

**EDUCATION AS A SITE OF CONTESTATION AMONG
NAGAS IN MANIPUR: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF
SENAPATI DISTRICT**

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

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For the award of the degree of

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CH JOB CHAWANG



ZAKIR HUSAIN CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY -110067

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Declaration

I, Ch Job Chawang, declare that the dissertation entitled "Education as a Site of Contestation among Nagas in Manipur: A Sociological Study of Senapati District" is submitted in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University and is my original work.



Ch Job Chawang

Certificate

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in this University.

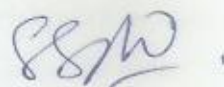


Prof. Saumen Chattopadhyay

Prof. Saumen Chattopadhyay

Chairperson

Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067



Dr. S. Srinivasa Rao

(Supervisor)

Associate professor

Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

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ABBREVIATIONS

HIDIPSAM - Hill District Recognised Private Schools' Association, Manipur

APSAS - All Private School Association Senapati

BOSEM - Board of Secondary Education Manipur

NBSE - Nagaland Board of Secondary education

ATSUM - All Tribal Students Union Manipur

ANSU - Anal Naga Student Union

MIL - Major Indian Language

NPO - Naga Peoples Organisation

ANSAM - All Naga Student Association Manipur

MBC - Manipur Baptist Convention

KNF - Kuki National Front

NSCN IM - National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah)

UNC - United Naga Council

MLC - Maram Literature Committee

PLC - Paomei Literature Committee

MLC - Mao Literature Committee

RLC - Rongmei Literature Committee

COHSEM - Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur

KSO - Kuki Student Organisation

CTLLSM - Council of Tribal Languages & Literature Societies, Manipur

NSCN-IM - National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah)

NSCN-K -National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)

MLR & LR Act - Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act 1960

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Manipur, a small landlocked state located in the north-eastern region of India is generally known for its overall makeup in terms of its geographical settings, socio-cultural diversity, and potential human resources. The state shares territorial boundaries with several neighbouring communities that are not unlike her other seven sister states. It is bounded by Nagaland to the north, Mizoram to the south, Assam to the west, and Myanmar to its east.

The salient natural feature of Manipur like many other regions is typically marked by hills and valleys. In general, the topographical feature of the state gives an impression of more or less a bowl-like shape appearance, with the hills surrounding the valley areas on all sides. Demographically, the state is inhabited by three major ethnic groups, viz. the Meiteis, Nagas, and the Kukis. Accordingly, the major religions of the state are the Hindu, Christianity, and Islam, besides several other minor denominations like Jainism, Buddhism and other traditional religions. In terms of administration, the state is bifurcated into 9 revenue districts¹; four are located in the valley and dominated by the Meitei's and the remaining five in the hills by the Naga and Kuki tribes. The proportion of tribal population constitutes 35.1% of the total population as per 2011 census. Yet, a vast 90.98 percent of the total geographical area is occupied by them and the remaining 10.02 percent by the majority non-tribal Meitei population (Suan, H. 2009: 268).

There are 36 major communities and 35 native languages spoken by the people in the state.² Out of this, 34 are tribal languages, 1 of Meitei as the Meitei Pangals (Muslim) speaks Meiteilon as their mother tongue and the other of Nepali. Each language is generally spoken by people of a particular community, however, there usually is a variation characterized by a differing tone and

1 The move for creation of 7 new additional districts in Manipur by the state government over the existing 9 districts has resulted in a mix reaction from different communities, over the issue. The due objection especially, by the tribal communities has deterred it from its full fledged operation despite being recognized and passed in the official order of the state. Details regarding the 7 new districts can also be available at <http://manipur.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/creation-of-7-district-1-2.pdf>

2 According to Gangmei, R. (2017). 'The rediscovery of Manipur' there are actually 40 communities including the few minorities like the Khasi, Mikir, Angami, and Sema spread across different territories in the state.

dialect even from village to village, almost unintelligible with one another despite being clump under the ambit of a particular community. Such a trait is seemingly prevalent especially among the Nagas, the subtlety of whose culture can also be seen in their distinctive traditional style of clothing and other make-up.

Having mentioned the characteristic of language variation, it is not an exception even among the Meitei community or the Kukis, for that matter, as they too have a differing dialect from place to place. Viewed broadly from this perspective besides considering several other important features like the social, cultural, and environmental dimensions, one easily gets to familiarise with the vast and unique diversity of the state. Thus, by situating our understanding within this context, the nature of diversity prevailing in the state can be aptly described as a case of "diversity within diversity".

The present study is focus on understanding the process of socio-cultural transformation among the Nagas in Manipur. The Naga society has undergone a tremendous extent of change since its inception in the historical process through forces acting both from within and outside their society. However, much of their traditional culture and knowledge system were lost in the process as a result of acculturation that took place with other dominant culture. In this study efforts are directed to bring to fore the various discourse of change that has taken place in the Naga society and how this is influencing a new direction of change among the contemporary Nagas. From this point, the research tries to situate the role of education in perpetuating socio-cultural transformation among the Nagas. At present with all the increasing complexities in politics and trends of modernism, the assertion of identity has become ever more important in the claim for right and authority especially in a multicultural existence. Given this context, the need is earnestly felt by the Nagas to revive their cultural history as the basis for the construction of their identity. Education as follows is simultaneously projected as the best medium to propagate the knowledge of cultural history and transmission of the same. But it is for this same reason that education has become a space for diversified interest since it has been the initial monopoly of the dominant ethnic group for a long period of time. The problem arises when the reign of dominance is challenged by the minority communities in their assertion of equal rights and representation. It is from this perspective that the current research will try to understand how education is catering to the interest of every ethnic community in the state.

I. Education in a Multiethnic Society

It goes without saying that education is the most fundamental need and right of every human being in a society. From a sociological point of view, Dye (2008: 125) suggests the essential function of education is to “create social cohesion by teaching values, aspiration, and a sense of identity to less fortunate members of society”. Its role, as he further adds also, includes in resolving and preventing all possible conflict by inspiring people to respect and imbibe every component of diversity” (ibid.). The importance of education permeates across every level of society ranging from individual to the family across the community and the state at large. Education is filled with a great potent force that is instrumental to potentiate change both at the micro as well as the macro level. It is a tool through which people acquire knowledge, techniques, and skills that shape them about the consciousness of their rights as well as that of their fellow human beings. Education, in short, is a transformative agent that potentiates people to realise their fullest ability, enhances their choice and in return capacitate them to foster a cohesive society.

The sum meaning of education furthermore is about training the mind to develop a cognitive ability beyond the gated dimensions of the constitutive knowledge that is set by social agencies. On one hand, education is supposed to play a pivotal role in containing corruption, discrimination, inequality, etc., and on the other hand, it unfolds a liberating effect for individual efficiency and social progress. The way of learning through education as the famous British Philosopher of education Peter forwards, should prepare the individual with a “broad cultural initiation” across a wide spectrum of social understanding with a critical ability to question rationality. It should fill the individual with the depth and breadth of knowledge rather than a mere acquaintance of facts (cited in Carr, 2014: 219). Overall, the inevitability of education as a concept in a way has made it seem like where “everything that starts with education ends in education”. There is no discernible end of education, it is a lifelong process characterised by dynamism, and therefore, the study of education in any society is always a constant subject of interest.

Acknowledging the importance of education the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 has declared it as a human right. Thereafter, its official recognition has been widely replicated in

several other international treaties including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1988). In India, the discourse of progress in education has gradually but always displayed an upsurge movement based on the capacity of the government. One of the most praiseworthy achievements in this regard has been the institution of the Right to Education Act, 2009, which is aimed at free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of 6-14 years within a decentralised framework of planning and development.

Having briefly discussed the importance of education, however is not to say it is free from its susceptibilities. In fact, all the socio-cultural, economic, and political factors broadly underpin a great role in influencing the system of education. Carr (2010) observes that, “in the contemporary literature of educational philosophy and theory, it is almost routinely assumed or claimed that ‘education’ is a ‘contested’ concept: that is, it is held that education is invested – as it were, ‘all the way down’ – with socially constructed interests and values that are liable to diverge in different contexts to the point of mutual opposition” (p.83) Education as a contested concept is also argued by Winch (2002), who acknowledges the different prevailing variant of conceptions as part and parcel of the manifestations of the contest (p. 102). The paradoxical dimension of education as the source of snobbery and transcendence is also noted by Guru (2014).³ The conceptual understanding of the author owes its reliance to Gandhi and Ambedkar, the two bedrock of Indian educational philosophy who were oppose to the instrumental value of education and attribute to it as the primary source for all elitism and alienation, and liberation.

Viewing from a political perspective, Bernstein (1971) has maintained that education is a reflection of “the distribution of power and the principles of social control”.⁴ There are two faces of education as given by Chakraborty and Gosh (2013) that can be broadly categorised as destructive and constructive. The former aspect manifest in the uneven distribution of education to create or preserve privilege, the use of education as a weapon of cultural repression and the

3 Two Conceptions of Education: Gandhi and Ambedkar. Abstract presented by Gopal Guru at, International Seminar on Philosophy of Education 2014. Azim Premji University (p.1)

⁴ Chakraborty, S. & Ghosh, B. N. (2013). Ethnicity: A Continuum on Education. Available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED540936.pdf> (p.128)

production or doctoring of textbooks to promote intolerance. And the constructive side goes beyond the provision of education for peace programmes, reflecting the cumulative benefits of the provision of good quality education. These include the conflict-dampening impact of educational opportunity, the promotion of linguistic tolerance, the nurturing of ethnic tolerance and the “disarming” of history”.⁵

Bush and Saltarelli (2000) showed how educational systems can be manipulated to drive a wedge between people, rather than drawing them closer together, their study was mainly based in the context of a conflict situation, but this is enough to suggest a similar effect on education in a multiethnic society with diverse political and ethnic aspiration in a state like Manipur. A crucial point in their argument is the acknowledgment of what they called “peace education” in the midst of an ethnic hatred. However, given under any circumstances, it is not possible for education to solely manage or resolve the identity-based conflict or contestations by itself without a complementary social, economic, and political initiatives. Any sustainable resolution to the distinct and diverse interest in education can be “developed and supported by both governmental and non-governmental factors within violence-affected societies in ways that are consistent with the fundamental and universal principles of human rights as education transmits language, culture, moral values, and social organization, leading to a particular identity and often has a strong political role”.⁶

II. Educational Dominance and Contestation from Minorities

The primary subject of the current topic as it would be looking at education and its conflicting interests in a multicultural society. Perhaps, it is not only advisable but ineluctable to at least briefly consider and specify the nature of its relationship with culture as they are entwined concepts. Though there is no one conclusive definition of the word ‘culture’ and ‘education’ or vice versa. Still, it cannot be denied, given their inseparability, they are simply two sides of the same coin. The two concepts as Obanya (2005: 2) suggest “can in fact, be said to be indistinguishable, as the primary definition of education is acculturation”. The highly

⁵ Ibid., p. 130

⁶ Ibid. p. 131

interdependent nature of these words likewise impels that any changes occurring on one side do not go unaffected on the other side. Culture as defined by Naghizadeh, (2000) cited in Ettehad et al., (2014: 411) “as a set of belief, knowledge, education, customs, and values that society has developed them based on their own belief in the process; it aims to achieve a development, defined and explained to them by its world look”. Culture in a general sense of the term can also be broadly understood as something which encompasses all the social code of conduct, spinal for social operation. It is a result of social construct over a period of time, the outcome of which forms the shared basis of assumption and interpretation of social reality amongst people. The essence of culture likewise, is what gives the individual a sense of identity and create a link of affinity and understanding in the society.

The significance of culture as the most fundamental aspect of society and as the utmost basis for education is a known fact. However, education, without doubt, is the most effective social mechanism for the transmission of cultural values. Add to this, perhaps, it is also the most important agency for crystallizing human knowledge in interpreting the world around them. The proximity of the terms 'culture' and 'education' is also evident from the fact that they are constantly reflected in each other. Both are dynamic concepts and since every society has its own changing socio-cultural needs, it requires education to meet those needs.⁷ Yet, the close relationship between these two terms is not without its danger, especially when taken in juxtaposition in a diverse social and cultural milieu, where it has an equal chance of doing good as well as bad for the society. The dynamic force of culture and education has in its capacity for integrating as well as disintegrating the development of society. Both are essential drivers and have a potential role in evoking peace and resolving conflict at the same time (Smith, 2010 in Singha, 2013; Preis and Muster, 2013).

It is based on the reality of these facts and alike that necessitates some basic understanding while dealing with the society. Unlike in a homogenous society, the general perception of the population towards culture as an underlying concept in a heterogeneous society is generally liable to be less coherent. For what is considered as befitting, a particular social group might often be viewed with distaste by another depending on the nature of its social relationship in the

⁷ Gulati, & Ahmad. (n.d). Lesson 2. Introduction to Philosophical , psychological and sociological bases of education. B.A. (programme) School of Open Learning, University of Delhi. (p. 21).

past and present context. In a heterogeneous society, moreover, it is worth its salt only, so long as it imbibes the collective spirit of cultural accommodation and succeeds in contextualising social equity in diversity based on democratic principle. Further, any social relationship that obliterates the scope of a dialectical consensus is bound to induce dissonance at some point in time that perhaps can be a major deterrent in building a cohesive society. Thus, the practical concept of culture and education can be made more relevant thereby keeping this understanding and approach in mind.

Accordingly, inferable from the above debate is the inevitable and consequent concept of acculturation as slightly indicated even before. The close line of relationship between culture, education, and acculturation is undeniable as far as any of these topics is concerned. There are several debates surrounding the term “acculturation”, which concerns around the important question of whether it being a one-sided or dual reciprocal process. Scholars like, Parsons (1936), and Graves (1967) strongly contend the act of acculturation as a unidirectional phenomenon where the change is directed upon ethnic minorities in the line of the majority culture.⁸ Nevertheless, few other proponents like Linton (1940), Bogardus (1949), Dohrenwend and Smith (1962), are on the contrary are more inclined towards proclaiming the process as involving an implicitly two-way reciprocal relation.⁹

Debates such as this are ongoing, and it is hard to take a categorical stand on any side, but a point still worthy of attention is from the stance of those who argue about the process as having a double-edged effect. Leaving aside this seesaw argument, the inherent fact, however, remains, that there is always a point of contact between groups or individual which is indispensable in the process of acculturation. Following this, the almost ubiquitous theme consistent throughout the whole paragraph in this section may be best put across as “direction”. Teske and Nelson (1974) have posited a very insightful question in this regard concerning the issue of direction as is evident from the quote: “does the phenomenon of acculturation incorporate a one-way, unidirectional process of change or a two-way process? And, if the former, what are the determinants of the direction this process will take; if the later, is the degree of change greater in

8 Raymond, Jr. & Nelson, B. (1974) Acculturation and Assimilation: A clarification. Available at: <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1525/ae.1974.1.2.02a00090> (p.353)

9 Ibid., p. 354

one direction than in the other hand, if so, what is the determinant, or determinants, of this change?" (p.353)

Regarding the part of cultural reflection in education, it is worth understanding the basics of it by taking certain prior interrogatories into question. The whole objective of an ideal cultural and educational system as is to shape and harness a common future for the unity of the people. It is not insignificant to introspect how the various aspects of multicultural diversity are played out in the case of a small state like Manipur. Questions like, how the current education system reflects cultural diversity? Whose cultures are reflected in textbook? What level of emphasis is in pursuit to cater larger democratic participation and social representations? Not just this, the more important question around the identity of the minority community, their dilemmas as well as their anxieties concerning the change, continuity and the challenges facing their culture in the fast transitioning modern world are crucial. Concurrent with this, it is also essential to collate the perspectives of the majority community regarding their interest as well as their perceived insecurities in their relationships with other communities.

Holistically, in a state comprising of multiethnic community, every group of people living within its territory may experience some major form of acculturation or assimilation from other dominant cultures. This is not devoid of the Meiteis who had their own indigenous tradition and religious practices but were highly influenced under Hindu culture in the early 18th century. Today, there are said to be followers of Hinduism than their own traditional religion of Sanamahi although the revival process of the old religion is continuing side by side.¹⁰ The revival of the ancient Meitei Mayek (Manipuri script) is also substantiated at the same time. Added on to this, under western colonisation, several changes were also implicated in the internal structural organisation of the Meitei society although the influence of Christianity did not gain much foothold as it did in the tribal community. Considering the tribal society in Manipur, there certainly is not much difference between the Kukis and the Nagas in terms of their experiential circumstances and encounters of cultural change. While Hinduism as a religion could not establish its stronghold in the tribal areas, it certainly could not evade the influence of Christianity and that made the whole difference.

