in terms of such broad category.

### The Direction

This refers to the orientation and the perspective with which the investigation will be pursued and the results organized for purpose of presentation.

A clear distinction can be made between 'orientation' and 'perspective'. Orientation for the most part refers to

affiliation to a particular academic discipline (such as anthropology, sociology, social psychology, political science). Perspective of a study refers to the list of analytical concepts, variables, and empirical indicators current with an academic discipline. (Refer Smelser, for detailed discussion on comparative difference between social science disciplines through their orientations and perspectives).

The theme of 'ethnicity' , we can find, has engaged attention in a number of academic disciplines. On the one hand, while such widespread involvement with the theme 'ethnicity' between the different academic disciplines has enriched the empirical as well as the theoretical repertory, on the other hand there prevail a deep sense of inadequacy. We may note:

- (1) 1975. Without detracting from the merit of these more recent works, it is apparent that a theoretical framework capable of informing comparative ethnic studies has not yet emerged (Despers).  
1975. It is transparently evident from the work of several contributors that such an inquiry could not proceed without interrogating at least some of the conceptual apparatus attending the study of ethnic and racial phenomena. That this was necessary should not come as a surprise to those who are familiar with the literature, in the absence of an established and generally acceptable theoretical framework, it needs to be considered how observation will be ordered and interpreted (Despers).
- (2) 1989. Roy Burman while presenting a review article on "Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict and Their Genesis", at one occassion could not withhold but express that "but still the question of building up an over-arching framework remains.

- (3) 1968. In the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, the entry on "Ethnic Groups" ends with the observation "With the growth of good communication and the spread of travel, ethnically and culturally diverse societies are likely, in short term, to increase in number rather than diminish. As the sociological study of society ceases to be solely a Western discipline, the need to find appropriate conceptual tools for analyzing ethnic and cultural variation will undoubtedly become a major preoccupation of the discipline (Morris).

The just presented observations highlight attention to one common desiderata, 'formulate a framework' (with all that this notion of framework can mean). The present exercise, in its orientation as well as perspective, has addressed itself to this desiderata. The present exercise can be taken as one of the exercise which takes one step towards the desiderata, the final work will expect many such exercises.

In view of such desiderata, the present exercise may be taken more as one with a heavier orientation towards methodology rather than ethnography. This does not imply however that ethnography has been completely lost sight of. In the present study, as we will note from the contents to follow, in fact we have heavily drawn from the ethnography of Manipur.

At this point there are some initial clarifications which need to be presented. This relate to issues emerging from the observations such as made by Despers:

"In the absence of an established and generally acceptable theoretical framework, it needs to be considered how observation will be ordered and interpreted". (op. cit.)

To bring to more clear focus, the issue related to exercises involved with formulating the theoretical/analytical framework. Despers (1975) reached to such a conclusion through the deliberations and presentations at the IXth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences where nearly 200 papers devoted to the discussion of comparative ethnic studies.

The publication of Barth's investigations of the populations from Northwest province of Pakistan and the adjoining frontier areas of Afghanistan mark the turning point in the theoretical attention among the anthropologists towards the ethnic phenomena (Barth, 1956, 1959, 1964). In the period intervening the publication by Barth and the IXth International Congress, that of nearly one decade 1964-1975, with all the academic presentations that emerged, the realization which was widely shared related to the absence of a suitable framework.

Nearly a decade later, 1984, a conference were organised at St. Catherine College, Oxford, "to test whether there were point of convergence or continuity between theoretical stand-points which might be explored and exploited to the benefit of the subject as a whole". By 1989, Rex and Mason published their collection on works of "original theory, empirical research, and

texts on the problem of racially mixed societies" under the title "Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations". The editors prefaced their presentation with the observation,

"On the face of it the development of a universally argued theory and an agreed paradigm for race and ethnic relations research seemed impossible"

They however included the clarification that :

"(Though) several disciplines were involved, but within the main ones, namely sociology and social anthropology, there seemed to be a number of competing if not warring schools. None the less it was thought worthwhile to try to bring together some of the major internationally known scholars to present their ideas to possible conceptualization of the field to order to see whether what appeared at first to be irreconcilable conflict could in fact be replaced by a sense of complementarity".

Within this extended quotation what stands out for our attention is the 'the search for a possible conceptualization', the search for a comprehensive framework.

Such concerns which may have made their first appearance with the publications by Barth, 1956, have continued till date, initially formulated between 1956 (Barth) to 1975 (Despers), and then outlined the analytical ramifications 1975 (Despers) to 1989 (Rex and Mason). This suggests the direction for the present investigation. The present exercise is thus inclined heavily towards outlining and attending to issues of methodological and theoretical consequence, to the exercise of formulating an analytical framework. Such an exercise has been undertaken here

however by drawing heavily from the empirical experiences from Manipur.

### The Style

The substantive theme of the present exercise is 'ethnicity', with empirical reference to the experiences from Manipur. What in fact has drawn our attention, as mentioned earlier, are the efforts involving the different communities in defining and redefining their respective identities. Such story of defining-redefining of identity by an ethnic group represents, in other words, the biography of the ethnic group. An analysis of such phenomena will involve thus in many ways relating the biography of the concerned ethnic group.

Scientific research, the exercise of formulating an analytical/ conceptual framework, in terms of the full sequence of exercises involved refers to the biography of an intellectual exercise. Any scientific research in the social sciences is expected to be based on a well prepared schedule of exercises to be conducted. This is referred to as the research design. From the stage of formulation of problem, to the last stage of presentation of the results, the research design guides through methods and techniques, orientation and perspectives. At the end of the research exercise, when we sit down to prepare the final presentation, we recall our experiences, in terms of empirical observations and conceptual decisions that have appeared before us, and relate them. We can refer to such recounting as the

writing of biographical account of the research.

The style of presentation in the present exercise will be one of presenting the biography of our efforts comprising (of) two sets of biographies, distinct but intimately interdependent, obviously. We will recount the set of biography of the empirical observations, which we refer as the 'experiences', and concurrent to this we will recount the biography of method and techniques which have helped in formulating a conceptual-analytical framework, which we have designated as the ethnicity syndrome. To borrow from Merton (1957) we will recount 'the bearing of theory on empirical research' and 'the bearing of empirical research on theory'.

## THE PRESENTATION

The contents of the present exercise have been presented through six chapters, as follows:

### CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

In this Chapter we introduce (i) in broad terms, the theme; (ii) in some detail, the genesis of the subject, (iii) the direction of the investigation, and (iv) the presentation of the investigation.

### CHAPTER II : REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND FORMULATION OF PROBLEM

In this chapter we look back at the available materials on the study of ethnicity, and through a critical review outline the

crucial and recurrent themes and points of controversy that emerge. Such a review we find helps us to formulate the problem for investigation in terms of the orientation and perspective. This helps to define the object of the study and outline the approach to analysis.

### CHAPTER III : MANIPUR - THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

In this chapter we present a general introduction of Manipur, its location, demography and history. We can note that the history of Manipur has a logical link with the theme of the investigation as it describes the social formation of Manipur through the ages, interface.

### CHAPTER IV : THE EXPERIENCES

In this Chapter we present main 'data' in terms of the 'six experiences'.

### CHAPTER V : THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

In this Chapter we discuss the sequence of theoretical and the methodological issues.

### CHAPTER VI : ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION

In this Chapter we attempt to collect the strings from the different foregoing chapters and try to reckon what we have been able to achieve, and also identify the suggestions for later exercises.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE  
AND THE FORMULATION  
OF PROBLEM

- **The Review of Literature**
- **The Formulation of Problem**
- **The Perspectives**
  1. **On the basis of academic disciplines**
  2. **Substantive Issues**
- **Paradigm shift.**

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THE FORMULATION OF PROBLEM

#### I

The review of literature - this forms an invariable part of any research presentation, more so if it is from a research student.

The formulation of problem - this is considered invariably as the opening exercise for any piece of social research, more so when it is from a research student.

In this Chapter we will take attention to each of these 'invariables'. We will examine:

- (i) What involves each of these, individually,
- (ii) What are the lines of correspondence between the two.

(iii) In operational terms, what needs to draw our attention, more so with specific reference to the subject of the present research.

It is common knowledge in scientific social research that (a) Social research is the interface of 'facts ' and 'ideas', in which 'the ideas' refers to 'theory', while 'the facts' refer to the empirical information. (b) There is a general agreement that 'there is an interdependence between theory and research, with both being reciprocally reproductive and difficult to dissociate.' R.K.Merton has at great length elaborated on the bearing of theory on empiricism, and on the bearing of empiricism on theory`.

"The complete scientist is one who embraces theory and experimental practice at the same time: (1) he states a fact, (2) an idea occurs to him with regard to this fact, (3) with this idea in mind, he reasons, initiates and experiment, imagines and achieves the material conditions".

(Claude Bernard: Introduction to the study of Experimental Medicine, 1966).

## II

### 1. The Review of Literture

- (a) What involves this.
- (b) Why do we need this.

In Social research the answer to each of these questions are common knowledge. This notwithstanding we better make brief mention to the answer to each of the two questions. It will help

ready reference and clarity. It will also help to continue our discussion in the present Chapter.

In the Review of Literature we have considered, here:-

- (i) The academic writing on the broad theme of 'ethnicity'.
- (ii) Such writings on the communities inhabiting Manipur, which provide insight/information relevant for the present study.

List of the written references has been presented in the bibliography.

## 2. The Formulation of Problem

Irrespective of the reality of whether the chick came first or the egg, namely, whether the research student has identified a broad theme, like ethnicity, or has made an observation, like 'the experiences' from Manipur, once the broad theme and the observation, both, are before the research student, a decision will need to be made in regard to defining 'the object of research'. As Durkheim observed " The sociologist's first step should be to define the things he is dealing with in order that one knows and that he knows what is in question."At the time of the preparation of the research Design, the exercise is referred to as 'defining the' 'key originating question'.

As discussed earlier, when dealing with the genesis of the present study, during the course of the study conducted as part of the M.Phil. programme, which dealt mainly with the

'historical' experiences, and later, continuing this with the observation of present-day situation, the initial experience was worded as one of 'fission-fusion' of identities by different communities inhabiting Manipur. A designation is offered to the 'observed phenomena'. It is at this point that the 'orientation' with which the concept is intended to be viewed needs to be clarified. This leads to define the 'orientation' become available from the 'theories' on the theme. We may recall the elaborate discussions presented by Merton in his discussions on "The Bearing of Sociological Theory on Empirical Research" and "The Bearing of Empirical Research on Theory".

As brought out through the discussion made earlier, we may restate, the starting points for the present study were two, distinct but intimately inter-related:-

(a) The empirical observation of the phenomena of fission-fusion of identities among the different communities inhabiting Manipur. The phenomena was referred to as one of ethnicity.

(b) "Without detracting from the merit of these more recent works (circa 1975), it is apparent that a theoretical framework capable of informing comparative ethnic studies has not yet emerged."

(Despers, op.cit.).

This suggests to us to present discussion on 'theory' and 'the direction of the study' in close company, as part of the same Chapter.

### III

The Review of Literature - this expects a sort of systematization, trying to outline a typology and trend in the theoretical exercises. We can systematize the vast array of theoretical presentations on ethnicity on basis of -

- (1) The different orientations which have contributed the theoretical perspectives.
- (2) The different perspectives with which the theories have emerged.
- (3) The key issues that emerge from a review.

Ethnicity and its different derivatives, is a phenomena which has been of attention with a wide range of social scientists, representing different academic disciplines.

The academic efforts on the study of ethnicity, can be divided into three broad categories, (a) those which have a prominent social psychological orientation, (b) those which have prominent orientation towards sociology and social anthropology, and (c) those with an orientation in political analysis.

The nature of studies initiated by Adorne and by Allport consequent to the experiences arising from (a) Hitler's Germany

(the Jew persecution) and (b) the racial discrimination in the United States (the Black-White divide) provided outstanding academic studies on the phenomena of prejudice, ethnocentrism, racism, and the like. The beginning of studies with such background, for obvious reasons, was in the thirties of this century.

Soon to follow studies with such orientation were the studies initiated by sociologists and the social anthropologists. Their concern was patently ethnographic, to outline social and cultural elements which define the 'ethnic group'. Studies with such background introduced the notion of 'ethnic groups'. The pioneering works with such orientation were by anthropologists like Barth, and sociologists like Moynihan, Glazer, Summer, Bogardus, Likert, etc. Their main focus was on themes like 'the boundaries of ethnic groups', and how these shape in situations resembling 'melting pots'.

The third category of studies, initiated through the analysis of politics of developing nations, is of comparatively recent origin. The studies with such orientation, the main focus has been on political stability and the bearing socio-economic transformations in the developing countries on this.

Academic Discipline	Scenario	Authors
Social psychologists Sociologists Social Anthropologists	Negro discrimination Social/Cultural elements to define boundaries of ethnic groups.	Adorno, Allport. Moynihan, Barth
Political Analysts	Bearing of social economic transformations on political stability	Karl Deutsch, Lucian Pye, Almond Coleman, Weiner.

A critical reading of the three orientations, those from the social psychologists, from the sociologists, from the sociologists/ social anthropologists, and the political analysts, provided two broad suggestions.

(a) The focus of analysis will need to be on the process element, rather than on the genesis, the implications, the supports, or any other elements of ethnicity.

(b) The processes involve the interaction of the structural dimensions, the normative dimensions, and the behavioural dimensions relating to the experiences.

A critical review of the orientations as represented by the different academic discipline (social psychology, sociology/social anthropology, and political sociology) suggested that we can classify their approaches in terms of three broad

perspectives - (a) the historical perspective, (b) the typological perspective, or (c) the evolutionary perspective. (Coleman, 1971,73).

The historical perspective has been more descriptive in its efforts and has tried to present the totality. The descriptive presentations do not reveal any effort of critical analysis or explanation, and as such, therefore, such accounts have not been based on any hypotheses. The main contribution of such efforts has been to define sets of descriptive variable like time, location, precipitating incidents, genesis, natures of behaviour, the nature of groups involved, intentions, implications. we have excellent accounts of social histories, economic histories, movements and restive behaviours (such as revolts, revolutions, insurgency, etc.)state formation and nation building.

The studies which reveal a typological perspective, their main effort has been to (a) present the process from the two polar ends the 'traditional' ethnic identities to the 'emergent' (modernized) ethnic identities, and more importantly, the trait-lists to differentiate between the 'traditional' and the 'emergent' forms of ethnic identities.

The studies with an evolutionary perspective have tried to examine the dynamics of ethnicity as a processual change in the systems-phenomena involving the elements of the structural, normative and behavioural dimensions of the society to put this

in more clear terms, those who have adopted the evolutionary perspective, assume that (a) the process of ethnicity is a systems-phenomena, namely, the outcome of interaction of various elements of a system, (b) the elements involved with any system can be put into three broad categories, the elements involving the structural dimension of the system, the elements involving the normative dimension of the system, the elements involving the behavioural dimension of the system. In view of these, (c) the process of ethnicity needs to be analyzed, and explained in terms of the structural dimension, the normative (functional) dimension and the behavioural dimension.

#### The Perspectives.

One of the approach to categorize the different theoretical orientations is on basis of the set of variables, namely, the perspectives with which the phenomena is viewed.

Ethnicity as a subject of academic discussion, the history of this can be traced to the writings of Park and his colleagues made in the early years of this century. (1913 onwards). Around the years of the second World War, three writings gave some new direction to the academics of ethnicity and race relations. Gosnell in 1935 and Cox in 1948 brought out their volumes on Negro relations, while in 1939 Furnival came with his volume on the study of plural societies in Netherlands India (the present day Indonesia).

"Current analytical discussions in the study of race and ethnicity provide useful grist for the contemporary mills of sociology of knowledge. Not only do they demonstrate the historical evolution of different epistemological stances, they also reflect the ongoing synthesis that we create between these academic traditions and the specific politico-academic contexts in which we operate. These contexts to a large extent determine our perspectives, focus our interests and through criteria of relevance set our priorities (cf. Murphree, 1986).

The tradition of academic writings on ethnicity and race relations have been influenced visibly by the academic heritage as well as the empirical location of academician. We can adopt the following two schemes to organize the academic writings on ethnicity and race relations:

1. On basis of academic disciplines

- (i) Ethnicity and race are subjects which have taken the attention of every core academic discipline in the social sciences, to name them in alphabetic order, anthropology, economics, history, human geography, political science, psychology, sociology. It will be interesting to note the thrusts in each, and the pattern of shifts within each. The anthropologists for the most part have confined their study with reference to tribal communities, while the sociologists with

negro race relations in urban and industrial areas. The psychologists may be said to have initiated their engagement with the analysis of anti-semite (Jew) situation in Europe, which yielded much literature on prejudice, but later they extended their focus to analysis of urban situations with reference to the negro urban situation. This yielded much material on stereotypes. In political science, much different from this, academic attention on ethnicity formulated with comparative political analysis of developing societies and the third world countries. Such a neat designation of key thrust area with each of the academic discipline should not be carried too far. In course of time there has been variety of academic excursions.

(ii) During the several decades in which study of racial and ethnic relations has occupied an important place among social scientists, theoretical disagreements have often rested on the different levels of analysis from which they proceed. Rather than seeing these different levels as part of an interdependent system, the tendency in many cases has been to emphasize one level as fundamental. There are three broad category of dimensions which can be identified.

(a) The early observers to whom prejudice and discrimination was the main characteristics.

(b) A second level of analysis which sees inter-racial and inter-ethnic relations as expressions of struggle for power, income and prestige. It is within this that the Marxist perspective of analysis has developed.

(c) The level of analysis which takes attention to the process by which individuals are socialized, and the nature of self-regard, wants and values instilled by the society.

Analysis of the traditions which have developed in anthropology need some closer attention.

According to one appraisal (Despres, 1975), "reflecting more specifically upon the literature of social anthropology, one is tempted to consider ethnic studies B.B. and A.B. (Before Barth and after Barth, editor, 1969). Before Barth, excluding a few studies of racial and cultural minorities, ethnic phenomena receive their most explicit theoretical attention in the work of those anthropologists who are concerned with the organization of plural societies. Barth perceived ethnic exchanges as situations disclosing a more inclusive system of ecological, political, social and cultural relationships and the structure and organization of their respective communities which need to be explained in terms of part of this system. Barth thus explained that ethnic groups are formed to the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for

purposes of interaction, and that a stable system of inter-ethnic relations presupposes a structuring of interaction along the boundaries of ethnic groups, that is to say, it presupposes a set of rules governing situations of inter-ethnic contact. According to one scheme a distinction can be made between the subjective view and the objective view of ethnicity. Cf. van den Berghe, "Ethnic groups are defined both by the cultural modalities of their behaviour (including most importantly their linguistic behaviour), and by their subjective views of themselves and each other".

## 2. Substantive Issues.

A survey of this can be made reference to two distinct empirical contexts, the study of ethnicity with reference to the Negro and Black situation and the study of ethnicity with reference to other native situations, which for the main part includes the plural societies in the New States, in Africa and Asia mainly.

There is another consideration with reference to which a survey of substantive issues can be made. This refers to the orientation, more precisely, the conceptual perspective, with which the phenomena has been analysed, (a) in terms of class and social stratification, (b) in terms of power and political authority, and (c) in terms of economic resources and deprivation.

The race/class debate has been one of the most enduring to be found in sociological literature. This has been the confrontation between the Marxist the non-Marxist scholars in which the latter have argued for an independent casual role for 'race' while the latter have insisted that 'race' is merely one manifestation of more fundamental class struggles. (cf.Mason,1986)

According to another line of orientation, ethnicity is but one of several possible forms of status ascription which may be contrasted to all forms of status achievement. These dissimilar forms of social differrentiation give issue to correspondingly dissimilar stratification structures.Accordingly, ethnic phenomena might best be understood from the point of view of stratification theory or perhaps even more general theories of power. (cf.Despres,1985).

In terms of the third orientation, which perceives the phenomena of ethnicity in terms of access to resources and the behavioural features in terms of this, competition for resources forms the main diacritica for social organization of the ethnic identities. The concept of competition implies that within some social context there are groups for whom membership and internal cohesion are ideally determined by non-economic factors. Competitive relationship with reference to shared resources can exist between groups only if they share a subjective assessment

of the resources for which they are competing and, in addition, if they enjoy a relative amount of access to those domains in which such resources are lodged.

Despres summarizing the substantive issues that have appeared in social science orientations this far, makes some very precise observation. According to him, "The conceptual framework that emerges from the works this far suggests that these phenomena might be understood from the point of view of stratification theory or perhaps more general theories of power. Such conceptual framework is however in need of further discussion and refinement. We may however note that this approach is particularly productive of hypothesis relating various dimensions of ethnic phenomena to a wide range of objective and independent factors affecting the competition for material resources.

#### Paradigm Shift

It will be interesting to note the direction of change in approaches developed in social anthropology. Initially the social anthropologists in the study of inter-group relations have concentrated typically either on ethnic identity as a social phenomenon or social and cultural pluralism as a distinctive form of social organization. These topics have emerged, each in its own distinctive way, from the combination of an interest in social groups and systematic interrelationship with a concern with social integration.

One of social anthropology's traditional theoretical preoccupation has been a concern with corporate groups and social systems. During the colonial and immediate post-colonial periods this manifested itself as an orthodox assumption that the subject matter of the discipline - 'primitive' peoples (Firth, 1958) was most commonly organized into tribal groups. The notion of the 'tribe,' as a real social entity was central to both the theoretical and methodological development of social anthropology. This provided the anthropologists with a theoretical model of the nature of the 'non-civilized' social organization which could both serve to organize his ethnographic data and function as a framework for the cross-cultural comparison of 'primitive social organization' . It will however be wrong to understand that this was an explicitly formulated analytical framework, it was not, remaining instead implicitly embedded in most ethnographic studies, never being examined or seriously called to question.

The publication of the volume by Barth (1969), a collection of essays, clearly marked a paradigm shift in social anthropology, from tribal society to ethnic groups. The major thrust of the argument therein is that ethnicity, the boundaries of ethnic groups, and hence their ontological status as social groups, should not be treated as 'hard', or be uncritically accepted as a fixed aspect of social reality. In fact, Barth

insists, ethnic identity, and its production and reproduction in routine social interaction, are to be treated as problematic features of that reality, the ethnographer must examine the practices and processes whereby ethnicity and ethnic boundaries are socially constructed. The starting point for such an examination must be a recognition that 'ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by actors themselves.' (cf. Jenkins, 1986)

Next to appear on the scene of social anthropology was the study of plural society, marking the shift from tribe to ethnic groups and now to plural society. Just as the conceptual replaced of the tribe by the ethnic group may be attributed to a post colonial movement in the moral and philosophical centre of gravity of social anthropology, so the development of the notion of the plural society appears to be another responses to the loss of the empire. It is interesting in fact to note the details of this in some length. We may present here.

The notion of pluralism arose as a response to two separate, if not dissimilar, problems. The first concerned those colonial territories which, like many British possessions in Africa and elsewhere (so also the north-eastern India), were governed by means of a system of indirect rule, through native courts and chiefs, for example. In situations such as this, different groups of people were integrated into the administration framework through different sets of institutions and conflicting bodies of

customs and laws. How was one to conceptualize the convergence of these distinct institutional systems into an integrated social system? The second problem had to do with those colonial states which were, by contrast, basically unitary institutional systems for the purpose of politics and government. In such systems the natives were rarely if at all considered to be jurally adult members of the polity. As the twentieth century drew to its midpoint it appeared that this situation will change, the native people were moving from subjectship to citizenship. What would be the political structure of the new states?

Both of these problems, in fact, were the products of the same historical trend : the creation by the colonial governments of polyethnic colonies and the later emergence of new states, whose boundaries bore no or little resemblance to the real or natural boundaries of ethnic identities. This required the social anthropologists to develop a new analytical model in order to understand the changing situation.

They did not in fact develop a new model, instead they turned to the political science. The notion of pluralism and the concept of the 'plural society' which have their origin with the analysis of colonialisation in East Asia by Furnival found ready currency with the social anthropologists. M.G. Smith, Leo Kuper were some of the social anthropologists who gave serious currency to this. (cf. Jenkins, 1986). When these writers talk

about pluralism, they are talking about the incorporation of different ethnic groups or collectivities into one social or state system. In other words, as opposed to the homogenous nation-state, there is the heterogenous plural society. Even though the model's initial formulation predated the seminal contribution of Barth (1969), the concept of pluralism sits very comfortably with the ethnic paradigm, as forwarded by Barth as well as Cohen. As such, even though not many social scientists are these days concerned with the theoretical elaboration of contrasting models of pluralism, it is probably true to say that the notion of pluralism has carelessly passed into the vocabulary of the social anthropologist as a loose and apparently useful descriptive term for labelling all multi-ethnic societies.

