

THE TRIBES OF MANIPUR
(AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY)

DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED IN PART-FULFILMENT
FOR
M. PHIL. IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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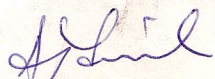
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation "The Tribes of Manipur - An Ethnographic Study" submitted by Ms. Lucy Thomas in part fulfillment for the degree of Master of Philosophy in ANTHROPOLOGY for the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong is a record of bonafide research work carried out by her with my supervision and guidance.

The results embodied in this Dissertation have not been submitted to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

Ms. Lucy Thomas through her work and deligence is a candidate fit for the award of the degree, subject to the approval of her dissertation.




A.P. Sinha
(Supervisor)
24/5/88

North - Eastern Hill University

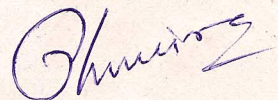
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This is to certify that Miss. Lucy Thomas Vashum has satisfactorily completed all the course requirements in the Master of Philosophy programme in Anthropology.

- 1) System of theory and data processing
- ii) Bio-Cultural Evolution
- iii) Historical Methodology
- iv) Philosophy of Social Science

She is permitted to submit her M.Phil Dissertation to North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India.



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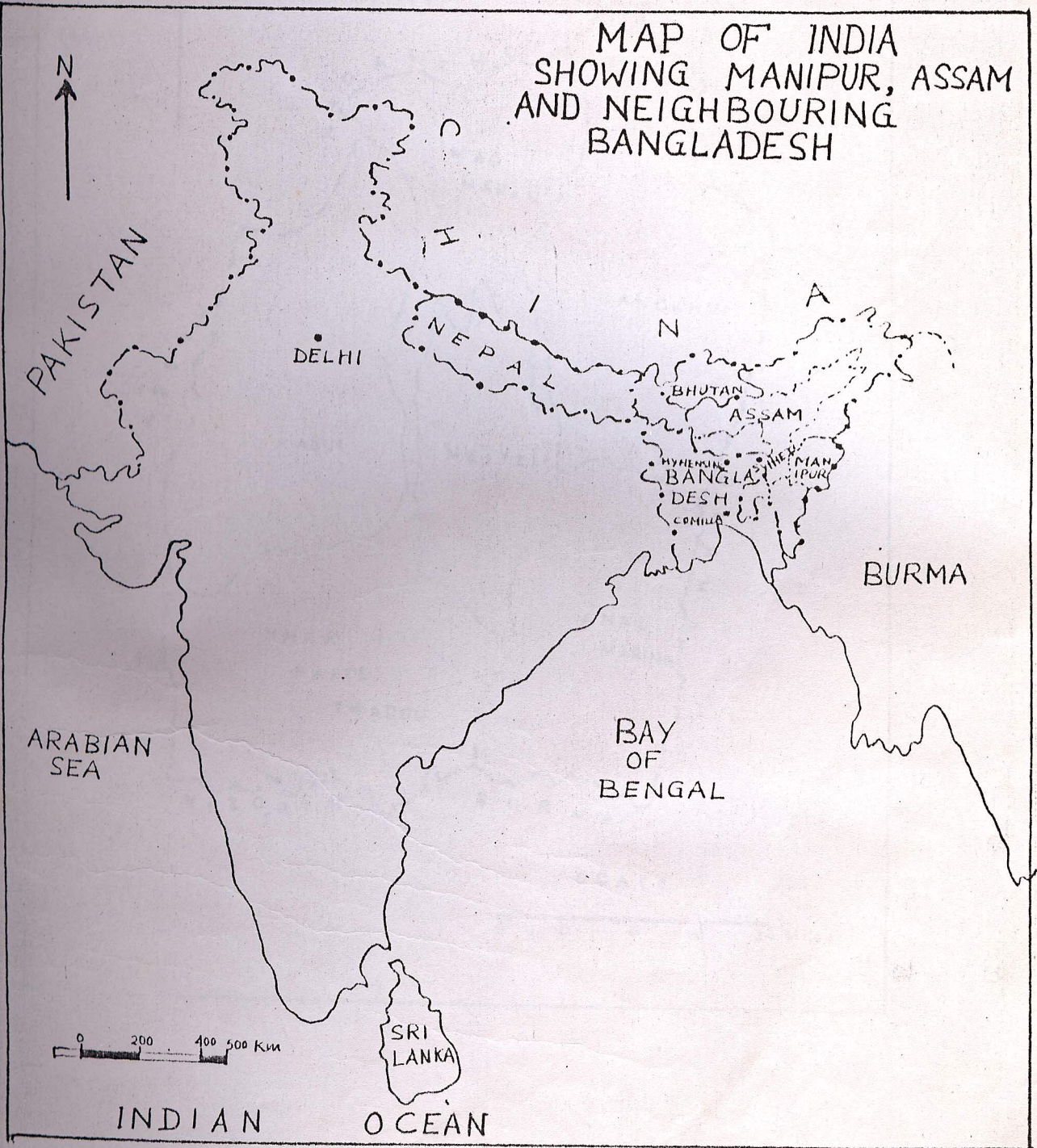
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C O N T E N T S

	<u>Page</u>
1. Supervisor's Certificate	
2. Head of Department's Certificate	
3. Acknowledgements	
4. Maps	
5. Chapter - I	1 - 35
Introduction (Objectives & Scope)	
6. Chapter - II	36 - 103
The Land and its People	
7. Chapter - III	104 - 119
Theoretical Discussion and Method	
8. Chapter - IV	120 - 165
The Dynamics of Ethnicity & Ethnography	
9. Chapter - V	166 - 177
Conclusion (Analytical Discussion)	
10. References	178 - 183