¹⁰ Sanamahi is the ancient religious cult of the Meiteis, the downfall of the religion came about with the introduction of Hinduism as the official religion during the reign of King Meidingu Pamheiba in 1717 who later converted his name as Gharib Niwaz after his own conversion.

To take a case here, one cannot be oblivious to the fact that, the tribal community like the Nagas, has been for many decades being '*acted upon*' and that more conspicuously during the colonial period, the intervention of the Christian missionaries and even up to the post-colonial period. The process of change that took place in the Naga society under the circumstances became the sole monopoly of the outsiders rather than their own. An enormous level of change was involuntarily directed upon them primarily in the form of external imposition of culture and education. Judging by the phenomenon of change that the Nagas experienced in its historical process, it will not be biased to say that the force by which the changes were driven has been primarily or mostly unidirectional in nature. The dynamics of social relationship inherent in the power structure having deprived of the Nagas thus, restrained them from deciding its own discourse in many different contexts. Consequently, the whole idea of direction which is mostly reliant upon domination through power in this case rather than anything predisposed the Nagas to a sub-dominant group.

Given the concept of domination here once again, Teske and Nelson (1974) opines that it is not something that is essentially a prerequisite but rather an important variable in determining the acculturation process. In fact, this definition somehow seems to hold its validity, especially when paralleled along Bogardus three types of acculturation, viz. Imposed acculturation, Blind acculturation, and Democratic acculturation (p.355). A close look at the Naga society in this regard tends to insinuate the relevance of the imposed form in most of her developmental experience. Imposed acculturation, as the definition suggests, is the ability of a dominant group to suppress and enforce its own ideas and culture upon the sub-dominant group. Here the point of reference being the Nagas, first contact with the westerners in which much of their cultures were subdued and demoralised. The continued subjection under the paternalistic attitude of the nation at large with its various apparatus of the state mechanism and dominant community is deemed by most Nagas as an inhibition against their autonomy. However, it does not mean discrediting the relevance of two other forms of acculturation. For the Nagas who are caught in the current tussle of their search for identity amidst the blending reality of the modern phenomenon, fixation along foreign culture is not uncommon (Wettstein and Stockhausen, 2008: 185).

Acculturation derived from consensus based on inspiration from the social and cultural environment is also another dimension that cannot be overlooked. Under these varied scenarios,

there remains much to understand, how the Naga people in Manipur feel and correlate with the constant force of change within the purview of their developmental circumstances. Of late, there has been some renewed interest, particularly among the Nagas to preserve and promote their culture. In this sense, they are beginning to project their attention more specifically and rigorously towards education as a potential vehicle of cultural upliftment. In the light of this urge, there has been more informed contestation and resistance against the chauvinistic attitude of the dominant Meitei community especially for projecting and imposing their culture over the tribal's. This is the reason why this study is particularly significant to see how education as a common platform is being used as a space to address the equality of opportunity and incorporate the diverse interest of the different ethnic communities in Manipur in general, but Naga tribal groups in particular.

III. Education as sites of diversity and contestation in Manipur: Framing the Research Problem in Theoretical Discourses

As far as the state of Manipur is concerned, it is a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious one. However, in the backdrop of this diversity lies several pre-eminent issues and one of this is notably the problem in education particularly that of the tribal minorities. The concept of diversity as it prevails in the state, reflected in different aspects of life, remains debatable if not incommensurate in instating diversity in education. The policy of education and its subsequent textbook curriculum that is adopted by the state has often caused distraught among the tribal's attributing to it tended to be discriminatory and favour the monopoly of the Meitei community. Multicultural education as a concept and policy under the guideline of National Curriculum Framework 2005 to which Manipur is also a subscriber in practice still seems to deviate largely from its prescribed principle. The imposition of Meitei centric knowledge and language approach in the state education system has been a recurrent practice and continues to be in place. The discord arising from this attitude of the dominant Meitei's has often incited tribal's to agitate, and threaten the state to affiliate their school to other education boards and demand for alternative arrangement. For example in 2007, schools located in the four hill districts dominated by the Nagas called for an affiliation with Nagaland board as a reaction to the suppressive policy

of the Meiteis in education. However, what followed later was a prolonged agitation and hartal on both sides of the hill and valley with each accusing the other of their hidden agenda. The worst effect of this incident particularly came to pass with the student community as they were caught in a catch 22 situation. The period up to the present days continues to be remembered by most students, parents, and teachers as one of the most horrific incidents that caused the biggest loss and endangerment to their careers. This particular event in Manipur is a very strong case that exposes the intersectionality of educational interest, ethnic biases, divisions, and violent conflict prevailing in the state.¹¹ Broadly Manipuri situation may not be one of the situations, but is confronted by many such multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies across the world. Thus we draw some stimulus from literature on multiculturalism to frame the research problem.

The term “multiculturalism” covers a wide range of topics such as race, gender, socio-economic class, culture, language, sexual preference or disability etc., (Kinchloe and Steinberg, 1997: 1). The use of this word is variedly applied, nevertheless, there is a common consensus about it which is to respect, preserve and promote diversity base on equality and social justice. Gordon and Robert (1991) observe multicultural education as a thing that “relates to education and instruction designed for the cultures of several different races in an educational system. This approach to teaching and learning is based upon consensus building, respect, and fostering cultural pluralism within racial societies”.¹² Bucher (2004) and Connerley and Pedersen (2005) cited in Rodriguez and Lamm (2016: 115) explain diversity in education as a formal effort to enhance the “development of awareness, knowledge, and skills to effectively work with, work for, and manage diverse others in various contexts, despite whether differences are readily apparent or in underlying attributes”. There are several other definitions of multiculturalism but in general, it is more or less the same as what Motani (2001) defines it “as a value and political principle that intends to promote peaceful and meaningful coexistence of culturally diverse groups by protecting people's cultural heritage and identity” (p. 8).

Drawing from the above understanding as a frame of reference, the state of education in Manipur, however, seems to present a slightly contrasting scenario. The idea of multiculturalism

11 Education in the midst of Violent Conflict in Nagaland and Manipur: An Exploratory Study. A study conducted by Aman Trust, (2007) and supported by National Foundation of India, New Delhi. Available at http://amanpanchayat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Education_Nagaland-Manipur.pdf

12 Chakraborty & Ghosh (2013), p. 140

as envisaged and sought in the policy is not properly corresponded in practice to appreciate the inherent diversity. It is based on the fact that there is a strong proven sense of mutual suspicion and insecurity running deep behind the background of every ethnic group of the state. Reasons for this dubious relationship are numerous; however, the major domain of the problem lies clearly embedded in the larger politics of ethnic identity assertion. Understandable is conflict as an ineluctable¹³ characteristic of a society but the point of concern in Manipur is considering the situation which does not seem to be getting any better. Going beyond the general problems of education that are jointly faced by the people in the state, there is a growing ordeal among the tribal's who seem to be more burdened by the brunt of inequality and feeling of discrimination often giving way to strong resistance. In order to understand the inter-play of the current educational problems in the state, perhaps may be best elicited from the perspectives of contemporary research findings.

Jacobs et al. (2012) opine that a similar approach along colonial lines though less overt, but nonetheless implying disfavour for tribal culture can be discerned even in the present-day educational system as most of the institutions in Naga tribal regions are administered by missionaries (p. xvi). However, this does not affirm the innocence of the State in its democratic pledge, discrimination by the majority and the imposition of dominant language and culture in education, which continue to instigate strong discontentment among the minorities. By and large, the educational system in the state has never been in the interest of the tribal community. According to Kengoo (2011), "the problems of tribal education in Manipur are the fallout of a larger problem of cultural upheaval, political unrest, and economic stagnation that has gripped the education system".¹⁴

One of the fundamental factors causing the rise of commotion along this line perhaps is due to evolving diversification in ethnic politics¹⁵ and the resultant mismatch in development between the valley and hill districts. "Meiteis as the dominant group inhabit in Imphal, the Capital of

13 Dubey, 2008 in Singha, (2013). Conflict and education in Manipur: A comparative Analysis. (p.2)

14Kengoo, (2011). Education system in Manipur: A comparison between the tribes and non-tribes. Available at www.nagajournal.com/articles/education-system-in-manipur-a-comparison-between-the-tribes-and-non-tribes/

15 Kom, (2011). Ethnic politics in the hills of Manipur. Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences. Vol.3, No. 1, p. 153.

Manipur, and they exercise power to administer all the development in education. Democratic forms of educational development are thus an imbalance in the state”.¹⁶ On a similar note, Gangmumei (2000) observed that “The state has schools and colleges established by the government or private agencies. In the government schools that are administered by the state bureaucracy, there is no question of democracy in management. The aided institutions have to function within the whims and fancies of the state educational bureaucracy and those who wield political power” (Gangmumei 2000: 195).

To put these prevailing circumstances in a slightly different twist, Smith (2003) states that, “Irrespective of the degree of decentralization and differentiation between the systems, issue of equality carry the potential to inflame or ameliorate conflict between different groups within society. Equality concern may arise, inputs such as equal access of all groups to education, transparency in the allocation of resources and the recruitment, training and deployment of teachers” (p.26). Notwithstanding this, the existing depth of the issue in Manipur is far more complicated than what is mentioned here. Chasie (1999) contends that little of what the Naga students learn from contemporary schooling is relevant to his provincial situation (p.121).

A similar view to this is highlighted by Dolly Kikon (2006) as she writes, “the BSEM social Science reader for class VIII dwells heavily on the way of life in the Imphal Valley. It only gives a cursory look at the tribes and communities in descriptions of shifting cultivation as a primitive method of farming, narrations of the spread of Christianity, or topographic charts that compare population, literacy levels and landholding between the Imphal valley and the hill districts” (p. 17).

An extract from a field study conducted by Aman Trust (2007), (A New Delhi based NGO) in Manipur covers an interview with Mr. Paul Hiring, the former president of All Naga Students Association Manipur, (ANSAM) which carries the following excerpt:

“The hill people have faced a lot of discrimination and have been denied the right to education and development by the valley people. The BSEM (Board of Secondary Education Manipur), syllabus impose Meitei Mayek i.e. the Meitei language on us. Our language, culture, history have no

¹⁶ Kengoo (2011),ibid.,

place in the syllabi. It is not just a political issue but something linked to our very way of living and future generations”.

In brief, this statement underscores a major summary of the problem among others that continues to be a source of concern today.¹⁷

Imposition of knowledge like this in the form of educational content may seem harmless instantaneously but it poses a larger threat in conditioning the young mind by slowly uprooting them from their culture. An implication of such a situation is put forward by Kengoo (2011) who states that children in such (negated) environment grow up learning and accumulating varied kinds of knowledge but meanwhile miss learning about the major aspect of their own identity. The gap in knowledge is widened without practice and gradual detachment of the Nagas from their own history over time. Thus, this puts forward the need for more culturally relevant educational materials in local languages and for skills and personality development to extend the students’ critical thinking, problem-solving and creative ability (Mukherjee 2012; Basu, 2014 cited in Douglas, 2017).

In order to come to terms with the reality and quest for equality in education, Michael W. Apple (2000) has noted in his observation that, “for some groups of people, schooling is seen as a vast engine of democracy: opening horizons, ensuring mobility, and so on. Whereas, for few others, it is seen as a form of social control, or, perhaps, as the embodiment of cultural dangers, institutions whose curricula and teaching practices threaten the moral universe of the students who attend them” (Michael Apple, 2000: 180). The current scenario in Manipur regarding its educational system is not very different from the above-given statement. The concept of “critical multiculturalism”¹⁸ though much desired is not found to be practiced or implemented. Education and schooling remain highly politicized favouring some and disfavouring many. The manipulation of political power by the dominant community exerts a ripple effect on the entire system. One predominant example in this regard besides several others is the imposition of

17 Aman Trusts, (2007). pp. 23-24

18 A critical multiculturalism concerns itself with issues of justice and social change and their relation to the pedagogical”, where “pedagogical, refers to the production of identity – the way we learn to see ourselves in relation to the world”, Kincheloe, and Steinberg, (1997: 26).

Manipuri language¹⁹ in school education throughout the state. The tribal community has for long been enforced with Meitei language alongside Hindi and English while the state government has deliberately remained indifferent to the importance of tribal indigenous languages many of which are declining fast among native speakers.

According to Ghosh and Kumar (2008), such an imposition is looked at by the tribals as a kind of cultural hegemony of the Meitei/Manipuri chauvinists (p. 206). The consequent result of this imposition, as they further argue, has been one of the main reasons for the emergence of the pan-tribal movement in Manipur. The issue of dominance is also well placed by Rao (2008) in his article entitled “India's Language Debates and Education of Linguistic Minorities”. The author maintains that “the assimilative nature of dominant languages makes it detrimental to the survival of minority languages or languages of less power. The "majority" ethnic languages or English, as the case may be, depending on the context, are the culprits for the extinction of minority languages in any given society” (Rao, 2008: 67).

A growing realization along this line amongst the Nagas alongside their political empowerment has seen them contesting the power dynamics and subjection in education. As mentioned earlier, the year 2007 was a historic landmark in which the four hill districts inhabited by the Nagas openly rejected Manipur Board and opted for Nagaland Board causing a tremendous problem for thousands of students.²⁰ The major cause that instigated this incident centered on the question of exclusion of Naga history and their culture in the syllabus of the state board on top of the issue of language imposition (Meitei Meyek). The strong sense of this awakening in a way resembles the argument advanced by Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997: 26) that unless some form of cultural separatism prevails; the only choice is to stick to the existing academic structure. Once again the nature of tribal indignation in Manipur directly or indirectly indicates an orientation to the famous question posed by Michael Apple in the path of Herbert Spencer, Whose knowledge is most worth? (Michael Apple, 2000: 180). As an extension of this question, it is also important to pose an obvious reminder of whose language is most important? The whole politics of

19 Ghosh, and Kumar, (2008) Manipuri denotes two meaning: A people (Manipuri/Meitei) and language (Manipuri/Meiteilon) spoken by them and as such it is wrong to use reference as “Manipuri Nagas” as evident in Ghosh and Kumar, (2005: 14).

20 Nagaland snubs Manipur on affiliation issue. (n.d.). *E-PAO*. Retrieved from: <http://e-pao.net/epRelatedNews.asp?heading=10&src=150907> Accessed: 17th November 2017

domination, inclusion, and exclusion in education thus remains a predominant issue for tribals in Manipur.

Some changes are also evident currently in the field of education in Manipur, based on language. Students are given the option to choose their respective recognised tribal subject as MIL²¹ (Major Indian Language) in lieu of Manipuri which was mandated previously. But, here too, the policy is not so much in favour of the tribal students. Attempts are often frequented intermittently by the education department to make MIL (mother tongue subject) compulsory by removing Additional English as MIL subject which most tribal students do opt at the moment. The major problem to this is from a practical point of view, firstly, because most of the tribal languages are in the initial stage of development with many tribes still struggling to come up with their own literature. And secondly, because there are no trained language teachers or to say the least, no proportionate number of teachers, to teach different tribal MIL subjects.

Further, according to Singh (2000), “The socio-cultural milieu of the tribal people of Manipur has its distinctive characteristic. The 29 recognized tribes of the state speak 29 dialects. However, the recruitment of teachers is not on the basis of merit and capability of the individuals, since it has become the system of money power, recruiting the right person is not in the practice by the education department in Manipur. Teachers have been recruited excessively among the Meiteis, and even for the posts which are reserved for the tribals” (cited in Kengoo, 2011: 3).

Considering this, the quality of education specifically in terms of transmitting cultural content is a matter of great concern. In the absence of proficient tribal subject and language teachers as a direct result of the lack of a proper training system, meeting the objective of quality and equality remains a far-fetched dream. Study by Korthagen and Russels (1999) has that the prior knowledge of teachers plays a powerful role in comprehension and learning.²² If this argument is taken into consideration to reflect upon the current education scenario in Manipur, chances are

21 Thadou-Kuki (MIL) subject at secondary school level. Retrieved from: http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=education.Education_Announcements.Edn_Ann_2016.Thadou_Kuki_MIL_subject_at_secondary_school_level_20161017Date - 14th October 2016.