A critical review of the available literature on the subject was very helpful in providing the proper opportunity for defining the scope as well as the methodology for the study. The review of literature helped in appreciating the perspectives with which substantive as well as methodological issues relating to the present study could be determined.

CHAPTER III

MANIPUR—THE LAND  
AND ITS PEOPLE

- **General Introduction**
- **Location**
- **Topography**
- **Minerals**
- **Agriculture**
- **Rivers**
- **Communication**
- **Administrative Divisions**
- **Demography**
- **People**
- **History**
  1. **The History of the Imphal Valley, the land of the Meitei**
  2. **The History of the Hills, the land of the Tribes.**

### CHAPTER III

#### MANIPUR - THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

##### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Manipur is one of the smallest states in the country, with a total area of 22,327 square kilometers. Prior to the elevation of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh to the status of States, Manipur ranked as the smallest State. Like the other states in the north-east, Manipur too has its international borders, with Myanmar (Burma) in the south and the east. A small tip of southern Manipur adjoins Mizoram. Its other neighbours are Nagaland in the north, the Cachar district of Assam in the west, the North Cachar Hills of Assam in the south-east.

Between the seven sisters of north-east India (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura) in many ways, Manipur stands out distinct as: (1) Manipur is the land of the famous Manipuri classical Ras-lila

dance (2) Manipur is the land of the legendary Rani Gaidinliu (3) Manipur is the land of the famous Manipur handloom products, specially the shawls, bed-covers and Sari (4) In India, during the Second World War, besides Nagaland, Manipur was part of the country which saw the march of Japanese army on its venue of war. The Japanese troops had entered Manipur, to stay there for a fairly long period. Much prior to this, before the British rule in India, Manipur had been twice captured by the Burmese. In other words, Manipur has been the venue of many wars (5) After Independence, Manipur has been the scene of some of the worst forms of Insurgency (6) The population structure of Manipur is unique, this state has two distinct category of "original inhabitant", the tribal section and the non-tribal section of population. What is distinct about this is that it is only in Manipur that there is a rather very sharp and distinct cultural difference between the two sections of population. Compared to this, in Assam and Tripura, both of which also have "mixed populations" like Manipur, there is much of culture-transfer between the tribal and non-tribal section of populations.

## I

### LOCATION

Manipur is located between 23° 80'N latitude to 25° 68'N latitude and 93° 03'E longitude to 94° 78'E longitude in the extreme eastern parts of India.

## TOPOGRAPHY

The topography of Manipur comprises of two geographical regions, the valley and the surrounding hills. The hills of Manipur are the abode of the different tribes inhabiting the State. The hills comprise of nearly 90 percent of the total area of the State, while the tribal population inhabiting it account for nearly 27.30 percent of the total population of the State. In other words, more than 70 percent of the total population of the State is found in 10 percent of the land of the State. The valley in Manipur is known as the Imphal valley. This is the abode of the Meitei who account for the nearly sixty percent of the total population of the State.

In the north-east, besides Tripura, Manipur was a princely state during the colonial rule of India. Like other princely States during British rule in India, Manipur had its own Maharaja, ruler. The ruler of Manipur was a Meitei. His kingdom extended to the neighbouring hills inhabited by tribal communities. After the departure of the British, and the accession of the princely state to India, Manipur became a part C state. In 1956, with the reorganization of the States, along with Tripura and the creation of Meghalaya, Manipur was made a Union Territory. In 1972 it was raised to a status of a State.

It is interesting to recollect that Manipur, much before the end of British rule, had acquired a prominent identity in the

cultural and social activities of the "main land". This was unlike some other States of the region, such as Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya. These later listed states, in many ways lived a "cultural-social autonomous" life, to themselves. The Vaishnava religion and the Manipur classical dance had bridged a strong cultural-social link between the people inhabiting this border state with those inhabiting the main land.

### MINERALS

Manipur has rich mineral resources. Till recently Manipur depended on her own supply of mineral salt. Limestone and iron ore are also found, and geological survey with the intention of prospecting them is being carried.

### AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people inhabiting the Imphal valley. It has rich alluvial soil. The hill areas are rich in forest resources. Shifting cultivation, commonly referred to as jhuming, is the prevalent practise in the hill areas. They have now taken to terrace cultivation also. In some parts of Manipur, indigo and tea grow wild. Weaving is the second common practise which is practised by the inhabitants of the hills as well as the valley.

Manipur is self-sufficient in paddy, the staple ingredient in the food of its people. Manipur has the highest yield rate of

paddy (1448 kg. per hectare), higher than even than that of Assam (1109 kg./hect.). Manipur ranks first between the seven states in the region, on basis of percentage of area under irrigation.

### RIVERS

In Manipur, there are two principal rivers, the Imphal and the Barak. The Imphal river, with its tributaries. The Iril, Nambul and Kongba, passing through the valley and the hill sides, meets the Chindwin in the Kale valley of Burma. The Barak river which is called the Gwai river by the Meitei flows most of the northern and western hills in the course to Cachar and Surma Valley into the estuary of the Ganges.

### COMMUNICATION

Manipur has no proper railway network and the only surface communication connecting Manipur with the rest of India is the Imphal-Dimapur Road, which has a road length of about 215 kms. (i.e. 134 miles). It is connected with the rail head at Dimapur and as a matter of fact, this road is her life-line comparatively, road communication in the valley is better than that of the hill areas which is yet to be developed due to difficult terrains.

As we know, 90 percent of the state are hill regions where there are still few facilities for mechanised transport. Out of five hill districts three hill district headquarters viz, Tamenglong, Ukhrul and Chandel are yet to be connected with black

topped road of the standard of State Highways. The sub-divisional headquarters at Henglep and Tousem are still not connected by a good roadway. Even the sub-divisional headquarters at Phungyar, Chassad, Chingmei Khullen, Kasom Khullen, Saikul and Singhat are connected with only fair weather roads and thus many roads are not useable throughout the year.

National highway No. 39, Kamagaon Moreh (an important border town of Manipur near Myanmar (Burma) Border) road passes through the state and another road of considerable economic importance is the 224 kms. long New-Cachar Road connecting terrains of the Manipur west district. Recently, the North-Eastern Frontier railway is going to extend its route from Silchar (Assam) to Jiribam (Manipur). A foundation stone was formally laid on 3rd November 1987 at Jiribam. the Imphal Tiddim Road is also another important road which touches Bishempur, Moirang and Churachandpur.

Manipur possess one reputed airport at Tulihal (about 7 Kms from Imphal town).

#### ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

The state is divided into eight districts, namely Imphal, Thoubal and Bishnupur in the valley and Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Churachandpur in the hills. Previously, there was six districts only. According to 1981 census, there are 28 sub-division. Under the eight districts, during the year 1983-84,

there are six autonomous Hills district councils, 32 towns and 165 Gram Panchayats.

### DEMOGRAPHY

The state of Manipur has a population of 18,26,714 persons consisting 9,3,511 males and 8,95,203 females according to the 1991 census (provisional).

The sex ratio of the state is 961 females per 1000 males. Manipur is among the few state of India whose sex ratio in the past censuses was in favour of females. That is, the number of females was more than the number of males. The sex ratio of Manipur was highest in 1931, and since then it has declined gradually. Till 1961, the number of females was more than the number of males, but in 1971, 1981 and 1991 the number of females has declined considerably. In the absence of industries and rail heads which would have otherwise encourage heavy migration or influx of people mostly males from outside, the increase in male population may be attributed to the Drama of births and deaths.

In the eight districts of Manipur, the sex ratios do not show considerable variation. The number of males in each of the eight districts is more than the number of females. Ukhrul District records the lowest sex ratio with 878 per 1000 males (Table 1).

The area of Manipur is predominantly hilly. The total area of the state is 22,327 sq. km. Out of this about 20,720 km

comprise the hilly region. We may now imagine how there has been concentration of the state population in districts regions. The state has been divided into eight districts - Imphal, Thoubal, Bishnupur, Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong, Churachandpur and Chandel. The first three districts comprises the plain valley of Manipur while the last five districts are entirely hilly areas. The bulk of the population is found in the valley districts. The least populous district is Chandel with 70,734 persons (Table 1).

There is a uniform trend of increase in the density of population for both the state and its districts from 1981 to 1991. An important feature is that the average density of population in the valley comprising three districts viz. Imphal, Thoubal and Bishnupur districts is above 16 times the average density in the five hills districts viz. Senapati, Ukhrul, Chandel, Churachandpur and Tamenglong. It will be seen that Imphal district having the only city above one lakh population is having the highest density of population with 576 per sq. km. followed by the other two districts namely Thoubal and Bishnupur districts with a density of 565 and 373 per sq. km. Chandel is the most thinly populated district in 1991 census. In the three valley districts the density is above the all India average of 1981 census whereas in the five hills districts they are much below the all India average of 1981 census (Table 1).

The decennial growth rate of population of the state shows a decline during the decades. The growth rate of population in 1981-91 is 28.56 percent as against 32.46 percent in 1971-81. Similar trend prevails in the districts also except in Tamenglong where growth rate increased from 35.31 percent in 1971-81 to 37.38 percent in 1981-91 (Table 2).

At the 1991 census, there is only one city with a population above 100,000 persons and it refers to Imphal Municipality. For the first time at the 1991 census, the concept of Urban agglomeration has been adopted with reference to Imphal city by agglomeration of contiguous Urban areas and their population. The total population of Imphal Urban Agglomeration is 200,615 while that of Imphal Municipality is 196,268 comprising 97.83 per cent of the total population of Imphal Urban Agglomeration. In both the areas the number of males is more than the number of females showing a sex ratio of 949 females per 1000 males.

Out of the total population of 200,615 persons of Imphal Urban agglomeration 143,946 persons 71.75 percent are returned as literates. The literate population does not include persons in the age-group 0-6 years who are treated as illiterates in the 1991 census. In the case of Imphal Municipality the percentage of literacy is 71.82 which is slightly higher than that of Imphal Urban agglomeration.

According to 1981 census report, in Imphal (Municipality area 34.78 sq. kms. in 1972) town areas, the density of population is above 5,300 persons per sq. km. The population of Urban area has shown a marked increase from 8.7 per cent (1961) and 13.3 per cent (1971) to 26.44 per cent (1981). Imphal Municipality was the only town in 1961. As a matter of fact, Urbanization in the state is a recent programme (Table 3).

It may be worthwhile to examine the growth of literacy in Manipur from 1941 onwards. Because the year 1941 has special significance in that Manipur was under the British then. On Sunday the 10th May, 1942 Manipur was bombarded by the Japanese and became an area of World War II. The devastation of the war lasted till the end of 1944 or the beginning of 1945 had its repercussion upon the growth of literacy in Manipur passes through three different phases. Upto 1941 it was a peaceful period of British rule. The second phase from 1941 to 1951 was a period of war, destruction, independence and reconstruction. Period from 1951 to 1991 is the third phase on the post-independence era of self rule.

In 1941, the total population of Manipur was 512,069 persons. The total literate population was 24,905 persons only consisting of 23,242 males and 1,663 females. Thus, the proportion of literates to total population was 4.86 per cent in 1941. The proportion of female literates to total female

population was miserably poor with 0.63% only. After one decade, that is in 1951, the total literate population was 65,895 persons and their proportion to the total population was 11.41%. As in 1941 census, the female proportion is lagging far behind.

In 1961 census we find a different picture. The literacy rate rose to 30.42% with 237,276 person out of the total population of 780,037 being literate. In absolute numbers, the total no. of male literates is 174,556 and the total of female literates is 62,620 compared with the males, the females have not made much headway in the field of literacy in 1961 although there is considerable improvement over that of 1951. The overall picture of literacy from 11.41% in 1951 to 60.96 in 1991 is a good achievement. According to the census 1991 (provisional) the total literacy rate of the state is 60.96 per cent out of which males literacy rate is 72.98 per cent and the female literacy is 48.64 per cent (Table 4,5).

From the population figure of table 6, two features emerge prominent (i) between the different tribes, the Thadou are the most populous, and (ii) between the three major divisions of the tribes, the population of the Naga group of tribes is more than that of the Kuki group of tribes. Yet another prominent features which draws our attention is that the population of the much known tribe, the Purum is not available. One of the explanations is that they have merged their identity with the Chothe.

TABLE 1

Distribution of population, Sex-Ratio, Growth Rate and Density of population by District

State/District	Population 1991	Sex-Ratio female per 1000 sq. kms	Density of population per sq. kms	Decennial growth rate of population					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Persons	Males	Females	1981	1991	1982	1991	1981	1991
Manipur	18,26,714	9,30,511	8,95,203	971	961	64	82	32.46	28.56
Senapati	2,06,933	1,05,047	1,01,886	928	970	47	63	49.66	35.17
Tamenglong	85,572	44,127	41,445	975	939	14	20	35.31	37.38
Churachandpur	1,76,043	90,565	85,475	929	944	29	39	33.93	30.89
Chandel	70,734	36,900	33,834	935	917	17	21	45.76	25.32
Thoubal	2,90,393	1,46,913	1,43,480	994	977	453	565	27.49	24.81
Bishnupur	1,79,903	90,415	89,488	992	990	286	363	30.31	26.91
Imphal	7,07,184	3,58,981	3,48,203	990	970	454	576	29.06	26.91
Ukhrul	1,09,951	58,563	51,389	917	878	18	24	33.29	32.56

Source - 1991 Census (Provisional figures).

**TABLE 2**

**Decadal variation in Population since 1901**

State/District	Percentage Decadal Variation in Population									
	1901-1911	1911-1921	1921-1931	1931-1941	1941-1951	1951-1961	1961-1971	1971-1981	1981-1991	
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Manipur	21-71	10-92	16-04	14-92	12-80	35-04	37-53	32-46	28-56	
Senapati	-	-	-	-	-	51-89	44-50	49-66	35-17	
Tamenglong	-	-	-	-	-	12-38	22-21	35-31	37-35	
Churachandpur	-	-	-	-	-	49-01	51-45	33-93	30-39	
Chandel	-	-	-	-	-	15-09	39-90	45-76	25-32	
Thoubal	-	-	-	-	-	35-96	34-72	27-49	24-81	
Bishnupur	-	-	-	-	-	37-78	37-69	30-31	26-91	
Imphal	-	-	-	-	-	36-28	37-27	29-06	26-91	
Ukhrul	-	-	-	-	-	17-99	28-07	33-29	32-56	

Source 1991 Census (Provisional Figures)

**TABLE 3**

**Statement showing cities with a population of 100,000 and above**

Sl.No.	Name of City/Urban Agglomeration	Provisional Population, 1991		Sex Ratio	Total Literates*			
		Persons	Females		Persons	Females		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.	Imphal Urban Agglomeration	200,615	102,950	97,665	949	143,946	83,067	60,879
2.	Imphal Municipality	196,268	100,710	95,558	949	140,956	81,323	59,633

\* Literates exclude children in the age group 0-6 who are treated as illiterates in the 1991 census.

Source : 1991 Census (Provisional Figures)

**TABLE 4**

**Literacy rates 1961-1991 Manipur**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Persons</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
1961	36.04	53.49	18.87
1971	38.47	53.70	22.87
1981	49.61 (47.45)	64.12 (61.05)	34.61 (33.39)
1991	60.96	72.98	48.64

Source : 1991 Census.

TABLE 5

LITERACY

State/Districts	Total Population, 1991		Literate Population, 1991 *			
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Manipur	18,26,714	931,511	895,203	895,223	542,513	352,710
Senapati	2,06,933	105,047	101,886	57,605	37,007	20,598
Tamenglong	85,572	44,127	41,445	37,511	22,092	15,419
Churachandpur	1,76,043	90,565	85,478	87,093	50,013	37,080
Chandel	70,734	36,900	33,834	26,495	16,688	9,087
Thoubal	2,90,393	146,913	143,480	126,794	80,512	46,282
Bishnupur	1,79,903	90,415	89,488	82,874	51,180	31,694
Imphal	7,07,184	358,981	348,203	421,597	250,573	171,024
Ukhrul	1,09,952	58,563	51,389	55,254	34,448	20,806

\* Literates exclude children in the age group 0-6 who are treated as illiterates in the 1991 census.  
Source - 1991 Census (Provisional Figures).

**TABLE 6****Population distribution of tribes in Manipur, 1981**

<b>Tribes</b>	<b>Projected Population for 1981</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Aimol	1100	0.3
Anal	8770	2.0
Angami	82	0.01
Chiru	3664	0.8
Chothe	2507	0.6
Gangte	8298	1.9
Hmar	30,672	7.0
Kabui	52,966	12.1
Kachanaga	17,138	3.9
Koirao	2,132	0.5
Koireng	603	0.1
Kom	8618	2.0
Lamgang	3450	0.8
Lushai	9845	2.2
Maram	5972	1.4
Maring	12,927	2.9
Mao	43,917	10.0

Table 6 (Contd.)

1	2	3
Monsang	1224	0.3
Moyon	1989	0.5
Paite	32,570	7.4
Puram	N.A.	-
Ralte	203	0.04
Sema	5	0.001
Simte	5496	1.3
Salhte	5	0.001
Tangkhul	76,115	17.4
Thadou	78,883	18.0
Vaiphei	16,245	3.7
Zou	13,236	3.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43,8,632</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source : Tribes in Manipur at a Glance, 1984.

## II

### PEOPLE

Manipur is ethnically heterogenous. The people inhabiting Manipur can be divided into two broad categories - the tribal communities and the non-tribal communities. In terms of distinct ethnic identity the people in Manipur can be broadly classified into four distinct groups:

- (i) the Meitei, including the Loi (scheduled castes),
- (ii) the Bishnupriya,
- (iii) the Pangam (Manipuri Muslims), and
- (iv) the hill tribes.

The Meitei are the main inhabitants of the Imphal valley. The Imphal valley and the Meitei are usually taken as synonymous. The Loi scheduled caste, are scattered throughout the valley, interspersed with the Meitei. The Bishnupriya are concentrated in some villages around Bishnupur town. The Manipuri Muslims, locally referred to as the Pangan, are to be found chiefly on the fertile tracts of land between the Imphal river and the Iiril river. The tribes inhabiting Manipur are concentrated in the hills, with some very few tribal pockets in the valley.

The tribes inhabiting Manipur can be divided into two broad groups - the tribes belonging to the Naga group, and the tribes belonging to the non-Naga group. This lay classification has

been the source of many attempts to classify the tribes of Manipur.

Officially the tribes of Manipur have been classified into three groups -

- (i) The Naga group of tribes,
- (ii) The Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes, and
- (iii) The intermediary category of tribes, i.e., which strictly speaking, undecidedly trace linkage of identity with both the major groups.

According to official recognition, the total number of tribes and their names in each of the groups is as follows -

(i) Naga group of tribes

Kabui, (Rongmei & Puimei), Kacha Naga (Liangmei and Zemei) collectively known as Zeliangrong, Mao, Maram, Tangkhul & Maring (six tribes).

(ii) Chin-Kuki-Mizo groups of tribes

Gangte, Hmar, Lushai (Mizo), Paite, Simte, Thadou (Kuki), Vaiphei & Zou (eight tribes).

(iii) Intermediary group of tribes

Aimol, Chiru, Koirang, Kom (collectively called Komrem), Anal, Chothe, Lamkang, Koirao/Thangal, Purum, Mongsang & Moyon (eleven tribes).

The present administrative division of Manipur into districts has in a way amounted to each district being the area of concentration of a particular major tribe. The Tangkhul Naga occupy the north-eastern hill areas of Manipur, and thus concentrate in Ukhul district. The Mao Naga are concentrated in north Manipur, and thus are the main inhabitants of the Senapati district. The Zeliangrong are the main inhabitants of the Tamenglong district, the Kuki of the Churachandpur district and the Maring and Anal of the Chandel district.

A more precise list of the distribution of the tribes and the non-tribes between the different districts is as follows -

1. Senapati
1. Mao (Major group)
2. Maram (Major group)
3. Thadou Kuki (Major group)
4. Kabui (Minor group)
5. Tangkhul (Minor group)
6. Maring (Minor group)
7. Chiru (Minor group)
8. Kom (Minor group)
9. Koirang (Minor group)
10. Vaiphei (Minor group)
11. Kacha Naga (Minor group)
12. Sema (Minor group)
13. Kairao (Minor group)

**2. Tamenglong**

1. Kabui (Major group)
2. Thadou Kuki (Minor group)
3. Gangte (Minor group)

**3. Churachandpur**

1. Hmar (Major group)
2. Paite (Major group)
3. Thadou Kuki (Major group)
4. Anal (Minor group)
5. Chothe (Minor group)
6. Kabui (Minor group)
7. Kom (Minor group)
8. Vaiphei (Minor group)
9. Zou (Minor group)
10. Mizo (Minor group)
11. Gangte (Minor group)
12. Simte (Minor group)
13. Ralte (Minor group)
14. Salte (Minor group)

**4. Chandel**

1. Anal (Major group)
2. Maring (Major group)
3. Thadou Kuki (Major group)
4. Lamkang (Minor group)
5. Zou (Minor group)
6. Gangte (Minor group)
7. Mayon (Minor group)

- |              |                            |
|--------------|----------------------------|
|              | 8. Monsang (Minor group)   |
|              | 9. Aimol (Minor group)     |
|              | 10. Chothe (Minor group)   |
|              | 11. Purum (Minor group)    |
|              | 12. Mizo (Minor group)     |
|              | 13. Tangkhul (Minor group) |
|              | 14. Kom (Minor group)      |
| 5. Ukhrul    | 1. Tangkhul (Major group)  |
|              | 2. Kuki (Minor group)      |
| 6. Thoubal   | 1. Meitei (Major group)    |
|              | 2. Kabui (Minor group)     |
|              | 3. Chiru (Minor group)     |
|              | 4. Maring (Minor group)    |
| 7. Bishnupur | 1. Meitei (Major group)    |
|              | 2. Kabui (Minor group)     |
|              | 3. Kuki (Minor group)      |
| 8. Imphal    | 1. Meitei (Major group)    |
|              | 2. Kabui (Minor group)     |
|              | 3. Tangkhul (Minor group)  |
|              | 4. Kuki (Minor group)      |
|              | 5. Mao (Minor group)       |

### III

#### HISTORY

The history of Manipur, like the population structure of Manipur, will require reference to two distinct facts of history - the history of the Imphal valley, the land of the Meitei, and the history of the hills, the land of the tribal inhabitants of Manipur.

In the name of history of Manipur by now much is available in print. A little close look at this literature will easily reveal that much of it relates to the history of the people inhabiting the Imphal valley, the Meitei. Compared to this not much is available about the history of the people inhabiting the hills, viz., the tribal section of population of Manipur.

It may not be difficult to find the reason for comparatively fragmentary reference to the history of the people of the hills of Manipur. We may identify two reasons - firstly, the people inhabiting the hills of Manipur, viz., the Naga and Kuki group of tribes, are rather very recent arrivals to the hills, hardly two centuries old. Secondly, the peoples inhabiting the hills have been pre-literate, and one with no organized government/administration which could leave any form of historical evidence.

The inhabitants of Manipur, as we know, are a combination of two distinct category of people, the tribal and the non-tribal

people. The land of Manipur, as we have described earlier, is also divided into two distinct topographical zones, the Imphal valley and the surrounding hills. The tribes who are concentrated in the hills are recent arrivals, nearly two hundred years ago. Compared to this, the Meitei, the inhabitants of the Imphal valley are very old inhabitants there.

**A. The history of the Imphal valley, the land of the Meitei**

An attempt has been made to present a brief reference to the history of the Meitei. This will help to present the history of the tribes in the proper perspective. The history of any community of people can be put into two broad categories - the 'myth' of origin, and the history of origin, travel, and administration etc. History again can be sub-categorized into ancient history, mediaval history, and recent history. In the present case we can divide the periods of history as the pre-British period, the British period, and the post-British period.

We will make a brief reference of the history of Manipur as presented in the available literature. Necessary care will be taken to clearly bring out the history of the Meitei, distinct from that of the hill people, the tribal section of population of Manipur.

Manipur is an area of composite races formed out of several strains. Mongoloid races from Burma seem to have mixed with the Indo-Aryan strains from India. In fact, Manipur is the place

where different waves of races and cultures met through the ages, which ultimately mingled together. The Meitei are a separate group of people having their own identity. The name Meitei has been derived from the word - "me" - man, and "tei" - separate. The Meitei speak Manipuri language which is of the Kuki-Chin group under Assam-Burma Branch of the Tibeto-Burman family.

Though original inhabitants of Manipur, the Imphal valley, there are colonies of Meitei in Burma, and in the Neighbouring districts of Assam (Cachar), Tripura and even Bangaldesh. These were as results of raids and wars which involved the Meitei, and the subsequent settlements of those who had to flee their homeland, the Imphal valley.