MAP OF INDIA
SHOWING MANIPUR, ASSAM
AND NEIGHBOURING
BANGLADESH



PAKISTAN

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NEPAL

BHUTAN

ASSAM

MANIPUR

DHAKA

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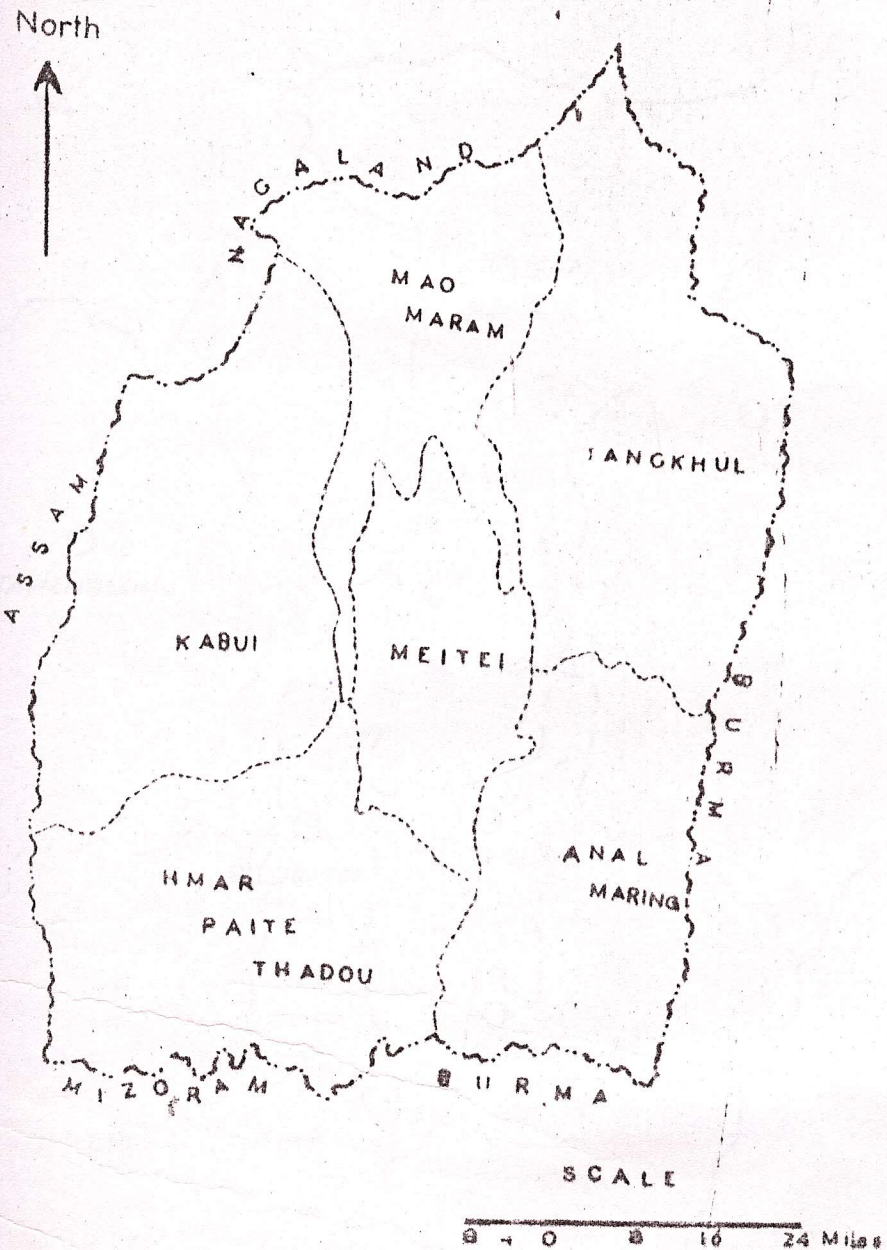
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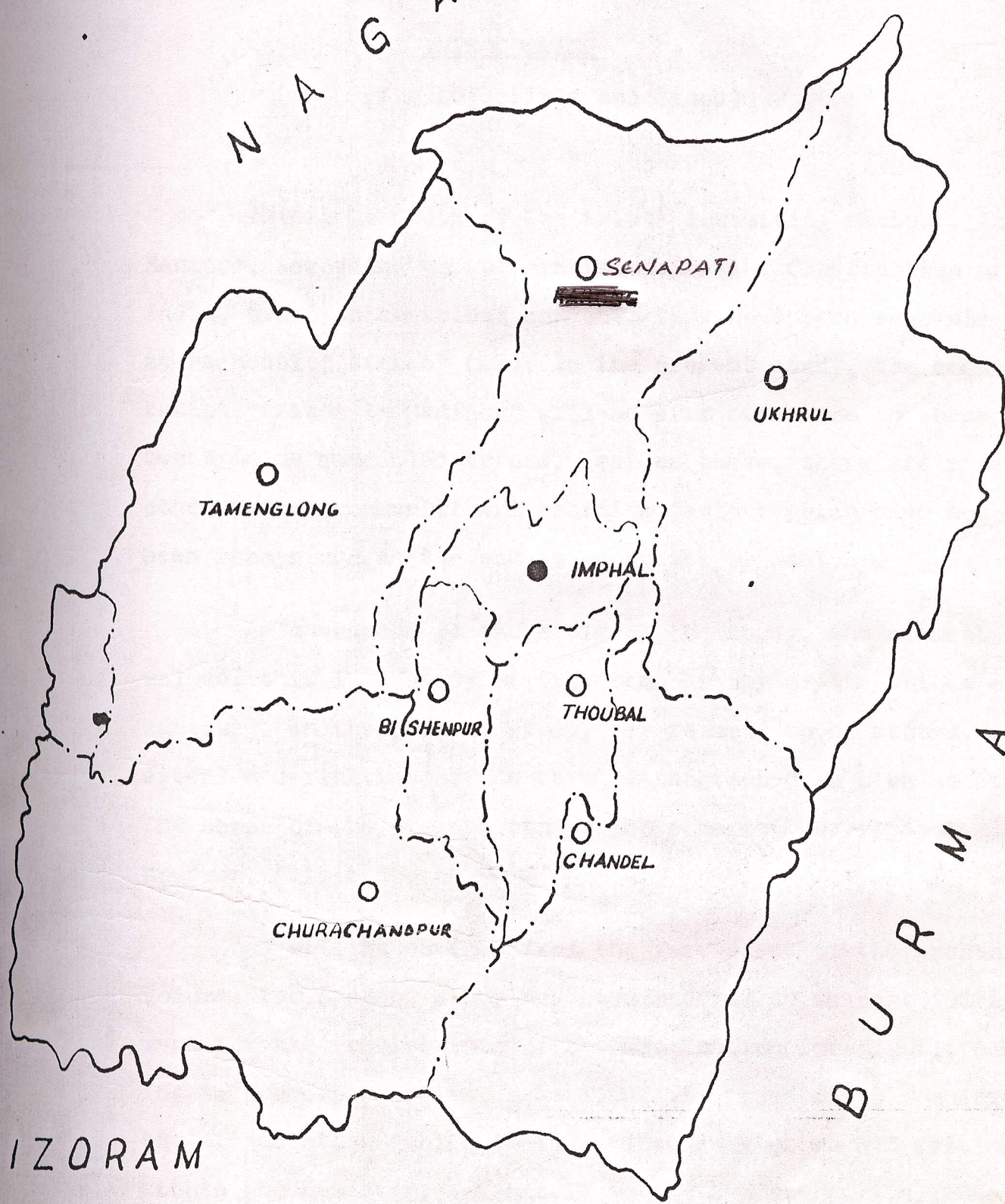
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ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION—MANIPUR