22 Korthagen, F. & Russell, T. (1999) Building teacher education on what we know about teacher development. Retrieved from: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED431717.pdf>

very bleak to take into confidence the learning outcomes of children in cultural education, particularly for the tribal students.

Overall, however, there are efforts to promote cultural literature by every recognised tribe in the state. Part of the reason for this is because of the government recurrent notice to pass the mandate of compulsory mother tongue education in school. The other reason is because of the fast declining culture due to which promotion of literature is seen as the best way out to preserve cultural knowledge. Nevertheless, this is in fact, is a great leap of progress for the Nagas and other tribes in Manipur. Can this mean that the system of education in Manipur has become more tolerant towards multicultural education however is a question that remains to be examined further in the subsequent chapter.

Further, most of the existing research (Kengoo, 2012; Pramodini, 2011; Singh, 2018) in the field of tribal education in Manipur although talks about the significance of culture and language in education but does not really lend much insight into the problems and challenges that are involved in the process of developing tribal literature and contestation around education and this research will try to fill that gap. In the absence of adequate support from the government for developing tribal literature and contestations around education and proficient teachers to teach the subject it remains to be seen how the official transaction of cultural education is taking place in its actuality. Up till now most of the research undertaken in education merely talks about discrimination against tribals in Manipur but does not produce much on structural exclusion. The current study also attempts to delve into the 2007 education board issues in Manipur by taking the perspectives of different communities, specifically the Nagas. In this regard, the study will bring to fore new developments in the field of education in the post 2007 imbroglio and how it continues to be perceived by different tribal communities in the state.

IV. Objectives, Research Questions and Methodological approach

a) Objectives of the Study

- To study the social, historical and cultural transformation of Naga society in Manipur
- To examine the role education played in bringing about both cultural and social transformations or ruptures and disruptions within the Naga society in the state of Manipur.
- To study how education has become a site of conflicting interests and symbolic domination by majority community.
- To study the resistance of tribal minority groups for inclusion in the educational content of Manipur state education.

b) Specific Research Question

1. How does the current Naga society in Manipur perceive the ongoing cultural transformation and how is the sense of Naganess transmitted in the process?
2. Does education bear any influence in instating a sense of cultural consciousness or need for the revival of traditional culture?
3. What has been the extent and coverage of content pertaining to the Naga tribal cultures into the educational process?
4. What are the various dilemmas, aspirations, and expectations of educational stakeholders including, parents, community leaders, and organisations protesting for inclusion of tribal content in education, school authorities, and policy framers of education in imparting traditional cultural values?

c) Methodology

The study is primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature. It seeks to capture various historical and educational events and their role in facilitating the inclusion of Naga tribal educational aspirations into the so called mainstream educational processes.

Towards this end, a qualitative research approach using exploratory method was followed. This is convenient considering the nature of the topic of study, the major aspect of which is to dwell on different perspectives of the people and bring out their narratives. Moreover, in exploratory research, the primary focus is on the discovery of ideas and insights (Kothari, 1990:36). The advantage of using exploratory method also stems from the fact that it is highly flexible and does not pose any formal structural barrier. Using this approach ensured confidence for the researcher and simultaneously enabled him to improvise his technical knowledge during the research stage itself. Added to this, both the approaches have a very good combinability and are effective for each other.

d) Research Setting

This study is conducted in Senapati district of Manipur, which is one of the hill districts that have revolted against lack of tribal content in education and campaigned for affiliation to Nagaland Board. The reason for choosing the said area is particularly because it offers a certain advantage in comparison to other districts. Of about reported sixteen Naga tribes inhabiting in the state, a good number of them ranging from ten to eleven tribes are found in Senapati district, which makes it ideal for study in terms of the population distribution (Singh, 2008: 12).

Adding to the convenience is the familiarity of the researcher with the place as a member resident of the district. This made it easier at least in terms of mobility and given time frame for the researcher to incorporate diverse views in realizing credible data. However, the study necessitated the researcher to travel outside of Senapati district in Imphal as the head-quarter of the state education system is harboured in the capital. By taking advantage of this travel, sometimes were allotted from the researchers own schedule to visit Manipur University particularly in Center for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy to discuss with some of its faculty on the theme of education. Consequently, this also provided an opportunity for the

researcher to visit the State Archives Center from where newspapers review of the past several years could be reviewed. A visit to the Manipur Baptist Convention was also undertaken to discuss about Naga culture and the various effort that is on in its promotion. But, on the whole, a visit outside of the primary area was done basically for meeting some respondents depending on their availability and convenience according to their personal work.

e) Sampling

Regarding sampling, a non-probability sampling technique based on purposive and snowballing technique is employed for the study. Luborsky and Rubinstein (1995: 10) define purposive sampling as a practice where subjects are intentionally selected to represent some explicit predefined traits or conditions. Using this technique, sample units were selected based on people having knowledge and credentials and also are involved in the movements for tribal assertions in Manipur. Subsequently, employing the snowballing technique enable the researchers in identifying potential informants with participants as the reference source and other reliable local recommendations. Implementing these two techniques were helpful to the researcher considering the requirement of time and availability of the respondents and reach out to the credible respondents. However being aware of the potential threat of bias and individual subjectivity likely in both these techniques, keen attentions were directed to keep the quality of data objective and credible in all possible dimensions.

Within this context, maximum efforts were directed towards the selections of respondents from a heterogeneous sample. The sample included apex church members, as their role is somehow more pervasive and representative of Naga population. Community elders from different tribes were consulted as they are usually the culture-bearers of their specific group. An informal interview was also held with the Secretary of the Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur (COHSEM) and professors from Manipur University to glean their insight on the policy and perspective of the education system in the state. Besides this, teachers mainly principals of schools and members of the Private School Association of Senapati district were consulted. Discussions were also carried out with the representatives of various tribal literature committees to understand their work and challenges in promoting tribal language and culture. Next, the

views of student leaders like the All Naga Students Association (ANSAM) and Kuki Student Organisation (KSO) were included as they had pivotal role in education of tribal children. Last but not the least, gender participation was one thing that was always ensured during the data collection and side by side different age group of participants was taken seriously to lend insight on intergenerational perspectives.

f) Data collection method and tools

Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. The primary data was collected by administering unstructured interview which is also often used interchangeably as in-depth interviews²³ and informal group discussions. The unstructured interview allowed the researcher great flexibility as there is no standardised questionnaire that really minimize the interviewer's freedom in the information gathering process but also allows relatively the same autonomy for the respondents. This always provided an opportunity to explore and add new dimensions to the problem in study. Mini Chiello et al. (1990) defined them "as interviews in which neither the question nor the answer categories are predetermined. Instead, they rely on social interaction between the researcher and the informant".²⁴ Punch (1998) also described "unstructured interviews as a way to understand the complex behaviour of people without imposing any a priori categorization, which might limit the field of inquiry".²⁵ However, this does not mean that the interview can be conducted without a sound knowledge and preparation, in order to achieve a good insight into people's lives (Patton, 2002).²⁶ Using this technique, requires keeping in mind the purpose and scope of the study ahead of the interview although nothing fixed as a predefined questionnaire Executing the technique though relatively seem more time consuming, it enabled the interviewer a chance to collect detailed information in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Similarly, the use of focus group discussion was also study and it allowed the researcher to confirm, reinforce and contradict within the group discussion (Webb and Kevern, 2000: 800).

23 Zhang & Wildemuth. (n.d). Unstructured Interviews. (p. 1). Available at. https://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~yanz/Unstructured_interviews.pdffou don't save them.

24 Ibid. p. 2

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

Incorporating this technique served a suitable alternative to ensure the reliability of the field data that might have not otherwise emerged solely from the interview process alone. The key stronghold about this technique is interaction which enhances a high level of face validity. Emphasising on the point of interaction Kitzinger (1995) writes that: “the idea behind the focus group method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview...When group dynamics work well the participants work alongside the researcher, taking the research in new and often unexpected directions” (p.299).

In the case of secondary data, information was gathered by conducting the literature review of journals, books, and newspapers. Reference were also drawn from various published and unpublished sources such as souvenir, Pamphlets, and other official documents collected from civil organisation, student bodies, and state officials. Visit to the state archive center in Imphal was necessitated especially for newspaper archives specifically to keep track of all the issue of educational affiliation back in 2007. Last but not the least, a brief observation of textbook from class seven to ten of the state board was done to understand the decentralised participation in the formulation of text.

CHAPTER 2

NAGA SOCIETY AND IDENTITY IN MANIPUR

In India, Nagas reside in four states, namely, Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh where except in Nagaland, in all others, they represent a minority population. There are many different opinions as to what the exact number of the Naga tribes are and also in terms of several claims and counterclaims prevailing in the realm of politics and identity contestation.²⁷ However, the census report of 1991 has officially recognised 15 Naga tribes in Manipur, 17 in Nagaland and 3 in Arunachal Pradesh.²⁸ Even this figure as already explained before, is not consistent and often than not we come across differing figures in various sources. In Manipur, the Naga tribe predominantly inhabits in four districts, that is, in Senapati, Chandel, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul districts. The current study is being conducted in the context of the Nagas in Manipur with a special reference to Senapati district, the details for which will be discussed later.

I. The Nagas and etymology of the word ‘Naga’

This chapter outlines the socio-historical and cultural construction of Naga identity in general and that in particular reference to Manipur. Mention of the term ‘Naga’ requires a more elaborate illustration with a brief historical clarification. This is deemed crucial particularly for two chief reasons. Firstly, doing this may be essential especially for the sake of critics and those who are new to its understanding. Secondly, as this study will also be touching the aspects of culture, giving a brief historical background of the term and its usage will surely prompt the path for its subsequent sociological and political understanding for one to easily make more sense of the discussion that will ensue.

²⁷ Highlights the varying number of tribes falling under the Naga group in the work of various scholars as for Sema (1986) who listed it to be 20, Horam (1975) 32, Shimray (2005), 40 and Asoso (cited in Chasie) lists 50 tribes.

²⁸ Shimray (2007). *Naga population and integration movement*. Mittal Publications. pp. 22-35. Information regarding the number of Naga tribe in Manipur can also be seen at, Warngam, T. S. (2013).

To begin with, the word “Naga” is a catch-all term for conglomerations of several groups of tribes of Mongoloid stock inhabiting the North-eastern region of India and parts of North-Western Myanmar. It is not exactly clear as to how the word came into being as the history of its origin is mostly shrouded in mystery. Nevertheless, there are several claims of hypothesis regarding the origin of the term “Naga”. Some of the most prominent hypothesis in this context can be enumerated as given below: -

- (I) It is believed that the word “Naga” is derived from the Sanskrit word “*Nanga*” meaning “*paucity of cloth*” as found mention in (Shakespeare 1914, Johnstone 2002)
- (II) There is yet, another reference suggesting the term to have been derived from the word ‘*Nok*’ (Tibeto Burman language) meaning ‘*people or folk*’.²⁹
- (III) And perhaps a comparatively nascent one from a native scholar R.R. Shimray (1985) who claims it to have been derived from the Burmese word ‘*Naka*’ meaning ‘*earring*’ as the Nagas usually have pierced ear.

Whatever may be the theory of origin, the use of the term ‘Naga’ in its true sense became widely popularized and solidified only during the British reign, as they commonly use it to refer to those tribes living to the eastern mountain tracks of the Ahom kingdom.³⁰ Prior to this, the tribes who presently identify themselves as the Nagas associated and functioned more as an independent unit mostly in allegiance with their village and Clan system. It is held that the gradual exposure of the Nagas to the political context of the outside world particularly under colonialism served a major impetus that prompted them to solicit for a larger identity.³¹ Henceforth, a quick realization was through, that only under a collective identity could they safeguard themselves from being imbibed into the fast expanding nation-building project that was on between India and Burma after the British administration. As a result, leaders from different tribes of the Nagas gathered to harness a common expression by discovering their many commonalities for

29 Elwin, Verrier., Nagaland, 1961, p.22

30 Wettstein, M. (2012). Origin and migration myth in the rhetoric of Naga Independence and Collective Identity. Available at

<http://www.marionwettstein.ch/wpcontent/uploads/2014/08/Wettstein2012NagaMigrationOriginMyths.pdf>pg. 215

31 Ibid.,

developing a sense of belongingness. It is vivid that the construction of a common Naga identity has been a gradual but an expanding process. That the concept of Naga identity is a fluid process is also evident from the fact that there were only eight indentified Naga tribes when they first wrote to the British's "Simon Commission" in 1929 for demand of autonomy. Not only this, but at one point of time, even the Nepalis, Kukis, Kacharis, Abors and Singphos were also included in the list of Naga tribes (Kumar, 2007:24-25). In this way, the inclusion and exclusion in the construction of Naga Identity has witnessed a lot of in and out unlike today whereby it is firm and defined. Overall, the rhetorical discourse of the Nagas as one people evolved but it became a staunchly ingrained phenomenon in their popular appeal for sovereignty right since the time of colonialism.³²

II. Construction and Imagination of a common Naga Identity

Ever since the early 1990, the Nagas had been asserting that they formed a different nation and create a separate identity different from the rest of India wholly.³³ The principal basis for most of this sort of argument has always been centred on the racial, historical, political, social, cultural, and religious theme of differences that it had with the rest of India. The uniqueness of the "Naga history" a familiar term as is often reiterated in its political discourse has been constantly sought after to nurture a "We feeling" and its demand for a separate Naga homeland. An important linchpin argument to this rhetoric, as Wettstein (2012) points out, is woven around origin and migration myth for the identification and construction of a collective identity. To elaborate briefly based on this notion, there are several views and narratives claiming the homogenous identity of the Nagas as one people although there is no one commonly accepted understanding of the same. Examples of some of the prominent theories in support of the claims of this nature as for instance are briefly given as below:

According to Nuh (2002:2-3), quoting from his own words "It is believed that the earliest home of the Mongoloid people was on the upper reaches of the Hwang-Ho River in China and further

³² Ibid.,

³³ Shonreiphy, L. (2014). Territorial dimensions in the Naga peace process. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol. 3(5), 41-45. P. 41

moving down to South-East Asia through the mountains. The Nagas belong to the great Mongolian race, which spread all over the world as far as China and South America. History unveils that the Nagas are from a higher civilization which flourished somewhere in South East Asia from time immemorial”.³⁴ But even for such a claim which might have induced certain fans of believers, reality does not permit a scientific mind to concur in the absence of a viable historical record and reference which it failed to provide. A subsequent account is forwarded by Jamir and Lanunungasang (2005).³⁵ Their study traces the origin of the Nagas from a particular village called “Mongkhuma” in Mongolia before entering into the Kachin area of Burma, settling down in various places together until they reached the last point called “Sukai”. From here, it is believed that the group split in two, with one group moving southward over the “Patkai hill” until they arrive in the plain of Manipur. And thereafter moving further into the north to finally settle in the present Naga Hills; the other group crossed the Chindwin River in the north and spread over the same hills from the northern and eastern sides.³⁶ Though from a research point of view and critique perspective, this story of origin and migration as Wettstein (2012) opines is more viable considering the references it uses with specific details and key sources of respondents (ibid. 221).³⁷ However, in the absence of any firm scientific record and history to affirm such theories, it merely becomes another story of possibility and addition to the several other mythical histories of the Naga identity.

The lack of coherence in the construction of a common Naga history has similar other challenges. There are different theoretical versions exacting the origin and migration from across various tribes of the Nagas. For instance, the Ao tribe defends their first origin from a particular village called “Chungliyimti” around their present territory.³⁸ Similarly, a story runs about a place called “Makhel” in present-day Manipur, held as a point from where all the Naga tribes are

34 Ibid., pg. 220

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., pg. 221

37 Ibid. A close observation by Wettstein (2012) on Jamir and Lanunungasang’s work (2005) points out at least two reliable sources about the origin and migration of the Nagas. The first source refers to S.S. Khaplang, leader of the NSCN-K faction and another source a book by Isaac ChishiSwu, one of the two leaders of the NSCN-IM with ThuingalengMuivah, both of whom claim to be the more genuine representation of the Independent Naga Nation. Placing the research statements of these two scholars in conjunction with the current political rhetoric and geographical settlements of the Nagas, Wettstein analysis reflects the possibilities of brotherhood that is maintained in the research work of Jamir and Lanunungasang with the two groups of Nagas represented by the two factions who were set apart by the path of migration, with former group who settled along the northern route without entering the present Nagaland and the later belonging to the group who first migrated first to the south and then north.