The pre-history of Manipur is shrouded in mysteries and nothing could be said definitely. There are a number of mythos associated with the origin etc. of Manipur and its people. Some of the prominent may be briefly mentioned.

According to one myth, Manipur is the creation of Lord Shiva. It is said that when Manipur was under water, nine Gods and seven Goddesses were throwing hillocks into the water to create land. Lord Shiva with his consort Parvati landed on one of the hills and drained out the water by providing an outlet with his trident.

Associating Shiva and Parvati with the origin of Manipur, but with a different myth, it is said that the first settlement

of Imphal was started by two lovers, Nongpok-Ningthou and Panthoibi. They were considered as the incarnation of Shiva and Parvati.

A myth of a different order, relates the origin of Manipur with Brahminical Puran. It is said that the Meitei are the descendents of Babrubahan, son of Arjun, the third Pandava of Mahabharata. It is said that Manipur was named by Babrubahan taking the meaning from "Jewel" (Mani) when he came into possession from the Land of Raja Nag or Serpent King.

According to one of the early British administrator writers, "Manipur are the descendents of a Tartar colony, which probably emigrated from the north-west border of China during the Sanguinary conflicts for supremacy which took place between the different members of the Chinese and Tartar dynasties" (Pemberton, 1966, 37).

Manipur, the land of "Jewels", was known to its neighbours by different names. So the Shan in neighbouring Burma, it was called as the Khasi, the mainland Burmese referred to it as Katha, for the Ahom it was Maketi, for the Cachari it is Mogli. To the Meitei themselves, Manipur is known as Meitei Leipak and Kang Leipak.

According to the local traditions, the valley was originally occupied by several tribes, the principal of which were the

Koomal, the Loowang, the Moirang, and the Meitei. Between these four, the Koomal are said to have been the most powerful, followed by the Moirang. Ultimately however, the Meitei subdued them all and formed them into a single people with a strong administration. Tradition says that the Moirang came from the south, the country of the Kuki and Chin, the Koomal from the east, where the Tangkhul are now found, and the Meitei and Loowang from the hills to the north-east (Allen, 19, 11-12).

The political history of Manipur can be traced back to the beginning of this century. History prior to that, it is said, is "shrouded in mystery". Pakhamba is known to be the first ruler of Manipur. he reigned from 33 A.D. to 154 A.D., i.e., he ruled for nearly 121 years, so it is said. (cf. Tombi Singh, 1975, 51) with him began the Nimthouja dynasty which ruled through 75 kings till the accession of the princely States to the Indian Union, after independence. Reliable evidence of the early rulers of Manipur is found records in different forms, like the Cheitharol Kumbaba, is the court chronicle, it sets out briefly in a solemn diction the reign of kings from 33 A.D. Besides these written records, stone images, stone tablets, and inscriptions are also available. These form the basis for reconstructing a history of the Meitei, the inhabitants of the valley. Nothing of this sort has been found about the people inhabiting the hills. These early records of the Meitei however do help to some extent in drawing inference relating to the early history of the people

inhabiting the hills. In many ways the people now inhabiting the valley, the Meitei, the ruling community, had interaction with those inhabiting the surrounding hills.

It is generally believed that the "Manipuri civilization" started taking shape on the Koubru Peak, which lies north-west of Imphal valley. This was the time when the entire Manipur valley was a vast expanse of water. In course of time when the water started receding, and fertile land coming up, the people started spreading to settle in the valley. There are some legends which describe how the water of the valley was "drained out" by the Gods.

Scholars attending to recounting the history of Manipur, and specially the people in the valley, seem to have widely differed in their opinion. It is rather interesting to note these. These accounts, though in variance to each other, provide much insight to the history of the people inhabiting the hills.

The Meitei, as mentioned earlier, constitute the main section of the people inhabiting the valley. The Meitei are divided into seven clans (salais) : Ninthouja, Angom, Khuman, Moirang, Luwang, Chemlei, and Khaba-Nganba. Each of these seven clans had their respective territory of concentration in the valley. "Their relation, struggle for supremacy and subsequent fusion in a common race called the Meitei and their extension of arms to the adjoining provinces of Burma, Tripura, Cachar and Naga hills form the history of Manipur".

Manipur was lying on the trade route of the ancient travellers between China and Europe, carrying silk from China to be exchanged into gold from Europe, with Afghanistan as the centre for the exchange. Evidence of such a trade route have been the source of many speculations and explanations relating to the early history of the people inhabiting the valley. Tartar, Aryan, and Mongolian (Chinese) elements are identified. There are a number of explanations which have been offered with no unanimity, except the fact that "the pure Meitei represent a mixture of many races".

Pemberton, writing the Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India (1835) contended that "we may safely conclude them (Meiteis) to the descendants from a Tartar colony from China". According to a Manipuri (Meitei) scholar (Kirti Singh) "anthropologists like Denikar do not give any adequate proof as to the settlement of Tartar group in Manipur. No one can prove any directed or inner connection between the Meitheis and the Tartars" (Kirti Singh, op.cit., 14).

This can be taken as the beginning of the dialogue (controversy) between scholars on the question of the origin and character of the racial history of the people inhabiting the valley and the hills. Nearly two decades after the Report by Pemberton, McCulloch came out with his "Account of the valley of Manipur and the Hills Tribes" (1852) has mentioned that

"tradition brings the Moirang tribe from the south - the direction of Kukies, the Koomal from the east - the direction of Murrings, and the Meitei and the Loowang from the north-west - the direction of the Koupooes.

Among the Meitei tradition, 'Pakhangba' is considered as the first king of the seven salais. He is believed to be the tail of God and the head of mankind. That is why, they called him "Epuhou" or the first grandfather. Epuhou Pakhangba is still being worshipped at a sacred place known as "Kangla Alter". Meitei also believe that this kingdom was in the form of a human being. (According to Meitei's philosophy a human anatomy is related with her geography).

After the reign of Epuhou Pakhangba (the first mythological king of Meitei), a series of Godly kings of seven salais moulded and ruled this kingdom. Khagemba (1597-1652) was the last king of the Meitei who preserved the old Meitei culture and used to defy the expansion of Hindu religion in the Meitei society. In 1729, king Pamheiba and his Hindu Guru Santidas collected all the sacred puyas of Meitei and burnt it. He also forcibly gave Hinduism to his subjects and later on, it became a way of life of Meitei people and started to worship different Hindu Gods and Goddesses along with their original Gods and Goddesses. Pamheiba assumed a name, better called as Garib Niwas and also brought

the Aryan Hindu Brahmins as the missionaries of Hinduism from Bengal through Cachar, a Bengali predominant area.

The present state "Royal Chronicles" called as "Cheitharol-kumpaba", recorded some events like war, accession, death of Kings etc. But, these chronicles used to miss many important kings and queens of the Meitei and they (chronicles) used to mix the idea of history with mythodogy. That is why, the story of Pakhangba (33A) itself is very controversial and it contains full of mystery.

After the death of Pamheiba, the power of Manipur greatly declined between 1755 A.D. to 1826 A.D. with a series of Burmese invasions and internal dissensions. This is commonly known as the "Dark Period" in the history of Manipur.

King Chingthangkhomba (Bhyagachandra alias Jai Singh, 1755) a grandson of Pamheiba (alias Garib Niwas) ascended the throne to reign for five years under an agreement with his elder brother Gourashyam. During Jai Singh reign, the nourishment of Hinduism reached its Zeith. He was a great devotee of Lord Krishna and constructed a big temple of Govindaji at Imphal. Jai Singh was attacked by Khillei-Nungnang-Telheiba, King of Moirang and Khellei (elder brother of Jai Singh's mother) was supported by Burmese army. So he fled to Tripura under the mercy of king Rajeshor Rao. This was the first devastation in the history of Manipur and it seems to coincide with the first great invasion of

Manipur by a Burmese (Kabo) army Alompra (took place in 1755) and this was commonly known as primary devastation.

Again, in 1758 Alompra in person attacked Manipur and it led to the first time for external aid and appeared afterwards for the British protection.

Jai Singh sent an agent to Chittagong and a treaty was concluded with Mr. Hentry Verelst, on behalf of British Government in the year 1762. This was the first treaty between Manipur (meitei) and the British. Under the treaty of 1762, British sent troops to Manipur. In 1764, Gourashyam confirmed the treaty with the British and promised to pay the charges for military assistance which were unable to pay during the period of Jai Singh. Jai Singh and Gourashyam with the British assistance succeeded in devastation of Burmese army from Manipur. After a long gap, the Burmese again devastated Manipur popularly known as "severe seven years devastation" for seven years from 1819 to 1825. At the time, Gambheer Singh (1823 to Jan 1834), the youngest son of Jai Singh, obtained British help and expelled the Burmese army even from Kabow valley and the first Burmese war ended with British victory. Thus, the treaty of Yandabo was signed on Feb 24, 1826 and Gambheer Singh was recognised as the Raja of Manipur till he expired on January 1834, leaving a minor son the Raja Kirti Singh, who was finally acknowledged by the

British Government. Thus, the first Political Agent Captain Gordon (1835) was appointed in Manipur. The successors of Gambheer Singh became weaker and disintegrated and finally led to "Anglo-Manipur War" of 1891.

After the glorious "Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891, Manipur was totally under the cover of British rules through the puppet kings of Manipur. Thus, the first appointed king was Sir Churachand Singh, according to the Gazette of India, No. 1700 e, dated August 21, 1891. A number of crisis arose during the reign of Sir Churachand (1891-1941) and Maharajah Bodhachandra (1941-1955) specially the formation of political parties and its demands for political right and freedom. During this period revivalist movement among the Manipuri (Meitei) was also started.

Only in 1939, while the world witnessed the second world war, Manipur witnessed the uprising of its women and all political and religious activities were also stopped for a short period. The uprising of Meitei women is known as "Nupi-Lal".

After world war II, in the year 1947, India achieved independence and Sardar Patel, the Home Minister, tried to merge this state in the category of part C states to be governed by a chief commissioner in view of their strategic position, territorial integrity. It was finally controlled by the Central Government at New Delhi and the merger agreement was signed by the appointed Maharajah Bodhachandra at Shillong in September 21,

1949 and the state was taken over by Government of India on October 15, 1959. Manipur achieved a full fledged Indian state on 21st Jan 1972.

#### IV

Focusing our attention to the history and origin of the tribes inhabiting the hills of Manipur, it will be helpful to get acquainted with some of the explanations of history and origin. For the sake of clarity and brevity, the different versions of explanations can be listed, each with their respective brief explanations. Some of the available explanations recounting the history of the people inhabiting Manipur are :

1. According to McCulloch: Tradition brings the Moirang tribe from the south - the direction of the Kukies, the Koomal from the east - the direction of the Murrings, and the Meithei and the Loowang from the north-west, the direction of the Koupooes. Serious doubt is expressed about this theory, both on historical as well as anthropological basis (McCulloch, 1852).

2. Countering this explanation James Johnstone is of the opinion that "The Manipuris are themselves a fine stalwart race descended from the Indo-Chinese stock with some admixture of Aryan blood, derived from the successive waves of Aryan invaders that have passed through the Valley in Pre-historic times ....." (Johnstone, 1896). According to Kirti Singh, this explanation needs to be taken with due caution as "we can scarcely connect

the people of Manipur with other other known group of Indo-China in the absence of linguistic and ethnic data."

3. According to Pemberton "we can safely conclude them (Meitheis) to be the descendants from a Tartar colony from China". (Pemberton, 1835). Kirti Singh in this connection cites Denikar who does not find adequate proof of Tartar colony in Manipur. According to him no one can prove any direct or inner connection between the Meitheis and the Tartars.

4. Hodson traces "the Meithei to the Tai branch of the Moi tribe". According to him "In the Moitay of Manipur we have the combined appellations of the Siamese Tai and the Kochin-Chinese "Moy". Kirti Singh, in this connection is of the opinion that "the Manipurian tribe called Cassaihas by the Bengalis, belong to the Moi section of the great tribe called Tai by themselves and Shanven Syan by the Burmese, the Sectional name being also foreign and equivalent to the native".

5. on basis of linguistic evidences, there is no evidence to prove the migration of the Moi tribe to Manipur. We need to remind ourselves in this connection that "Manipur had cultural contacts with the Shans or Pongs of the great Tai family of Indo-China, Kabaw Valley was pre-eminently a land of the Pong and Kabaw (Shan tribes). "The Manipuri scholars however would like to trace an Aryan descent, and they would like to prove that "Manipur was settled by the Aryan in the early times". They

claim that Poiraiton who came to Manipur in 33 A.D. was an Aryan priest. Kirti Singh notes that "historically it is recognized that the Aryans were penetrating and establishing themselves in Manipur in the 4th or 8th century A.D. Their case as tillers of the soil, propounder of Hindu culture and philosophy from time to time." some Manipuri scholars-historians like Atombapu Sharma who had written the Rig Veda in Meitei language, were of the view that "the Brahmans had a great hold on the Meitheis, Hindu jurisprudence had its voice in Manipuri society. They discovered genealogies of the Meithei people from Naryana. The existence of patriarchal and primogeniture system among the Meitheis confirmed this view. We also see the Varna system as providing a clear and definite course which the people followed through life's journey."

6. Grierson and Suniti Kumar Chatterji hold the view that "the Meitheis are the Kuki-Chin section of the Tibeto-Burman stock. They appear to have scattered over the hill areas from Lushai hills and Chittagong. They have their kinsmen in Burma. Situated between India and Burma and forming an intermediate Tibeto-Chinese group between the Tibeto-Burman people of Assam and North Bengal on the one hand and the Burma on the other, the people of Manipur were not crossways: but they elected to fall in line with the Hindu people of India". But in recent times this view has been challenged by some scholars who hold that "there is gulf of difference between the Meithei people and the Kuki-Chin

group. The institution of marriage of the Meithei people is very different from the people of the Himalayan region. The similarity of language is not a sufficient test of race".

Concluding these diverse views, Kirti Singh concludes that "The mass of people in Manipur is a composite one to which the Dravidians, the Mongolians, Aryans, Pongs, Chinese, Siamese, etc., were contributory". He quotes Bowers, who observes that "racially, the Manipuri is a deeply mixed ethnic group. West was mixed with East, and North with South. Chinese have blended with Aryans, Mongolians with Dravidians. This mixture creates the "pure" Manipuri, called Meithei, who live in the valley and number 400,000 of the total population of 600,000. The balance constitutes the racially purer but artificially inferior hill tribe who live in the mountains and who are greatly looked down upon by the highly civilized Meitheis (Bowers, 1953).

#### B. The history of the hills, the land of the tribal inhabitants of Manipur

The way we find some "detailed" account of the history of the Meitei people, not much is found about the hill dwelling tribal communities. The reason is more than obvious. Historical accounts are found when history is written. The hill dwelling people, compared to the valley dwelling Meitei were comparatively less advanced in technology and script. It is till about a

hundred years ago that the language in the hills were without any script, and hence no written record.

As we know, the tribal communities inhabiting Manipur are classified today into three broad categories - (i) the Naga group of tribes; (ii) the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of tribes; and (iii) the intermediary group of tribes. This is the official classification as at the time of the 1981 census. It will be interesting to note that in a writing of 1976 it is mentioned that "the tribal population of the present Manipur state is broadly divided into two ethnic groups - the Nagas and the Kukis". (Mukherjee, 1966). Elaborating on the distribution of these tribes it is mentioned that "the present day Naga area lies north of the Koku valley road via. Aimal and where it joins the old Cachar road, to the south of which inhabit the Kukis. (Hudson, 1911). There are about seven recognized Naga tribes of which the Kabuis form a large group and reside in the west of Manipur (Tamenglong). The original name of the Kabui was Mpui, which the British administration distorted as Kabui. There are three divisions among Kabui - the Zemi, the Liangmei and the Rongmei - who have many similarities in their customs, traditions and ethnic characteristics. The Zemi are concentrated in the eastern portion of the North Cachar Hills at Asalu, Laison, Thrungi, Jaaisak, Haajilo, Baladhan and Handrum. The Liangmei are mainly spread over the south-western parts of Nagaland, and the Rongmei form the majority of the Kabui population in the Tamenglong sub-

division of Manipur. In the hill areas there are reports of traditional rivalries and conflicts between the Kuki and Naga from Burma, the Mizo Hills and the Naga hills, specially in the last century. The various tribes have been living in Manipur for generations. The Naga as a whole are more static in habitation whereas the Kuki group were more migratory and their onward movements were checked by the Nagas". (Mukherjee, op.cit.).

The concern in focus at present is to trace/outline the history of the tribes. The available reference have been quoted, more correctly, listed with annotation. This will be followed with a brief discussion on the methodological relevance of these references, specially with reference to the understanding the history of the tribes inhabiting Manipur.

Among the Naga group of tribes, the Kabui form a prominent group, whereas among the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group, the Hmar form a very prominent group. Considerable account of history of these two tribes is available. We will confine to a mention of these two only.

Hmar history: The account presented here is, for the most part based on the accounts given by Pudaite. References from elsewhere will be mentioned accordingly. The ancient home of the Hmar people is called Sinlung. "There are traditional songs, innumerable poems and legends about Singlung civilization handed over from generation to generation". The exact location of

Singlung is a moot question. A Hmar Historian, Hranglient Songate, understands it to be the present Tailing or Silung in southwest China. Speculation has also been made that this Sinlung might have been Sining in Central China. Another possible theory advocates Sinlung to be a derivative of Chin dynasty of 221-207 B.C., when the people lived in a clustered city state community. Advocates equate Sin with Chin and Lung (rock) with dynasty, poetical expression. Whatever the answer might be, the above poem brings out two significant facts. First, they were pushed out by a stronger power or people. Second, that the invading army were "innumerable" and the same were the "innumerable" the people when they jumped out of their place of origin. Dr. Edward Thomas Williams in his book, China Yesterday and Today, mentions the expansion under the Chow dynasty. Following the Chow dynasty came the Chin dynasty. The Chin dynasty "violated all the rules of courteous warfare, triumphed and took over the territory and symbols or rule of the Chow dynasty." The Chin dynasty absorbed many of the tribes that were already in the land. Those who refused to be absorbed were pushed out and "the pressure which forced these tribes to the southwestern coast and drove the Mizo to the mountains came from the northwest. The successive waves of Chinese immigrants drove the earlier colonies to the south. The earlier colonists, such as the Shans, pushed the Mizo and other tribes still further south.

A similar story of tribal movement is told of Cambodia, on the eastern side of the Indo-China Peninsula. Colquhoun mentions six other tribes that are found there, which before the 200 B.C. had been located in the province of Kuongtong and Kunagsi, and were forced out of China in two migrations.

A.W. Graham in his "Handbook of Siam" says, "It is now the very generally accepted theory that, during the last few thousand years, Siam and in fact the whole of further India, has been subjected to periodical flooding of successive waves of humanity, set moving by natural or social upheavals of population for to the north or Central Asia".

According to Grover Clark - "The most recent of these waves began to rise roughly three thousand years ago and these waves moved along the same board channels" from the north south-ward into the Mediterranean Basin, into Indian and into China. One often wonders if "could the Hmar have been moving along with one of these successive wave of humanity from Central Asia ?" Perhaps they were.

Pudaite feels that "whether or not we are able to trace the exact location of Sinlung, it appears historically evident that the Hmar originally came from Central China, following one of these mass migrations, especially those of the late pre-Christian and early Christian centuries. The Hmar left Sinlung because the waves of Chinese immigrants and political pressures drove them

away to the south. The exact time of departure from Sinlung and the original route they followed is not known, however, traces have been found in poems and legends that they came to the Himalayas. The great mountains made it impossible for them to continue their southward journey, so they turned eastward from there. Shortly after they turned eastward they met a tribe who were ahead of them. This tribe, known to them as Mishmi showed friendliness to them, and they settled among them for over a generation."

"After a generation or so with the Mishmi the Hmar moved on eastward in search of territory. They moved along the Irrawady river and entered a territory where they met the "Tai" or "Shan". After Sinlung, their place of origin, the next settled place for the Hmar was in the present Shan State. When the Hmar arrived there it was already peopled by the Shan, and according to Pudaite "the Shans must have come along with the tribes 'who refused to be pushed out' of Central Asia and migrated only sometime in the 8th century A.D." The entry of the Hmar into the Shan was met with strong opposition though finally they fought their way into it.

According to one account (Sir George Scott), these Tibeto-Burmans, viz., the Hmar, migrating from the eastern Tibet into Burma came from the Tien Shan, that range of mountains which divides Chinese from Turkestan into northern and southern

sections". These Tribesmen were located in the valley of Irawaddy, from which place they had driven out the Mon Khmer. Subsequently they themselves were forced to follow the Mon Khmer into Burma. As the Shan civilization advanced much farther than Sinlung; and the people showed greater intelligence. They know now to celebrate agricultural prosperity, learned better art of war, and made festival of their victory over the enemy. Furthermore, they learned the use of iron implements and moulding of pipes (out of brass). Many of their great festivals were connected with the Shan State civilization.

The generations of prosperity in Shan State was intercepted by a disastrous famine. The famine was so severe that the tribes started moving toward north and north-west in search of food. The movement was organized according to the clan. Each clan followed a particular route and entered into the hitherto unoccupied area of Indo-Burman frontiers. They built villages and called them by the clan's names. To this day many of the villages are in existence under the same name. Examples of these are Khawbung, Zote, Biete, Khelte, Dawngawn, Leiri, Lungtau and so forth, in both Mizoram as well as in the Chin Hills of Burma.

Travelling closely with them were the Lushai tribe on the south and the Kuki tribe on the north. There exists a close affinity between these tribes both in cultural and social background. At one time the entire tribal group was known as

Kuki tribe. They were constantly at war against each other in their claim for territorial possession.

During the westward movement the Hmar came into contact with the British Indian government. In a communication sent to Warren Hastings in 1777, i.e., nearly two hundred years ago, there was mention of some Kookie revolting against the British. The term Kuki was given by the Bengali to distinguish the barbaric tribesmen from the civilized settlers. Shakespear in his book on "The Lushai Kuki Clans" puts the Hmar under the "Old Kuki" and refers to them as the "Khawtlang" to differentiate them from the Lushai and those currently known as Kuki. According to Shakespear's account, the 'old Kuki' migrated from Burma and went as far as Chittagong Hill Tracts and retraced part of their migratory routes, after they reached the Bay of Bengal. However, in the return journey they left a large segment of their population in Chittagong Hills and Tiperah or Tripura State. Many of these were later known under different names by their neighboring tribes. One of the significant statements by Shakespear is that "all these old Kuki Clans are organized far more democratically than the Lushais and Thados". According to Pudaite, "the chief, though absolute in theory, never exercised that power or made full claim to the land. The British territorial expeditions left the people (the Hmar) without any strong leadership, and thus their land was divided according to the wish of the British Commander, as result of which today those

distinctly known as Hmar are found in Mizoram, in Cachar district of Assam, in Tripura, in Manipur, and in the northwestern part of Burma.

According to the Hmar, one thing that has long remained a mystery is the way in which their land was annexed to the British India Government and how the rulers divided this territory without any negotiation with the British agents. Studies have revealed, in part, how this was done. The annexation of Hmar Territory was based on two factors. First, it was the desire of the British to prevent the Burmese invasions of Assam by strengthening the power of the Manipur Raja that led to the secret annexation of the Hmar territory in the southwest of Manipur and Cachar. Burma was constant threat to Assam. This was around 1832. The second, in 1872, the British had to launch a punitive expedition against the 'marauding Lushai and Hmar tribe' who attacked Cachar district and killed employees of Tea gardens. This was in resentment against the 'nominal submission' of their land. The whole land was brought under control in 1872 and a new administration was set up in the south with Aizawl (then Aijal) as the headquarters. The new administration led to the definition of boundaries which divided the entire Hmar population to six segments. Consequently the Hmar found themselves divided under strange administrative arrangements. The Cachar district was annexed to the sylhet district, the Lushai hills became an excluded area of strict tribal administration, and Manipur became

a native state under British protection. There began an almost complete separation between the Hmars in Chittagong Hill Tract, Tripura, and Burma as the result of the enforcement of the divide-and-rule policy.

A few words about the Burmese attack. While the books on India give an account of Burmese attack as if the Manipur Raja had always to suffer, and to save him the British had to come to his rescue. In books on Burma, the story appears to be prominently different. Donnison in his account on "Burma" the story is something like the following:

"King Thalun's successors were ineffectual and stagnation and later disintegration had set in. In the mid-seventeenth century Chinese raids disturbed Burma. From the early eighteenth century the small mountain state of Manipur on the north-west began raiding Burmese territory and in 1749 the raiders only just failed to take Aca. By 1752, in Burma emerged a great military leader. His short reign offered eight years of incessant fighting. Alaungpaya (1752-60) devastated Manipur and then invaded the Shan States, most of which made their submission. During the cold season of 1758-59 he was in Manipur. He was an expansionist, his forces invaded Manipur and placed his nominee on the throne of Manipur. Towards the end of his reign he invaded Assam, but by now was showing signs of religious mania. By 1837 the map of Burma was virtually identical with

that of the present day, except only that the Chin Hills and the far north-east were not included, although much of Assam was.