MANIPUR

N A G A L A N D



B U R M A

M I Z O R A M

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

(The Objectives and Scope)

This is a study of the tribes inhabiting Manipur. In Manipur, according to the provisions of the Constitution of India, twenty-nine tribal communities have been recognized as "scheduled tribes" (ST). In the present study, the connotation "tribes in Manipur" will be with reference to these twenty-nine scheduled tribes. Besides these, there are a few other tribal communities inhabiting Manipur which have not been recognized as the scheduled tribes of Manipur.

As announced in the title of the study, the present volume, this is a study of "the ethnography of the tribes of Manipur". In the present study, for reasons to be stated, an extended definition of the term "ethnography" as been adopted. The scope of the present study, for some obvious reasons, is, however, "limited".

As will be obvious from the face sheet of the present volume, the present study has been undertaken as part fulfillment for the requirements of the examination for M.Phil. According to prescribed rules, a candidate is expected to complete the dissertation (which includes data collection and writing) within one Semester, extendable to two Semesters, i.e., one year.

It is within this time limit that the present study has been completed. A study on the ethnography of the tribes in Manipur, it will be agreed, will require much more than one year.

Besides this constraint of resource of time, there was another factor which was a constraint on the present study. For the author, as a student of M.Phil this is the "maiden venture" towards research. Much of the time was expended in attending to gain the necessary competence and proficiency with the "skills" and "techniques" of research. This puts its own constraint in defining the scope and objectives of the present study.

These limitations on the study notwithstanding, every care has been taken to ensure that the results of the study are comprehensive and reliable. Every care of scientific enquiry has been ensured while pursuing the present study. The nature of attention on this has been elaborated in the Chapter on "Research Methodology".

II.

As the title of the study will indicate, the present study is intended to be a study of "ethnography" of the tribes inhabiting Manipur. As mentioned earlier, in the present study an "extended" definition of "the scope of ethnography" has been adopted. As students of anthropology, we are familiar with the nature, the scope and content of ethnographic studies. Within

the anthropological literature on the tribes inhabiting India we have a number of ethnographic studies, such as those on the tribes of north-east India and central India. Writings of this category provide an idea about the nature of contents included in ethnographic studies.

Every student of anthropology is also familiar with two manuals - the Notes and Queries in Anthropology, and the Outlines of Culture Materials. The former has been prepared by a team of senior British anthropologists and the volume has been published by the Royal Anthropological Society. The later volume has been prepared by a team of ethnographers under the leadership of George Peter Murdock, and has been published by the Yale University Press.

Until about two to three decades back both these books formed indispensable companion to a student of anthropology, during his field work. Today both of these volumes have assumed the reputation of "the old classics". The definition of "ethnographic studies" has now passed through substantial change, through re-definition of what constitutes "ethnography". The present study which is intended to be an ethnographic study of the tribes of Manipur, has not tried to be non-conformist in terms of the classical definition of "ethnography", nor has it made any attempt to take a position in the new debate on "ethnography". Different from any such stand, the present study has tried to define its objectives of ethnography with a set of revised considerations.

In the early part of this century a number of ethnographic studies on the tribes of India were prepared. Many of these were prepared by the British ethnographer-administrators, and quite a few by Indian ethnographers. Those interested in the study of the tribes in India, the students of anthropology are well familiar with the rather impressive corpus of literature available on this.

Vidyarthi while tracing the history of anthropology in India had the following observations:

"...the British administrators, missionaries, travellers and a few other anthropologically oriented individuals collected data on tribal and rural groups and wrote about their life and culture ... Along with other historical and geographical information, they also collected ethnographic data and published a series of district gazetteers, handbooks on tribes and castes, and a number of monographs specially on the tribes of Assam. ... British scholarly administrators... wrote encyclopaedic inventories about the tribes and castes in India, which, even today, provide the basic information about the life and culture of the peoples of the respective regions. ...(The scholars) were specially influenced by such early British anthropologists as Rivers, Seligman, Radcliffe-Brown and Hutton, who worked on the tribes and published their monographs." (Vidyarthi, 1978, 8-9; emphasis added.)

This observations will help to perceive the orientation of the early anthropologists in relation to ethnographic studies.

Each of the early ethnographic monograph, without any visible difference, were descriptive account of the prominent

and broad "ethnographic features" of the tribe. This comprised of five main parts - origin, physical features, material culture, social organization, and language or folk-lore. The section on social organization, often covered through a number of chapters, would comprise of marriage, family, village organization, religion etc. The section on language and/or folk-lore in some of the early classical ethnographic works formed the main part of the book, while in some books they were included as an appendix.

It will be interesting to obtain an idea of the nature of ethnographic studies prepared in the tradition of early British anthropology. They reveal some distinct varieties. A slightly closer look at different varieties in ethnographs prepared in the tradition of early British social anthropology can be attempted here. It reveals some interesting features, and also helps to impress that no standard definition of "ethnography" was followed. The scope and objective of what constitutes "ethnography" depended to a great extent on a combination of three factors - the resources available for study, the perspective of the ethnographer, and the 'ready availability' of information.