38 Ibid., pg. 222

said to have departed in different directions for a new settlement.³⁹ There are yet more other theories of origin and migration for such an example. But what we can at the most divulge from this is the intermittently unstable nature of assertions concerning the history and identity of the people which is not uncommon even within the Naga population besides the generally held theories of oneness. This is well supported by Kumar (2005), who concludes that “not a single legend tradition of origin and migration is acceptable to or has common currency among all Naga tribes” (Wettstein, 2012:231). Despite of this, a commendable aspect of the Naga history lies in the fact that such criticism has not deterred the zeal for building on a discourse of a collective identity. However, it is not necessary that ethnicity should be solely based on pure hereditary basis as that is only a one sided proposition, on the other hand, ethnicity can also be formed depending on identification along certain subjective preferences. To be fair to the whole debate, Gangumei Kamei may have been right as he describes that, “the evolution of Naga nationality is not a ‘fait accompli’, but an ongoing search for ethnic identity” (Dena, L. 2007:2).

Thus, amidst all the controversial debates surrounding the origin of the Naga history centering on its vagueness, we also see several ways that are being explored to give a historical sense of the past. Often there are discourses drawn directly from external historical references sought to suggest and defend the antiquity of the Naga history. Some commonly accepted theories by the Nagas in this regard points back far to the time of Ptolemy, the Greek geographer of Egypt 150 CE, who is said to have mentioned the people of the “Nangalogae” meaning “the naked”, living approximately in the current geographical area of the Naga territory.⁴⁰ However, an argument as this is not without its limitations because such a reference could easily be meant even to those non-Nagas living in the close proximity of their region as no exact location can be deduced. There are also other studies that suggest about reference made to the Nagas in the account of a Chinese traveller called Huang Tsang in the seventh century. And further again in the chronicles of the Ahom kings, beginning from the thirteenth century (Wettstein, 2012: 232-233). According to Wettstein, these are also generally some of the most cited sources when the question of Naga history and its antiquity comes into play.⁴¹

39 Ibid., pg. 227

40 Hutton, J. H. (1965). The mixed culture of the Naga tribes. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*. p. 17

41 Wettstein (2012) pp.232,233

Looking at all the above discourses as an instance that underpins the idea of a collective identity, it is hard to generalise or even understate the history of the Nagas as one people as they are divided into different tribal and linguistic groups. What is evident and cannot be ignored however is the strategic use of myth in both the origin and migration story with its vague advantage rendering equal possibility for everyone to identify in the Naga fraternity.⁴² Perhaps, this is one good reason why Wettstein (2015) argued that the Nagas, notion of a collective identity is still in its making (p. 234). Somehow this point seems quite relevant considering all the various approaches that we come across in the process of its ethnic rhetoric's like the "territorialisation of memory" (Smith, 1996), "myth of origin and migration" (Wettstein, 2012) and consequent "purification of cultural history" (Smith, 1996). Given all these possibilities, what remains by far the most important is to go by the general inclination of the people and that has it in the present general acceptance of the Nagas as one people.⁴³ Moreover, by looking into the context of the Nagas, it is hard to not acknowledge the concept of "unity in diversity" which conforms pretty well in its ethnic assertion movement (Dena, 2007).

Overall the Naga population as a whole we see is widely scattered, however, the common experience of cultural and social transformation that it underwent remains more or less the same. This is because the unanimity of the Nagas traces back to their belief in common ancestry, historical process, a common political objective, and aspiration to live together. That all being said, it should not, however, be taken as a total suggestion to equate all the experiences of the Nagas into one single context but rather look at it from the standpoint of its evolving developmental experience in different regional and sub-regional discourse. Based on this notion, the current study can be broadly set in two dimensions. First, it aims to particularly lay emphasis on divulging the perspectives of the Naga communities in the context of the larger socio-cultural revival movement taking place in the contemporary Naga society in Manipur. Secondly, it tries to understand the role of education both as a tool and space within the framework of the first point and explore various other mechanisms through which the same process is intended.

42 Ibid., 234

43 Ibid., 222

III. Contextualising the socio-cultural image of the Nagas

a) Colonial Construction of Naga Image

Historically, the Nagas were independent hill tribes and like any other indigenous people around the world, they had their own sophisticated material and oral culture. A major disruption of its indigenous traditional culture, however, occurred as a direct result of Colonial and Euro-Christian expansion.⁴⁴ Much of the old systems of belief, customs, values, and institutions got uprooted under colonialism as it did in other oriental societies (Weinstein, 2010: 85). For the colonisers, the Nagas were barbaric and lawless as they did not fit into the purview of the imperial law and so their actions were redeemed as a “civilizing mission”.⁴⁵

The idea that the Englishman was there essentially to improve the life of the so-called “primitive savages”, and orient them about civilisation was highly upheld by the colonial masters (Guha, 1996: 2376). Thus, under the scheme of such an ideology, the principal yardstick for progress came to be set entirely in terms of the western parameters which at the same time were used to justify conquest and colonialism.⁴⁶ Though at times, a few colonial administrators shared their concern for the natives and wrote about conserving their unique culture as it was. On the whole, they let its end loose regarding their responsibility wholly from an ethnological perspective. Thus, rather than acknowledging the unique worldviews of the Nagas, they constantly denigrated and miscast the people and its culture as something that needed to be mainstreamed or civilised.

The colonial administrators and ethnographers who wrote extensively about the Naga socio-cultural life often had the habit of portraying the Nagas in a bad light using exaggerated forms of character. Of course, their writing provides many comprehensive accounts of the Nagas ranging from the geography of their habitation, village life, laws, customs, traditions, religious beliefs, dress, food habits, physiological traits, rituals, folklores, and domestic life etc. Based on the review of colonial literature that is written on the Nagas, the discourse that greets the readers is often flooded with many stereotypical and undesirable terms like, ‘immoral’, ‘wild’, ‘savage’,

44 Thong, T. (2014). *Progress and its impact on the Nagas*. Ashgate Publishing Limited. P. vii-viii

45 Ibid, p.75

46 Weinstein, J. (2010). *Social Change (3rd Ed.)*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc. (p.41).

‘heathen’, ‘witchery’, ‘uncivilised’, barbarian, and ‘untameable’ etc.(Gadden, 1898; Hutton, 1921; Smart, 1995; Elwin, 1969; Raile, 2013).

Another very typical example of over generalisation about the character of the Nagas can be found in the account of J. H. Hutton (1921) a colonial anthropologist and an administrator. His views about the Sema Naga tribe are rather blasphemous he writes that “As far as his untruthfulness is concerned it must be admitted that the Semas readily takes a false oath’ (p. 26). Further he also purports that, ‘the charge of thievishness that is frequently brought against the Semas is likewise well founded...It is doubtful, however, if he is as bad as the Ao (another Naga tribe), who is at least a big thief and a bigger liar” (ibid.). One is often surprised as to how Hutton arrive at such a conclusion based on what kind of reliable data to brand the whole tribe in such a manner. The characterisation of the Nagas in this manner has set a deep stigmatisation, the psychological effect of which continues to linger as such references are often implied now and then even among the Nagas in a light derogative way.

The indigenous nature of the Naga culture which has already suffered many stereotypes reached the peak of its vulnerability particularly under protestant missionisation. That being said, Christianity and colonisation were always conjoined to a greater or lesser degree.⁴⁷ In the words of Andrew Porter (as cited in Thong 2014: 85): “Protestant Christianity embodied the peak of religious perfection”, and it was believed that the West was in ‘possession of a revealed religion; and that the possession of that religion can alone confer immortality and best confer present happiness”. And thus, filled with such strong passion and confidence, the missionaries openly condemned and attributed the practice of traditional culture as “*heathen*” culture (Sitlhou, 2009: 71, Sema, 2013: 60). Further, they imposed an enormous prohibition on the converts from practicing their traditional belief system. The nature of restrictions placed on Naga traditional culture, however, was biased and uni-dimensional, as it never really tried to arbitrate the value of culture from the indigenous perspectives. This is well testified by Christopher Haimendorf who opines, “The missionaries encourage their converts to disregard tribal laws and customs in spheres not directly connected with religion” (Thong, 2014: 88). In much the same way, Mills

47 Excerpt from the letter of one colonial officer named Jenkins to his superior suggested about working out a possible collaboration with one missionary named, “Mile Bronson”, (first missionary to the Naga hills) particularly for two reasons: to gain control of the Nagas natural resources and extend civilization among Nagas and promote its supremacy (Barpujari 1986: 256, cited in Thong, 2014: 59).

(cited in Thong, 2014: 99) observed that “neither the songs nor the dances are in any way indecent’ and added that the prohibition of singing and dancing not only added to village life but seriously contributed to the loss of genealogies and traditions embedded in the practice”.

Tezenlo Thong (2014: 10) has described the prejudices of negating the traditional culture in such a manner as equivalent to burning of history books, as for the Nagas, who are illiterate; this medium represents the only conduit through which they pass on their knowledge system from one generation to the next. In all of this, it did not just result in the loss of culture but created a pattern of mindset amongst the natives about the need to follow and learn much from the values of the western counterparts in order to progress. The long-term impact of such an imprudent prohibition moreover is evident from Wettstein and Stockhausen (2008) study on Naga culture. According to them, though many people nowadays take part in performing traditional culture, but are unable to discern the meaning of the dance steps, interpret the pattern in costumes and don’t understand the meaning of songs they sing.

Albeit the process of colonization certainly made a huge impact on the Naga society, the level of cultural transformation under Christianity evidently is much more profound. To argue whether the transformation is good or bad for the Nagas is a subject of intense debate (Thong, 2014: 9). However, there are several acknowledgeable as well as contemptible aspects of the missionaries and the administrators considering their style of engagement with the Nagas. According to Gurralla, (2015: 126), the spread of Christianity and modern ideas not only helped to put an end to the rampant inter-tribe warfare and irrational practices such as “*head hunting*” which are better off without, but it certainly brought about more unity and introduced the essential concept of health and hygiene. The dual impact of Christianity thus can be termed as such that it not only initiated the ground for evangelisation but also introduced the path to civilisation. It created the basis for the process of modernisation to operate in an otherwise educationally and economically backward area (Jeyaseelan, 1996:23-24).

Various works of the missionaries and the administrators alike are also laudable for their role in stamping out several social ills and evil practices of the Nagas. The contact with the westerners in many ways capacitated them to understand the reality of the much broader world beyond their limited confinement. In much the same way, the onset of Christianity to the Naga Hills as Inato

(2007: 75) contends, initiated new ideas of liberation, transformation and revolution in science and technology, economy, polity, culture, and education. Thus, by recapitulating the impact based on some of these facts and more others it is beyond doubt that Christianity and the colonial administration have certainly played a major role in bringing about a major positive reform in the Naga society. However, there is always an associating downside whenever a topic such as change is concerned and this is not an exception in the case of the Naga society and that cannot be left undiscussed.

At the very outset, perhaps the most significant contribution left behind by the westerners for the Nagas remained unparalleled to the introduction of western missionary education. Through education, the tribals were gradually withdrawn from their more enclosed lifestyle and encouraged to participate in the mainstream activity of the state. Albeit, through western education, came numerable positive reforms, yet, at the same time it set the path to concretised cultural colonisation. One of the foremost negative impacts of western education in this regard is the displacement of the traditional institution of “*Morung*”,⁴⁸ a Naga equivalent of modern school (Sitlhou, H. 2009: 73). The “*Morung*” formed one of the most important part of the community institution with functions to impart age old cultural values, key skills, and traditional knowledge to the younger generations. It is here that young Nagas learn the various arts of living based on traditional morality, responsibility, and community service.

However, the replacement of *Morung* with modern school and impartation of gospelly education not just augmented conversion but gradually prepared the ground for the locals to distant from their own culture. In the process, the new converts to Christianity who are also the beneficiaries of its numerous systems learned not only to condemn their culture but also began dissuading its fellow members to abstain the path of old tradition. A particular example to elucidate in favour of this argument is from Peseye (2003) cited in Joshi (2012:10), in which he writes that the early Christian converts in the Angami area (Present Nagaland), objected to the effort of one American missionary named Reverend Supplee, to translate the gospel hymnals into Angami folk tunes, complaining that it reminded them of their old lifestyles which they were no longer part of. The

48 The *Morung* (traditional dormitory, separate for male and female) was an important educational institution for both the boys and girls in traditional Naga society. From here Naga cultures, its customs and, tradition have been transmitted from generation to generation through folk music and dance, folk tales and oral traditions, carvings of figures on stones and wood, and designs on clothes.

sense of stigma attaching all traditional social elements created by the outreach of this extraneous force gradually led to departure of the natives from participating traditional festivals and ritual performances. The importance of meaning attached to traditional concepts and activities has shifted and as Mawon (2017) takes a particular case, this is the reason why nowadays festival like “Christmas” is given immediacy in tribal areas more than their own native festival (p. 172).

Western education, as some critics, further argues, also brought about the hegemony of major culture through the imposition of dominant languages such as English, Hindi, and Assamese (Douglas, 2017: 182). The new development which brought forth a wide change in the nation-state political dimension also came at the cost of traditional customary laws and norms as it became more dysfunctional.⁴⁹ The success of cultural obtrusion in this manner and alike other ways more than anything manifested in creating a deep negative outlook amongst the Nagas to view their own past with shame and regard it as unchristian till today.⁵⁰ All in all, there are two important reminders that can be highlighted based on this discussion. Firstly, the importance of enculturation was intentionally ignored by the westerners and secondly, most of the Nagas weren't critical enough or were too incredulous to realise the value of their own culture upon which their great history triumph.

b) Post-Colonial Continuities and Change

The process of cultural transformation as it continued after the westerners under Indian administration is worth further consideration. The concept of “mainland and periphery” gained momentum with the forced agglomerations of the Nagas under the centralized political and economic structure under India (Chasie, 2005: 259; Gros, 2018: 139). Some renowned nationalist scholars such as Ghurye and Thakkar suggested about assimilating the tribals with the advanced civilisation of the plains people with the former scholar even referring to the whole of the tribal population as backward Hindus (Guha, 1996: 2381). Such a proposition, however, was

49 A. WatiLongchar, “Gospel and Culture: A Tribal Perspective,” in National Consultation on Gospel and Culture (Bangalore: 1996).

50 Stockhausen and Wettstein (2008). Cultural extravagance' and the search for identity in the present-day Nagaland. p. 183

viewed with suspicion, an extension of the superiority complex by the advocate of tribal culture like Elwin Verrier. The concern from the protectionist perspective had its basis from the evident examples in history where the policy of intervention has marginalised tribal culture in all aspects of their social life (ibid. 2382). A validating approval to the hegemonic attitude of India is also found in the statement by Kumarupe, that several constitutional and extra-constitutional forces were pivotal in creating disunity among the Nagas (Pimmo, 1990:2340).

The idea of proposition for assimilation with the so-called “plain people” moreover is simply too myopic in view as it failed to reason behind the choices of the hill brethren preferring to live autonomously. This phenomenon is well captured in the argument posited by James C. Scott (2009:4-5) regarding the general perception about non-state hill people. Scott challenges the much-received wisdom about primitivism, arguing that the non-state hill people (so-called ‘primitives’) should not be seen as archaic vestiges, left behind by the evolutionary sequences of history. On the contrary, he argues that they have deliberately sought refuge in the stateless hills, where they have been the architects of their own marginality, for reasons based on their desire to keep the state at arm’s length (Wouters, 2011: 430).

Given all this rather overt socio-political and economic discourses alongside controversial academic disquisition that is visible, a gradual, yet determinate intervention is further evident in the religious sphere. A consistent and undercurrent work of the religious wing of Hinduism under the aegis of VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) has been actively involved in their attempt to assimilate the non-Christian Nagas particularly the followers of “*Heraka*”⁵¹ religion among the Zeliangrong Nagas since the 1960s. Here the method of approach has been mainly through its established welfare agencies and financial patronage to the non-Christian Nagas (Longkumer, 2016: 4-11). For the adherents of Hinduism, the manner in which the Christian rhetoric regarded the Zeliangrong movement and their age old religion as anti-Christian served a favourable point that succeeded them in portraying the movement as a religious and cultural movement against Christianity (Thomas, 2016: 90). However, noticing the spark of such development has further

⁵¹ Heraka is a traditional religious cult among the Zeliangrong Nagas propounded by Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu. Adherents of this religion have been strongly against conversion of the natives under Christianity and dictate of external political control.

incited a stronger cultural revivalistic consciousness⁵² as the concept of tribe and Christian nationalism became even more deeply embedded in the majority Naga self-image (Oppitz, et al., 2008).