By 1795, for the next twenty five years the British continued to experience frontier irritations, which spread from Arakan to Assam where a Burmese invasion drove refugees across the frontier into India, producing a situation similar to that on the boundaries of Arakan and Chittagong. From British territory these refugees plotted subversion and would invade Burmese territory. The Burmese, rightly or wrongly, suspected that the British encouraged these activities. In driving out rebel refugees the Burmese would violate Indian territory. It became more and more certain that war must ultimately come, for the Burmese were aggressive and high-handed, contemptuous of Indians, and had no conception at all of the fundamental strength of the British in India. In 1824 the British operation started and by the Treaty of Yandabo on 24 February 1826, the Burmese were made to cede Assam, Arakan, and Tennasserim and to undertake not to interfere in Manipur, Cachar, and Jaintia.

#### IV

Kuki and Naga form two of the main tribal groups in Manipur. The foregoing description tried to trace some history of the origin of the tribes now inhabiting Manipur. Between the history about the origin of the Naga and the Kuki groups of tribes, comparatively lesser material is available about the origin of

the Naga tribes and their migration to present abodes in Manipur.

One of the hypothesis is that the Naga must have come from the sea coast or at least seen some islands or the seas is strengthened by the life-style of the Naga and the ornaments being used till today in many Naga villages. It is considered very probable that the Nagas had first followed the southward movement and after reaching the coast or some islands, they turned northwest leaving their brothers somewhere near the coast or perhaps in some islands.

According to one account (Marshall), the Mongoloids distributed themselves from the upper reaches of Yellow river of China in three groups - one westward (Tibetans), the second southward (the early Indo-china tribe) and the third south-east (Chinese). According to this theory, the Naga and other tribals of north-east India followed the southward movements towards Indo-China. It has been seen that the ancestors of the Naga had lived at the east coast in remote past. This has been inferred from various evidences.

This theory is further supported by the fact that the last take-off in their migration was from Thangdut in Burma (previously called Hsawngsup and pronounced as Samsok in Tangkhul). The last migration from Samsok (Thangdut) in Burma to Makhel in Mao, Longpi and Hunphun in Ukhrul district is very clear and most recent and is supported by historical facts and

monuments. The Naga folk songs (Mayon-Monsang Naga) clearly indicates that they followed a big river in their migration. It is said that the river referred to in the folk songs are the Chindwin and Irrawady rivers. Most of the migration wave have followed the river courses, this is established beyond doubt now.

It is probable that having stayed in the Irrawady valley in the neolithic age, they moved up along the Chindwin river finally reaching Samsok (Thangdut) which lies on the west bank of Chindwin river. It is said that having stayed there at Samsok for some period they started again their migration to the hills. According to the stories, one of the reasons for leaving Samsok was that it was too warm to stay permanently and also there was mosquito menace. Next they settled in the Naga hills. Those who settled in Samsok valley transformed themselves into Burmese in their historical process of intermarriages, while those who settled themselves in the hills in course of time were known as the Naga.

It is probable that the first wave of migration, that which went northwestward from Samsok, went to the foot hills to Makhel as there was no habitable place in the valley because it was swampy. About the historic city of Samsok (Thangdut), Alexander Mackenzie writes: "The valley (Kubo valley) is divided into three principalities, viz. Sumjok, Kumbat, and Kule. The first and last are still governed by descendants of the original Shan chieftains, who were dependent upon Mongmaorong, but Kumbat

appears never to have regained its former prosperity, after its destruction by the united forces of Pong and Manipur".

Those who moved from Samsok, the greater group that proceeded north-westward had settled at Makhel, a historical place in Mao-Maram, North district of Manipur. It is from there that the various Naga tribes are said to have distributed themselves, to the various corners of what is now called Nagaland and Tamenglong area.

As to their origin, and dispersal, the various tribes of the Naga have now accepted that Makhel as the original places from where they dispersed themselves. There are many historical facts such as stone monoliths and sacred trees planted at Makhel when they were about to disperse themselves to different directions.

Makhel is taken as the second known distribution centre, Samsok being the first. At the time of dispersal, the eldest son lived at Makhel and the second son at Makhan village, a few miles away from Makhel. This is why intermarriage between the two villages was forbidden till 1950.

According to the story of the Tamenglong Naga, the Liangmei, the Zemei and the Rongmei, three brothers, went westward from Makhel and after a long journey, settled at Oklong, the first Liangmei village from where the two younger brothers in accordance with Naga tradition went out in search of habitable

lands, Zemei, the second brother went to the west while the youngest, the Rongmei, went to the south. The Zemei Naga pushed on towards the north till they met the Angami Naga.

Some of the legends support that the Angami, the Sema, the Chakesang, the Lotha, the Rengma, and a few other Naga tribes trace their origin from a flat stone in Makhel. Shimray finds difficulty about the Konyaks. They trace their origin to Longhang in upper Konyak and established a village at Longphang (Chinglong) where they discussed whether they should have Angship or not. Those who opposed Ang institution (kingship) went back to Longphang side and Phom areas, and those who supported the system of Angship settled first at Chui village from where they migrated to lower Konyak and Tirap areas. This is why till today we find in Konyak society two institutions - one monarchical and the other republican. It is not quite sure if they had been the descendants of Makhelians as other tribes are or followed different wave of migration from Burma for the Singpho and Kachin are contiguous geographically to the Konyak. But the fact that they all trace their origin to the south at Longphang and their way of life is exactly similar to that of the rest of the Naga tempt us to conclude that they are the descendants of the people who had settled at Makhel. It is believed that even some of the Tangkhul are the descendants of Makhel.

The party that went to the right (north-east) were the Tangkhul and the Somra. The Tangkhul and Somra Naga were very

small in number compared to the other party that went leftward. The Tangkhul are considered one of the oldest among the Naga who came to Manipur. According to Hudson : "From the records of Manipur, we gather some rather important facts regarding the antiquity of the Tangkhul. One of the earliest raids mentioned in the chronicles of Manipur is dated 1435 and is said to have been the work of Tangkhul who as on subsequent occasions, availed themselves of the opportunity afforded to them by the temporary absence of the forces of Manipur, on what the local historians call march or conquest in the direction of Thangdut to make a raid on the valley".

"There can be no doubt that much of what we find in the chronicles is hopelessly exaggerated, but it is quite clear that these tribes, especially the Tangkhul were settled in the areas they now occupy at an early date, when the Meitheis, now their masters, were yet wild and untouched by the finer arts of life".

In regards to the history of the plains and the hills, it may be noted that it is a complex story but some observation has been narrated to throw some light on the whole scene.

CHAPTER IV  
THE EXPERIENCE

- **Purum experience**
- **Zeliangrong experience**
- **Meitei experience**
- **Bishnupriya experience**
- **Thadou experience**
- **Chin-Kuki-Mizo experience**

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EXPERIENCES

In this chapter we relate six experiences which we find prominently represent the different variations in the process of ethnicity in Manipur. Each of the experience related here represent a full story of definition-redefinition of identity by the different communities inhabiting Manipur.

The experiences (six) related here can be classified on two basis:

- (1) Relating to tribal and non-tribal communities.

#### Tribal Communities

- (i) Zeliangrong experience
- (ii) Thadou experience
- (iii) Chin-Kuki-Mizo experience
- (iv) Purum experience

### Non-Tribal Communities

- (i) Meitei experience
- (ii) Bishnupriya experience
- (2) Those experience which have a pre-Independence and post-Independence origin.

### Pre-Independence Origin

- (i) Purum experience
- (ii) Zeliangrong experience
- (iii) Meitei experience

### Post-Independence Origin

- (i) Bishnupriya experience
- (ii) Thadou experience
- (iii) Chin-Kuki-Mizo experience

In view of this, the presentations of the last three experiences, namely, those relating to the Bishnupriya, the Thadou, and the Chin-Kuki-Mizo do not have any reference of the pre-British experience.

I

### PURUM EXPERIENCE

#### General Introduction

To the anthropologist the Purum is a very known name. This is the name of one of the tribes inhabiting Manipur. In Manipur, today there are 29 scheduled tribes. It was rather an unusual coincidence which brought a name for the tribe, among the

anthropologist. About six decades ago, 1931, the faculty of the Department of Anthropology in the university of Calcutta, in their usual characteristic style, started to concentrate for their 'annual ethnographic exercise' among the Purum, under the leadership of the late Mr. T.C. Das.

T.C. Das, the leader of the team, on basis of the intensive field work by 1945 brought out a detailed ethnographic account of the tribe which was nearly three hundred pages, stuffed with material. This work would have gone rather unnoticed but for the fact that some structural characteristic of the Purum society attracted the attention of some structural anthropologists. This formed basis for theoretical debate among the anthropologists. As Needham points, among the Purum all lineages are allied to all others, so that, from the view point of ego's lineage the society is exhaustively categorized into two exclusive group, wife-givers and wife-takers, so that the only possible exceptional marriage would in fact be a special forbidden one.

But for the theoretical discussions that developed later on the Purum example, the Purum would not have acquired the name among the anthropologists in the world, as they have today. This was an example no different from that which brought fame to Morgan, the American anthropologists, Morgan's work on the history of family would have remained rather unnoticed had Karl Marx not adopted this for his classic theories.

When T.C. Das, in 1935, conducted his field work among the Purum, he noted, the total population of the tribe as 303 (according to the census of 1931). Four decades later, according to census of 1971, the population of Purum was NA (not available). Obviously, the Purum had not become extinct within these forty years. It is explained that the Purum have merged their identity with the cognate tribe, the Chothe.

### LOCATION

The tribe at present comprises only 12 villages, having not more than 20 to 60 houses in each village. These villages are now most commonly found in the Tengnoupal district of Manipur, whereas only one village Chothe Lamlanghupi is situated near Bishnupur in the south district of Manipur.

### DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. Pre-British Period

The earliest reference we may find from the accounts of Muslim Chronicles who narrated the Kukis to have rendered various help to the rulers of Tripura in their struggle with the Muslim administrators during the Mughal rule. The family Chronicle of the Maharaja of Tripura also bears an account of the depredations of the Kukis and their gradual subjugation and employment in military service. It is, nevertheless, not known which of the Kuki groups represented the given accounts.

## 2. During British Period

One of the earliest references of the Purum (Pooroom) is found in the "Account of the valley of Munnipore and the Hills Tribes with comparative vocabulary of the Munnipore and other Languages" published by Major W. McCulloch, a political agent, in 1859. According to him, the hills around the Manipur valley were inhabited by a large number of tribes including the Purum and their cognate the Chothe, who were much more numerous than what they were when the author studied them (1859 : 41-42). Though our knowledge about the reasons for their decline in numerical strength remains inadequate, McCulloch found them to have been able to retain all their special customs. he considered both the Purum and Chothe along with several other tribes to be "evidently only varieties of the Kookie stock" (1859 : 64). Since in physical features they appeared to him more or less alike and he found no striking difference in their customs and other attributes, McCulloch put rather an extra emphasis on their common heritage. What is important to note here is that although the Purum and Chothe closely resembled one another in physical appearance, rituals, and customs, McCulloch was still in favour of assigning independent tribal identities to them under the broad Kuki genera.

R. Brown, another Political Agent of Manipur, made a reference to the Purum only once in his "Statistical Account of

the Native state of Manipur and the Hill Territory under its Rule (1873). According to him, they were a sub-division of the Kom tribe along with the Kairup, Chiru, Aimol, Quoireng, Karam, Mundung and Laikot (1873 : 53).

T.C. Hodson while describing the Naga tribes of Manipur, made somewhat a passing reference to the Purum. With regard to their succession of authority, Hodson writes:

As a variant upon the custom of primogeniture we find at Purum, the old Kuki village in the SW, a custom by which the occupants of the village offices moves up in regular succession. This custom provides a succession of expereinced persons ..... (1911 : 102)

From the given quotation it becomes fairly evident that by Purum, Hodson did not mean to signify a tribe or any other population. He was rather categorical to refer to an old Kuki village.

Shakespear assigned altogether a different identity to the Purum. In his treaties on the Lushai-Kuki clans, Shakespear devoted a whole chapter to describe the old Kuki clans among whom Purum and Chawte constituted parts. According to him, the Purum are an endogamous clan divided into a number of exogamous families (1912 : 153). It thus, becomes obvious that Shakespear while ascribing the status of clan to the Purum, did not follow the usual definition of the same. He instead, conceived clan as a division of race - a proposition, which Shakespear neither adequately substantiated nor illustrated in accordance with the



usual scientific procedure. Nevertheless, we thus see that Purum as a conscious form has so far been variously conceived by different authors as a tribe, as a sub-tribe of Kom, as an old Kuki village in the South West Manipur and also as a clan.

### Post British Period

The Purum were brought to sharp attention by the monograph published by T.C. Das in 1945, which in itself was based on his field work from 1931-1936. From 1931 to 1936, T.C. Das along with the students of the University of Calcutta made four excursions into the interior of Manipur Hills and studies the Purum for a total period of about five months. Although he submitted the manuscript to the University in 1941, it could not be instantly printed due to shortage of paper during the war years. T.C. Das had close familiarity with the accounts of McCulloch (1859), Brown (1873), Hodson (1911), as well as Shakespear (1912). He evaluated the various view points of the earlier authors on the subject quite carefully and exercised himself fairly extensively before he described the Purum as an old Kuki tribe of Manipur. To elucidate the point, we may refer to T.C. Das<sup>1</sup> very specific statement regarding Hodson's position in foot note No. 7 of the introduction of Das' The Purums : An old Kuki tribe of Manipur:

The situation of the Purum village in south-west ("S.W") seems to be a mistake. The Purum village are all now found in the South-east and had been so at the time of Hodson. There is a Chothe village in the south-west which Mr. Hodson knew. He does not mean by Purum this Chothe village (which he calls Chawte) though the Chothes are a branch of the Purums (1945:7)

From the given excerpt it becomes abundantly clear that T.C. Das had examined the question whether the Purum is a tribe or a village fairly comprehensively and did not ascribe the independent tribal identity to the people without sufficient scrutiny. He also examined the issues of treating the Purum as a clan as suggested by Shakespear (1912) or a sub-tribe as suggested by Brown (1973) in a reasonably elaborate manner before he drew the conclusion that the Purum satisfied all the conditions to be treated as a tribe. It may be pointed out in this connection that right from the title as such, throughout his treaties, Shakespear considered the people as a clan. The only exception in this respect appears at page 8 of the book Lushai-Kuki-clans where the author referred to various people as tribes. Since T.C. Das had already examined the question of ethnic status and identity of the Purum in extensive detail (1945 : 106-108), normally there should not have been any confusion regarding the issue. Incidentally, the matter of identity of the people came to the surface all over again on a different count altogether.

T.C. Das expressed a sense of apprehension whether the Purum have been able to survive the wrath of war. What impact the war

had on the life and culture of the Purum could not yet be known as no serious study in this context has been taken up so far. But noticeable decline in population strength of the Purum during successive census years made the Purum case a matter of general concern. The 303 strong Purum population (when studied by T.C. Das in 1936) had no representative left as per census return of 1971, although in 1951 and 1961 their population strength were recorded to be 43 and 82 respectively.

**POPULATION DISTRIBUTION**

Year	Total Purum Population	Total Chothe Population
1931	305	250
1936	303	not known
1941	not known	not known
1951	43	695
1961	82	1035
1971	NA	1905
1975	NA	1464
1981	NA	2507

This suggests that inspite of extraordinary loss of their population strengths during the interim decades at least a small proportion of the Purum population survived the ravages of war. Nevertheless, whether this extraordinary decline in Purum

population is at all due to the impact of war could not be exactly ascertained. Therefore, the obvious question that remains unresolved is to what extent the phenomenon of war can account for this reduction in population strength and how far other factors were responsible in this matter.

In the year 1975, the Anthropological Survey of India sent a team to Manipur in order to investigate the Purum case. Since no definite information was available to indicate whether the world war II had anything to do with the sharp changes in the population distribution, Das Gupta (1985 : 53) assumed that by 1971 all the Purum decided to call themselves Chothe. Since this does not fully explain the nature of variation in population distribution of the Purum and Chothe. Das Gupta was rather quick to observe that the whole paradox of Purum and Chothe had been due to the lack of awareness of the system of naming a people as was in vogue in Manipur valley.

It is important to take into account the fact that in older days the Purum chief traditionally had his headquarters at Purum Khullen. This gave the village a special status among Purum villages which used to have special scarf. Das Gupta reports that the villages earlier located on the hill top from where the people used to practice slash and burn method of cultivation have now, due to denundation of forests, gradually moved downwards and taken to wet cultivation (1985 : 64). This change in the location of the villages has exposed the people to the forces of modern

market economy through their cultivation of cash crops. It is also noted that the traditional authority structure of the Purum apparently organised on hierarchical principle has undergone change with the adoption of a new supra-local body - the Chote General Union. This suggests the existence of simultaneous pressure of the dual process of transformation on the Purum society from an old form of authority structure to a new one and the tendency of loss of Purum identity in favour of the Chothe. Of late, the people have started aspiring for even a wider identity which gets reflected through the activities of the Chothe Naga students' Union, an affiliated body of the Naga Student Union.

The Purum issue, we find has engaged the attention of the anthropologists in two directions, at two different points of time. Initially, 1945 onwards, the Purum kept the attention of the anthropologists through the structural principles contained by their society. Within the next three decades, we can note, the Purum become a centre of attention among the anthropologists for a different issue. "The 303 strong Purum population (when studied by Prof. T.C.Das in 1936) had no representative left as per census return of 1971, although in 1951 and 1961 their population strengths were recorded to be 43 and 82 respectively".

Such decline in the population of the Purum raised a number of issues. According to Das Gupta:

In Manipur valley, people are often called by the village they inhabit. As such a Loi of Phayeng and Andro may simply be referred as "he is a Phaying" or "he is an Andro". Since villages in Manipur are usually homogeneous, i.e., uni-ethnic, Andro would naturally mean a Loi only, because Lois are to be seen in Andro; and similarly Phaying would naturally mean a Loi of Phayeng the Purum case, we know that all the Purum villages have the prefix Purum because Purum is the type of land in which they inhabit though the villagers call themselves as Chote. To the Meitei or to any village group, Chote of Purum Tampak may be known as only Purum and this might have resulted to the confusion for others (1985 : 53).

Danda feels that "Das Gupta's argument seems quite valid provided it explains the sharp variations in the distribution of populations. Since contrary information are also found.

1. The Purum stands for a territory or a type of land having special characteristics of hills and forests.
2. There was perhaps no ethnic group ever having the name Purum. The people inhabiting the area known as Purum might have been referred to as the Purum.
3. T.C. Das (1945) was perhaps not aware of the subtle distinction between Chote and Purum.
4. The ethnic group Chote was referred to by the Meitei or any other people of the valley as Purum.

Das Gupta observed in this context:

"In Manipur, our experience shows that territorial identity is not equal to cultural identity. Purums have been able to check large scale absorption. Younger people are in favour of independent status (for the groups), a separate identity". (1986: 86)

ZELIANGRONG EXPERIENCEGeneral Introduction

The name of Rani Gaidinliu and the Zeliangrong movement is prominently known. This is a movement about the redefinition of identity of three small tribes inhabiting Manipur, Nagaland and Assam.

The three sub-tribes namely the Zemei, Liangmei and the Rongmei have more or less similar customary laws, traditional customs, folk songs, folk dances, folk lores etc. The only difference of these three sub-tribes is that they have distinctive dialect of their own and habitat scattered in contiguous areas. It is believed that in the earliest days, they spoke only one common dialect that is most probably the present Liangmei Naga dialect. There are certain fact for saying that the Liangmei Naga dialect might be the common dialect of the Zeliangrong Naga tribe in the older days until they imigrated to the present areas. First, until recently the other two sub-tribe (Zemei and Rongmei) used to speak in Liangmai dialect whenever they performed religious rituals. Second, most of the religious languages, folk songs etc. were composed in Liangmei Naga. Third, all names of their great grandfathers were names in Liangmei and also all names and the titles of the folk tales, legends etc. were given in Liangmei Naga dialect.

## LOCATION

The Zeliangrong Naga tribes comprises of the three sub-tribes, namely the Zemei, Liangmei and the Rongmei who are scattered in contiguous areas of Nagaland, Manipur and Assam. This tribes covers a compact area of nearly 4600 sq. miles which are distributed as follows: Manipur (i) Manipur west district; (ii) Sadar Hills (West) Sub-division; (iii) 11 Zeliangrong villages of Mao west of North district, Manipur; (iv) 17 villages of Honglop sub-division of Manipur south district; (v) Jiribam sub-division : Nagaland; (vi) Paren sub-division; Assam (vii) To Mauzas of north Kachar hills inhabited by Zemei; (viii) some areas on the west bank of Jiri river in Cachar district.

## DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Pre-British Period

By the 17th century the Kachari kingdom had established in Dimapur. Between the 17th and the 18th century, these Kachari were engaged in expanding their kingdom. In the process of expanding their kingdom, they were making excursions upto Manipur, crossing over the Naga Hills. These Kachari often intruded into the lands of the Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei which were resisted.

Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei also resisted the expansion of the Meitei kingdom in the southern part of their country.

However, the appearance of the British on the scene of the region after the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) in the wake of expansion of Burmese imperialism brought to an end all the conquest designs of the Kachari, Meitei and even those of the Assamese.

Still Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei Naga were utterly disunited setting against each other, like any other Naga tribes living freely in their villages. They were not subscribing to any idea of establishment of common state although the respective chiefs of villages had commanding authorities over their subjects.

The Kuki under their autocratic chiefs swept down upon the well permanently settled villages of the Zemei, Liangmei, Rongmei, Mao-Maram Naga if conditions proved advantageous. The Kuki tried to gain access and control. Most often they found themselves a comfortable place to live in even whatsoever a nomadic life might expect.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Meitei began to contact the more civilised Aryan and Dravidian Hindus from Bengal through Cachar than the Burmese who become their traditional enemies owing to frequent wars. The contacts had resulted in an extensive impact of the rising tide of the Vaishnavite Hinduism preached by Chaitanya (1486-1553). Ultimately it proved to be an event of great historical importance because it completely

changed animistic Meitei life. King Pamheiba known as Gharib Niwas decreed Hinduism as the state religion in the 18th century and the principal features of Hinduism penetrated virtually into the whole of the Meitei society. Meitei Laipak (Meitei land) was changed into Manipur, the place of jewel, and Meitei, Manipuri. The Hindunised Manipuri observed themselves in different sense the rules of the Hindu casteism and considered the Naga and Kuki as rude and degraded, and later on particularly during the reign of Chandra Kirti as the "untouchables". Sometimes, the Naga and Kuki also were accepted to the ranks of the Manipuri if they were converted into Hinduism according to the Hindu rites which comprised of ceremonial ablution, impression of the tilak, and investiture with the sacred thread, all accompanied by recitation of mantras (YONUO).

The history of Manipur was one of series of invasions from the Naga when the Manipuri tried to exercise their authority over them. The moment the resistance of the Naga failed, the Manipur imposed on them the duties such as exacting tribute, providing soldiers, porters and menials. For these purposes, they arranged a broad survey of the Naga village states and called them Manipuri names without any attempt to administer them with their own people. On the Assamese side, the Naga village-states were divided into different districts in their maps and given different names arbitrarily, unknown to the Naga, for the

convenience of exaction of tribute from the Naga whenever they were strong enough.

These sorts of relations were borne among the Naga, Meitei, Kuki and Assamese before the emergence of the British. Not surprisingly, conflicts as well as harmonies were bound to crop up in the intercourse among these Mongolian people since they were strange to one another, though they all belonged to the same race.

## 2. During British Period

After the end of the First Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) the British to enhance their interest accentuated the processes of Kuki influx from South to North i.e. the Lushai Hills, Cachar and Tripura to Manipur.

Some Kuki were also brought to Imphal by the Manipur Government and were given better settlement there in order to open communication through them with the warlike Lushai and Naga tribes.

In 1828-29, the Raja of Cachar Govind made use of the Kuki in his feud with the Raja Tularam Senapati of the North Cachar Hills.

A large number of Kuki migrated following the attacks of Lushai in the North Cachar Hills, Naga village and Manipur. They were given settlement on defence and humanitarian grounds in

Manipur by the British authorities in consultation with the Manipur king in early 1940's. And used advantageously against the Naga and Lushai.