In the tradition of the early British anthropology, we can distinguish two sets of ethnographic studies. One, those prepared by the British ethnographer-administrators in

the early years of the present century. These, for the most part, were the studies conducted about the tribes in India. By the time most of the British ethnographer-administrators had completed the writing of ethnographies on the tribes of India, trained British anthropologists had started devoting themselves to the study of the tribes in Africa. We have the long range of studies conducted by British anthropologists trained at Oxford, Cambridge, and London. Later, Manchester became also a centre, sending out trained anthropologists to study the tribes in Africa.

Distinct from the traditions of British anthropologists, it is interesting to note, there have been a few of the Indian anthropologists who prepared ethnographic studies of a totally different order. The name of T.C. Das may be mentioned in regard.

As mentioned earlier, the ethnographic monographs prepared by the British ethnographer-administrators contained reference to five aspects of the tribes - the origin and history; material culture; social organization, customs, rituals and beliefs; physical features, and language and folk-lore. The ethnographic study on one of the tribes of Manipur, the Purum, conducted by T.C. Das, was markedly distinct from these, in the sense that T.C. Das devoted nearly equal attention to describing the physical characteristics as he devoted in describing the social-cultural characteristics of the Purum. In the study of the Purum

conducted by T.C. Das he has employed the training as a physical anthropologists as prominently and in detail as he utilized the training as a social anthropologist. The pattern set by T.C. Das, through his study of the Purum tribe of Manipur was not later followed by any Indian anthropologist.

Much distinct from the tradition of ethnographic studies followed in India, the British anthropologists engaged in the study of the tribes in Africa concentrated their attention to the social organization of the tribes. For the most part the studies on the tribes of Africa, as made by the British anthropologists in the early half of the present century confined to the study of family and kinship (Fortes, Evans-Pritchard, Nadel, Firth, Radcliffe-Brown, Shapera, Wilson, Audrey Richards, etc.), or to the study of Religion (Nadel, Middleton, Reinhardt, Evans-Pritchard).

In anthropology a clear distinction is made between ethnography, ethnology and social anthropology. In this connection two references may be cited. These are from Radcliffe-Brown and Penniman. Both have given special attention to defining the nature of ethnography, ethnology, and social anthropology. In fact both of these British anthropologists have tried to present the definitions in the perspectives of the history of anthropology.

The writing of Penniman seems to predate that of Radcliffe-Brown, and hence we will present in that order. According to Penniman, who was writing the Hundred Years History of Anthropology, 1835 to 1935,

"Anthropology is the science of man, a master-science embracing first, such biological studies as help to explain what man is and was, and his place in the realm of animated nature. These shade into a second group, that of psychological studies, as is clearly shown by physiologists who have studied behaviour experimentally. ... Ethnology is the application of any or all of the methods of anthropology to the comparative study of races of peoples, a race like the Nordic or Alpine being distinguished by physical characters and a people like the English or the Jews by cultural characters. Ethnography is the study of particular race, people, or area by any or all of the methods of anthropology. Ethnology is that part of anthropology which deals with the comparative study of the physical characters and material and social cultures of the races of mankind, based on the methods, and under the headings, described for anthropology. In other words, it is a study of the formation and distribution of ethnic types or peoples, with their varying physical and cultural conditions. Ethnography is the intensive study and description of a group of people or of an area by method and under the headings which have been described for anthropology. It furnishes data required by anthropology, and employs the methods based on such data." (Penniman, 1935, 15-16.)

Radcliffe-Brown when writing his essay on the Formation of Anthropology, also an account of the history of anthropology, distinguishes between ethnography, ethnology and

social anthropology as :

"One task of ethnology is the classification of peoples by reference to their racial characters, their languages and their culture. A second and connected task is to obtain knowledge of the history of peoples, for which there are no written records, by inference drawn from various kinds of circumstantial evidence. It is a kind of historical study that uses methods different from those of the historian. ... Social anthropology,.... had its origin in the philosophical investigation of human progress.... Social anthropology is essentially the comparison of different forms of social life, of primitive societies one with another, with ancient societies about which we have historical knowledge, and with advanced societies of the present. Comparison can be used in different ways and for different purposes. There is the scientific use of comparison... the purpose is to arrive at classifications and generalizations; this may be called the "systematic" use. But comparisons may be used for entirely different purpose of formulating a historical or genetic hypothesis. ... It is no part of the work of the social anthropologist to "reconstruct" history; he can leave that to the ethnologists, archeologists and "historical anthropologists". (Radcliffe-Brown, 1958, 125-134.)

Evans-Pritchard in writing on the Scope of social Anthropology identified physical anthropology, ethnology, prehistoric archaeology, and sometimes general linguistics and human geography" as the branches of "the wider subject of anthropology". While making this classification he held that:

"It is important to appreciate, however, that through ethnology and social anthropology make their studies very largely among the same range of peoples they make

them with very different purposes. Consequently, though in the past no clear distinction was made between ethnology and social anthropology, they are today regarded as separate disciplines. The task of ethnology is to classify peoples on the basis of their racial and cultural characteristics and then to explain their distribution at the present time, or in the past times, by the movement and mixture of peoples and the diffusion of cultures. The classification of the peoples and cultures is an essential preliminary to the comparisons which social anthropologists make between primitive societies, because it is highly convenient, and even necessary, to start by comparing those of the same general cultural type - those which belong to what Bastian long ago called 'geographical provinces'. When, however, ethnologists attempt to reconstruct the history of primitive peoples, for whose past historical records are lacking, they are compelled to rely on inferences from circumstantial evidence to reach their conclusions, which, in the nature of the case, can never be more than probable reconstructions." (Evans-Pritchard, 1951, 14.)

In terms of the foregoing definitions the present study on the tribes of Manipur is an attempt of ethnography with a heavy overtone of ethnology.

