

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

**THESIS**

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## 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 (ii) 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 occasion 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 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.

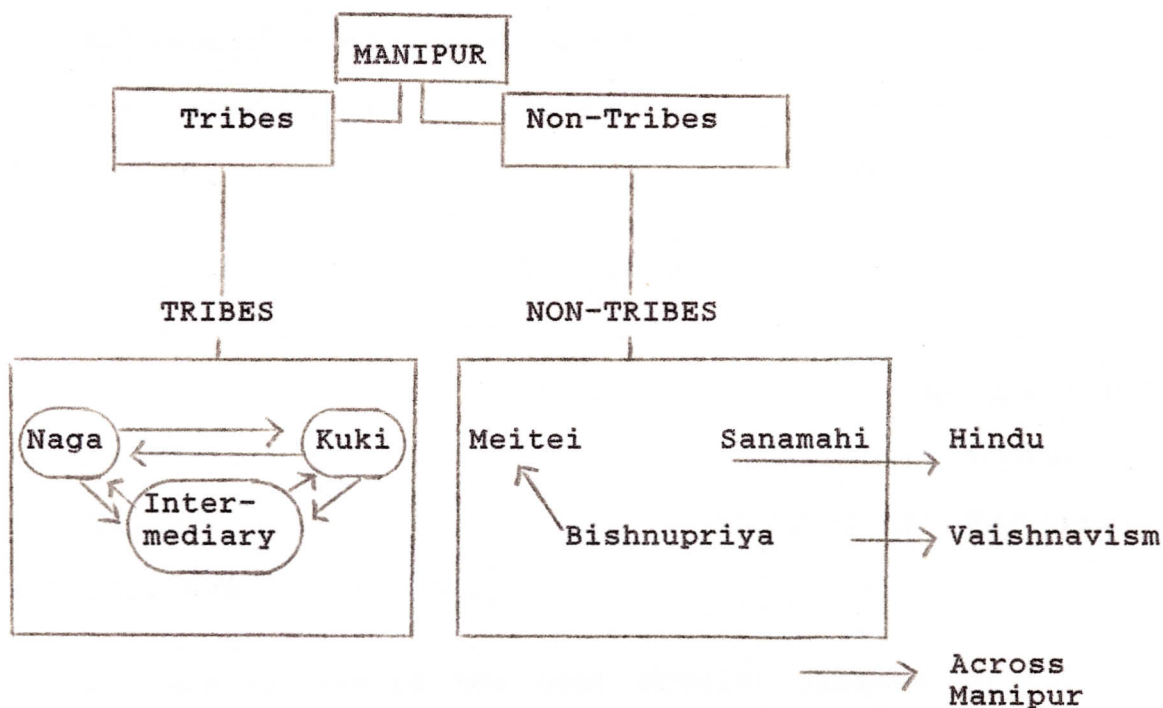
We proceeded to analyze the six experiences in terms of the process of fission-fusion of identities. Analysis of the data revealed two points, that within the recent history (the two stages referred above).

(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.