The British managed to keep on the antagonism between the Naga and Kuki as a good instrument to suppress any movement started by either of them for assertion of their independence.

But at this time, the British Company Government except protecting their subjects from the raids of the Naga and Lushai maintained stern policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the tribes and decided not to conquer or add the barren hills inhabited by the Naga, Lushai and other tribes into the British Empire.

After India was taken over in 1858 by the British Government from the East India Company in the wake of the sepoy mutiny or war to regain the Indian freedom in May 1857, the British authorities in Bengal, Assam, Manipur and Tripura determined to extend their dominion whenever it could penetrate and thereafter framed a forward policy coupled with divide and rule in India as a whole. Accordingly, in the eastern Bengal, the Kuki were found as a good element to go against the martial tribes.

Between 1879-80, the British conquered the Naga in battles at Khonoma and other villages with the active help of the Manipuri and Kuki and subsequently ruled them.

But during the British military operations in 1881-82 against the freedom movement of the Kacharis. The Kuki militia villages whose services were expected to be utilised by the British authorities had not rendered much help in giving information of the Kacharis' uprising and in hunting down the fugitives or collecting evidences against them because of the realisation of the fact that they were mainly purposed to go against any freedom movement setting against the British interest, and for which their conscious refused to submit every call of the British Government. As a result, they were disbanded by the orders of the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1882 though they were still used as hill porters on dangerous expeditions and were able to defend themselves against the Angamis.

The affairs of the Naga and Kuki since the installation of the boy, Churachan Singh on the throne as a result of the war of Manipur independence in 1890 were dealt on behalf of the Maharaja by the British. The British remained quite indifferent to the internal affairs of the tribes and did not do anything worthy to put down oppressing measures of the Kuki on Zeliangrong, Tangkhul, Kom and Anal Nagas. In other words, the Government of Manipur did not give any sufficient protection against the Kuki raids when asked for help inspite of the fact that they offered their loyalty to the British. The two of the five battalions of the Assam Rifles posted at Kohima in the Naga Hills, and at Imphal in Manipur, each was reserved for the use of rare

unavoidable occasions to control the turbulent tribal warfare or any other serious disturbances for a show of British presence and power in their lands were not prepared enough to go to different inaccessible places of Manipur.

The Zeliangrong people aroused their resentment and disobedience to the British authorities as they failed to interfere in the oppressive inroads by the Kuki into their country. Subsequently, the Zeliangrong refused to pay house taxes for four years after the British-Manipuri War in 1890. In order to exert the British power, the Assistant Political Agent of Manipur, P.L. Crawford collected the house tax by show of force in February and March 1894.

No doubt, taking the stories of the tortures of the Naga by the Kuki, playing in the intense bitterness of their feelings against the Kuki and the British and realising the seriousness of the threat to their independence and animism, Jadonang (a young Rongmei NAGA) incited the Naga particularly Zeliangrong into a great unity and awareness.

In course of time the movement took different forms beginning from a religious revivalistic movement in reaction to spreading Christianity around them, and then taking the shape of a nationalist freedom movement.

According to those who have written history of this movement (Yonuo), 'in shaping his political destination, Mahatma Gandhi was a great symbol and ideal to Jadonang'. The British could not tolerate for long the nationalistic movement started by Jadonang. After a few incidents of confrontation, and the incident of the killing of the four Manipuri traders in a Zeliangrong village. This and other similar incidents compelled the British administration to arrest him on February 19, 1931. After a trial, he was awarded death sentence, to be hanged on August 29, 1931. Jadonang was hanged in 1931.

After his death, the leadership of the movement went with his cousin, Gaidinliu. Rani Gaidinliu became a legendary figure through her heroic participation and leadership of this movement. It was with great difficulty that the British could capture her, after which she was imprisoned for life, to be released only after the end of the British rule. Gaidinliu was so influential among her people, that even in 1949 the Government of Assam was hesitant in ordering her unconditional release. It was only with the personal intervention of Jawaharlal Nehru only that she was released.

The popular interpretation is that Rani Gaidinliu had launched a movement of religious revivalism. On a close look, we find differently.

Following the elimination of Jadonang and imprisonment of Gaidinlui, the British Government in Manipur and Assam had banned the Jadonang movement, and many other organisation or meeting could not be started or held without the prior permission and approval of the Government functioning in the Zeliangrong areas. But when Zeliangrong particularly Rongmei who were loyal to the British government expressed their desire to preserve their Animistic customs, culture, traditions etc. the Manipur state government headed nominally by the Maharaja of Manipur, Sir Churachand Singh allowed them to form Rongmei (Kabui) Samiti in 1931 with an object of assisting the government on the customary laws and rules. In this regard, the Samiti was the highest body on the religious issues of the Kabui, nevertheless the Samiti was restricted to take up any political problems other than religious matters without the knowledge of the government.

Just after the second world war, the Zeliangrong realised the urgent need of an organisation to enhance their political inspiration. The idea to form one political party still was met with a hindrance from the government of Manipur. As such, only Rongmei (Kabui) formed the Kabui Naga Association for the consolidation and warfare of the Rongmei in Manipur.

The Kabui Naga Association was not enough. Now, the leaders of Zemei, Liangmei, Rongmei people came together to form an organisation to fulfil their inspiration and interest, living in

Manipur, the Naga Hills and North Cachar Mikir Hills of Assam.

Meanwhile the British authorities in Manipur state and Assam let loose of their control on Zeliangrong on the reason that India's freedom became imminent and their exit was inevitable. At this opportune time, the Zeliangrong leaders met at Keishamthong, a Kabui village at Imphal on 15 February 1947 with the initiative of the active members of the Kabui Naga Association namely Kakhengai in Manipur, and Mr. and Mrs. L. Lungalang, Dr. T. Haralu in the Naga Hills. The meeting resolved among other things.

"In view of the close ethnological and cultural connection between the Kabuis and Kacha Nagas of all the districts in Assam resolved that they shall henceforth be combined to form a large body with the objective of furthering the economic, social, educational and political advancement of this unit"

It decided to make current use of the combined three tribes i.e. Zemei, Liangmei, Rongmai into one being called Zeliangrong council comprising of all the representatives of the Rongmei, Liangmei and the Zemei.

But since the Zeliangrong Nagas were administered separately they could not function all the times unitedly and properly and failed to achieve its objectives as expected however it made an impact on the Zeliangrong. As such, the Kabui Naga association which was turned into Manipur Zeliangrong union carried its own problems in conformity with the objective of Zeliangrong council.

However, Zemei, the Liangmei and Rongmei always had the myth of their common ancestry and this provided the opportunity for leaders of these tribes to combine themselves into a single group and thus the prefixes of each of these three group names were combined into one name Zeliangrong (Kabui, 1982) it was in a large meeting held in Manipur on 15th February 1947, at Keishamthong that the word Zeliangrong was coined and adopted (Kabui. 1982).

### 3. Post-British Period

From the early 1950's Rani Gaidinliu had become more seriously concerned for the development and welfare of the Zeliangrong people than in the affairs of the whole Nagas in many fields. In this connection she met a number of Indian National Congress leaders and acquainted with them some of the acute problems faced by her people.

The militant phase of this movement had declined with the independence of India. Rani Gaidinliu's national recognition was natural. It was Jawaharlal Nehru who had accorded the symbolic title of 'Rani' to Gaidinliu for her contribution.

The development as observed among the Zeliangrong in Manipur, the north Cachar hills and the Naga hills appeared not to come to any sharp attention of the government of either Manipur or even Assam. The Zeliangrong were more stringently

suppressed by the policy and measures than what was done to them during the period of the British rule and they felt that they were treated as colonial and unwanted subjects and that the authorities had desired to keep them illiterate, and backward so that they might remain isolated from the mainstream of the Naga and not pose a serious threat to the government by not joining hands in the force of the Naga freedom movement led by Phizo, the President of Naga National Council.

In 1955, the people of Naga Hills rose in violent upsurge. As could be expected the Indian Army had to meet it. The Government of India refused to recognise the existence and freedom of Nagaland as demanded by the extremist Naga, Rani Gaidinlui ran into a great dilemma. She did not come out openly against the Naga National Council's struggle for independence. But she was against the proselytization of christianity as she upheld Naga animism. On the other hand, the Naga who were christian criticised her Animism as being against the progress of christianity and an obstacle to the Naga freedom movement since she was more directly concerned to unify the Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei areas in Manipur, the Naga hills and Assam for an administrative unit to form a nucleus of Nagaland, within the Indian Union than supporting the cause of the independence of Nagas that she was advocating before. To fulfil her aim of integration of Zeliangrong people she visited all the Zeliangrong inhabited areas in Manipur Cachar and north Cachar - Mikir hills,

and was received with warm welcome from the people. But her effort to work only for Zeliangrong were criticised as narrowly located idea by the underground Naga and had incurred their displeasure as they had been fighting the Government of India for the Naga independence and their ultimate unification of all Naga living in Assam, Manipur, NEFA and Burma. For this stand she was threatened by her enemies of serious consequences leading even to her murder and of her followers.

*John 'attempt'*

On January 1966, Rani Gaidinlui, taking into account of all the forces working against her movement formally agreed to lay down arms and work overground for the betterment of the Zeliangrong people through peaceful, democratic and non-violent means. After six years of hard underground jungle life in an old age, she came out from her jungle hideout to settle in Kohima and was welcomed by the people.

It may be stated that the Zeliangrong movement has touched almost all aspects of the life. It has restored faith and pride in the traditional values and customs while foresaking superstition and 'animistic' practices which overburdened the people and prevented their social consciousness. In its course the movement has not only revitalized the music and folk dances to a great extent. But has given tremendous impetus for carving out a single district comprising areas in Manipur, Nagaland and Assam where the three sub-tribes of the Zemi, the Liangmei and the Rongmei lives. All the people belonging to the three sub-

tribes are willing to take up the issue (for a single district) and have their common identity as the Zeliangrong.

### III

#### MEITEI EXPERIENCE

##### General Introduction

The state of Manipur has been in the limelight for reasons like the famous Manipuri classical dances, the gorgeously costumed female dances, the energetic martial dances performed by the males, her handloom productions and the activities of the Meitei insurgency which holds the entire valley where the bulk of the Manipuri's Vaishnavite Hindu population is concentrated and the state administration to ransom.

Today, the Sanamahi-revivalist movement are slowly surfacing up. The reasons have been many. We shall deal with the reasons in this experience.

##### LOCATION

The Sanamahi movement of the Meitei is confined to the valley in the districts of Imphal, Thoubal and Bishenpur and relates to the growing aspirations of the Meitei, perhaps the only Mongoloid but Vaishnavite Hindi group in north-east India.

## DEVELOPMENT

### Pre-British Period

Originally the Meitei, like the other hill people of Manipur, had their own animistic religion and other cultural traits. At one time the valley appears to have been occupied by many tribes, and the Meitei were one of them. The different tribes of the valley have also traditions amongst themselves that the 'Munniporees' are offshoots from them. The Manipuri seem to have descended from the surrounding hill tribes (Hodson p. 6. 1908). Hinduism came to the valley during the reign of king Garib Niwas (1709-1748 A.D.) when Santidas Gosai a disciple of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited the valley.

In course of time this brought phenomenal change in the cultural pattern of Meitei society, though it continues to retain many of its old tribal social traits.

At the instance of Santidas Gosai, the king Garib Niwas was against the use of Meitei script, songs and prayers. He introduced the Bengali script and substituted Meitei songs by Bengali songs. He, in a religious frenzy collected the rare manuscripts numbering one hundred and twenty. The books were burnt up by the Ramandi preacher with the help of the king. Suppressive measures were taken against the non-Ramandi system of worship. There was a great opposition from the people when Garib

Niwas tried to introduce Ramandi Vaishnavism with the help of Santidas.

To quote T.C. Hodson, "At first the decree of the king received but little obedience and the opposition to the change centred round the numerous members of the royal family who were supported not unnaturally by the Maibas, the priest of the older religion. Religious dissent was treated with the same ruthless severity as was meted out to political opponents and wholesale banishment and execution drove the people into acceptance of the tenents of Hinduism". Many scholars (Meitei) opposed the move.

Thus, the king not only substituted Meitei scripts by the Devanagari script and had changed the original or personal name of the Meitei into a Hindu's name (e.g. Meitei name of 'Pamheiba' was changed into a Hindu name 'Garib Niwas') and had forcibly given Hindu religion to all his poor subjects.

It must not however be accepted that Vaishnavism destroyed the previous religious beliefs of Manipur. They have survived to the present day making adjustments with the new religion. The king became milder in his religious policy on account of the hostility of the public. So an attempt was tried to strike unity between the two creeds. Santidas gave the name Manipur to the country - a name ever since used. The king also ordered the Manipuri Brahmins to worship some primitive Gods like Sanamahi, Yumthai, Lai Panthaibi and Nomsava. The Brahmins of Leiheothabam

family became the worshipper of Sanamahi from this time. They worshipped this deity in the temple at Keisamthong according to Hindu rites.

### During British Period

After the "Anglo-Manipuri War" of 1891, Manipur was totally under the cover of British rules through the puppet kings of Manipur. Thus, the first appointed king was Sir Churachand Singh, according to the Gazette of India, No. 1700E, dated August 21, 1891. A number of crisis arose during the reign of Sir Churachand (1891-1941) and Maharaja Bodhachandra (1941-1955) especially on the formation of political parties and its demands for political right and freedom. It was during this period revivalist movement among the Manipuri (Meitei) also started.

One of the revivalists worth mentioning was Naoriya Phullo from Cachar District of Assam. He is considered to be the Chief founder of "Apokpa" Marup of Sanamahism (Meiteism) during the year 1930 at Cachar. He fought against the evils of Hinduism in the Meitei society. His activities were quite opposite to that of Nikhil Manipur Mahasava (Meiteism) during the year 1930 at Cachar. He fought against the evils of Hinduism in the Meitei society. This activities were quite opposite to that of Nikhil Manipur Mahasava (a political cum religious organisation, 1936). Later on 'Meitei Marup' (an organisation of Meitei's religion,

established in Manipur, during the year 1945) used to work at the line of Apokpa Marup in Manipur.

Mention also may be made of one great revolutionary late Hijam Irabot. He used to fight against feudalism and colonialism and also tried to revive the ethnic links with the Meitei who settled in Burma, Dava, Sylhet, Assam, Cachar, etc. Many competent cultural organisations begin to take shape in the valley. The movement is believed to be almost anti-communalism and had in focus the socio economic and all round development of the Meitei.

### 3. Post-British period

A closer look to the most demanding movement in Manipur in 1947 to date provides an entirely different picture. Both in 1947 (strictly speaking in 1955-56) and to date, insurgency with successionist demands is the most demanding movement. Between these two periods there has been a complete change in the actors and goals of the movement. The target group, action and thrust however, has more or less remained the same.

In 1956, the Naga group of people inhabiting the hill region of Manipur, contiguous to Nagaland, took to armed insurgency to press their successionist demands. The hill politics in the state took approximately the same course as in the Naga hills, then a district of the composite state of Assam. The consolidation was frequently on ethnic lines but involved major

social issues dividing the hills vertically as well as horizontally. On the one hand, the Kuki groups of hill men were divided from the other Naga groups while on the other hand, the Thadou chiefs in the Kuki land had more or less vertically divided the hills people into Kuki chiefs and commoners.

Between 1960 to 1967, the Kuki and Naga groups of Manipur hill tribes came into constant touch and were visited by the underground Naga and Mizo leaders. The Kuki chiefs, after being dispossessed of their traditional rights, began joining the underground from both the areas. The hill area of Manipur then became a corridor for Mizo underground visiting China and to the Naga underground trekking to erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

Like the Mizo experience, the environmental conditions, chieftainship and the existence of a class structure were to some extent the cause of the insurgent movement. But this did not provide the requisite conducive factors essential for an effective organization and conscious realization of goals by the actors. Most of the actors, both in the initial stages and also who somehow kept on sustaining it, were those who joined it as an imitation of the Naga experience. However, with the signing of the Shillong Peace Accord of 11 November 1975, by the Naga underground leaders, the hill Manipur insurgency movement lost its punch.

In the valley, plough cultivators have a two tier caste system - the Brahmin and the Kashatriya - although of late the Meitei plainsmen are refusing to be recognised as Hindus. The communists have been quite influential in the valley and from time to time they have been organizing protests movements among the Meitei.

In the 1960s, when the Naga insurgency in the hills of Manipur was at its peak, the Meitei realized that they were one of the target group as they along with the Hindus of the rest of the country were being identified as symbol of the Central Government and exploitation. This was some what uncomfortable for the Meitei. The situation was uncongenial and against the very roots of the leftist inclinations of the youths and some sections of the leadership because the target group of leftists tended to be identified as their associates.

It was unfortunate that during this period the sharing of a common identity symbol, that of being Hindu, with the rest of the countrymen did not bring the Meitei any marked economic gains, while the union government, in its bid to win over the underground elements, showed marked preference for the development of the hill areas of Manipur. This prompted the Meitei to ponder over the need for finding a new target for themselves as their own target group - the central authority - was being clubbed together with them by a section of people of

their own area. Cultural revivalism, therefore, was found to be the most useful goal. And ever since the Meitei have been trying hard to renounce their Hindu identity, revive the old Meitei (Sanamahi) culture and reform the Meitei society.

Simultaneously, a movement for revival of the Meitei script and the adoption of the same for official use has been launched.

Some Manipuri scholar has singled out two persons viz., Naoria Phulo (Cachar) and Hijam Irabot who initiated this movement in the 30's. The Hindu Society, despite the Vaishnavite sense of liberation from caste and creed, high and low became decadent under the Brahminic framework with persistent struggle for power between the king and Brahmins. The poor masses were just benumbed and suppressed inspite of an artistic flowering associated with this Indo-Mongoloid group. Power was in the hands of the king and few feudal nobles and it was their day while the masses groaned and suffered. A most obnoxious part of the social degeneration was a terror Mongba Sengba (untouchability) perpetrated on the masses by the king (Maharaj Churachand Singh) in collusion with a few Brahmins. A mere declaration by the king or somebody on his behalf or even a rumour was enough to make a family miserable as it would be boycotted by one and all. Dead bodies of their families would remain unattended for days for fear of the royal persecution.

The new Vaishnavite movement had to suppress also much of the heritage and the door to the incredibly rich heritage preserved in thousands of manuscripts by the local pandits was closed to the people.

On the other hand in the field of socio-economic reforms, an organization under the name and style of Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was started in 1934 with the king as the president who presided over both the Inaugural Session (1934) at Imphal and the second Annual Session (1936) at Silchar (Assam). The third session was held at Mandalay (Burma) in 1937 and it reflected some of the political scenerio in India. The fourth session at Imphal (1938) took a political stand and was renamed Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. The image of mother Manipur in bondage and tattered clothes became increasingly visible with shouts of Bande Mataram and under orders of the king and the British authorities, all the officials excepts two Hijam Irabot and Elangbam Tompak) had to concentrate on artistic movement like theatre, literature and painting. The Mahasabha assumed the name of state congress in 1946 by a resolution. The second women's war came in 1930 which led to political arrest including Irabot. Swadeshi movement and non-cooperation movement also started and Manipur experienced the dignity and horror of freedom struggle with mass movement and allied political organisation like Krishak Sanmilani (1937) and Praja Mandal (1947).

Religion or spirituality which is the soul of Indian culture has been integrated with the predominantly distinctive aesthetic temperament of this Indo-Mongoloid group (called traditionally the Kirates) and Bengal Vaishnavism (since 18th century A.D.) found its supreme expression in songs and dance in this valley with royal patronage and the British masters did not feel like interfering in it. A profound sanskrit scholar and also a social worker, Panditraj Atombapu Sharma made a persistent efforts to integrate the old culture with Vaishnavism and traced the origin in the Veda, by publishing more than 100 books in Manipuri and Sanskrit. This happens to be a major stream which raised the dignity of the socalled Non-Aryan group to the heights.

The people of the valley were proud to be Hindus and could legitimately boast of their artistic expression which won increasing recognition not only in India but also abroad.

There was however a note of dissent, a revivalist, which as mentioned earlier traces its origin in the 30's somewhere in Cachar (Assam) in the person of Naoria Phulo who started Apokpa Marup with its accent on old Manipuri gods and goddess like Sanamahi and Pakhangba. It was a reaction against Vaishnavism and had an ethnic dimension as Sanskrit was totally replaced by chaste Manipuri expression. This happened in the form of a protest and reached the valley soon and a minority (almost microscopic) movement sprang up. It found a positive echo in the

minds of the young people in their search for ethnic identity and affected the creative expression of young writers and scholars of Manipur to a considerable extent.

Consequently, a group of young people refused to accept Manipuri's merger with India and struggled for a separatist movement which, even though subdued, is still alive in the form of extremist of the Manipuri in the valley.

Yet even today, despite the iron grip of Vaishnavism, Sanamahi the highest prevedic deity rules supreme. All Hindus in Manipur, be the Sharmas, Singhs or scheduled caste worship Sanamahi. The temptation to say that Meitei is a Hindu who worship Sanamahi is irresistible.

However, the Sanamahi revivalist movement are bent upon banishing Hinduism and they Vaishnavite who they believed have submerged the ancient Meitei cult. All Hindu and Vaishnavism are to be dealt with as foreigners and got rid of. The Ras dance which has made Manipur a household name in the rest of India is to be done away with, because it started with Vaishnavism.

The caste name Singh is foreign and should be dropped. Some zealots among the revivalists have already dropped it.

'Tilak', which most valley people go in for, it to be abandoned, because that again come with Hinduism. Needless to say, Gagnopaveetham or the 'Sacred Thread' is looked upon as a

live symbol of the bondage in which the Hindu religion holds the Meitei.

According to some (especially the older generation) the chances of Vaishnavism being abjured by the valley are remote. This is not entirely due to the presence of a large Brahmin community who have become naturalised Meitei. Even the Singhs who claims to be as much sons of the soils as the tribals in the surrounding hills are not likely to foreswear. Vaishnavism, for more than four centuries Hinduism and Vaishnavism have been orienting the religious and social life of the Meitei. The Bhakti cult premeates the emotional being of the common people. So amount of revivalist preaching can get Vaishnavism out of Manipur with creating a spiritual void. There is no substitute for Radha and Krishna in the Meitei Pantheon Revivalist who want to reinstate the Meitei religion, the central figure of which is Sanamahi.

Every Meitei including the Brahmin who is a foreigner turned indigene worships him. Krishna was an addition but acquired supremacy. This supremacy could have been successfully challanged if Vaishnavism had forbidden the worship of Sanamahi. The Tolerance of Vaishnavism which makes it easy for Lord Krishna to share the people's devotion with Sanamahi frustrates the Meitei revivalists objectives.

Further, some also believe that Meitei nationalism will be able to wipe out Vaishnavism from the land when the aging generation is replaced by the coming youthful society.

#### IV

#### BISHNUPRIYA EXPERIENCE

North-East India is a Multi-Ethnic Region, and the Bishnupriya is one of the prominent groups of the region. Members of this ethnic group prefer to be referred to as 'Bishnupriya Manipuri' at least on formal occasions. Cachar district of Assam, areas around Agartala town in Tripura, and Comilla and Sylhet districts in Bangladesh have a substantial and prominent concentration today.

Bishnupriya is a community the origin of which in its present form is traced to Manipur. The Bishnupriya were originally confined only to the surroundings of Lake Loktak in Manipur. The principal localities where these people were living are now known as Khangabok, Ningthoukhong, Heirok, and Bishnupur. So, at present we find the Bishnupriya inhabiting Manipur as well as some places outside it, mainly the Cachar district of Assam and parts of Tripura and Bangladesh. The Bishnupriya who are outside Manipur give their full name as 'Bishnupriya Manipuri'. The Meitei object to the Bishnupriya using the 'suffix' Manipuri along with their name.

The Government of Manipur objected to suffixing the word 'Manipuri' after 'Bishnupriya' as, according to them the 'Bishnupriya are not Manipuri'.

In October 1983 and February 1985, the Government of Assam and Tripura respectively took the decision to include the Bishnupriya Manipuri language as one of the mediums of instruction at the primary level. The decision of the Government of Assam to provide recognition to Bishnupriya Manipuri language as medium of instruction sparked off severe controversy on the justification to recognize Bishnupriya as a 'Manipuri' language. The Government of Manipur "expressed their resentment on the decision of the Government of Assam and raised objection" that "the Manipuri language is one and only language that has been accepted as state language of Manipur from the time of Maharajas of Manipur. And therefore, there can be a language spoken by the Bishnupriya as 'Bishnupriya' language, but there can never be a 'Bishnupriya Manipuri language ..... The Bishnupriya language is not a constituent part of the Manipuri language, as such, it can not claim the use of the word 'Manipuri' as 'Bishnupriya Manipuri language .....'.