A mention of the definition of "ethnography" and the factors distinguishing it from ethnology and social anthropology, and a mention of the variations in the content of available "ethnographic studies" has been made with a purpose. The intention was to outline two points: one, what is contained in ethnographic studies, and two, how some "contextual

factors" have influenced the definition of objective, scope and content of the ethnographic study.

The difference is revealed by the ethnographic studies by British anthropologists trained in Oxford/Cambridge/London or Manchester and involved in the study of one of the tribes in Africa, the ethnographic studies conducted by the British ethnographer-administrators on the tribes in India, and the study of the Purum by T.C. Das. To repeat the salient features of difference, as outlined earlier, while the first have confined deep attention to one of the core aspects of social organization, the second have distributed their attention evenly on the social, material, and physical aspects of the tribe, trying to broadly touch upon the salient features of each. T.C. Das, ^{how} distinct from these as he gave undoubted evidence of deep investigation with the tools of a social anthropologists as well as those of a physical anthropologist.

The contextual factors which have had a bearing on the 'nature' of the study, it may be said, depended to a great extent, again, on two factors - (a) the training of the anthropologist, and (b) the environmental factors relevant to a study.

The British ethnographer-administrators, as will be evident from the designation, they had no training in anthropology, as such, and hence the study conducted by them gave sufficient

of the rather general nature of the contents. As distinct from these, the study made by anthropologists trained formally through the university system revealed a form of "depth" in their studies.

The intention in presenting the foregoing discussion was to bring out two points, first, within the standardized definition of ethnography, as given by Radcliffe-Brown and Penniman, there have been prominent variations in how ethnographies have been written. The second point intended to be highlighted is that approach to ethnographic studies have to a large extent depended on the background (training) of the ethnographer as well as on a complex set of environmental conditions (refer Kuper) in which the studies have been conducted.

This point needs some clarification, viz., how the "environmental factors" have influenced the traditions of anthropological studies.

A close look at the early traditions in study of the tribes will reveal that while the trained British anthropologists concentrated their attention to the study to the tribes in Africa, the responsibility for the study of the tribes in India was left to the administrator-ethnographers. This made a

significant difference in the "tradition" of ethnographic studies which developed in India. Adam Kuper (1973) made an insightful analysis of the reasons as well as the nature of difference between early traditions of anthropological studies of the tribes in India and Africa.

"From its very early days, British anthropology linked to present itself as a science which could be useful in colonial administration.... Certainly it would be difficult to specify what practical uses the anthropology of the diffusionists and evolutionists - Frazer's students of the past - could have had for the colonial governments. Still the anthropologists argued the possible uses of their subject. ... If the British government and the public were not easily stirred to a sense of the possible uses of anthropology, the colonial governments were equally unimpressed. In the East the tradition was that administrators would benefit by studying the languages and legal systems of the complex societies they administered, but sociological research was never encouraged. In India, for example, 'ethnology' seems never to have meant more than the development of the census to include some social and cultural data, and, to a limited extent, the study of 'tribal' peoples. For the rest anthropology was used mainly in the African empire, although in 1920 the Australian administration in Papua appointed a government anthropologist. ... This concentration on Africa is not easily explained. The Indian sub-continent and the Middle East were increasingly disturbed politically after the First World War, but Africa was (comparatively) calm." (Kuper, 1973, 123-136.)

III.

The definition of the objective of the present study has to a large extent been determined by a set of "environmental

factors". The exercise of defining the objective of the present study went through a rather long process. By hind-sight it is possible now to recollect that the exercise of defining the objective of the present study involved a two-phase exercise. In the first phase, as a normal practise, the objective of the study was defined (a) on basis of a readily available information and preliminary knowledge about the tribes of Manipur, and (b) the standard considerations of what should contain an ethnographic study. Later, as some initial data collection was made, the objective of the study had to be re-defined.

It may be said that the definition of the objective, in the first instance, was based on contextual considerations. As some initial data was collected, it was realized that the objective of the study will have to be re-examined and defined in terms of some theoretical considerations. In other words, the definition of the objectives of the study, finally, was a product of contextual and theoretical considerations.

This may be explained in detail. To understand this it will be helpful to go one step back and recall the first few steps involved with any exercise of empirical social research, the type intended for the present.

IV

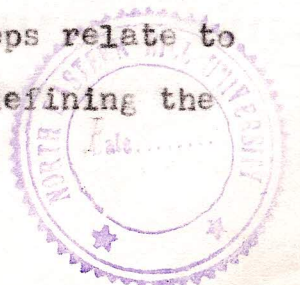
As we know, the first few steps of social investigation make it necessary to prepare (i) the synopsis, and (ii) the research design.

A synopsis is a brief statement, while a research design is a more elaborate statement on different aspects of the proposed study. Both of these are necessary as each serve definite purpose. The synopsis of a study is needed to "communicate" to others about the scope, objective, and perspective of the proposed study. Distinct from this, a research design is required as it helps to "guide oneself" about the different stages of the study. The difference between "synopsis" and "research design" is thus obvious, while the first (synopsis) is intended to "communicate to others", the second (research design) is needed for "guiding oneself".

In the present study both the steps were followed, viz., the preparation of the synopsis as well as the preparation of the research design. Some attention may be devoted to outline the nature of exercise involved in the preparation of these two, and in the process, in defining the objective of a study.

In any social research the first few steps relate to (i) assigning a title to the study, and (ii) defining the

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scope and objectives of the study. This is often referred to as "the definition and delimitation of the problem of the study". In any standard text-book on social research methods, prominent attention is given to this. Different authors have tried to elaborate on this in their own way.

One of the text-books on social research very popular with the students is by P.V. Young. She prefaces her elaboration on "objectives of research studies" with the observation that

"With the realization that each research study is complex came the conclusion that the specific nature of the study should be determined early, and precisely, particularly when limited time and energy forbid false starts." (Young, 1966, 14).

In a volume on "Research Methods in Social Research" which grew out of a 'Formulation of a Research Problem'. According to the author of this section:

"Scientific inquiry is an undertaking geared to the solution of problems. The first step in formulating the research is to make the problem concrete and explicit. A research worker should identify some aspect of the topic which can be formulated into a specific research question which it is feasible to investigate with the resources available." (Abraham, 1984, 61).