On the whole, the varied experiences of the Nagas as a minority in the development process have certainly awakened an urgent need to preserve and promote its unique identity and culture. The colonial framework of the British rule permeated further under the state project of India and various dominant communities have continuously evolved the spirit of consciousness among the Nagas. In context, the concept of inclusion and participation which gained prominence in the post-liberalisation era certainly became more relevant in a state like Manipur,⁵³ where the control of democracy by the dominant community (namely Meiteis) has created a deep developmental imbalance in the state (Kengoo, 2011). This aspect about democracy is supported by Friesen (1985) who argues that, “democratic perspective is for government to cater to the majority, even though they run the risk of becoming a tool of powerful lobbyist” (p.53).

Added on to this is the issue of an identity crisis with the current exposure to globalization as many young Nagas are increasingly attracted to western culture thereby missing the root of their own a identity (Stockhausen and Wettstein, 2012: 185). The blind and easy assimilation of foreign culture has in many ways rendered the local people especially the youths to be abhorrent at their own culture as substandard and lesser value. But despite of all this emerging social and cultural challenges in the Naga society, there is a consequent growth of consciousness from those who are heralding the instant need to save culture from the perils of its disappearance as well as rethink and re-educate about culture as an essence for maintaining one’s identity⁵⁴ Therefore, considering from all the above, the issue cuts across various factors, such as the demand for secession, movement for greater autonomy, ethnic clashes, fight over resources and earnest assertion of identity (Singha, 2013:5).

52 Baruah, S. 2003. Confronting constructionism: Ending India’s Naga war. *Journal of Peace Research* 40, p. 321-338.

53 Saprana, L. C. (2015). Tribal Participation and Development in India: A Case Study of Manipur. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*. p. 104

54 The Morung Express. (2015, January 2). The Naga culture conservation: First expedition. Retrieved from <http://morungexpress.com/the-naga-culture-conservation-first-expedition/>

IV. Naga society in Manipur and its transformation

The paradigm of “interventionist and protectionist” approach has been the dominant basis for determining the process of cultural transformation in the Naga society in Manipur. This is because the advent of the American missionaries and the British colonialist administration had its impact in more or less the same way as it had in other parts of the country. But somehow it did not end there in the case of the Nagas, for the colonial policy was closely replicated further under independent India and its so-called democratic state apparatus. With all that said, firstly, it should not be misconstrued that the concept of change or transformation was an external importation or that it was unknown to the Nagas before they were contacted by the outsiders (Scott, 2009: 4). The Naga society for that reason has always remained interactive to some degree both within and outside their environment limited by their needs.⁵⁵ However, the experience of change presented a wholly different phenomenon for the Nagas throughout the different epochs of its history.

There is a close vestige of resemblance considering the nature and history of social and cultural transformation among the Naga society in Manipur with the rest of the Naga population elsewhere. By that, it should not however be misinterpreted as a reiteration of narrative for any similarity in the occurrence that arises in the larger context of the Nagas in general. Building on this point, the first major wave of cultural transformation amongst the Nagas in Manipur can notably be said is the one prompted with the coming of the westerners. Notwithstanding this, the mode of securing the initial access through the tribal corridor was far from smooth as the trespassers were often greeted with a strong resistance (Haokip, 2004:40). Often than usual, the Nagas were very much apprehensive and antagonistic towards evangelism and intolerant to the presence of any exogenous elements. In relation to such constraints, the mission of evangelisation was not a one go process but spread gradually across a span of time striding from village to village and tribe to tribe mobilising the people mainly through the use of education and medical care facilities (ibid. 9). Gauri Viswanathan (1989) in her prominent work, *Masks of Conquest: Literary study and British Rule in India*, argues the propagation of English literacy in India as an imperial tool, a method by which the people were brainwashed and reduced into

⁵⁵ Inato Yekhetoshikhu, (2007). “A rediscovery of and re-building of Naga cultural values” p. 47-48

accepting the cultural superiority of Britain. The use of English by the British administration as she further elaborates was strategically designed to contain the anticipated threat of native insubordination.⁵⁶

Considering the administrators, the relationship with the missionaries was at times strained, though not completely, as they often consented with the tribal members who resented proselytisation or even sanskritization (Haokip, 2004: 44 Downs, 1992: 4). However, by keeping aside the aspect of difference at bay perhaps, the most noticeable transformation in the Naga society has been the gradual disbandment of its traditional institutions and its consequent socio-cultural practices. The new conquest directed a massive level of change as they were enforced upon with their legal administration, religion, and education which eventually affected every aspect of life.⁵⁷ In fact, it is not to say that all the aspects of traditional culture are valuable, for, the administration under the new system has considerably improved the mindset, and attitude of the people.⁵⁸ The extent of change set forth particularly under the advent of Christianity at the most benefitted not just a particular community in specific but the whole tribal society of Manipur percolating all spheres of activities including their ways of life, cultures, and customs. Several unworthy social practices such as polyandry, polygamy, and killing of twin babies practiced by some Naga tribes were among the few examples that were abolished as a precondition in order to be accepted in Christian faith.⁵⁹ Further, it was through Christianity that initiated the ground for understanding and providing a common platform for social unification of all the Naga tribes. The greatest impact of Christianity that among the tribal people, as Frederick Downs (1992) opines is that, it provided them a means of preserving their identity and promoting their interests in the face of powerful forces of change (p. 7). Here the force of change is basically attributed towards the assimilative threat posed by “Hinduism” and Christianity as

56 Kumar, p. (2017). The concept of ‘Hegemony’ and Gauri Viswanathan’s The Mask of conquest. *Pune Research*. Vol. 3, Issue 4. p. 2. Available at <http://puneresearch.com/media/data/issues/59843cf8952a7.pdf>

57 Inatoshiku, (2008). Nagas and the acculturation. Inatoshikhu’s weblog. Retrieved from: <https://inatoshikhu.wordpress.com/2008/08/11/nagas-and-the-acculturation/>

58 Shimrat, (2007). Nagas in Social Dilemma. Retrieved from: <file:///C:/Users/HP/Desktop/Nagas%20in%20Social%20Dilemma%20%20My%20Perception%20and%20I.html>
Accessed on 19th/04/2018.

59 Ngakang, T. (2011) Colonial Encounter and the Cultural Processes of Nagas. E-PAO. Available at: http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=manipur.Arts_and_Culture.Colonial_Encounter_and_Cultural_Processes_of_Nagas. (Accessed on, 20th, April 2018)

Downs maintains that it protected the tribes from what otherwise would have simply categorized them “at the lowest level of the socio-cultural hierarchy”, as is suggested by sociologists like Srinivas and Sanwal (p.4).

The introduction of medical care facilities was another major factor responsible for the breakthrough in the traditional animistic attitude and in expediting the gradual acceptance of the people. It liberated the mind of the tribalists in whose mind, the fear of spirit, afflictions and curse was an inherent inhibition. Here also, it may not be insignificant to point out that, the missionaries were instrumental in laying down the initial groundwork from which the current health system emerged (Haokip, 2004: 96). Most of all, the presence of the westerners in many ways fostered the society to embrace scientific awareness and subsequent progress towards modernism (ibid.).

Having emphasised upon the positive aspect of the western intervention, however, it is not all. There are other unsolicited effects as a direct result of the action-oriented by skewed reasoning and superior outlook of the westerners which has created a vacuum in the Naga tradition. Kumar (2007:26) remarks that the strong age-old bond of historical, cultural, social and religious connection which the hill and the plain people had with each other for centuries was segregated by the British based on different communities and sub-regions. The same method of division was also emulated and occurred in the religious dimension, as the social gap of interaction began to widen between the Christians and the non-Christians (Converted Hindus and tribal Animist). However, this is not a phenomenon that was directed from Christianity alone, According to Kamei, G. (2007) as cited in Rocky and Kamei (2013), Hinduism created cleavage between the hill tribes and Meitei plainsmen. The conversion of the Meities essentially followed the introduction of caste system to the society unknown to such differences otherwise.

The western influence on the Naga society in Manipur has also broadly perpetuated an instantaneous and dire constraint in the overall continuity of their traditional culture. According to Chasie, (2005: 255) the independence of the Naga village-state effectively disappeared with the integration of the traditional institutions into the larger colonial system. With it, the

traditional concept of “governmentality”⁶⁰ which is based on the egalitarian structure of customary laws became out-worn and ineffectual. For the Nagas, being operated under the Indian administration after the British also means the gradual permutation of its cultural orders. The forced assimilation of the region under the westerners and the union of Indian states was more than anything a mere transgression of their genuine will, an annexation. In effect, the Nagas were countered with a situation akin to double colonization although proponents of the union government may exonerate these facts with intent. The direct occupation by all these forces in the region brought about new power centers within the Naga society.⁶¹ The replacement of the traditional authority by that of parliamentary election system, as Chasie (2005) further contends, rather than anything created more division and conflict in the society. The abandonment of village culture and its mechanism of integration gradually deteriorated the society and destroyed the significance of the meaning of family, clan, and village (Somare and Vigorelli, 1992: 179). But most significantly, the deliberate execution of the age old formula of divide and rule policy under India more accentuated gradual detachment and frustration amongst the Nagas themselves.

The impact of this exogenous obtrusion is yet again forwarded by Inato, (2007: 45-46) who posits that the sudden breakdown of the age-old efficient administration instigated a rapid change. However, this traumatic transition has made it difficult for the society to maintain a balanced approach. One of the primary reasons behind this difficulty in coping with the new change is explained by Toshi (1992). According to him, the abrupt nature of change resulted in a sudden displacement of society however without adequate substitution. The new change moreover had its flaw as it created a massive confusion amongst the people by uprooting their culture rather than trying to blend and find harmony within it. With these changes occurring, the traditional socio-political and cultural equilibrium is disrupted and disturbed which then resulted in dislocation (ibid, 194).

60 The term “Governmentality” coined by the famous French philosopher Michel Foucault which means the “art of government”

61 Safeera, T. T. (n.d). Landscape as Narrative: Depicting the alienated Nagaland in EasterineKire’s Bitter Wormwood. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/12405769/Landscape_as_Narrative_Depicting_the_Alienated_Nagaland_in_Easterine_Kires_Bitter_Wormwood (p. 53)

In Manipur state specifically, the situation of ethnic dissension can be said to be growing more rapidly than ever premising from all these changes. The rhetoric of ethnic identity formation bolstered by the exclusivity, integration and dominance often results in internal conflicts and demands for greater autonomy (Baruah, 2003; Kipgen, 2013; Kom, 2011; in Singha, 2017: 58). Having this situation in the backdrop, a case in point is the demand for autonomy by the Nagas with its own territorial envisioning causing other ethnic groups to raise eyebrows as a direct challenge to their integrity. Further, the preponderant polemics in the state has also developed fast around the contest for control over the political administrative structure. Thus, to a large extent the criss-cross of power-play between the residents of the hills and the valley centred mainly on the theme of land and political power continues to eject the much hardship for both the parties.

For the former (tribals) who control a little more than 90 percent of the state's total geographical area and the later who garner 40 out of the 60 seats available in the state legislative assembly. The problem lies in neither willing to give up their own expedience based on their own stated facts. Often the blame for the fault lines in the socio-cultural and political ecology is attributed to the transcending politics of the Meiteis over the tribal issues. Because of this, the wraths of the tribals is mostly seen directed against the dominant display of the Meitei's for breaching the constitutional privilege and safeguards of the tribal rights. As for instance, mention can be made about the recent imbroglio regarding the attempt for implementation of inner line permit system (ILP), a demand by the Meitei community much against the wish of the tribal people who are already cordoned off by other special protection laws.⁶² A subsequent example can also be given of the recurrent attempt to impose Meitei Meyek⁶³ (Manipuri script) over tribal children in school education since the 1980s continuing to instigate a strong social unrest among the tribals till today (Haokip, 2011:81-82). In the same line the massive level of mismatch in development of infrastructural projects in the valley and hill areas is perhaps another apparent factor that has

62 Saikia, A. (2017, August 18). As the Inner Line Permit demand returns in Manipur, the state government treads with caution. *Scroll.in*. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/article/847256/as-the-inner-line-permit-demand-returns-in-manipur-the-state-government-treads-with-caution>

63 Tungpa, S. (2016). Location of Ethnic groups in politicization of ethnicity. *Imphal Times*, (2016, June 22). Retrieved from <http://www.imphaltimes.com/pdf/2016/June/June%2022%20Page%202.pdf>

caused the tribal critics to raise eyebrows and equate it as the prejudicial plot of the Meitei's (Sharma, 2017:17).

Acknowledging the impact of all these trends as some would contend, a sort of cultural optimism appears to be unfolding with increasing number of people feeling the need to recompense the felt loss of identity caused by various developmental factors (Sutter, 2008: 184), thereby drawing the concern from the fast ensuing rift that is taking place both within and outside the communities. Efforts are thus directed towards building and reinstating a collective sense of identity for social solidarity.⁶⁴ The result for this has been the earnest call for cultural resurgence aimed at reinforcing ethnic ties for forging a spirit of collective consciousness.⁶⁵ Smith, A, D. (1998) has pointed out there is a significant role for ethnicity in influencing politics and harnessing the sense of nationalism.⁶⁶

In conforming to these aspects of reality, factors like education and culture are ardently sought after as the key measure for reinforcing common aspiration and determination of the Naga solidarity. Promotions of cultural events and festivals for the get together of tribes and preservation of cultural traditions are being encouraged to link the general population with a cultural experience and manifestation. The whole tenet behind the significance of such steps and initiation appears to sum up pretty well in the argument expounded by Wettstein (2016), who asserts that, "Visualisation and materialisation are two powerful means to make concepts graspable in the true sense of the word" (p.392). For the many Nagas who are concerned about their culture, the idea of facilitating a space for public consortium for collective performance and representation more or less became the surest way to enforce a strong social sustenance and bonding.

64 Given the concept of social solidarity here is taken as a reference from Durkheim's work "The Division of Labor in Society" translated by W.D. Halls. "Social solidarity is a wholly moral phenomenon which by itself is not amenable to exact observation and especially not to measurement, indeed where there is social solidarity exists, in spite of its non-material nature, it does not remain in a state of pure potentiality, but shows its presence through perceptible effects". (p. 24)

65 Ibid. p.39. Collective consciousness is once again described by Durkheim as "The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own"

66 Smith (1998: 191) defines ethnic community as a "named human population of alleged common ancestry, shared memories and elements of common culture with a link to a specific territory and a measure of solidarity" (p.191).

Yet, even in this, a problem still persists as a mix symptom of disdain and nostalgia towards traditional culture continues to coexist at the same time amongst different generations of people. For instance, an excerpt from an interview in (Oppitz, et al. (2008) states that “older generation Nagas have a fairly schizophrenic attitude towards their past. They demand respect for their traditional culture and its preservation, but at the same time they refuse to introduce interested youngsters to this culture” (p.27). This perspective is well fitted by Inato (2007: 46) who states that the Nagas are no more at the crossroad of cultural identity, but have gone beyond, on a road to cultural confusion. Part of the bigger reason behind the uncertainty in the cultural transmission process is also because of the strong underpinning of Christianity, which the contemporary Naga society has more or less embraced as a form of “new tradition” (Stockhausen and Wettstein, 2012: 185). Together with this, the common psyche of the older generations is in a way largely influenced by the colonial education system and environment which has an enormous influence on their present outlooks (Tomlison, 1984: 33). This leaves an important room to explore the role of education and influence of religion in the promotion of traditional culture in Naga society. Therefore, an intergenerational perspective on culture is substantial to capture the contemporary discourse in action which the subsequent chapters would throw light on.