There is therefore, a deep controversy between the Meitei and the Bishnupriya on the use of the suffix 'Manipuri' alongwith the name 'Bishnupriya'. There are two situations before us. It will be interesting to note the contrast between them. One

situation refers to the Bishnupriya in Manipur today. This refers to the Bishnupriya in the place where the identity of the Bishnupriya in the present form emerged. This is the Imphal valley of Manipur where the Meitei form the major population group. It is interesting to note that the crisis is only with the Bishnupriya living outside Manipur. The Bishnupriya now residing in Manipur have either to a great extent merged, or subdued their distinct identity vis-a-vis the Meitei identity. Moreover, there does not apparently exist any situation of 'crisis of ethnic identity' for the Bishnupriya now in Manipur, as by the very fact of their living in Manipur, they are 'Manipuri'.

The other situation relates to the Bishnupriya presently inhabiting territories outside of Manipur (the Cachar district of Assam and parts of Tripura and Bangladesh). They on their part, make two claims. Suffixing 'Manipuri' to the name Bishnupriya, specially those in Cachar, as this gave the impression that the Bishnupriya represent the Manipuri. In the face of it there was no such intention of the Bishnupriya, that to project an image that they only represent the Manipuri. In the heat of the controversy, the main issue was lost, and as mentioned by Tombi Singh, 'the extreme orthodoxy of the Manipuri outside Manipur', preceptated the issue on a totally new direction. While on the one hand the Bishnupriya claim their Manipur origin, to the extent that they claim to be the true Vaishnavites, and the

'original inhabitants' of Manipur, the Meitei on the other hand contest this to the extent of accepting that the Bishnupriya belong to Manipur.

The Meitei object to the use of the designation 'Bishnupriya Manipuri' by the Bishnupriya residing outside Manipur. The Meitei feel that the use of the 'suffix' Manipuri by these Bishnupriya outside the state of Manipur gives the impression that the Bishnupriya represent the 'Manipuri' community. The Meitei want to avoid any such situation which should give the 'wrong' impression that the Bishnupriya represent (all it may mean) the 'Manipuri' community. To strongly emphasize this apprehension the Meitei seem to go a step further to prove that the Bishnupriya is not a community indigenous to Manipur, even those living in Manipur today are 'non-locals'.

The controversy relating to the use of the suffix 'Manipuri' in a way precipitates the issues - identity controversy. It is found that this issue has originated outside Manipur. This issue may be said to have been precipitated with the decision of the Government of Assam in 1983 to recognize 'Bishnupriya Manipuri' language as medium of instruction upto the primary standard. In 1985 the Government of Tripura also took a similar decision. The Government of Manipur expressed their resentment on the decision of the Government of Assam raised the objection to suffixing the word 'Manipuri' after 'Bishnupriya', thereby giving the impression that the Bishnupriya represent the Manipuri.

While providing their individual arguments, the Bishnupriya as well as the Meitei take it to the extent to controverting on the very 'Origin' of the Bishnupriya. The Bishnupriya on their part claim their origin in Manipur as the Meitei. And they have extended this even further by claiming that 'they' (i.e. the Bishnupriya) are the original inhabitants of Manipur. In other words, in terms of originality, the Bishnupriya proceed the Meitei. In support to this the Bishnupriya go even a step ahead to claim that they are 'the true Vaishnava followers as compared to the Meitei'.

History in this respect is in a way rather clear. Vaishnavism came to the valley of Manipur around the 18th century, during the reign of king Garib Niwas (1709-1748 A.D.), when Santidas Gosai a disciple of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited the valley. History also has it, that prior to this it is possible that some kings have brought some of them (the Bishnupriya) and allowed to settle in Manipur. In Bishenpur district, the areas surrounding the Lok-tak' lake in Imphal valley are identified as the original place of the Bishnupriya. Formerly, Bishenpur was the capital of Manipur and the Bishnupriya were concentrated in Bishenpur (formerly known as Bishnupur).

In the history of Manipur, during the 17th and 18th century, the Bishnupriya migrated to other places particularly to Assam, Tripura and Bangladesh. Two causes may be assigned to the out-

migration of the Bishnupriya from Manipur. One of the causes of their out-migration has been the internal conflict between the princes of Manipur and the second cause has been the repeated attacks of the Burmese on the Manipur kings.

The Bishnupriya in Manipur are older than Vaishnavism. This the Bishnupriya do not contest, rather using this aspect of the history they claim to be 'the Vaishnava compared to the Meitei'.

A review and comparison of the ethnographic and historical traits of the Bishnupriya and the Meitei reveals some interesting features. The starting points of discussion is the acceptance of the fact that the Bishnupriya community comprises of people with origin outside Manipur. In an ethnographic study of the Bishnupriya (Shibani Das) in Cachar, we find that like the Meitei, the Bishnupriya also have only two castes, the Brahmin and the Vaishya. This is claimed to be as a result of the impact of Vaishnavism on the Meitei, as well as on the Bishnupriya. It is said that the Vaishnavism was a 'leveller'.

A little closer look at the caste system among the Bishnupriya reveals a rather different situation. The Meitei are divided into seven clans, while the Bishnupriya are divided into nine clans. The clans names among the Bishnupriya are similar to that of the other Hindu castes, while the clan names of the Meitei reflect continuity from their animistic past, the pre-Vaishnavait period.

A prominent point of difference between Bishnupriya and the Meitei is the reference to the geneology at time of marriage. Among the Bishnupriya, an account of father in respect of geneology is very important. Among the Meitei, an account of mother in respect of geneology is very important and a lack of it is taken to be a very important draw back. In relation to marriage the Bishnupriya have adopted some traits from the Meitei, while they have retained set of other traits the origin of which can be traced to the origin of the Bishnupriya from the Bengali. The Bishnupriya share structural characteristics with the Bengali. Both are divided into nine gotras, and both strictly follow the rule of avoiding marriage within the Sapinda. All that the Bishnupriya have borrowed from the Meitei is the ritual solemnized marriage.

According to Grierson the Bishnupriya language is of Indo-Aryan group, while the Meitei language is of the Tibeto-Burman group.

The Bishnupriya Manipuri language is therefore different from the Meitei language. Moreover, the Bishnupriya Manipuri language has drawn sustenance by assimilating words from the Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman language. Further Bengali language had exerted the longest influence on the growth and formation of the Bishnupriya Manipuri language.

In the discussion of culture forms such as dance, music, food, dress, and ornaments, it becomes clear that there is no significant difference between the Bishnupriya and the Meitei except folk dance. The folk dance of the Bishnupriya, namely, 'Varan-Dahani Mritya' is not practised by the Meitei. On the other hand, the Meitei folk dance presented in the course of a 'Lai Haraoba Festival' is not practised by the Bishnupriya.

Moreover, Rain-invoking song is the oldest folk song of the Bishnupriya. Meaning of the song, reveals that the song was composed probably in the 16th century which supports the earliest existence of the Bishnupriya in Manipur.

'Ras-Leela' and 'Kirtana', the greatest features of the Bishnupriya culture, have got equal prominence in both the Bishnupriya and Meitei. Members of these two ethnic groups feel proud for this. As regards the food, dress and ornaments there is no significant difference between the Bishnupriya and the Meitei; they are differed from Bengali particularly in respect of dress. The traditional dress of the Bengali women is 'Saree' whereas that of the Bishnupriya is 'analuri' or 'Lanau'.

It is interesting to note that as mentioned earlier the acceptance of the fact that the crisis is only with the Bishnupriya living outside Manipur. The Bishnupriya now residing in Manipur have either to a great extent merged, or subdued their distinct identity, vis-a-vis the Meitei identity except that the

Bishnupriya have their marriage alliance between three villages - Ningthoukhong, Heirok and Khangapok.

However, there does not apparently exist any situation of 'crisis of ethnic identity' for the Bishnupriya now in Manipur as by the very fact of their living in Manipur, they are 'Manipuri'.

The Bishnupriya-Meitei affair on review of history, reveals that it is one of identity controversy rather than one of identity-crisis of the Bishnupriya.

Like the Thadou experience Bishnupriya find themselves in an ambivalent situation requiring them to redefine their identity. The situation is ambivalent for them as living in Manipur and outside find themselves in two different opposite situations. The Bishnupriya living in Manipur find it advisable to merge their identity with the Meitei, while those living outside Manipur, as in the Cachar districts of Assam, and in Tripura, identify themselves as the Bishnupriya-Manipuri, distinct from the Meitei. The genesis of this can be traced to their exposure, culture-contact with other ethnic groups.

v

### THADOU EXPERIENCE

Among the tribes of the Kuki group, the movement for ethnic transformation which draws our attention is that relating to the Thadou. They form the main prominent group of tribes among the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group.

Kuki is a name which has been imposed on the people now holding the name. Originally they were known by their own tribal names, which in most of the cases was based on the name of the clan or the village. With the coming of Christianity among the Kuki group of people, it came first to the Thadou, and thus the first translation of the Bible was in the Thadou dialect of the Kuki group of languages. The implications of this were far reaching.

Gradually the British officers and so also their records started referring to the Kuki as the Thadou-Kuki. This gave the impression that the Thadou represented the entire Kuki group. This continued for considerable time. According to the 1950 part C state order, the tribes were listed as Kuki, but by a modification which became necessary, by 1956 this name had to be dropped and the tribes, like the Hmar, Paite, Gangte, Vaiphei, Zou etc., who were hitherto known by the generic name Kuki, had to be referred to by their tribal names. Only Thadou continued to add the name Kuki along with their name.

In 1960 translation of the Bible was printed. It was called the Kuki Bible, though it was one in the Thadou language.

Interestingly enough, this led to fissiporous tendencies among the Thadou themselves. The dispute ultimately reached the court, for arbitration. One party claimed that the language in which the Holy Bible was written should be named Thadou, while

the other party claimed that it should be designated as Kuki.

Kuki is a generic name of several clans (sub-tribes) of Kuki. For Manipur, Kuki covers two groups of different clans:

KUKI GENERIC NAME OF

A. GROUP

B. GROUP

1956 Recognised

Unrecognised

1. Aimol	1. Baite
2. Chiru	2. Changsan
3. Chothe	3. Chongloi
4. Gangte	4. Doungel
5. Hmar	5. Guite
6. Koireng	6. Hangshing
7. Kom	7. Haolai
8. Paite	8. Haokip
9. Purum	9. Kipgen
10. Ralte	10. Khongthang
11. Simte	11. Kilong
12. <u>Sukte</u>	12. Lenthang
13. <u>Thadou</u>	13. Lungkim
14. <u>Vaiphei</u>	14. Lhangum
15. Zou	15. Lupho
	16. Lupheng
	17. Lhungdim
	18. Lotjem
	19. Misao
	20. Mate
	21. Mangte
	22. Ngoilu
	23. Sah-um
	24. Thangeo
	25. Tuboi etc.

1. Those clans of Kuki, recognised to the level of a tribe in Manipur, each tribe (now) has a slightly differing pronunciation of the Kuki common language and they develop their dialect for their own group.

2. But Thadou clan now recognised to the level of a tribe speak the common language of the Kuki people with those unrecognised clans which could have been elevated to a tribe like in the case of Thadou. As shown in the diagram Thadou speaks one and the same language to be named after their clan name Thadou. Here other 26 clans with whom Thadou speak one and the same language objects on the ground that Thadou is a name of a person and that name Thadou does not cover other clans, speaking the language, but Kuki name covers both Thadou and others clans as stated above. ✓ Therefore, the language name is Kuki as justified by the District Court back 1972 and the Government of Manipur has been using Kuki to be the name of their language ever since then. It should continue for unity and integrity of the Kuki people.
4. The Thadou worked through their way to change the Government standing order (using Kuki) when Mr. Paokhoaei Thadou became an elected Member of legislative Assembly in 1984. As the matter is politically motivated, the present Government, thought understands the mistake or misnamed of the Kuki language is waiting order of the Court of Justice to make do the correction once for all.

This situation may be interpreted as follows:

While the section which is in favour of designating the language as Thadou represent the 'purisit' group, while those who are in favour of carrying the Kuki name represent the

'politicized' group. This latter group appears to be in search of a wider identity which (a) has been current so far (the Kuki) identity, and (b) has the potentiality of mobilizing a viable and effective larger group for political bargain. In the midst of the dispute referred above, the pro-Kuki section demanded a constitutional modification of the list of Scheduled tribes for Manipur to make a room for Kuki in the constitutional list of scheduled tribes. They succeeded in this. In the latest official list, Kuki is the name of a major division while under it there are a number of tribes.

As mentioned earlier, in Manipur, among speakers of the Thadou language, there are those who favour to be designated as Thadou and there some others who would like to be designated as Kuki. In fact this division has gone down to the clan level. There are some clans which favour to be referred to as Thadou while there are some others who would like to be referred to as Kuki. It has been noticed that within the same clan sometimes opinion is divided. Some members would like to be called Kuki while other would like to retain the name Thadou Kuki. The reason for this is something which demands careful attention.

The Thadou follow the principle of primogeniture. Among the Thadou, in a village, those who are the descendants of the senior ancestor would like to be designated as Kuki. This gives them the advantage of maintaining superiority over the other smaller

clans. According to Kamkenthang, "Thadou as the ancestor is not the senior most ancestor for all the Thadou speakers. They do not like to bear the name Thadou. They prefer to be known as Kuki. They say that to bear the name of a junior is contrary to the norm of the society".

However, Shaw (The Thadou Kuki, 1929) mention that "the origin of this word (Kuki) is not know, but it first appears in Bengal, Rawlin's writing of the "Cucis on Mountaineers of Tipra" in Asiatic Researcher (II, XII) in 1792. Klongshai is the name used in Aracan for the Lakher tribe (Shakespear, Lushai-Kuki clans, p. 212) and some of the Thado-Haokips, I think - are said to use a word Khongshai for Kukis in general which reappears in the Meithei Khonjai and probably in the Angami Naga Kotso-ma. They speak of themselves as Thado, and though this term may be taken to cover only the descendants of that eponymous ancestor, it is generally used to cover also dependent clans now intermingled with and closely associated with those descendants though not actually claiming Thado as an ancestor, such, in particular and the descendants of Lenthang and Lunkin for whom, if they are not to be called Thados, there is no other distinctive term".

Thadou claim that the Chongsan, Lhangum, Lenthang, Lunkim, Kom, Gangte, Vaiphei, Kholhang, Chiru and those of inferior lineage were all under the wing of the Thadou and so were then included under that term.

This dispute has taken extreme forms, as a result now the name of the tribe has been retained as Thadou-Kuki. The other who were previously in the Kuki category have preferred to be designated by their original names, like Vaiphei, Paite, Simte, Ralte, Hmar, etc. There are many who have been opposing the multiplication of names. In one of the memorandum presented by the Manipur Kuki Tribes Recognition Demand Committee, "The existing list of 1956 was the result of spot study carried out by the Backward Classes Commission headed by the late Baba Kalelkar Saheb in 1953. The Commission met representative of all group concerned and their recommendation was examined and considered at all levels before the order of 1959 was issued. Now after thirty years (1986), no new tribes has been born and could not have been born. No genuine difficulties have been encountered during the last three decades. The present proposal to increase the list is nothing but the desire to create more fragmentation by bringing down the tribal level to the clan level and to emphasize even minor differences ignoring things which have been common and which held the communities so long and so far."

The Thadou Experience - One of the most populous tribal groups in Manipur, belonging to the Kuki group of tribes is being suspected of trying to over-rule the distinct identity of other category of Kuki tribes. Such a suspicion has arisen among the Kuki groups of tribes themselves, all about one section of the same ethnic group.

**CHIN-KUKI-MIZO EXPERIENCE**

There is a group of people who have no proper name by which they can collectively identify themselves as an ethnic group. They live in the Indo-Burma border areas. This ethnic group is divided into a number of tribes and the tribes are further subdivided into clans. Most of the tribes are now christians. Before they embraced christianity they were all animists worshipping various spirits dwelling in different places like the precipice, water, woods, rocks and spirits of the ancestors etc. These people are known by various names by outsiders. A bulk of their population is found in the Chin State of Burma while other members are dispersing in Manipur, Tripura, Bangladesh, Assam and Mizoram. The tribes found in India were known as Kuki by the outsiders. Their cognate tribes found in Burma were known as Chin by the outsiders. So they become both Chin and Kuki whether they like it or not. The Kuki-Chin race is a sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman or Indo-Chinese family.

The terms Kuki and Chin are foreign words unheard of by the people themselves at first. They were the names given as their generic names without the knowledge of the people themselves for whom there have been much confusions about the names.

These Chin-Kuki people are all closely interrelated tribes having many common characteristic features such as same name,

their appearance, customs, languages, which cannot separate them from one another. Naming the same group of people by different foreign names is really confusing for the insiders as well as the outsiders. An outsider thinks that Chin is different from Kuki and vice-versa. An insider who may like to accept either Chin or Kuki is again in an embarrassing situation when another name is applied to him. It creates confusion in him also. Besides these confusing names there are various tribal names by which they are identified with reference to one another. This group of tribes have a number of common affinities by which even an outsider will be convinced that the various tribes belong to the same stock. Some of the common features are no longer operated in full but remained in vestigial form owing to socio-cultural changes that are taking place through ages. Some of the common characteristic features are given below.

#### 1. Clan Songs

Possession of clan songs by the clans forming the tribes is a very unique feature of the Chin-Kuki tribes. Members of the same clan in each tribe possess clan songs. Owing to Christianity the knowledge about possession of clan songs is very dim among some clans and tribes. The clan songs are dirges lamenting the death of a member of the clan. They are sung at wake, burial and during mourning. But they would never be sung at ordinary times. The clan songs afforded means of reaching the spirits of the dead to the land of the dead and rejoining the

spirits of the dead ancestors and of members of the clan.

## 2. Linguistic Affinities

Linguistic affinities prevail among these group of tribes unlike among the tribes of Naga. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman speech group. A remarkable feature among them is that members of different tribes can converse one another by using their own respective dialects or languages. But there are some tribes which are a bit remote in linguistic line but one can make idea out of the speech in course of conversation. In such cases understanding is difficult but one understands something out of it.

The whole group can linguistically be divided into R-group and Non-R-group of languages. The non-R-group has no R-sound and some consonant clusters like TI.Hm etc. their languages. Such groups are Thadou, Paite/Tedim Chin, Zou, Vaiphei etc. The R-group include Lushai, Hmar, Lakher, Pawi and all the so called old Kuki who happened to be in contact with outsiders earlier than their cognates. Of the old Kuki group, the Kom, Anal, Chiru etc. may be viewed to be far removed from the Chin-Kuki ethnic affiliation with reference to the non-R-group of tribes in linguistic point of view. But they are very closely related again to the R-group.

## 3. Belief in Common Origin

The different tribes of the Chin-Kuki world held a common belief that they originally emerged out of a cave or hole

according to their mythological stories put in different but in analogical versions. This mythological cave is known by various names like Khul, Khur, Khurpui, Khurtu-bijur, Sinlung, Chinlung and so on by various tribes like Thadou (Shaw 1929 : 24-26), Lushai (Shakespeare 1912), Lakher (Parry 1976 :4), Paite/Tedim Chin (Kamkhenthang 1967: 1-2) and Moyon-Monsang etc.

#### 4. Possession of Common Folktales

There are many folktales common and current among these tribes they are dispersing far and wide geographically. We are having such tales as Khupching and Ngambawn, Thanghou and Liandou, Ngalngam (Ralngam), Temtatpu/Tingtingpa (the dao sharpener) a wild cat and a domestic hen and so on. These stories are found more or less in similar forms in Manipur, Burma, Mizoram, Assam etc. Possession of the same folktales means nothing but the people are of the same folk having similar, social ritual norms and similar philosophy of life.

The same folktales reflect the thought, idea, socio-cultural life including value systems.

5. Each of the tribes under the Chin-Kuki group has particular design of cloth associated with the tribe by which they can be identified as a group. In this regard particular interesting designs are found among some tribes. These designs may conveniently and provisionally be termed as Kuki element. They are KHAM-TANG SAIPIKHUP designs of cloth found among the Thadou,

Kom, Aimol, Chiru, Chothe etc. Besides these, there is what we may term as Thadou Linguistic element in their languages. That is the sound of double vowels called i.e. as in Pathien Lienpu etc. are found in Hmar, Thadou, Aimol, Chothe etc.

#### 6. Agamous Marriage

Majority of the tribes follow agamous marriage in which a man can marry any woman within and outside his clan. The distinctiveness of the tribes and clans of the Chin-Kuki group is its agamous marriage. All the major tribes like Thadou, Hmar Paite/Tedim Chin, Kakher, Lushai etc. practice agamy. The only exception to this rule is the so called anthropological old Kuki.

They follow Purum type of marriage in which there is a marriage circle. There are definite wife taking and wife-giving groups. A man cannot take wife from some groups and he is to get wife from predetermined group or groups. He cannot marry from his own social group as among the Anals, Monsang, etc. They also have a system of marriage by service whereas in the case of other group marriage is by purchase. Among the Hmar also there had been marriage by service in the past as practised by Anal, Moyan, Monsang etc.

#### 7. Historical Course of Migration

As tribes claimed emergence from cave or hole uniformly they had more or less mythological and historical course of migration. Tradition tells us their movement from China through Tibet to

Burma. From Burma many tribes made their farther movement into different places in Bangladesh and India while many of them remained in Burma. Mizoram is one of the routes through which migration took place as claimed by many tribes now living in Manipur.

In addition to the above common characters there is a set of characteristic features of the tribes applicable to them at one time. Vamkhohau (1973 : iii) reproduced the characteristic features of the Chin-Kuki people in a book "Zo Suanh Khang Simna" as recorded in the Encyclopaedia Britanica as follow:

"The respect from the birth and the knowledge of pedigrees the virtue of hospitality the clanish feeling the suddens of their raids"

There was truth in the remarks. The remarks were nicely applicable to them in the past during the period of tribal vandalism. There are some remarks which still hold good uptill now. The clanish feeling and knowledge of pedigree are still very strong in many case. As for example, all the clans speaking Thadou are aware whether their clans have direct geneological connection with the ancestor of the Thadou or not. This makes fissiparous tendency dividing loyalty into proper Thadou and Kuki. The clanish feeling is expressed in the clanwise organisations and demanding recognition of the clan to the Government as a tribe.

They have established the oneness of the tribe basing on their socio-cultural affinities. They have a good deal of homogeneity. Earlier authorities classed the Naga as nearly akin to the Chin-Kuki. But that is not correct. ✓ The Naga are distinctive for their heterogeneity and the Chin-Kuki tribes are distinctive for their homogeneity. The difference between the Naga and the Chin-Kuki can be shown in brief in the following points. The tribes of Naga believed that they either originated at or dispersed from a place called Makhel near Tadubi village in Manipur whereas the Chin-Kuki tribes believed that they emerged out of a cave somewhere in China. Tuck and Carey (1876 : 3) had shown the distinction between the Naga and the Chin-Kuki) and said "The Government of Nagas tribes is distinctly democratic. Their chieftainship does not necessarily pass from father to son. The Kuki chiefs, on the other hand, invariably inherit their position by right of birth and take initiative in all matters concerning the administration of their clansmen". There is marked difference between the Naga and the Chin-Kuki in methods of cultivation in which the Naga have more developed and terraced cultivation whereas the Chin-Kuki work on jhum in a wasteful and untidy manner on the hill sides. The Naga do not keep hair long but the Chin-Kuki people kept hair long in the past. The male kept their hair in a knot either at the back of the nape, example, Paite, Thadou, Hmar or at the occiput of the head as in the case of Lakher, Pawi, Maring etc. There is more unity and a

sense of oneness among the heterogenous Naga whereas there is more disunity among the homogenous Chin-Kuki tribes.

Now we have established the facts showing that the Naga and the Chin-Kuki are far removed and not related as examined under their marriage form, migration, folk arts, material and spiritual cultures. The Naga form their own separate identity and the Chin-Kuki also have their own distinctiveness which cannot hide them from view. The Naga have vigorous forms of dances whereas the dances of the Chin-Kuki are very slow and lethargic. The Naga dances are attractive and the dances of Chin-Kuki group are very dull.

The Naga observe strict clan exogamy in which members of the same clan do not marry unlike the practice of agamy found among the tribes of Chin-Kuki-Mizo.

The Naga construct house on a flatered surface of the ground. The floor of the house is rammed earth on which the house stands. In the case of Chin-Kuki-Mizo the normal way is to construct a house on a slop surface of the earth. The floor is never of earth but of bamboo matting. There is sufficient space underneath the floor to keep the domestic animals. Houses of the chiefs or richmen are usually conspicuous by having horn-like structures displayed on the ridge of the roof and also by having very steep roofs. The houses of the Chief among the Chin-Kuki are normally big in size having maximum

varandah which may be divided into roofed part and unroofed part.