The point in this connection which needs to be noted are in fact ^{are} three, (i) the nature of the exercise, (ii) the significance of the exercise, and (iii) the process of the exercise.

As it should be easy to visualize the reference is to the exercise of defining the objective of a research exercise. Between these three, the first two, viz., 'nature' and 'significance' of defining objectives of a study, appear more prominently in text-books rather than in the actual operation of the research. It is the third, viz, the process by which the objective of a study is defined, which appears prominently in the actual conduct of a study. Much about this has been written in some of the text-books.

The main point in this connection which deserves attention relates to the series, and sequence, of considerations which shape the decisions relating to the definition of the objectives of a study. According to P.V. Young,

"The social research guided by desire to gain knowledge or by an urgency to solve a problem scientifically, works out a plan of study. At the beginning this plan is generally vague and tentative. It undergoes many modifications and changes, as the study progresses and insights into it deepen..... The considerations which enter into making the decisions regarding the what, where, when, how much, by what means, constitute a plan of study or a study design." (op. cit., 13).

In another standard text-book on social research:

"Methods in Social Research" by Goode and Hatt, part of a section

is devoted to discussing "the delimitation of variables". The significance of this is introduced with the observation that:

"The previous chapter has dealt with some of the elementary principles of research design. This analysis is carried forward in the present chapter by a discussion of these problems: (1) delimitation of the factors to be studied and (2) further variations of research design." (Goode and Hatt, 1981, 92)."

Goode and Hatt elaborating on the process of delimiting the variables to be studied very strongly suggest that: 'the significant aspect of delimiting the variables to be studied has to be given much emphasis, and this has to be seen in both theoretical as well as conceptual terms.' In their opinion:

"Thus, these suggestions to this end should be followed: (1) studying the research literature on the subject; (2) analyzing the problem with colleagues and teachers, particularly with those who have worked on the problem; (3) attempting to locate unpublished materials or projected research on the subject; (4) attempting to carry

out formally the steps in conceptual re-specification; (5) developing in sharp detail the hypothesis, including its connections with social theory; and (6) actual contact, where possible, with the phenomena being studied."(op.cit.,92).

The definition of the objectives of the present study, interestingly enough, had to go through each of the above listed sequence of exercise. Such steps which were followed did not come only as per force of the prescribed rules of scientific inquiry, but as something which came rather very natural to the planning of the present study.

As the first step towards the standard procedure of scientific inquiry, the 'synopsis' and the 'research design' of the study were prepared. It was while going through these two stages, initially, i.e., the preparation of the 'synopsis', and later, the preparation of the 'research design', that considerable clarity relating to the objectives of the study started emerging. The "emerging clarity" was the main source to help define the objectives and delimit the scope of the study, and thus in re-specification of the variables and perspectives to be adopted.

To start a study, we know, two broad tasks have to be fulfilled: one, to prepare a 'synopsis', and two, later, to

prepare a detailed research design. A synopsis, as we know, again, is a proposal which has to be submitted before those who 'formally approve' it. In the present case, there is a series of formalities through which a research synopsis (for M.Phil, also) had to pass before it was approved. 'Experts' examine it. The point that demands attention in this connection is that the synopsis undergoes a process of 'technical' scrutiny. We will soon return to understand the implications of this on the present study.

A synopsis as such is expected to be a 'brief statement' about the proposed study. A synopsis is prepared mainly with the intention to 'inform others' about the proposed study. In sharp contrast to this, a research design is prepared to 'guide oneself' about the steps to be followed for the conduct of the study. By its nature, a synopsis, is brief in contrast, as a research design has to be elaborate.

A research design is an elaborate statement on the plan of the study. As mentioned above, it is aid to guide the course of the study. In India, for social research, as a guide, an elaborate format for preparation of 'research design' has been designed by the ICSSR. This has been adopted by many other agencies such as ICHR, TD Department, Ministry of Social Welfare, etc. These fund researches in the social and behavioural science.

The ICSSR, along with the handbook containing rules and procedures for funding research proposals, has appended the format of a "research design". The intention of appending the format is to help achieve precision and conformity in the proposed research projects. The format designed by the ICSSR can be taken as a reliable basis to guide the preparation of a research design for a study.

It will be noted that a research design contains the details relation to the "plans" to be followed at three stages of the study -

Broad stages in social research:

- (i) Before Data Collection.
- (ii) During Data Collection
- (iii) After Data Collection.

An "adapted" version of the research design (cf. Sinha) elaborates the following steps relating to the stage "before data collection". This is the stage when all the conceptual as well as operational decisions relating to the study are taken. According to the "adapted" version, the following steps have to be followed before data collection and its analysis and presentation is attempted. The steps are:

1. Statement of the Problem

- (i) Statement of the key originating question.
- (ii) critical discussion of the background of the study.
 - (a) theoretical background,
 - (b) empirical background
 - (c) methodological background,
- (iii) The broad context in which the study is being visualized, including the statement about the relevance of the study.
- (iv) The plan for search of alternate dimensions and decision about the choice of dimension.

2. Delimitation of the scope of the study: in terms of

- (i) Population (section/category) to be covered
- (ii) The time period to be considered.
- (iii) The geographical area to be included.
- (iv) The type of the study, descriptive/analytical/ or explanatory, and other details about the study.

V.

The present study passed through most of the considerations elaborated in the foregoing section. One of the first

exercises for the present study was, for obvious reasons, the preparation of the "Synopsis". The synopsis contained the first exercise in defining the "scope and objectives" of the proposed. Between the scope and objectives as defined in the synopsis and as it has been mentioned in the present "presentation" there is some prominent difference. The difference comes mainly in the delimitation of the scope of the study, it however, comes to some extent also in the objective of the study. The context, and the considerations which went in (i) delimiting the scope of the study, and (ii) in re-defining the objectives of the study form (the considerations and context) the contents of the remaining part of this Chapter. We will devote one Section each on (a) writing about the scopes and objectives of the study as originally given in the Synopsis, and (b) how this definition of the scope and objectives of the study had to be de-limited (scope) and re-defined (objectives) in the very initial stages of the study.