Talking about the importance of cultural revival moreover, it is certain that the totalistic approach for the revival of ancient tradition is not envied and, in this context, the role of church and education for the so-called 'cultural purification' is also seen by some as desirable. However, there are valuable aspects of Naga culture, for instance, like folk songs, folk tales, and artefacts, etc., which have been neglected and edged into oblivion. In fact, if the trend of hesitancy over cultural consciousness persists, the case of Nagas may not be different from what Rusell Jacoby (as cited in Giroux, 1981: 39) refers to as “social amnesia”, meaning a society’s repression of its own past. That means with every passing of older generation marks the corresponding passing of valuable Naga oral history without documenting them (Wettstein et al. 2008: 21).

On the whole, an event like this opens up several interesting questions like how the concept of “Naganess” is being defined and transmitted throughout the different points of time. What kinds of mechanisms does the current Naga society rely on to ensure a sustainable culture and how? Family as a fundamental unit for endowing children with cultural values, it remains to be seen how it is playing its role in the transmission of the same. But, most of all, the study concerns

education and culture and their transformations, it invokes a serious attention in the context of a heterogeneous state like Manipur where mutual suspicion based along the ethnic lines and conflict is not uncommon (Singh, 2016). Last but not the least, with the increasing anxiety for cultural loss and consequent assertion in a multi-ethnic and political environment, the role of education in cultural and social transformation is therefore of great interest to the researcher. Moreover, the researcher is also interested in understanding the disruptions and ruptures caused by the modern education.

V. Role of education in cultural transformation and Identity Formation

Speaking in the context of the Nagas, much of what is known today about the history of the past society is through the written accounts of the colonial administrators, anthropologists, and works of the early missionaries (Wettstein and Stockhausen, 2012: 183). The reality of this, as a matter of fact, speaks volumes about the importance of education in preserving and promulgating cultural knowledge.

Traditionally, the Naga society in Manipur as elsewhere was structured and organized alongside their own unique system of customs and values. Society has its own characteristic worldviews and informal system of education for transmitting traditional knowledge to the younger generation based on its own creative method. Education was mainly conducted by the family and other social structures, through initiation, apprenticeship, ceremonies and handed down through words, symbols, and action. To illustrate a particular example in the custom of the Anal tribes, it is said that “when there is a very immediate work to be done, char-coal was sent to the concerned person or authority. In times of war and aggression, a message was symbolised and sent through chilly and char-coal tied together to the surrounding village for reinforcement” (Gangmei, 2017: 58). So much is about the uniqueness of the Nagas in their own traditional way of life that even though society experienced change and transformation, the extent of it remained relatively much more spontaneous, mutual and traditional. A dramatic transformation of the Naga society, however, occurred unequivocally with the advent of the British colonizers and the American

missionaries. The most prominent factor that facilitated the success in instating a sudden change in the Naga society in this regard came as a result of the introduction of western education (Gurralla, 2015:124).

Education has always been an inherent part of the missionary movements in their mission for evangelisation. It was used as the primary tool for creating an outreach in propagating the message of the gospel vis-à-vis converting the people. As is evident from the historical account, William Pettigrew the first white Missionary who came into the Naga hill region in Manipur hold his firm belief that through education he could illuminate the minds of the people and slowly orient them towards the new faith (Adakho, 2011). This vision certainly came through as the establishment of school was subsequently followed by a steady rise in the number of enrolment which eventually laid the groundwork for the whole trajectory of history that was about to unfold. From this, the early converts who were taught in the bible having exposed to missionary education soon became the forerunners in preaching Christian doctrines in the neighbouring Naga villages without further needing to rely on western missionaries.⁶⁷

According to Wongtong (1992: 193), the impact of western Christian education as it had on the Naga society was widely felt in the social, political, cultural, and economic spheres. However, by reading the lines in history, it is difficult to oversimplify that the initial intention of the educational project was primarily to serve the interest of the local people. Materialistically though, the westerners were not much enamoured to the Naga Hills as much they did in many other regions of the country. The politics of endeavouring for administrative control besides the quest for ideological conversion to Christianity and western values were always projected in the forefront through education. Under such circumstances, a dominant structure came to be established which later paved the way for cultural hegemony and so education by will as well as by default became the chief way through which to assert and articulate for the Nagas.

Placing the discussion further on to its point of impact, through education the Nagas became increasingly aware of different worldviews and subsequently learned to assert the safeguard of their identity in the larger societal environment. From this, an attitude was developed regarding a

67 Lark Murry, (n.d.). A brief history of Christianity in Nagaland. Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/360739151/History-of-Christianity-in-Nagaland> P. 2

larger need for unity and gradually enough, the same began to be felt widely perpetuating a spirit of Naga sub-nationalism amongst the Nagas (Gupta, 2010: 10). A strong sentiment for ethnic ties was sought and popularised thereby weaving the issue around a common theme of culture and history. The development of political consciousness factored by education is further supported by Anikuzhikattil (n.d) as he held that because of Christian education the tribals were able to discover their tribal political identity, create political leadership, claim their political rights and contribute towards the political and administrative organization of the state.⁶⁸

In Manipur, when education was first introduced in the Naga areas, the missionaries also helped in promoting the local dialects to a relevant status by translating their mother tongue into Roman character so that they could familiarise learning their language with others. An example of the significant influence of the missionaries in this regard is given by Shimreiwung, A. S. (2015) a native of Tangkhul Naga as she writes:

“While carrying out the translation of Gospel into Tangkhul, transliterating Tangkhul language, and preparing school textbooks for school in Ukhrul, Rev. Pettigrew preferred English and Tangkhul languages for Tangkhul students in Ukhrul over other forms of language. The significance of native language as a mode of reading and writing for Tangkhuls had been recognised by Rev. William Pettigrew from the very beginning when Tangkhul primers were prepared for the schools. The adoption of native language over other languages of the neighbouring communities had turned out to be a visionary step towards the development of print culture in Tangkhul language” (p. 19)

Broadly speaking, the effect of education among the Nagas is at best apparent in their changing pattern of articulation as they began asserting their rights and challenging the dominant cultural discourse.⁶⁹ The emergence of native writers was another big leap that contributed to tribal

68 Anikuzhikattil (n.d). Contribution of Christian institutions to education in the Northeast region of India. Eastern Panorama. Retrieved from: <http://www.easternpanorama.in/index.php/component/content/article/64-2010/december/1234-contribution-of-christian-institutions-to-education-in-the-northeast-region-of-india>

69 Shimreiwung, A. S. (2015). Pettigrew’s Children: History of Print culture of Tangkhul Language. In Yaruvingam and kharungpam (ED.). Rethinking Education in the Hills of Northeast India. (p. 24-25)

language and literature as a result they were able to express their sentiments and aspiration worldwide sometimes even to the suspicion of the central Indian government as a handiwork of the missionaries. The foundation laid by education gradually lead to the growth and development of language consciousness among the Nagas on a larger scale. Aside from literary works by native writers, literature society from various tribes of the Nagas began soon followed. For example, one of the earliest books written by a native Tangkhul Naga in Manipur was ‘*Notes on Bible Reading*’ (1935), ‘*Lesson Preparations and Teaching Method*’ (1956) by M. K. Shimray.⁷⁰ Similarly, some of the early literature societies were the ‘Anal Literature Society’ established in 1934, the ‘Mao literature society’ initiated in the early 1940’s, and ‘Liangmei Literature Society’ in 1952, etc.

In the socio-cultural dimension, education has broadly enabled in reformulating and standardizing much of the old culture to blend in and harmonize with the present need of the society. For instance, the expressions of deep-rooted cultural values through handicrafts such as shawl-making and wearing, which are previously reflective of individual status,⁷¹ are now interpreted to serve a collective identity.⁷² This is a form of cultural purification as one would substantiate, which involves reconstructing and promoting traditional culture by giving suitable meaning and maintaining its continuity. Elaborating further, the aspects of social mobility duly improved under the western influence as the society better integrated the notion of social interdependence caused by ever expansion of opportunities and development. The old normative role of gender was also reshaped synonymously in conjunction with the new change. Besides this, the convergence of the traditional concept of egalitarianism along with Christian values was another vital factor that served as a remedy for relatively bettering the fundamentally orthodox view on gender.

70 Ibid., p. 22

71 Marion Wettstein (2016) How ethnic identity becomes real: the enactment of identity roles and the material manifestation of shifting identities among the Nagas, *Asian Ethnicity*, 17:3, 384-399, DOI: 10.1080/14631369.2015.1091653 Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2015.1091653> (p. 386)

72 Wettstein et.al. (2008). *Naga Identities: changing local culture in the northeast of India*. Reviewed by Stephen Gros (n.d.). Available at: https://www.academia.edu/10213116/Book_review_of_Naga_Identities_Changing_Local_Cultures_in_the_North_east_of_India_edited_by_Michael_Oppitz_Thomas_Kaiser_Alban_von_Stockhausen_and_Marion_Wettstein_Gent_Snoeck_Publishers_2008 P. 143

The gradual access of women to education also meant a path breaking record for women's identity in changing discourse and overall improvement in society's cultural perspectives. A major heartening feature in the tribal society of Manipur in this regard is the breakdown of the vast disparity in literacy that earlier pertained between the hill and the valley thereby simultaneously giving an edge to tribal female literacy over the valley in some areas (Haokip, 2004:11). Enumerating this changing phenomenon, Thong (2014) also articulates that, because of education, an increasing hope can be banked on upon the younger generation of Nagas who are searching for their root. Many educated Nagas today seem to have taken by the realisation that "the future lays in the past" and so by connecting befittingly with the aspects of the past traditions they can be more certain about their future (p. 164). Following this, the task is clearer about the greater roles and responsibility of education in instating the necessary change and deriving critical consciousness among the Nagas.

Coming to the point of economy, there is no doubt that the introduction of education has certainly created more opportunities and those individuals or tribes who came into contact with the western system earlier by virtue have an incomparable edge over the rest of the tribes in service and profession (Toshi, 1992:194). In the words of Thangmung (2015), foreign missionaries were keen to the local Church facilitated opportunities for the Nagas to go out of the country to study Bible and get other necessary training (p.264). As a result of such opportunity, changes became imminent at the individual as well as at the community level. Education also played an effective role in the creation of new scope for economy and livelihood through the promotion and continuity of Nagas past ingenuity in the forms of art and artefacts. Education is the primary basis from which the emergence of a new social class including, bureaucrats and other professionals manifested and who later became the harbingers and were preeminent in voicing the concern of the Nagas in many respects. The fact about this is reaffirmed by Srinath and Ngaihte (2011) in their study as they posit that education first gave rise to the birth of an educated elite, who later played an important role in giving shape to ethnic identities of the respective communities and it in turn led to ethnic movement in the state (Singha, 2013:7).

Overall, unlike in the past where the Nagas were seen as passive receivers of education in the shadow of the missionaries, today, changes are currently noticeable in which most of the interest is redirected towards questioning both the emic and etic values of the society rather than

conforming to them. Such a change is necessary as, for instance, Chasie (2005: 257) articulates that there is an inevitability of the old ways having to give to the new. The pity is that the Nagas have so far not had time to interpret the changes and make proper choices. Being reminded of a reality like this, a sort of retrospection seems to have taken place in many, to critically affirm the normative knowledge system through conscious and critical reasoning. Though for the fact cannot be defied regarding the “passing of traditional culture”⁷³ in general, yet, what remains hopeful is that with the passing of time, young educated Nagas are beginning to question the legitimacy of the existing knowledge system in every facet of their life. The Nagas are increasingly enamoured to explore the void of their culture by exploring answers to various unquestioned and inherited knowledge of their history. Unlike in the past where the Nagas set in the footpath of the westerners and assumed tradition as a thing of the past which should be discarded completely, the new generations of Nagas are beginning to acknowledge the creativity of the age old traditional culture by building on them and making new meaning in conjunction with modern values. The old Marxist perspective that had “all that is solid melts in the air”⁷⁴ meaning to suggest that tradition has to give way completely to the force of modernity has therefore become inapplicable in the present Naga context. Rather, in theory, the new outlook of the Nagas is found closer in meaning to Simon Malpas (2006) who view post modernity as a critical critique of modern values rather than as a sweeping replacement of the same. The new perspective of the Nagas therefore is focussed on to retain all the valuable aspects of their culture which is necessary for their identity.

Stockhausen and Wettstein (2008: 184) has highlighted this emerging change, according to them, there is a budding interpretation amongst local theologians that the old religion and culture have been inherently Christian and that the two ideational system does not exclude each other. The inversion of the argument namely that traditional animism has equal or even more validity is sometimes cautiously insinuated but in the end usually rejected again (Bedangangshi, 1993: 38-39). Judging by this nature of the prevailing scenario, the whole situation presents like a “pendulum effect” in the very of the Naga society.

73 The passing of traditional culture is a theme taken from Daniel Lerner 1958 famous work “The passing of traditional society: Modernizing Middle East”. The suffix added here is that of “Culture” in place of the original “Society”,

74 Malpas, S. (2006). The postmodern. London & New York: Routledge. p. 46

Aside from the changes pertaining in the religious dimension, there are emerging Naga intellectuals who are seriously engaged in cross verifying the authenticity of their history that are being inherited from the westerners. Perspective emerging from this kind of research often tries to examine and understand the objective of the colonial administrators as to why and how the Nagas were represented in a particular colonial portrait. For the Nagas who for long were subjected to the pen and papers of the outsiders writing about them, this is a turning point, a consciousness of another level redirected to question the methodology and data of the non-native writers and add their own refined version of history.

Skimming all through these discussions related to developmental dialectics of culture and identity, it is obviously worth understanding as to how the contemporary Naga society is viewing cultural change. Similarly, keeping in mind the cultural revival process that is ongoing, it is important to understand the various measures that the Nagas are resorting to, as a step towards “cultural security”.⁷⁵ Some important and specific questions like, how are the Nagas coping up with the changes and how do they look at understanding the changes are perhaps crucial.

75 The idea of cultural security, given here is drawn as an inspiration from the popular term “Societal security” coined by Paul Roe in his book “Ethnic Violence and Ethnic security dilemma”, the term is basically an expansion of the general concept of security, which in this context briefly refers to the sustainable development of traditional patterns of language, culture, religion, national identities and customs of State (Roe, P. 2005-42)

CHAPTER 3

ETHNIC AND CULTURAL CONTESTATION AND ASSERTION IN CONTEMPORARY MANIPUR

So far as the topic of culture is concerned, we know that it is a complex phenomenon which is embedded in every human relationship. It is the primary repository through which people derive identity and is responsible for creating social solidarity and vice versa. According to Trompenaars and Turner (1997) “Culture is like an onion and to understand it, you have to unpeel layer by layer” (p. 6). This simple definition is suggestive of the idea that, it is not an isolated term but rather consists of both its material and immaterial aspects. In the same way, we can also infer that no two cultures are the same and so the difference is what defines the distinction between different groups of people. Considering this understanding, in fact, any sign of superior manifestation by a particular social group over another run the risk of hampering the social dynamics and exacerbate the social division therewithin.

Further, culture in every society maintains a close interaction with and discursively influences the structure, politics, economic, and social features of the society.⁷⁶ However, as, Smith (2009) observes, “no national community has withstood the pressure of change, especially in a modern age and as a result, much has had to be discarded” (p.35).⁷⁷ The context of change, likewise, as Hutchinson notes, is constantly accompanied by revival and renewal as well as alteration and rejection to suit the demand of its periodical challenge.⁷⁸ In view of this, paralleling the notion of cultural study alongside change is crucial as the former being an output of a historical process and, consequently, because of its dynamic nature. It is also worth reminding that not only do time changes but that time itself change as it is impossible to reverse the time that has passed (Birx, 2009:159). Given this reality, questions and speculation concerning around the factors that drive the process of change is always likely, in every subsequent effort to situate the discourse in

76 Ettehad et al., (2014) The role of culture in promoting Architectural Identity. *ResearchGate*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272174216_The_Role_of_Culture_in_Promoting_Architectural_Identity (p.410)

77 Smith, A. D. (2009). *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism: A cultural approach*. London: Routledge. (p. 35)

78 Ibid., p. 36

an acceptable and balanced framework. Reiterating further, the social trajectory of cultural change as it is is always in a variant state of becoming.