Formally part of the Lushai speakers was Kuki while another part was Chin. But now they had completely succeeded in disowning the terms, Kuki and Chin by adopting an inborn word 'Mizo' for their identity. Various attempts have been made either to replace the terms given by the outsiders or to find out acceptable name for the people as a group.

The Chin, Kuki, Mizo are thus different names adopted by the same ethnographic group, the difference depending on the territory of their location. Those inhabiting Burma have identified themselves as Chin, while those in the contiguous territory within Manipur identify themselves as Kuki and those in the Mizoram part of the continuation of the territory like to be identified as Mizo. This cluster of tribal population inhabiting Manipur today by some factors of history are referred to as Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of people.

The increase of this fissiporous tendencies is clearly seen among the Kuki group of tribes. Either of the terms like Chin/Kuki/Mizo is not unanimously acceptable to the community as a whole.

By 1973, the resentment against the Kuki identity had grown tremendously. While the generic designation 'Kuki' was not acceptable to all. Similarly the generic name 'Chin' was also

not acceptable, as it gave the impression of close identity with the Tedim Chin from Burma.

Ultimately, the only solution was to adopt an expanded name, which will include the identity of the three sections - the Chin, the Kuki and the Mizo. We thus find that the Kuki groups of tribes, though linguistically and ethnographically homogenous have not been able to forge a common identity. This appear in sharp contrast to the experience from the Naga group of tribes, who otherwise represent greater of diversity.

CHAPTER V

THE THEORETICAL AND  
THE METHODOLOGICAL  
ISSUES

- **Conceptual clarifications**
- **Ethnic group**
- **Ethnicity**

## CHAPTER V

### THE THEORETICAL AND THE METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

#### I

In this chapter we discuss the sequence of theoretical and the methodological issues which appeared in course of the study. The issues related to (i) definitions, (ii) standpoints, and (iii) procedures.

The field observation - different communities in Manipur are involved with the process of defining-redefining their identity, took us to such issues like *defining* notion of 'tribe', 'ethnic groups', 'ethnicity'. Consequent to this appeared the issue to define the context with reference to which the field observations are being made. In operational terms, this involved the issue to adopting a *model* to represent the 'reality'. Every such 'model' has at its background a *standpoint* in terms of which the

'reality' is perceived. These two issues are primarily 'theoretical'. Along with these two appeared the issue of *procedure*, in other words, of methodology. In the present study this took us to *comparative analysis*.

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Category of Issues	Occasion for Issues	Specifics of Issues
Definitions of	The analytical concepts	Tribes, Ethnic Group Ethnicity
Standpoints relating to	The phenomena of definition - redefinition	Adopting the <u>model</u>
Procedure for	The formulation of the aspired analytical framework	The procedure of <u>comparative analysis</u> of the experiences (six) from Manipur

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The issues which appeared for attention in the present study are normal for any social research. The discussions here on the issues will follow the sequence in which they appeared. In this chapter, when making our discussion on each of the issue, we will

- (a) identify the issue,
- (b) examine some of the main academic discussions relating to the issue, and
- (c) elaborate our approach to the issue.

## II

The 'home experiences' of the investigator, who is an inhabitant of Manipur, and within it, one who belongs to the scheduled tribe, if this formed the aetiology of the present study, the genesis of the present study, as mentioned earlier, is from the academic suggestions which emerged from the exercise undertaken as part of the M.Phil programme. The definition of the scope as well as the direction of the present study came, to a large extent, also, as mentioned earlier, from such observations as:

"Without detracting from the merit of these more recent works, it is apparent that a theoretical framework capable of informing comparative ethnic studies has not yet emerged." (Despers, 1975, op. cit. Emphasis added).

The exercise was directed towards formulating such a 'theoretical framework'. A clarification will need to be rushed here, relating to what involves 'a theoretical' framework. Any effort by a research student in doctoral dissertation 'towards theory construction' need not be taken as "trying to bite more than what you can chew", the effort is confined to the formulation of an analytical (conceptual) framework that will provide a base for systematising the mass of complex information.

Such definition of scope as well as that of direction of the study, took us to two questions:

- (1) What involves an analytical framework (the content).
- (2) What involves the procedure to formulate an analytical framework (the methodology)

Mason (1986) in his review of "controversies and continuities in race and ethnic relations theory" intended to explore "whether there were points of convergence or continuity between theoretical standpoints which might usefully be explored and exploited to the benefit of the subject as a whole". In his opinion, on this occasion, "the most obvious starting point .... is the question of theory itself. What do we mean by a theory of race or ethnic relations? It will become clear, from the brief perusal of the contents that the authors here have divergent views about the answer to that question .... For some a theory is a little more than a set of working concepts or hypotheses by means of which observations may be classified and ordered. For others a theory is a set of interrelated and structural propositions whose purpose is pre-eminently etiological. For some a social theory needs to be as complex as the phenomena to which it relates, while for others social theory should aim to meet the same criteria of inclusiveness, economy and elegance which is traditionally taken to be the hallmark of theory in the natural sciences. Yet others, while sharing this as an ultimate objective, are content to build towards such an objective by

means of smaller steps, what Merton would have called "theories of the middle range".

✓ In the present study, the initial observation relating to that of ethnogenesis (the historical process whereby the identity of the different tribes has been constituted), and later, that how the different communities (the six experiences) are involved in the process of defining-redefining their respective identity, brought to fore two issues,

- (1) that of adopting a definition of the notion of 'tribe', and
- (2) that of defining the overall context (Structural ecology, for some authors) in which we perceive the collection of the six experiences.

This took us, in the parlance of social research, to issues relating to the definition of concepts, variables, and adopting a model. It is necessary that we elaborate in some detail to define these terms, and also on such methodological issues as 'adopting a model' and 'formulating an analytical framework'.

### III

#### CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

In our present discussion, these relate mainly to the definition of the section of the population involved in the process of definition-redefinition. In specific terms, the issue relates to definition of 'tribe', 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity'.

## Tribe

In our earlier exercise, as part of the M.Phil programme, we were able to note that there has remained considerable imprecision on the definition of the groups, in terms of distinction between 'tribe', 'clan', and 'sub-tribe'. It has been possible to identify between 1873 (Brown) and 1986 (Kamkhenthang), nine different schemes for the classification of the tribes inhabiting Manipur. (Refer Appendix for the different classifications). Some of the main features which come to notice are:

(a) Brown (1873), Dun (1886) and Hodson (1911) divide the tribes into two broad categories, the Naga and the Kuki, Shakespear (1812) refers to the Lushai Kuki Clans rather than the Lushai or the Kuki. Shakespear refers to "the many clans living in the hills tracts ..... of the Kuki race" (1812). He explains:

"The term Kuki, like Naga, Chin, Shendu, and many others, is not recognized by the people to whom we apply it, and I will not attempt to give its derivation, but it has come to have a fairly definite meaning, and we now understand by it certain closely allied clans, with well marked characteristics, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman stock" (p.1).

(b) Brown in 1873 identified 8 major tribal communities in Manipur, today, in 1981, the number has increased to 29, according to the official classification adopted by the Government of Manipur.

(c) It appears that Dun has multiplied the total number of distinct groups by including many more groups which hold village or lineage based identity rather than any distinct ethnic identity.

(2) In the present study, the issue relating to definition appeared when we came to defining the following:

(i) the definition of the Thadou vis-a-vis that of the Kuki. Do we consider the Thadou as a clan or a sub-tribe of the Kuki? Whatever decision we take, how do we define (a) clan, (b) sub-tribe.

(ii) In the Chin-Kuki-Mizo experience, how do we define, each of the three, namely, the Chin, the Kuki, the Mizo? In more specific terms, the question before us were;

(a) Do we consider each of the three, individually the Chin, the Kuki, the Mizo, as a 'tribe', in that case, what do we consider the double hyphenated group, the Chin-Kuki-Mizo? Also a tribe, or a bigger ethnic solidarity, within a larger territorial context.

(b) In case a common language, or more correctly, a language easily intelligible to each of the three is the factor for common identity of a tribe, then by referring to the 'local' cultural differences, what designation do we give to each of the three group ?

(iii) In the Purum experience, how do we explain the sudden 'disappearance' of the Purum and the more prominent appearance of the Chothe? What do each of the two indicate - are the Purum and Chothe distinct 'tribe', or the Purum is only a clan of the Chothe?

(iv) In the Zeliangrong experience, how do we define each of the three, the Zemei, the Liangmei, and the Rongmei, are they tribes? In that case what designation will we give to the Zeliangrong? Also, that of a tribe? In such situation, what would we like to consider as the comprehensive definition of a tribe.

(3) The notion of 'tribe' has engaged the attention of the anthropologists nearly all through the history of the discipline, and without any conclusive results. The concept seems to have defied any standardized definition by the anthropologists all through. According to Notes and Queries on Anthropology (1960), "a tribe may be defined as a politically or socially coherent and autonomous group occupying or claiming a particular territory". In the International Encyclopedia of the social sciences there is an entry on "Tribal Society" according to which,

"In general usage, the work 'tribe' is taken to denote a primary aggregate of peoples living in a primitive or barbarous condition under a headman or chief. The unnecessary moralistic overtones that this usage implies can be avoided or minimized by the use of the expression "tribal society", which is to be preferred

to such synonyms as "primitive society" or "preliterate society". At the same time, the word "tribe" need not be discarded. Indeed, it has become a technical term denoting a territorially defined political unit, a usage that recall the original use of the word for the political divisions or patrician orders of the Roman state." (Lewis, 1968).

The existence of distinct social groups or cultural groups within societies is widespread, and ancient. It has occurred in the communities of Africa to those of modern United States. It has occurred from such ancient days as those of the Old Testament, to those of the years on the eve of the 20th century. At this point "it would be wise, for the sake of clarity, to make the distinction between a Social group and a social category. By a group (we) mean an aggregation of people recruited on clear principles, who are bound to one another by formal, institutionalised rules and characteristic, informal behaviour..... Members usually identify themselves with a group and give it a name. In practice social groups vary in the degree to which they are corporate, and in certain situations one of the principal difficulties of analysis may be to decide whether a particular social entity is in fact a social group or a mere category of the population, such as red-haired people, selected by a criterion that in the context socially neutral and that does not prescribe uniform behaviour". We find he later argues that "Ethnic divisions may simply be categories of the population as are Welshman, and Scotsman living in England, or Indians, Chinese, and Creoles in Mauritius, who are beginning to lose a

sense of ethnic separateness. It is, therefore, always important to be sure what is the exact sociological status of an ethnic or cultural division. Clarity in analysis depend upon it". (Morris, 1968: 167).

The issue before us, with such arguments, and also our own observations from Manipur, specially those emerging from the different schemes of classifications of the 'tribes' that have been made, are two:

(a) How to solve such issues as posed by Shakespear, when he relates about the Lushai-Kuki clan, and our own experiences, such as those of the Zeliangrong -

Distinguish between a clan, tribe, sub-tribe, and wider category such as the Kuki or the Zeliangrong.

(b) What criteria do we need to adopt in making the use of the terms 'tribe' and 'ethnic group'.

The answer to these questions came from a two stage clarification adopted by us. In the broader context we adopted a clarification as follows. Bearing in mind the nature of the field observation from Manipur, that of the communities involved in constant process of defining-redefining their respective identity, which suggested the themes for the present study, we will need to base our analysis in terms of the social category in terms of which the people identify themselves as belonging to a

particular group. We could note that such a position did not contradict with the position as adopted by Barth who perceived the situation in terms of boundary maintenance.

We also felt that for purpose of clarity it will be advisable not to press the academic, classical definition of a 'tribe'. On the contrary to adopt operational definitions for such notions as 'tribe' or ethnic group, and use the designations 'tribe', 'clan', 'sub-tribe', and 'ethnic group' synonymously, if band when necessary, but only after providing alongside the operational clarification.

Operational clarification, or adopting operational definition, involves 'to operate' the empirical observations in terms of certain distinctions which will help categorization, classification, and then ordering of the data. Such definitional functions only help to proceed to testing of hypothetical statements and formulation of an 'theoretical framework'. Deduction, induction, and retroduction are the three approaches to reasoning which lead the investigator from facts to theory. In methodological sense, deduction comprises the inferential processes inherent in making concepts measurable and hypotheses testable; i.e. the process of operationalization. Whenever a concept is operationally defined, its meaning is made more explicit and more specific. The term hypothesis in such stands refer, in fact, to the assumptions which the investigator makes in the outset.

Referring back to our field observations, we consider the Kuki as well as the Thadou, both as distinct tribe and sub-tribe at one point of analysis, and a tribe and its clan at another point of analysis. In the early history of these communities, the original group was the Kuki tribe, and of which the Thadou were only a clan, the population of which was spread to a cluster of villages, within a specified territory. In course of time, to be more specific, with the translation of the Bible in the Thadou dialect of the tribe (Kuki), there was the beginning of the process in which this dialect group, clan of the Kuki, started to consolidate itself as a group distinct from the rest of the Kuki community. At this point of history, for the purpose of analysis, we will need to designate the Thadou as a distinct tribe, with the explanation that it has emerged from the original Kuki tribe. We may view the situation from another position as well. In case the Thadou today would prefer to be identified as a group distinct from the other Kuki, who are we to prevent them from this.

#### IV

#### Ethnic Group

One of the issue before us, as well be clear from the foregoing discussions, related to 'substituting' (?) the notion of tribe or 'community' with that of 'ethnic group'. In this relation the specific issue were two;

(a) What defines an ethnic group, and whether it substitutes the notion of tribe and non-tribe communities such as the Meitei or the Bishnupriya?

(b) Does the use of the notion of ethnic groups foresee at some point of time later, the redundancy of the notion of tribe, say, in the context of Manipuri ?

In the process of formulating reply to these queries, two situations drew our attention,

(i) Within Anthropology, what implies the traditions of 'ethnography', 'ethnology', and now the study of ethnicity. Note, the root 'ethnos' is common to each of the three.

(ii) The paradigm shift in anthropology, consequent to the publication of Ethnic Groups and Boundaries by Barth (1969).

In anthropology, in fact, we can identify a two stage paradigm shift, initially from early ethnography to ethnology and then to comparative analysis, and second phase of paradigm shift with the publication of the volume by Barth (1969). "An ethnographer is an anthropologist who attempts - at least in part of his professional work - to record and describe the culturally significant behaviour of a particular society". The early ethnographers based their generalizations about a 'particular society' on basis of observation from a micro-situation, often a village or the interview of a few knowledgeable persons, as a result, the notion of the 'society' was never explicitly

announced. What attracted attention was the culturally significant behaviour, rather than the 'boundary' of the society and the internal organization/structure which distinguishes it from others.

After 1945, with the end of the IIInd World War, there was a marked shift in the approaches of the ethnographers. As observed by Firth, the classical study material of the anthropologists seemed to be vanishing fast, and the anthropologists had to search for new subjects for purpose of their study, such as those of refined methodology, formulation of theories, the study of culture change. "Following the World War II, ethnography began to attract more theoretical and methodological attention". (Conklin, 1968, 174).

What comprises ethnology has three distinct sets of meaning, interestingly. While in the United Kingdom, ethnology is considered,

"The name 'ethnography' is generally used for purely descriptive accounts of a people or peoples. Ethnology goes beyond description. In the first place it seeks to provide a classification of peoples by comparing them with reference to their similarities and differences. People or ethnic groups resemble or differ from each other by racial characteristics, by lanaguage, and by their modes of life and mode of thought, from the kind of dwellings they inhabit or the kind of clothes they wear to the kind of beliefs they hold. Ethnologists distinguish between the racial characteristics of a people and their cultural characteristics and between racial and cultural classifications" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1958, III).

We may note, Radcliffe-Brown, who represents the interpretation as adopted in the United Kingdom, refers to race, peoples, and ethnic groups. This distinction, as we will note presently, has made a bearing on the present day perception and analysis of the ethnic phenomena.

In sharp contrast to the definition of ethnology in the United Kingdom, in continental Europe, ethnology refers to what comprises social anthropology in the United Kingdom. Much different from these two, in the United States, in the early years of Boas and Kroeber, ethnology referred to the study of evolution of the communities. Toward the end of the nineteenth century two schools of ethnology were founded, one by Boas in the United States and the other by Ratzel and Frobenius in Germany. Both schools emphasized the historical processes of diffusion and migration. In the United States, by the 50's, Murdock laid the foundation for cross-cultural studies, and through this, that of comparative analysis.

Such cross-cultural studies stem from the evolutionary interests of the nineteenth century. "The principal weakness of most cross-cultural studies so far is that their instances hop, skip, and jump across the map in such a manner that continuity of geographical distribution and other clues to genetic explanations are missing..... Although significant positive correlations in cross-cultural research are relatively easy to

find, casual relationships are more difficult to establish, and the direction of causation is still more elusive.... Naroll (1964) has drawn attention to the many problems surrounding the nature of the ethnic unit used in cross-cultural research. Because this is the unit counted in all intertrait cross-cultural correlations, its definition is crucial to such studies. (Driver, 1968 : 184).

We may return to examine the answer to the two questions posed earlier, relating to what constitutes ethnic groups, and the redundancy of the notion of 'tribe' with increasing analytical emphasis on ethnic group analysis. In view of the foregoing discussions, and also on basis of our observations from Manipur, a satisfactory characterization of a tribal society, we feel, must concentrate upon criteria of form rather than of content.

As regards the second question, that relating to the redundancy of the notion of 'tribe', the straight answer this has to be that 'such notions cannot be redundant as long as the people identify themselves as such'. The paradigm shift that has appeared among the anthropologists with the publication of the volume by Barth (1969), the guiding argument is that "the starting point for such an examination must be a recognition that 'ethnic group' are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves". With such guiding consideration, the notion of 'tribe' will obviously never be redundant.

It may be interesting, more so, relevant to note here is that the paradigm shift from focus on tribe to that of ethnic groups, there has been a concurrent shift in focus from structural organizational considerations of the respective group, to processual experiences of intergroup relations. While the early ethnographers confined their attention to the structural features and cultural traits of a particular tribe, the paradigm shift took the attention to the processes of intergroup relations.

While such paradigm shift appeared in the perspectives of the social scientists, more so, that of the anthropologists, it is interesting to note that social analysts have not been able to distance themselves from issues relating to race identity. As result, any discussion on ethnic relations has invariably included a discussion on race relations as well. As Mason (1986) explains "The problems of origin has long dogged the study of many aspects of human behaviour. It takes on special significance in the field of race and ethnic relations..... Ethnicity may be a resource in the making of a group's history, but the process of categorization, of which racism is the most striking example in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, illustrates that the superior capacity of some groups to define the circumstances under which that history is made is a crucial feature of a symmetrical power relations". (Mason, 1986: 5).

Academic disciplines, like ethnography-ethnology, and so also analytical concepts, such as ethnicity - ethnic group relations, it will be interesting to note, in the realm of sociology of knowledge, carry their own history. Knowledge is society specific, time specific. "Traditionally, the plural society thesis has been seen as the principal example of the attempt to develop a special theory of race and ethnicity. (Mason, op. cit. 11). The notion of 'ethnic groups' over period of time, and in different soils, has referred to different category of groups. To the Western colonisers it referred by and large to the tribal communities in Africa, and Asia. The colonizers, and the academicians in communion with them, found the notion of race more convenient to refer to them. Across the Pacific, in the United States, the notion of ethnic groups takes attention to the cultural minority groups, like those with a Mexican or Italian, or similar origin, who have now settled in the United States. With the development of black resistance in the United States in the 1960's, such groups have also been identified now as ethnic group.

In the present study on Manipur, we note, the distinctiveness of identity, all that it can mean to the person(s) concerned, are clearly defined through two factors, territorial affiliation and that of language/dialect by the people. A Thadou distinguishes himself from the neighbouring Kabui on basis of the difference of language, and so also the

Bishnupriya distinguish themselves from the neighbouring Meitei on basis of their distinct dialect.

In Manipur, the language issue has found its most clear expression in the Thadou experience. Among the Kuki-Thadou, as Kamkenthang reports, the fissiporous tendency started when the Holy Bible was printed in 1960. The dialect in which it was published was the Thadou dialect of the Kuki group of people. The version of the Bible was however designated as the Kuki Bible. This initiated resentment from the other Kuki clans, such as the Paite, Gangte, the Vaiphei, the Zou, etc. These communities, distinct dialect groups, felt relieved to be known by their true tribal names. This is how they returned themselves in the Census of 1961, and later got their recognition through official notification of 1976.

The Chin-Kuki-Mizo appellation provides a good example of how territorial affiliation brings different name to the same cultural-linguistic group. The section of population which resides in Manipur have been known for long as the Kuki, while those who have inhabited the neighbouring Mizo hills are known as the Mizo, and those across the borders in Myanmar (Burma) are being designated as the Chin. To some extent the Purum experience also reveals how (it is apprehended, and thus explained by some scholars) that Purum is a territorial designation while Chothe is a cultural-linguistic designation.

On basis of the exposition provided by Danda (1991), the issue is still inconclusive.

With all such examples from Manipur, and the academic debate on the issue of identification of ethnic groups, we considered it operationally convenient to refer to each community which feels to be identified differently, as an ethnic group, such as the Chin, the Kuki, the Thadou, and the numerous others whose name has appeared in course of presenting the six experiences, as ethnic groups. The issue of defining the boundary of an ethnic group, in our opinion, is not to be decided in terms of any set criteria adopted by the analyst, on the other hand, it has to be in terms of how the people themselves feel the distinction between 'we' and 'they', the 'insider' and the 'outsider'.

v

### Ethnicity

As regards this concept, same as in relation to the cognate concept of 'ethnic groups', we need to view it from the stand point of (a) the content as well as (b) the context. In terms of content, ethnicity refers to an overt expression of feeling of differentiation, such as the situation of how the other Kuki group of peoples differentiated themselves from the Thadou. It is conscious, express feeling.

In social science literature we find extensive discussions on the notion of ethnicity, but a close look at these readily

reveal that the attention to this notion has refracted to diverse directions rather than going deep to an analysis of what implies it. Smith argues that ethnicity should not be treated as a givens, like primordial givens. As we note from the available discussions, every discussion which is intended to be on ethnicity, refracts to a discussion on ethnic group boundaries and identities.

Etymologically the term traces its origin from the term ethnic that relates to community of physical and mental traits possessed by members of a group as a product of their common hereditary and cultural traditions. According to Webster's Dictionary (1978), it is a noun from the expression ethnic, and refers to certain quality or affiliation based on heredity as well as cultural considerations. Winick's Dictionary of Anthropology does not include any entry like ethnicity as such. It has an entry on ethnic which refers to a group distinguishable by certain common cultural attributes, such as language. It is interesting to note such unconcern or marginal reference to the notion of ethnicity has continued with the social science disciplines, as result this far no comprehensive definition has been provided. The attempt here will be only exploratory rather than in any way conclusive or definitive. Danda notes that,

"Still it does not appear to have fulfilled all the conditions of becoming a standardized concept as the meaning it conveys is even now largely society-specific as well as time-specific and to a major extent depends upon the orientation of the society as such".  
(Danda, 1991, p. 70)

As Danda has rightly summarized "by and large ethnicity is still presumed to be associated with the primordial system of categorisation". The issue is not what the notion of ethnicity implies in terms of the content, but the attention goes to the context in which the phenomena of ethnicity makes its appearance.

**CHAPTER VI**

**ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION**

## CHAPTER VI

### ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION

#### I

Analysis of 'facts' relating to identity of tribes in Manipur had suggested to us the soundness to investigation of the processes of fission-fusion of identities to understand the process of flux of ethnic identities in the State.

(i) In the philosophy of science such approach is referred as the inductive method. The exercises involved in this are clear and precise. We began by observation of data and then proceed to classify it into appropriate categories. A variety of descriptive facts and series of conceptual generalizations help to consolidate the facts in a systematic manner.

(ii) The formalization of available theories is another approach. According to this, the available theories provide the

initial clue for investigation in terms of the concepts incorporated in them. In philosophy of science such an approach is referred to as the deductive method. As we have noted, we had the advantage of a number of 'theories' on ethnicity, and we could have based our investigation on one or combination of them. An exclusive reliance on such a method could have its limitations. This notwithstanding, the available theories did provide much insight in regard to the line of investigation.

(iii) The third approach is one with the combination of the above two, referred to as the retroductive method which works by a technique of successive approximations, the concepts and assumptions of theories are brought into closer alignment with relevant evidence while at the same time maintaining the logic of consistency required of deductive method. (cf. Schrag, 1967). This was the method which helped us most in formulating the analytical frame-work with the present study.