It may be mentioned here that after some initial exercise in 'piecing together' the readily available material, it was realized that the scope as well as the objectives of the study will need to be slightly modified (redefined), as compared to what was contained in the Synopsis. Later in this Chapter, when discussing this at some length, I will

try to explain how such mid-course modification in the scope and objectives of the study as originally adopted, does not necessarily always indicate any shortcoming in designing the study. Such mid-course modification, on the contrary, may be indication of a more realistic and scientific approach to the study.

The first exercise to make formal writing about the study was in the form of the Synopsis. This was a five page presentation with brief writing about (a) the objective and scope of the proposed study. (b) the background, both empirical and theoretical, (c) the proposed methods of study and source for material, and the (d) the output. Writing of a Synopsis is a technical pre-requisite for one intending to pursue a research with intention to obtain degree. The synopsis for the present study was prepared with this in mind. This notwithstanding, a Synopsis serves a positive function also, it is a reliable and helpful precursor of the research design.

In the Synopsis the objectives of the study was brought out as follows -

"The available written material on the tribes of Manipur are discrete, incomplete, and outdated in many cases. ...Today when "development" is the keyword to all forms of community activities, there is urgent need for a comprehensive account of the tribes of Manipur, attempting to bring out three main dimensions (i) ethnographic account

of the tribes inhabiting Manipur, (ii) the changing trends in their social identities, and (iii) socio-economic profile of the different communities, as of the territories inhabited by them".

It may be noted from this that the objectives of the study, as proposed, comprised of three distinct parts:

- (i) The ethnographic account of each tribe,
- (ii) The changing trends in the 'identity' of the tribes, and
- (iii) A socio-economic profile of each community, i.e., tribe.

Apparently discrete, these three are intimately inter-linked. Manipur is the abode of twenty-nine recognized scheduled tribes. By data considerable amount of academic and other literature pertaining to the tribes is available. This notwithstanding it is not difficult to realize that no comprehensive and upto-date ethnographic account of each of the tribe is available. There is serious absence of any such writing. Any one intending to get acquainted about the tribes of Manipur would find it rather difficult, and for this he will have to consult and wade through a number of scattered writings. It was not difficult to get this experience as the author herself is an inhabitant of Manipur. Quite often she has been approached by inquisitive persons to suggest to them some concise writing to inform them about the tribes of Manipur.

Unfortunately there is no such book. Such books on basic ethnographic informations are quite often needed by those interested in some study about the tribes of Manipur.

This was one of the experience which suggested to include the first part of the objectives - ethnographic accounts of the tribes, within the scope of the present study.

The different tribal groups inhabiting Manipur are officially classified into three broad categories - (i) the Naga group of tribes, the (ii) Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes, and (iii) the intermediary category of tribes. In most of the writings on the tribal communities of Manipur, there is mention of only two categories - the Naga group of tribes and the Kuki group of tribes. One of the very obvious experience about the tribes of Manipur has been that there have been many movements about the definition and re-definition of their identities. In the official classification, the category comprising of 'intermediary' category of tribes includes those which for some time now have been redefining their identity. In many of the cases some of the tribes from the Kuki group have been trying to assume, either an independent identity for themselves, or they have been trying to acquire a Naga identity. It is this experience about the tribes in Manipur which suggested to include a brief analytical

description about this within the scope of the study. It appeared that in a way mention about this aspect of the ethnography of the tribes in Manipur could not be avoided as this referred to the very fundamental question relating to the identity of the tribes.

Analytical information relating to the tribes, in other words, ethnographic account, (of the tribes of Manipur) is something which is frequently needed by those involved with "development" activities/programmes. Manipur is one of the States which, in view of its large tribal population, has adopted the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) approach for tribal development. The States which have adopted the TSP approach have, as part of this programme, compiled some basic "bench mark data" about the tribes. In the introduction of the hand-books on the bench-mark data it is mentioned:

"It was pointed out by the Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, that preparation of Tribal sub-plan and integrated tribal development projects (TSP and ITDP) had brought to light certain deficiencies in the available data and also gaps in the understanding of the socio-economic condition of the tribal people. The State government also faced difficulties in drawing up realistic planning for want of reliable village and house-hold level socio-economic data resulting in preparation and implementation of generalized development programmes which tend to bypass the weaker sections. To obviate this difficulty, the Ministry of Home

Affairs decided to take up Bench-mark survey throughout the tribal sub-plan areas of the country. The survey will also help in evaluating benefits accrued from the implementation of earlier plans".

For Manipur, out of the six (original) districts, all the five hill districts where tribal population are dominant constituent of the total population, the bench-mark survey was conducted. We found that these Survey reports contain valuable information on the social and economic condition of the tribal groups inhabiting Manipur. For the purpose of this study we felt that while it will not be difficult to incorporate data from these surveys with the ethnographic account of each tribe, it will be very helpful for those in search of basic information about the tribes of Manipur. It was with this understanding that the third part of the objective was also included within the scope of the present study. Hence, one of the objective of the study - to prepare a socio-economic profile of the different communities.

A Synopsis, as normal practice, has to be presented for scrutiny and formal approval. When the Synopsis for the present study was presented, one of the comments was that the proposed scope and objective of the study was "too ambitious", specially for a study to be conducted towards an

M. Phil. degree. The Synopsis was "approved", though perhaps with some amount of persuasion. Later when the study proceeded it was realized that in a way the study was somewhat "ambitious" in its objectives, and some redefinition will need to be done.

It may be clear in the outset here that the realization that the scope and objectives of the study will have to be re-defined should in no way be taken as indicative of any weakness in preparing the initial design of the study. On the contrary that such a realization came, namely that the scope etc. should be redefined, and that the exercise of redefining was undertaken, this should be taken as indicative of a dynamic and realistic attitude.

VI.