A cursory view into the present Naga society in Manipur clearly has ways to indicate the continual process of cultural change and transformation, some of which has already been discussed in the previous chapter. Yet, an interesting feature in each of the phases of transition is the discernible discourse of public opinion that has always prompted differently contingent on the corresponding nature of change that took place. Similarly, the process of cultural revivalism which is directly or indirectly affected by the causality of change has not always been progressive. Despite this, the point to be certain about the present Naga society in Manipur is that it has moved on from a time when it tended to be more conforming to the value-oriented measure of external didactic approach to become more assertive and non-traditional in its overall articulations. In a way, this is indicatable from the growing prominence that is attributed towards traditional culture hitherto reflecting the popular imagination of the people. Similarly, today people are seen manipulating the development and construction of their distinct collective identity through a revitalization of their traditional culture.⁷⁹

Here the role of education and access to various media technology cannot be underrated for instilling the impulse of cultural reminiscent among the Nagas, the point that will emerge more clearly later in the discussion. This does not, however, mean in projecting the modernist perspective and its elements as having a higher edge over the ethno-symbolism and its concerns.⁸⁰ To clarify the matter better, though the two “isms”, namely “Modernism and Ethno-Symbolism” are mainly used to describe the idea of a “nation” and the factors on which it is dependent for its emergence. It nevertheless has a close meaning with that of the concept of “society” or “community” concerning the kind of social imagining that is required in giving

79 Longkumer, A 2015, "As our ancestors once lived': Representation, Performance and Constructing a National Culture amongst the Nagas of India' Himalaya, Vol. 35, no. 1, 10, p.52

80 For proponents of modernism, a nation owes its emergence more directly to factors like, education, modern institutions, technological innovation and material forces. Whereas, the same for the ethno-symbolists is more reliant towards subjective and symbolic resources like tradition, myths, and values etc. as responsible for engendering a common ideology and collective spirit. However, the two does not count out the importance of each other rather than the fact that each considers themselves more preeminent than the other. See for more detail, (Smith. 2009:13-21).

“life” to both, the responsibility and consequences of its norms thereafter.⁸¹ But to say which particular branch of philosophy has a more predominant influence is hard to answer as they are interdependent. By taking this understanding as a framework in the case of the Nagas, it is however clear about the collaborating effect of both the elements of modernism and ethno-symbolism functional in its cultural revival movement. We find the congruence to this view aligned in Longkumer (2015), a local scholar, who opines that “the relationship between tradition and modernity and underscores the significance of the power of cultural performances to express a national culture that is ‘authentic’ for the Naga at least”.⁸²

Having discussed culture broadly all the way, a more specific and an essential question that needs to be asked next is what Naga culture is? There is, however, an apparent challenge involved in attempting to answer a seemingly candid question as this as it is difficult to attribute any particular fixed set of culture as a Naga culture. This is because the homogeneity of Naga ethnic origin as it claims is not completely equitable with respect to its culture due to variations pertaining to its various sub-tribes. Despite this, one cannot negate the aspects of commonalities that it shares and which are broadly used as a common thread and characteristics of every Naga culture. An observation by Abraham Lotha (2008) can be taken as a very good point of reference to validate this statement. Lotha specifies some of the common features constituting the Naga unity such as the “clan organization, the system of “*morung*” or men’s dormitories, headhunting, the feast of merits, and recent Naga history which generated a ‘we-feeling’” (cited in Wettstein, 2012: 222).

The continuous envisioning of a common Naga future found in various social, cultural, political and economic expressions has enormously contributed to harnessing a firm nationalistic sentiment. Thus, by viewing the whole scenario from this angle, the cultural unity among the Nagas somehow represent more like a “concentric model” with each having some form of distinct cultural elements but meanwhile accepting in the larger notion of similarity and cultural collectivity, a sort of federal structure at the least. Consequently, an individual Naga may develop a greater sense of attachment and belongingness to one’s own tribe, but nevertheless unconditionally project the acceptance of his identity as a Naga overall.

81 Ibid.,p.13

82 Longkumer, (2015) p. 59

Elaborating the discussion briefly along this line in some manner insinuates us to the next important question regarding the increasing prominence that is directed towards the promotion of cultural development in the present Naga society in Manipur. Though for the fact that it is difficult to give a definitive answer to the question propelling this change, it seemingly has multifarious aspects to it, and most of which are beyond the scope of this study. But by taking a surface view of consideration however, the prevailing phenomenon of cultural consciousness can be said to be very much embedded in the larger social, economic, and political context of the state. Here, we want to specifically draw our attention to two main topics, viz. (1) The issue of ethnic contestation centering on land and territory (2) Assertion and consolidation of Naga Identity through the performance of cultural identity. Taking the context of discussion to this height perhaps is necessary in order to gain a better insight not just in the matter of cultural consciousness as suggested but also on its later relationship with the prevailing discourse in the educational system of the state which the next chapter explores.

I. Land as the conflicting site of Ethnic Contestation:

The problem of conflict over land and territory manifest a major concern in Manipur. It challenges not only the socio-economic, cultural and political front but also permeates a widespread effect in the educational sphere. Kengoo (2011) points out that “Due to the paucity of land resource there has been intense competition among the different ethnic groups to gain control over them, the ethnic conflict had far-reaching consequences and has impacted education adversely” (299). Therefore, by taking a cue from this statement, it is significant to first locate the discussion in the context of the problem emanating from this perspective and follow the larger implication that it has on the education system.

To begin with, the Northeastern region of India has been engulfed in a number of problems both in terms of its variety and volume as a result of which some of the critiques have described the region as the “minefield of India” (Singh, 2008:13). One of the most pre-eminent problems that the region is continually faced with is over the issue of identity and territorial boundary. Based on similar notion, of understanding, the situation in the state of Manipur does not seem to project any difference. The demand for sovereignty and subsequent self-determination movement has

always preoccupied the center stage of the state process since its merger under the dominion of Indian republic in 1949. A strong tendency for social division and assertion developed soon after as a result of the unconsented abrupt change and found its convenient expression in the ethnic consciousness of the people. Every ethnic community on its defence, proclaim their autonomy that they have never been subjected to India or any other community over themselves. Such aspirations overtime culminated in a strong urge for a separate identity and ethnic exclusiveness thus, escalating the rift between the tribals and the non-tribals.

Sharma (2017) through his analysis of the issue of land and conflict in the Manipur aptly remarks about the prevailing scenario as follows: “Most of the inherent problems in the state can be best understood in the context of territorial claims that is postulated by the Nagas, Kukis, and the Meiteis in their construction of separate “nation-state” (p. 3). Concerning the key aspect of territory, Sharma further observes that the problem has become even more intensified as a direct result of the momentum gained by the ongoing pan-Naga political movement for “Greater Nagaland” (ibid.). On its part, the Nagas have strongly endorsed for the amalgamation of all the Naga inhabited areas in the north-eastern states, something which basically requires a remapping of territory. Yet, this alone is not the specific issue of the boundary-related problem in the state as there are other separate claims of interest by the Kukis and the Meiteis. In the case of the former, an equally strong demand is posited for the creation of a separate statehood or “Kukiland” by carving out from the existing state territory.

Whereas the Meitei community has made it clear and maintained a very resolute stand to defend the integrity of the state territory from dissolving under any circumstance. Its militant wing also continues to wage insurgency with a firm determination to restore their old sovereignty. Thus, the clash of interest is obvious but what is though important to remember here is the different dimensional aspects of landholding which seems to succour the rights of different groups. Both the tribals as well as the valley based Meitei community have different approach and understanding taking the law and governance of their land which they consider it as their exclusive territories (ibid,p.27). For the tribals in the hill districts, the pattern of land management is guided by traditional customary law which has been given prominence by the British and under Indian Constitution whereas the same for their fellow plainsman is regulated by the state legislature.

Notwithstanding these differences, the profound attachment of every respective community with their land and territory is real and always associated with their culture and identity. As articulated by Kipgen (2018), “The traditional knowledge system and social history are connected to the land they live in” (p.117). Such a plain notion, however, poses a difficult challenge in a multiethnic society like Manipur as the concept of territorialisation corresponds to an overlapping claim over the same territory by another community. Yet to be precise, the existing claim over territorial control is conceptualized mainly based on their own traditional view of indigeneity and the legacy of administrative division laid by the western colonialists. In acknowledging the complicity entailing through this varied panorama, Pradip Phanjoubam in Kumar (2007) has posited a very pertinent question as he asks, where the verdict can go and on whose side as every group have invoked their individual traditions of “time immemorial” (p. 187). While the debate goes on alongside the competing geo-political assertion, the clear lack of any acceptable solution to particular group has more than anything jeopardized the harmonious existence of the state. The case is particularly serious between the Nagas and the Kukis due to their overlapping claim over the same geographical areas but meanwhile, an equal challenge is posed by Manipur integrity movement and that cannot be discounted. But of all the confrontation ensuing from this distinguished demand, it has proliferated, the rise of several ethnic insurgency movements. Burton (1990) argues that “It is the nature of human being that when the structural violence systematically denies the individual or the group their basic human need, they try to address it by deploying any means available to them”.⁸³ Following this argument, it is understandable that the concept of socio-cultural security as a concern invariably applies to all the communities irrespective of whether they belong to a minority or majority group. The primary question thus is not about who claims what, but the utmost inability of the Center and State to exert its influence in addressing the varied demands of the people.

According to Ross (1995) “the most commonly cited social science theories of ethnic conflict are structural, emphasizing how competing interest and overt conflict arises from the structure of the society or relationship between members of the societies” as cited in Kipgen (2013:26). From

⁸³ Bobichand, R.(2012). Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Manipur. Available at <http://kanglaonline.com/2012/07/dynamics-of-ethnic-conflicts-in-manipur/>

this point, it is apparent that the existing root of social complication in Manipur was first transpired as a direct result of the structural change imposed by the westerners, followed by the Indian administration and the subsequent creations of the state by default. The developmental experience of the state and its people under such blended circumstances has aggravated the limit of difference and instigated gradual intolerance among different ethnic groups. To put this in other words, the series of external administrative impositions have successfully manipulated a deep tendency for a social and cultural division which gradually percolated strong ethno-centric outlook among its people over time. An immediate effect of this development is perceivable in the radical shift of allegiance based on ethnic line inherited in the present political administrative system of the state. Kumar (2007) has mentioned about a particular trend of development, as he writes, “In Manipur, every political party is busy cultivating underground groups to be one-up on their political adversaries as also to strengthen their bargaining position” (p.28).

Under such circumstances, an ethnically induced social and cultural nepotism has emerged more drastically leading to uneven distribution and sharing of resources. The effect looming from this phenomenon then gets manifested in almost all the spheres of public life often causing numerous social breakdowns. In his study on ethnic nepotism, Vanhanen (2014) also remarks this similar feature. He points out that in a conflicting social group scenario, opposing parties struggle against each other in a social interaction thereby trying to exert pressure and inhibit each other in the power contest in their effort to attain certain incompatible goals (Vanhanen, 2014: 144). This perspective is very much relevant in Manipur, as the politics of the region in practice may be best expressed as a situation “where the gain by one community is viewed as a loss by another”. No community, in particular, is willing to reconcile their own interest while they want to claim and add more over their possession as it is legitimate from their own standpoint. At the same time, they have consistently used the prevailing disunity as a chip to distract and subordinate each other similar to the old Chanakya doctrine of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”.⁸⁴

The whole discussion in this section tries to situate the primary point of cultural consciousness among the Nagas. It places land as the central context in which the dynamics evolved as its basis. The concept of land since it inevitably links with the psychological, social, and cultural

84 Ayres, A. (2018). Our time has come: How India is making its place in the world. *Oxford University Press*. New York. p. 40

attachment of the native with an inbound sense of belongingness to a particular place. For tribal communities like the Nagas who have always stood and lived by safeguarding their territory based on their own customary laws since time immemorial. Territorial protection is not just a matter of one's own pride and right but also need and responsibility associated with their culture. But the extent and effectiveness of customary law as a safety-net has continued to seep gradually with the influx of various exogenous forces. The threat against customary laws and tribal landholding system in Manipur is directly from that of the central and state mechanism. Richard (2018) on his take on the land system in Manipur refers to "the growing shifts in the mindset towards an individualistic approach to land ownership" (p.53).

A constant effort to homogenise the pattern of landholding system has been underway by the state government under Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (MLR & LR) Act 1960⁸⁵ thereby overriding the constitutionally provisioned tribal lands managed under customary law. One of the primary reason for this is because, through the existing law, the tribals as well as the non-tribals who may be non-Manipuri, can purchase land and transfer property in the valley areas whereas the vice versa of the same process is not allowed for the non-tribals in the tribal areas. Although the Meitei community genuinely feels anxious about their land and resources being overpopulated and lost to those who are non-Meitei. The policy of MLR & LR Act as demanded by the Meiteis particularly, to be uniformly applied across the state. Their insecurity emerges from the fact that, the act once implemented would give the state the utmost power to redefine and reclassify the land that is presently deemed as hill areas and divide its territory.

Another stark problem seen as threatening by the tribes as part of the Act is the mention of 1951 as the base cut-off year to define the civil of the state. Many tribals fear that their citizen right would be forced out as they have not been registered as citizens at that time despite the fact that they have been living there for ages. Perceiving this gap and more others in the policy that has potential to marginalise the tribals is one factor that has disgruntled the Nagas and the Kukis particularly to resent vociferously. Nevertheless, the state government has been relentless in its effort to make the law applicable throughout the state. It has been reported that currently about 117 tribal hill villages are brought under the fold of the state legislature (Panmei, 2010 in

⁸⁵ In brief, the Parliament passed the MLR&LR Act in 1960, through this Act, the valley areas of the state is brought under the purview of modern land revenue system without effecting the tribal hill areas where right of customary law is constitutional

Richard, 2018:54). Such a recurrent policy of negative discrimination and infraction by the state to encapsulate the role of the “Hill Area Committee”⁸⁶ and other tribal powerhouses by reducing it to a mere nominal power frequently augment the grudges of the tribal people.

Another complex and groundbreaking development somehow closely related to the existing territorial assertion is the demand for Scheduled Tribe status by the Meitei community in 2012. In this regard, it is important to know that the community making this demand has been following and categorised under the “general category” for the past six decades. Whereas the term ‘Scheduled Tribes’ by the very meaning of its definition are referred to those groups who are officially designated as socio-economic and culturally backward, disadvantaged and marginalised communities in relation to their historical dependence on forest land and resources (Haokip, T. 2015: 83).

However, in India, the concept of ‘indigenous’ is synonymously used as a reference to equate with the Adivasis⁸⁷, a group classified under the Indian Constitution as ‘Scheduled Tribes’ and people who assign to themselves with the claim as the first inhabitants of India (Baviskar, 2005; Fernandes, 2013: 381). While the claim of ‘Indigeneity’ is often regarded as insignificant in most parts of India, it preoccupies a central tenet in the politics and ethnic rhetoric of most north-eastern region. In this context, the concept of indigeneity is always correlated with the territory and the same is used as a tool by particular group or community for asserting their rights as the original settlers of the land and legitimacy over resources.⁸⁸

Karlsson, (2003) has contextualised this in a very concise meaning. Being indigenous he argues argues is a way of situating oneself within a space and which in turn is a way for pursuing a new type of politics (Karlsson, 2003: 404). In Manipur, with all the emerging notions of ‘indigeneity’ and ‘territoriality’ over a contested space, the discourse of identity and indigeneity is a relentless pursuit by every community. As Srikanth (2014) observed, ‘Indigeneity is now above all a political question, closely bound with claims to territory, status, identity, and political power’ (cited in

86 Under article 371C of the Indian constitution, a committee consisting of tribal members alone from the legislative assembly of the State of Manipur is empowered to monitor the law making and administration of hill areas.

87 Adivasis in its literal sense is often taken to mean “Original settlers” or “Indigenous people”

88 Haokip. T. (2016). *Spurn thy Neighbour: The politics of Indigeneity in Manipur*. SAGE Publications. *Studies in Indian Politics* 4(2) p. 182-83

Haokip 2016: 179). Viewing from all these possible angles, it is indicative of the reason why a progressive and dominant community like the Meiteis are engaged in asserting for Schedule Tribe status through ethnic revivalism. With all the unfolding pressure of modernism, industrialisation, population growth and scarcity of resources, the struggle over identity has intensified rapidly than ever before.