After a review of relevant literature in anthropology and related social science disciplines, it was realized, that the notion of "ethnicity" can be adopted as the dependent variable for the present study. To suit the purpose of the present study, and also in view of the prevailing ambiguity in regard to a precise definition of the term, we adopted an operational definition. To tide over the limitations of the objective base of ethnicity and the subjective definition, both of which in a

way referred to structural considerations, we tried to adopt a behavioural approach to the definition of the notion of ethnicity.

According to us ethnicity is one category of social phenomena which involves the behaviour of people as well as the structure of the society in regard to social distinctiveness which finds expression in varying situations. Hence, the phenomena of ethnicity involves the structural as well as behavioural considerations.

## II

A close analysis of facts in regard to these which formed the source of data for the present study were:

1. The Purum Experience: We may recall some of the description given earlier. The process of identity reformulation as revealed by this community bring to attention two distinct features.

(a) This is a community considered to be from the intermediate category, and referred as the Old Kuki in official records by the British, but in their recent process of redefinition of their identity they prefer to be identified as a Naga community.

(b) There is the apprehension that this community has tried to adopt the identity of a larger community, the Chothe, in order to find a viable number and thus identity.

2. The Zeliangrong Experience: The Zemei, the Liangmei and the Rongmei tribes of the Naga group of tribes have tried to forge a common identity of the Zeliangrong. The history of this can be traced back to the early 30's of this century. The Zeliangrong movement is often referred to by its protagonists as an 'independence movement' against Naga and British dominations.

3. The Thadou Experience: The Thadou is one of the Kuki group of tribes. In terms of number, the total population of the Thadou is the highest of the 29 tribes inhabiting Manipur. This is also one of the most 'progressive' tribes of Manipur.

When the Bible was being first translated into the local tribal languages of Manipur, it was in Thadou language. Somehow, the early Western Evangelists who were involved in the Bible translation, they designated the Thadou version of the Bible as the Bible in Kuki. In course of time the other tribes of the Kuki group, specially the Gangte and Paite resented this. Such resentment became more pronounced after the Gangte and the Paite prepared their own language versions of the Bible.

The controversy among the Kuki group of tribes centered around naming of the Bible in the Thadou language. While the Thadou liked it to be referred as the Kuki Bible or the Thadou Kuki Bible, the other tribes of the Kuki group wanted the Bible to be referred to as the Thadou Bible rather than adding the Kuki appellation. They explained that any such name such as Thadou

Kuki gave the impression that the Thadou are the main representatives of the Kuki group of tribes.

4. Very similar to this is the Bishnupriya experience. Bishnupriya is the name of a non-tribal community concentrated in the Bishnupur district of Manipur. Today the people of this community inhabit parts of the Cachar district of Assam and some parts of the Agartala district of Tripura. The distribution of the Bishnupriya to three states-Manipur, Assam and Tripura. This is due to some historical reasons dating back to about two hundred years ago. Today we find that a sharp controversy has developed around the identity of the Bishnupriya. Much of the controversy has its origin in the happenings outside Manipur but what concerns us in the present study is how the controversy involved with the identity of the Bishnupriya has shaped itself in Manipur.

The Bishnupriya inhabiting the Cachar districts of Assam and those in Tripura prefer to be designated as the Bishnupriya-Manipuri. The Meitei in Manipur strongly resent this. According to them the Bishnupriya should be referred to by the single word, Bishnupriya rather than add the suffix 'Manipuri'. Any such usage is likely to give the impression that the Bishnupriya represent a section of the Manipuri people, which in fact they do not. The Bishnupriya inhabited outside Manipur, in Assam and in Tripura, justify their use of the appellation 'Manipuri' as they

claim to be one of the original inhabitants of Manipur, and share many common cultural traits with the Meitei.

In sharp contrast to this, in Manipur, the Bishnupriya inhabiting in Manipur prefer to be identified as Manipuri Meitei, rather than as Bishnupriya. The Meitei however are not agreeable to this. They would like to distinguish the Bishnupriya people from the Manipuri.

The Bishnupriya-Manipuri and the Thadou-Kuki, analytically, represent many similarities, it is the second part in each of the two hyphenated names which introduce new issues of controversy. The history attached with each of the two names has brought in a sequence of factors and interpretations which have provided full stories of definition and redefinition of identities in each of the case. In each of the two cases, while the first part of the designation is the indigenous identity the second part of the designation is the name adopted (Nee, assigned) by the communities by the British. Questions like what does the generic designation of Manipuri or Kuki imply, when was it introduced and with what understanding, over what period of time (during the colonial period and after) and how have these been defined and re-defined surround each of the two experiences.

5. The Meitei Experience. The most popularly known and numerically the most dominant community inhabiting Manipur referred to as the Manipuri. They are locally known as the

Meitei. There is the general understanding that the Meitei are Hindu. This interpretation has now become a subject of controversy as the Meitei, long known to be Hindu, would like to be identified as Sanamahi, the name of indigenous religious faith. According to some analysts this represents a process of religious revivalism. On a close look we find that a complex set of political and cultural issues are involved, most of which have emerged during the post-colonial period.

6. The Chin-Kuki-Mizo Experience. Such a designation for a group of communities sharing common territorial affiliation, that is Manipur, represents a unique experience of how irredentism finds its socio-cultural-political manifestation. In the case of Manipur, while on the one hand there are efforts to re-inforce and maintain the Kuki identity, pronouncedly distinct from the Naga identity, on the other hand we also note that the Kuki group of people find the need to keep themselves divided into the Chin, the Kuki and the Mizo identity. In a way this appears to be a miniature exercise in "unity in diversity".

In the north east, the Kuki group of tribes show a widespread distribution, extending over the states of Assam, neighbouring Manipur and Tripura, and the State of Mizoram, and across the border, in neighbouring Burma and Bangladesh. In Manipur, the Kuki group of tribes comprises of officially recognized 8 scheduled tribes. In Manipur, they are spread in

territory which have borders with Mizoram and Burma. The Kuki group of tribes, inhabiting Manipur, which are located in territory bordering Mizoram, would like to retain their Kuki identity, but would like at the same time to represent that, in Manipur, they are an extension of the Mizo. This includes Zou, the Hmar and the Lushai. The Paite, Veiphei, and some other tribes of Kuki, in view of their location in territory bordering Burma and while retaining the Kuki designation, would also like to keep alive their Chin identity, with people of the same name residing across the border, in Burma.

### III

#### Analysis

The substantive part of any research effort, as expected is the presentation of the analysis and interpretation of the data. Any such presentation has to begin with two statements. They are needed as much for clarification as for ready reference. The statements referred to relate to:

1. The empirical feature in term of which the phenomena has been perceived.

2. The conceptual scheme in terms of which the analysis has been formulated.

The subjective view of ethnic identity and the objective base of such identity are two sets of perceptions very common in anthropological literature. We need not consider this as

opposite to each other, on the contrary they can be taken as complimentary orientations, the combination of which provides a realistic appraisal of the phenomena on ground. One of the possible approach to integrate these two perceptions is to view the situation in its historical context. We have attempted this in the present study.

We can divide the period of history in focus into two stages, the first stage covering the colonial period and that preceding it, while the other stage covering the post-colonial period. In Manipur those ethnic identities with tribals, which we consider today as ascribed, subjective perceptions, were away from this during the early years. The corporate identity of the Thadou, the three small tribal groups now combining to make the Zeliangrong identity, the Purum, and the different communities of the Kuki group, as carried by each of them today are of recent origin. Till the annexation of their territory by the British and the appearance of elements of British rule to their lands, each of these tribes held a very loosely knit corporate identity based on hazy notion of shared common language and myth of common origin. There are clear indications that with the land of the Thadou and that of the constituents of the Zeliangrong tribe coming under British administration, there appeared some elements which initiated a process of progressive consolidation of their corporate identities. Between the Thadou and the constituents of the Zeliangrong, the sequence of events were different, but the

end outcome was same. With the Thadou it was the appearance of Christianity and with it the translation of the Bible into a local language which provided the initial element which initiated sequence of situations towards emergence of corporate identity. The precipitate effect of this appeared much later with the fission of the Thadou identity from larger Kuki identity. With the Zeliangrong, the sequence of events took a different turn. The precipitate effect in course of time was the fusion of identities between the constituent groups of the Zeliangrong.

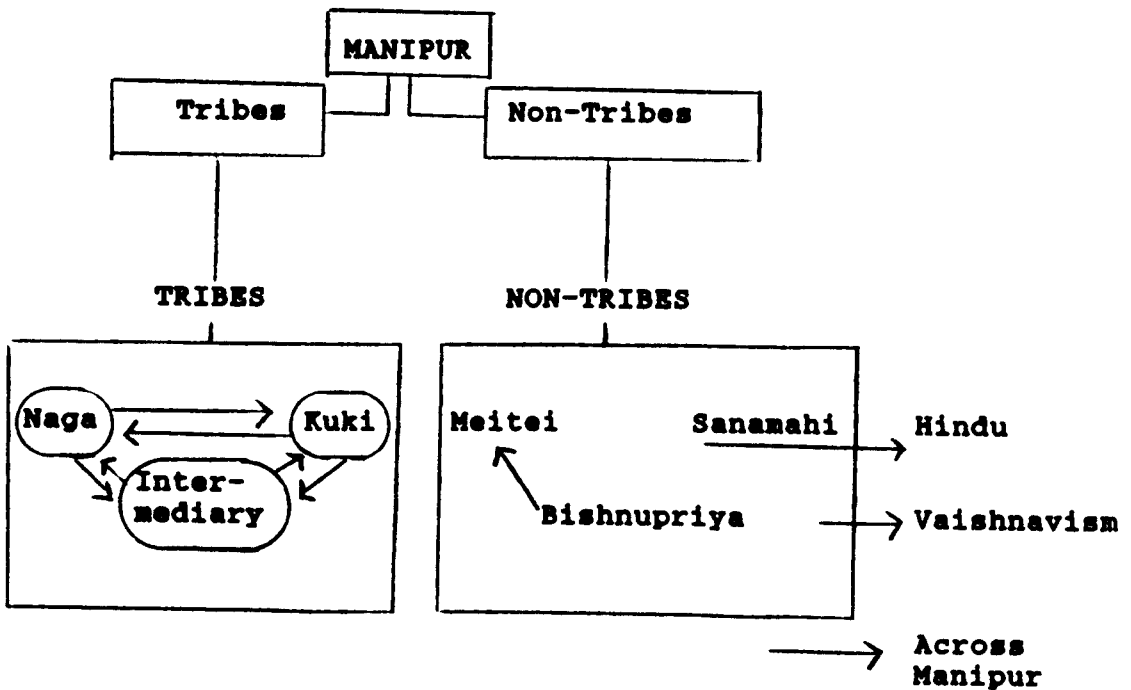
We proceeded to analyze the six experiences in terms of the process of fission-fusion of identities. Analysis of the data revealed two points, that within the recent history (the two stages referred above).

(i) The four of the experiences, those relating to the Thadou, the Purum, the Zeliangrong, and the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes represented a full cycle of fission-fusion process of identities.

(ii) The remaining two experiences, those relating to the Bishnupriya and the Meitei, represented where efforts were initiated to re-organize and project a revised identity. While the Meitei were involved in the process of trying to redefine their cultural identity sans the social-religious elements of Vaishnavism, on the other hand, the Bishnupriya were engaged in the process of readjusting their ethnic identity by underplaying

the Vaishnav elements in their social-religious organization.

(iii) Such an analysis as above revealed another very significant point. We could note that while the tribal communities in Manipur were involved in the phenomena of ethnicity with reference to the micro-level context, i.e., between the communities inhabiting Manipur, on the other hand, the non-tribal communities, the Meitei and the Bishnupriya were involved with the phenomena of ethnicity with reference to a macro-level context, in the larger context of the Hindu system. Diagrammatically this can be represented as:



We proceeded with an analysis of each of the six experiences relating to definition-redefinition of identity as part of -

'The process among the ethnic groups situated to organize various political and economic associations in response to developments affecting the perception of competition for material resources'.

Such an enunciation helped us to identify three broad category of variables with reference to which the analysis could proceed. The three variable-cluster were -

- (i) Political and economic association - their organization (Viability).
- (ii) Response to development (Exposure).
- (iii) Competition for material resources (Capacity).

We redesignated these variable-clusters as noted in bold letters along with each of the above three, Viability, Exposure, and Capacity.

Analysis of the six experiences in terms of (a) the processes of definition/redefinition and fission/fusion (b) the genesis, (c) the strategy and the nature of the groups involved (the actor group and the target groups), we noted depend on the above listed three broad category of factors; (a) Exposure; (b) Viability, and (c) Capacity.

Exposure is one of the most crucial element in the ethnic phenomena of Manipur, for obvious reasons. As other parts of this region, Manipur is characterized by seclusion from the rest of the country. The entry of the British to this part of the

country reduced the element of seclusion. The process of exposure was enhanced, with rapid speed and through diverse forms, after Independence. This appeared as one of the key elements to initiate processes of ethnicity in Manipur. Each of the six experiences represent different patterns of exposure, and through it, different trends in the expression of ethnicity. In academic terminology, the element of exposure has been referred to as a dimension of the process of modernization.

Viability is an important element as it involves and determines forms of fission and fusion of identities. In real life operation, it involves various process of group mobilization and organization.

Capacity is an element which is both an end result as well as a process. It relates directly to the aspirations as well as the actual experience of the ethnic group in regard to its control over the available resources.

We may present an analysis of the six experiences with reference to each of these.

On the basis of genesis and the dominant factor involved with each of the six experiences, we can divide them into three broad categories, as follows:

(i) Capacity - factor oriented experience: The Zeliangrong and the Meitei Experiences.

(ii) Exposure - factor oriented experiences: The Thadou and the Bishnupriya experiences.

(iii) Viability - factor oriented experiences: The Purum and the Kuki-Chin-Mizo experiences.

We may examine each of the six experiences individually.

1. Zeliangrong Experience: The genesis is from realization of relative deprivation with reference to the Kuki. The immediate strategy is redefinition of identity, by Zemei, the Liangmei and the Rongmei groups, to obtain a viable group, the Zeliangrong. The understanding is that this will give the capacity, to contest and claim needed access to the resources.

2. The Meitei Experience: The genesis here also is from the increasing realization of relative deprivation vis-a-vis the other ethnic group in the State. Through experience the Meitei have realized that they will need to enhance their capacity, and this is possible through a redefinition of their identity as a 'tribal community' as different from the current identity of a non-tribal community.

3. Thadou Experience: The Thadou, and the Bishnupriya experiences have many similar features, and thus can be put as belonging to one category. In each of these two experiences, exposure has been the main precipitating factor (genesis). In the Thadou experience it can be traced to the translation of the Bible in the Thadou language (dialect). This in course of time,

through a sequence of experience, initiated processes of definition and redefinition of the Thadou identity vis-a-vis the broad Kuki identity.

4. The Bishnupriya Experience: Like the Thadou experience, find themselves in an ambivalent situation requiring them to redefine their identity. The situation requiring them to redefine their identity. The situation is ambivalent for them as living in Manipur and outside find themselves in two different opposite situations. The Bishnupriya living in Manipur find it advisable to merge their identity with the Meitei, while those living outside Manipur, as in the Cachar districts of Assam, and in Tripura, identify themselves as the Bishnupriya-Manipuri, distinct from the Meitei. The genesis of this can be traced to the exposure, culture-contact with other ethnic groups.

5 & 6. The Purum and the Kuki-Chin-Mizo Experience: In each of these two experiences, the viability factor is predominant. The Purum and so also the Kuki group of tribes find it contingent for them to adopt/maintain a broad ethnic identity in the Manipur context. We note that in the Chin-Kuki-Mizo experience, the capacity factor acquires a dominant significance in the total sequence of the processes.

#### IV

The appearance of the exposure-viability-capacity cluster of elements with the fission-fusion phenomena of ethnicity of

Manipur provided the analytical framework for the interpretation of the six experiences. This framework can be taken as a helpful tool to proceed with wider and more deeper comparative analysis. We have tried to venture an empirical designation to the nature of experiences examined in the study. We find that -

(i) The phenomena of ethnicity in Manipur is a process where subjective perceptions of identity are interlocked with projecting of objective bases. This involves the process of fission-fusion.

(ii) In each of the six experiences the genesis and outcome represent the same cycle, with difference in the sequence and degree of the interaction of the three key elements, exposure-viability-capacity. When the genesis and outcome of a series of processes reveal some uniformity we can refer to such a process as "syndrome".

We have tried to designate the phenomena of ethnicity in Manipur as representing an 'ethnicity syndrome' where the genesis and outcome are towards definition-redefinition of identities, and in the intervening process there are different mix of the factors of exposure-viability-capacity.

**APPENDIX**

Appendix

Different Classifications of the Tribes of Manipur

TABLE I

TRIBES IN MANIPUR

---

NAGA	KUKI	
1. KOWPOI	:	
2. JATIK	:	
3. KOLYA	:	
4. ANGAMI OR GHAMEI	1. KHONJAI	2. KOM
5. TANKHUL OR LUHUPA	(a) KUDINGMA	(a) KAIRUP
6. MARRING*	(b) HAWKIP	(b) PURUM
	(c) MONBI	(c) QUOIRENG
	(d) CHONGFUT	(d) MUNDUNG
	(e) SUMTI	(e) CHIRU
		(f) AIMOL
		(g) KARMA
		(h) LAIKOT

Source : Statistical Account of Manipur.  
R. Brown (1873).

\* (the tribe which) is not considered strictly Naga.

TABLE II

THE ANGAMI NAGAS

NAGA TRIBES

---

1. The Southern Naga      2. The Western Nagas      3. The Central Nagas      4. The Eastern Nagas
- (a) Kacha Naga (Zemi, Lyengmai, and Maruiong-mai)      (a) Angamis including Memi and Maram      (a) Tangkhuls      (a) Konyak
- (b) Kabui      (b) Semas      (b) Aos      (b) Aos
- (c) Majority of the tribes of Manipur described by Mr. Hodson.      (c) RENGmas      (c) Sangtams      (c) Sangtams
- (d) Lhotas      (d) Lhotas      (d) Yachumi      (d) Yachumi
- (e)      (e)      (e) Changs      (e) Changs
- (f)      (f)      (f) Phom      (f) Phom
- (g)      (g)      (g) Kolyo-Kengyu      (g) Kolyo-Kengyu

Source : The Angami Nagas. J.H. Hutton (1885).

**TABLE III**

**HILL TRIBES OF MANIPUR**

**NAGA**

1. LAHUPA OR TANGKUL
2. KOLYA (KHOIRAO)

**KUKI**

:  
:  
:

	:	:
	NEW KUKI CLAN	OLD KUKI CLAN
(A) TANGAL	(A) THADO	(A) KOM
(B) MAU	(B) VUNGSON	(B) ANAL
(C) MARAM	(C) CHANGSEN	(C) NAMFAU
(D) UPURUL	(D) SHINGSOL	(D) CHIM
(E) THRENGBA	(E) MANGVUNG	(E) KOIRENG
(F) MAITHAIPHAM	(F) KHLANGAM	(F) CHOHTE
(G) MAIYANG KHANG	(G) CHUNGLOE	(G) PURUM
(H) TOKPA	(H) CHANGPUT	(H) MANTAK
(I) KACHANG/KATCHA includes LIYANG	(I) HAUKIB	(I) HIROI OR LANGANG
3. KAUPUI	(J) SIMMTE	
(A) SUNGBU	(K) KAMHAU	
(B) POERON	also called	
4. MARRINGS	SUKTI & WITE	
(A) SAIBU		
(B) MARRING		

Source : Gazetteer of Manipur, Dun (1886).

**TABLE IV**

**KUKI-LUSHAI TRIBES ON THE NORTH EAST FRONTIER**

**KUKI**

---

(a) Ranghol (Kuki)  
Lushai, co-tribe  
Bete sub-tribe  
Sakajaib,  
Langrong, Gom, Kolrew.

(b) Jansem (Kuki) Lushai,  
co-tribe Tadoi, sub-  
tribes Kotang, Shik  
Shinshum, Ralte, Seri

Source : A short account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North East Frontier. C.A. Soppitt (1893).

TABLE V

HILL TRIBES OF MANIPUR

---

NAGA

- (A) TANGKHULS
- (B) MAO & MARAM NAGAS
- (C) KOLYA, KHOIRAO OR  
MAYANG KHONG GROUP
- (D) KABUIS
- (E) QUOIRENGS
- (F) CHIRUS
- (G) MARRINGS

KUKI

- :
- :
- OLD KUKI
- (A) RANGKHOL
- (B) BETE
- (C) HALLAM
- (D) LANGRONG
- (E) AIMOL
- (F) KOLREN
- (G) KOM
- (H) CHA
- (I) MHAR
- (J) ANAL
- (K) HIROI-LAMGANG
- (L) PURUM

Source : Naga tribes of Manipur, T.C. Hodson, 1911.

TABLE VI

THE PEOPLE OF LUSHAI AND MANIPUR HILLS

LUSHAI	Clans not absorbed within Lushai but much influenced by it	OLD KUKI	THADOU (THADO)	LAKHER & MARA
(A) CHANTA		(A) AIMOL	(A) HAUKIP	
(B) KAWLHRING		(B) KOHHEN	(B) KIPGEN	
(C) CHONG THU	(A) FANA	(C) TIKHUP	(C) THADO	
(D) NGENTE	(B) PAIHE OR VAITE	(D) ANAL		
(E) KAWLNI	(C) RANGTE OR GANGTE	(E) KOM		
(F) PANTU		(F) VAIPHEI		
(G) RENTLEI		(G) LAMGANG		
(H) KIANGTE		(H) CHANTE		
(I) VENGCHHIA		KHAWTLANG		
(J) ZANNGTE		(HMAR)		
(J) HNAME		(I) CHIRU		
		(J) PURUM		
		(K) KHAWCHHAK		

Source : Lushai-Kuki Clans, Shakespear, 1912.

TABLE VII

HILL TRIBES OF MANIPUR

NAGA TRIBE	THE NON-NAGA (KUKI CHIN) FAMILY
(A) TANGKHULS (UKHRUL SUB-DIVISION ADJACENT TO BURMA)	(A) AIMOL <u>Distribution</u>
(B) ZEMIS ALLIED (TEMENGLONG SUB-DIVISION IN THE CACHAR NAGA & WESTERN HILLS OF MANIPUR)	(B) CHIRU Ethnologically they belong to the Kuki-Chin family.
(C) RONGMEIS (KABUIS) TRIBE	(C) PURUM All these tribes living in the Sadar hills, Chura-
(D) MAO (now called PAOMATA) live in the northern sub-division of MAO & Sadar Hills bordering Nagaland.	(D) PAITE the Sadar hills, Chura-
(E) MARAM	(E) THADOU chandpur, Jiribam & Tengno-
(F) THANGALS	(F) CHOThe upal sub-division of Manipur
(G) MARING	(G) KOM
(H) MOYON	(H) GANGTE
(I) MONSANG	(I) SIMTE
(J) LANGANG	(J) VAIPHEI
(K) ANAL	(K) HMAR
(L) MARAM	(L) ZOU
	(M) RALTI
	(N) ANY MIZO

Source : History of Manipur, Roy (1973).

TABLE VIII

(OFFICIAL CLASSIFICATION 1981)

TRIBES OF MANIPUR

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NAGA	CHIN-KUKI	Intermediate of the two groups (old Kuki)
1. Tangkhul	1. Gangte	1. Aimol
2. Kabui (Rongmei & Puimei)	2. Hmar	2. Chiru ✓
3. Kacha Naga (Liang & Zemei collecti- vely known as Zeliangrong)	3. Lushai (Mizo)	3. Koireng
4. Mao	4. Paite	4. Kom
5. Maram	5. Simte	5. Anal ✓
6. Marring	6. Thadou (Kuki)	6. Chothe ✓
7. Angami	7. Vaiphei	7. Lamsang
8. Sema	8. Zou	8. Koirao/Thangal ✓
	9. Salhte	9. Purum
	10. Ralte	10. Monsang ✓
		11. Moyon ✓

Source : Manipur at a glance Directorate of Tribal Welfare &  
Backward Classes, 1981.

**TABLE IX**  
**TRIBES OF MANIPUR**

<p><b>NAGA</b></p> <p>(A) TANGKHUL (B) KABUI (C) MAO (D) KACHA NAGA (ZEMEI &amp; LIANGMEI)</p>	<p><b>NON-NAGA</b></p> <p>or KUKI</p> <p>or CHIN-KUKI</p>
<p>(A) THADOU (B) HMAR (C) GANGTE (D) VAIPHEI (E) ZOU ETC.</p>	<p>(A) ANAL (B) MOYON (C) MONSANG (D) MARING (E) CHIRO (F) AIMOL (G) CHO THE ETC.</p>

Source : Identity Crisis among the Tribes of Manipur,  
Khamkhenthang, 1986 (Mineographed).

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