While the study was in its initial phase and data was being located and pieced together, it appeared that the scope and objective of the study, as initially defined, will have to be re-defined. In the process, two changes had to be made, firstly, the first two dimensions of the study - (i) to prepare an ethnographic profile of the tribes, and (ii) to outline the changing trends in "identity" of the tribes, these had to be combined. As the study proceeded we could realize that with the nature of information coming to us,

and for ethnographic reasons as such also, a somewhat heavy emphasis will have to be given to the study of the 'identity' of the tribes. The outlines of a very dynamic process in regard to the emergence of their identity was emerging.

The second change which we felt needs to be made was to drop, for the moment, the intention of including the preparation of socio-economic profile of the tribes.

These changes seemed necessary as some initial data was brought together. This revealed some important questions in the realm of 'comparative method', which demanded attention, and could not be ignored. As mentioned above, it became apparent that comparison of ethnographic traits across the tribes presented some analytical questions which could not be ignored. These questions related to the bearing of identity of a tribe on its ethnographic characterisations. The volume of work involved in this necessitated that the intention to include preparation of socio-economic profile be abandoned.

The stages of retroductive reasoning which were involved in the redefinition of the scope and objectives of the study are as below. It will be helpful to review these, as these help to appreciate the challenges that can be taken in preparing a meaningful comparative analysis of ethnographic traits of tribes sharing common territory and history, like those inhabiting Manipur.

1. The initial intention was to prepare (i) ethnographic profile, (ii) trends in change of identities, and (iii) socio-economic profile. This was with a specific reason. It was expected that a 'cold study' like ethnography could also be of relevance, if it contained comparative analysis of socio-economic indicators. Hence, the inclusion of preparation of socio-economic profile, in the study,

2. The summary observation in the official write-up suggested that there is some correspondence between ethnographic traits, like type of chieftainship, and the category of the tribe, viz., those belonging to the Naga group or the Kuki group. Along with this observation, there was also the observation that "...ethnic transformation is in process".

3. These observation irresistably drew attention to examine at some detail the question of identity of the tribes, before compiling ethnographic traits. A close look at this revealed that though the two major category of tribes, from 'aboriginally' from the same origin, north-west China, and belonging to the same linguistic stock, it is in the process of their 'arriving' to their present abode, viz., Manipur, that they have assumed different identities.

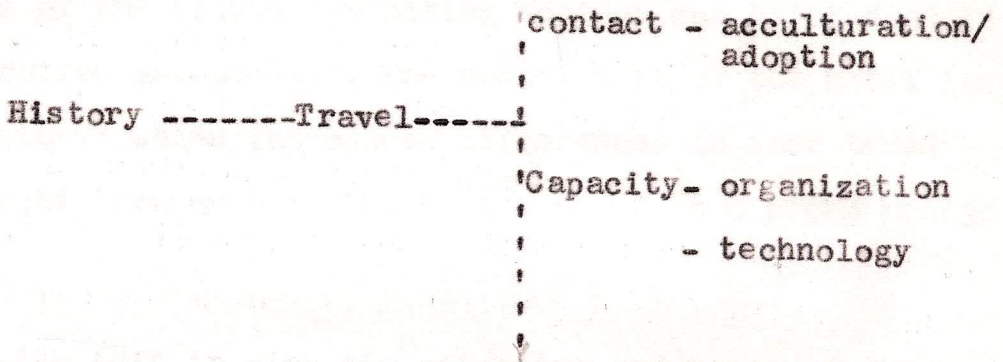
4. Somehow the ethnographic trait of 'chieftainship' and the observation that the Naga are more democratic compared

to the Kuki group of tribes, which are despotic, suggested to examine the reason for the difference in ethnographic traits. A slightly closer look at the history of the two category of tribes suggested that there could be a bearing of the route of 'travel' made by the two groups, before arriving to their present abode in Manipur.

5. This appeared somewhat plausible, as it appeared that (i) the Naga group of tribes proceeded the Kuki group of tribes in arriving to their present abode in Manipur and Nagaland, and (ii) they adopted different routes. In a way, the Naga group of tribes came 'straight' to their present abode, while the Kuki group travelled through the fertile lands of Burma, then to Mizoram, to Cachar Valley, and then to Manipur.

6. The initial progress in the study had by now suggested to examine the hypothesis: (i) route of migration (travel), (ii) the accompanying experiences of contact/seclusion, and (iii) ethnographic traits, such as 'chieftainship', rules of residence and inheritance, youth dormitory and village organization, interact to shape each of these. A complex process of inter-dependence is involved.

The hypothesis was irresistible, it was important and, for comparative analysis, it provided meaning to the exercise of ethnographic profiling. Hence, it could not be abandoned. Adopting this hypothesis as the mainstay of the study did not divert the attention, it only necessitated a re-definition of the perspective, the scope and objective.



bearing of these on ethnographic traits Naga group
of tribes - shorter travel
- lesser contacts
- heterogeneity possible

Mizo group of tribes:

- longer travel
- through fertile lands of Burma, Cachar
- larger contacts (on way)
- homogeneity helpful

7. It may be mentioned that adoption of this hypothesis did not in no way indicate any indecision in defining the scope

and objective of the study. The shift was in the definition of the 'dependent variable' rather than in the content of the study. The shift was from (i) ethnographic traits among the Naga-Kuki distinction, to (ii) the bearing of Kuki-Naga distinction on the ethnographic traits.

This model represents the context in which ethnographic features of the tribes inhabiting Manipur can be studied in a comparative perspective. The second part of the model lists the 'factors' which introduced differences in some broad ethnographic features in the tribes of the two broad categories.

With this in view the objective and scope of the study was redefined. It may be mentioned that the adoption of the hypothesis trying to explain the major characteristics difference between the two groups of tribes does not (the adoption of the hypothesis) indicate in any way any form of indecision in originally defining the scope and objective of the study. The shift has been in defining the 'dependent variable' rather than in the content of the study.

The objective of the present study thus is to critically outline the process of the formation of identities of the major tribal groups in Manipur, and how these have been reflected through the distinctive ethnographic characteristics,

mainly chieftainship. In its scope, the study will confine attention to some of the main tribal groups from Manipur. As this is an exploratory study, it may not be possible to make reference to and take into account all the tribal communities inhabiting Manipur.