Clearly, the intention overall is to reconceptualise their social category and an attempt to re-imagine and reconstruct the future discourse of their identity using the tag of indiginity. The grant of this particular demand would mean the reorganisation of the whole texture of the state in the form of inclusion, representation, reservation, and most importantly the land reform. The problem here is not much from any aspects of Meiteis demand who are raising campaign concerning the security of their survival and that altogether cannot transcend the constitutional law. But the hard part to this end is because it is difficult to relate it with the tribals knowing that it will essentially affect their age-old concept of landholding system and give the monopoly to the state to regulate. There is still another factor driving the fear and insecurity of the tribals as several communities who are previously categorised in the Schedule Caste are now converted to ST, leading to drastic increase in the number of population but without a symmetric change in the reservation policy (Haokip, 2015: 83). In addition, the discontentment of the tribals is heightened as the Meitei protagonists are in consistent motion to deliberate the matter at the level of the state acknowledging unparalleled advantage. Thus, mutual suspicion and disagreement accounting from lack of coherence and coordination has not only let to territorial divide but also an emotional divide between the hill and plain people.

The common outlook shaped by this change has gradually but continuously maintained its effect on the larger structural and administrative system. The whole scene of multiethnicity in the state as we have come across can be widely seen from the prism of the relationship between the Nagas and the Kukis on the one hand and the duo with the Meiteis on the other. There is no denying that the Meitei community in Manipur has always been at the better off position when it comes to all the general affairs of the state. They (valley dwellers) enjoy an upper-hand in the politics of the state as they singly constitute the largest ethnic majority in population (Kipgen, N. 2018:112). Arguing in the same vein, Suan (2009) writes that “not surprisingly all socio-economic, cultural and political development or non-development are seen through the prism of

this divide” (p. 264). Thus, with the politics of majoritarianism in action giving an incomparable edge to the Meiteis over the hill residents, a widening gap of development is massive between the two, often in favor of the former (Karlsson 2011: 28). The monopolistic attitude of the dominant regime likewise constantly sought to consolidate and extend its control over local resources, socio-economic and political benefits thereby pushing the hill communities further into marginalisation. However, in recent times, many covert agendas of the state often faced sustained opposition from hill people based on their awareness of their rights and challenges. All in all, the struggle against the dominance of larger and more powerful ethnic groups have been a trend in Manipur (Shimray 2001:3675).

II. Assertion and consolidation of Naga identity through cultural events

The vivid awareness about the degenerating traditional culture has at least caused a long widespread concern within the realm of culturally conscious Nagas. Culture because of its rudimentary cementing value is largely instrumental in managing a strong social and cultural bonding required in constructing a collective Naga identity. Moreover, it is the cultural and ethnic rhetoric as we have seen from the preceding discussions which are being used strategically throughout the history of the Nagas to fit various goals and objectives of its social and political reality.⁸⁹ An approach as this may not, however, be new as it is generally common in the case of many other small communities but also among the larger ones while in the interest of safeguarding their identity and scoring momentum in the discourse they want to create.

Ideas are fluid and constantly in the state of flux, the spirit of consciousness spread fast once it is disseminated or initiated anywhere. An example can be made of the “hornbill festival”,⁹⁰

89 Longkumer, A. (2015) p.52

90Hornbill festival is state level festival of Nagaland which is aimed at promoting and reviving the cultural heritage of the Nagas in the state. Started in 2010 and since then it has been organized annually. The festival is named after the iconic bird of the state, “Hornbill” due to its ubiquitous significance/presence in most folklore of the Nagas. The time frame of the event also coincides strategically with the date of Nagaland Statehood day celebration i.e. 1st of December. The festival which extends for a close period of 10 days is generally held in the first week of December. Generally, it highlights the various mélange of distinct Naga culture under the range of its material and immaterial dimensions. A notable point of the festival as often pointed out is the interesting synchronization between traditional and contemporary culture found displayed in various forms of exhibitions and performance.

wherein all the Naga tribes of Nagaland come together to celebrate and display their traditional culture. A close view of the event has several ways to indicate the festival serving numerous purposes for the Nagas rather than a mere edifice of a gala. As Peter Vam Ham has remarked this process as reflective of a shift in the technique and paradigm of the assertion that utilizes a symbolic and performative art to mirror the image of Naga culture.⁹¹ Looking deeper into the situation, if then one is to agree with Smith (2009) who argues about the “inconceivability of social reality outside of symbolism”.⁹² What the current Naga situation presents in the form of festivities may also be seen as a sort of remodelling of cultural resurgence for structuring a new social reality built on the past and purified in the present circumstances for the solidification of a strong ethnic identity consciousness.

The thing interesting about this is the perceptions and interpretations of such mega events which differ widely. Though the goal of collectivism and depiction of ‘Naganness’ as an objective remains utmost and unimpeachable at the least. One can find these varied understanding coterminously reflected in the interview collated by Longkumer (2015) in his article “*As our ancestors once lived*”. For some, the idea of the festival is understood as a step to inculcate education among the younger Nagas about the rich culture of the forefathers. While for more others, it is deemed as an effort to preserve the continuity of the age-old tradition in tandem with change for maintaining a distinction in the global world of a multicultural system.

A personal observation of the author Longkumer (2015) is also noteworthy as part of the interpretation in this regard as he particularly draws a semblance of the festival with Benedict Anderson’s idea of the “imagined political community”.⁹³ Whereas to compare the whole event politically may not be justifiable or even be advisable but what is surety about this is that it provides the necessary platform and premise for collective imagery and re-enactment of cultural embodiments in the interest of a pan-Naga Identity. This aspect is somehow fulfilled as people from different Nagas tribes come together to familiarize and interact with one another of which they know little or not much. The significance of the festival is in a similar manner once again brought to attention by the author in the same text by taking reference from Nestor Garcia Canclini (1995) who suggests “the staging of patrimony must be dramatized through cultural

91 Cited in Longkumer (2015) p.59

92 Smith, A. D. (2009). *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism: A cultural approach*. London: Routledge. P. 25

93 Longkumer, *Ibid.*, p. 57

ritualization that provides political force”.⁹⁴ The main aim of emphasis on culture thus evident is always in some aspect interlinked to the idea of consolidation of a pan-Naga identity in its unanimity besides the preservation and promotion of its cultural heritage.

In Manipur, a similar case in point among the Nagas almost closely resembles the one in Nagaland in terms of its depth and objective as we have just discussed above. A common festival called “Liu Ngai Ni”⁹⁵ is held every year under the aegis of ‘United Naga Council’⁹⁶ to mark the beginning of the seed showing season. Delegates from every Naga tribe of the state come together to observe, participate, and display their traditional and cultural elements besides other community members who are also invited as guests. Being in a heterogeneous state however interestingly, the festival is twisted with a slight convenience to fit the circumstances of the typical local condition. The nuances of this can be best exemplified and discussed specifically under two minor headings viz. “Venue and Theme” of the festival. But before proceeding further, perhaps it is important to be reminded by Yoosun, (2005) who posits a pertinent point which underpins the general understanding of culture. According to him “Culture is to be understood as a relational demarcator whose usage is an inscription of differential positions and hierarchical identities—a tractable device which can be used to demarcate whatever a particular set of interest dictates should be set apart from something else; included or excluded from the rest” (p. 13). Looking from this perspective, perhaps a relationship can be drawn to elucidate the discourse and usage of a cultural festival in the present Naga society without minimising the aspect of politics that follows.

94 Ibid.,

95 The term “Lui – Ngai – Ni” is derived from three different Naga dialects. The first word “Lui” comes from “Luiraphanit”, a Tangkhul word for seed sowing festival, “Ngai”, from Rongmei dialect meaning festival and “Ni”, a Mao word for seed sowing festival. Started first in 1987, this festival is commonly agreed as a general festival since it is celebrated by all the Naga tribes during the spring season unlike various other occasions which are usually specific and differs in norm, form, purpose and time. This festival has also been recognized by the Ministry of tourism as one of the tourist festival of India and honored by the state government as a state holiday every 15 February.

96 UNC is the apex civil society organisation of all the Nagas within the territorial boundary of Manipur. Formed in 1992, since then the organisation has been the chief custodian to organise and celebrate “Lui Ngai Ni” festival

a) Cultural territorialisation through the festival venue

At the very outset, the venue of the “Lui Ngai Ni” festival is held accordingly in rotation every year across the four Naga-dominated hill districts of the state. In an interview with Mr. Timothy, current executive member of the United Naga Council (UNC)⁹⁷ about questions regarding the significance of the festival and the idea behind maintaining a successive rotation in place for organizing the festival, here is what he had to say in brief:

“Lui Ngai Ni festival as the name suggests is a modern creation, but it is an ancient festival, which is celebrated since time immemorial by all the Nagas tribes that are today, although separately by every tribe unlike how it is celebrated today in a union. The main purpose of this festival is to seek the blessings of God for plentiful harvest thereby performing traditional rituals before planting the seed in the field”. Regarding the importance of the festival continues, “Most of our culture today is lost into oblivion because people are generally unaware and indifferent towards the importance of their own cultural tradition”. It is for this reason that I feel is very important that we bring to life our rich culture by reenacting them in practice besides mere documentations before it is permanently lost forever. Organizing this kind of event moreover is also important especially for the sake of those younger generations who can get a better familiarity and understanding of their own culture both in theory as well as in practice”.

Considering my second question regarding the rotation of venue, Mr. Timothy, plainly remarks that,

“Since not all the Nagas are constituted in one place, complying with this rule as he contends, is essential so as to avoid any potential feeling of inequality or dominance among the member tribes while sharing the

⁹⁷ Personal Interview with Mr. Timothy executive member of the United Naga Council on 20th February 2018 at his residence at Katomei village, Senapati District

privilege of hosting such a prestigious festival in the process of striving for cultural peace and oneness”.

On a general count, festival symbolises unity and opportunity as it provides the best place to explore cultural traditions, skills, knowledge. Similarly, the culture of the people is their identity as it what efforts them their due identity. Promoting the performative measure of culture is definitely a practical way to stop the culture from extinction and for passing it down to younger generations. Viewing broadly from an overt perspective to the excerpts mentioned earlier, this response may rather seem to convey only a general matter. However, a deeper analysis of the statement has ingrained potential to direct a different set of understanding with values manifested along the larger social and political context of the state. One of the most suitable ways to illustrate the state of this intricacy may best be elicited from the contemporary lens of cultural and ethnic assertion. The detail aspect of this development is clearly reflected in the evolving rhetorical discourse of tribal politics of recognition and representation.

While celebrating this festival does not seem to have any obvious issue in the Naga dominion districts of Senapati, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul, the situation somehow presents a different scenario in the case of Chandel district. To explain this with an example, many of the formerly known and recognized old Kuki tribes⁹⁸ such as the Chothe, Moyon, Chiru, Aimol, Anal, Maring, Lamkang, and Monsang etc. residing in Chandel district are presently recognized and categorized as the Nagas.⁹⁹ Genealogically, though the tribes mentioned here are said to have a closer linkage towards the Kuki tribe,¹⁰⁰ but are now assimilated within the fold of the Nagas and

98 The reference of the term old Kuki group was initially made by the British and the colonial scholars to categorize certain tribes based on their linguistic, geographical and other factors of proximity with other major tribes' viz. the Nagas and the Kukis. However, the usage of this term and its subsequent understanding has always sparked controversy continuing to remain problematic till today. There are inconsistencies regarding the reference even in the colonial literature as for instance the Anal and the Lamkang tribes which are earlier found categorized as Nagas by colonial writer like E. W. Dun. Census 1881, Pamberton (1835), Carrey, as given in Thoring (n.d: 510) are later regrouped as the old Kuki group in the work of colonial writers like Colonel J. Shakespeare (1912) and Grierson (1905) and further again regrouped by the later scholar himself as sharing more affinity with the Nagas than with the Kukis. More details pertaining to the old Kuki tribe can also be found at Johnstone, (2002) Dena, L. (2007), Sankhil, A. (2011) and Stephen (2013)

99 Kipgen, N. (2013). Intricacies of Kuki and Naga Ethnocentrism in Manipur. *HUFFPOST*. Available at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/nehginpao-kipgen/intricacies-of-kuki-and-naga_b_2531115.html

100 Chongloi, D. (2004). NakaliNagas of Chandel (India). *Kuki International Forum*. Available at <http://kukiforum.com/2004/07/nakali-nagas-of-chandel-india/>

seem to have developed a stronger line of identification with the Nagas. It should, however be noted that the basis for categorization and reference of these tribes as “Old Kuki tribes” are to be found initially in the colonial literature. But the lack of any consistent delineation in its reference has instilled an ambiguous understanding among many, causing uncalled repercussions. This is one prime factor that has vociferously flared the ethnic contestations among many tribal minorities in Manipur. That such a doubt and speculation persist hitherto moreover is comprehensible from the simultaneous cross-reference and claim over these tribes that are found simultaneously in various accounts on both the sides of the Nagas as well as the Kukis.

In this case, the focus of the discussion is briefly based on Chandel district, by specifically relating it with “Lui Ngai Ni” festival. The chief reason for this is because the district remains one of the main hot-spots where the assertion of identity-based on ethnicity holds particularly strong between the Nagas and the Kukis. For example, a press release from one of the early newspaper source article in “*The Freedom*” dated 18th May 1996, as found documented in S. R. Tohring (n.d)¹⁰¹, carries a vivid illustration that reflects the reality behind this ensuing imbroglio as quoted below:

“The KNF (Kuki National Front-one of the frontal militant armed group of the Kuki tribe) says that there is not a single Naga in Chandel district but the Anals were killed only as the Nagas since they used the word Naga as suffix under the instigation of seven or eight tribes. The Anals will be forgiven only when they stand as the Anals even if they do not wish to be the Kukis.” (Thoring, n.d: 507)

While keeping the above statement as a point of reference in conjunction with the contemporary discourse, Chandel district is generally held by most both within and outside the district as one of the Naga dominant regions in terms of its population. However, the sample statement above apparently is a way to indicate the strong dissension against such claims by the Kukis, who also constitute a majority community in the district. The Kuki tribe on its part has constantly blamed the affiliation of the Old Kuki tribes as a breakaway of their integrity due to the heavily clad

101 S. R. Tohring. (n.d). Ethnic Identity of tribes in India’s northeast: A case study of the Anal tribe. *Man in India*, 92 (3-4) p. 505-517. © Serials Publications. Available at <https://zapdoc.tips/ethnic-identity-of-tribes-in-india-s-northeast-a-case-study.html>

expansionist policy of the Nagas to devour its land and people. Another discernible aspect from the statement above reflects the implicit importance that is given to territory over the people. Notwithstanding the history and choice of these minor tribe, the feeling of insecurity for the Kukis stem from the fact that the union of the Anals and other tribes of the district with the Nagas would territorially and politically limit them to a disadvantageous position. To this end, the choice of minority community and their identity are clearly left to the mercy and imposition served by the majority community.

In fact, the deep emotional attachment of the Kukis and the Nagas with the once so-called “Old Kuki” tribes is still strong often luring heated contention in the academic and political realms. For instance, we find the usage of the term “Old Kuki tribes” being referred to as a misnomer by scholars like S. R. Thoring (2010:27), Sankhil, A. (2011:2), Monsang, W. (2015: 156-57) and the reference as an eighteenth century by Steward (1885: 185).¹⁰² While on the other hand, the identity of these tribes, has been suggested as an “intermediary tribes” (not necessarily Naga or Kuki) by Kabui (1991)¹⁰³ and Zehol (1998:37), with the former even referring to the Anals as “Culturally Kuki and Politically Naga”¹⁰⁴ and for Kukis own scholars like Dena, (1999), Kipgen (2013) and Haokip, T. (2013:256), etc. whose stance clearly reflects in favour of the cultural and linguistic affinity of the tribes to the Kukis. However, to add a more holistic dimension to these counter-assertions, one cannot overlook the political deliberation of these minor tribes who also have their own educated elite in influencing their decisions rather than perceiving the whole scenario as an outcome of a coercive action.

The state of the situation thus remains volatile and the rebuttal of assertion pushes back and forth often causing dismay among different tribal communities. Both sociological and political questions around the identity of these tribes do not seem to have depreciated much. This overlapping nature of claim has further implicated a feeling of insecurity by taking over the aspects of ethnic identity and territory between the Kukis and the Nagas. In such a scenario, it is

102 Steward, Lieutenant, 1995. “Notes on the Northern cachar.” Joournal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal XXIV: 180-95.

103 ThongkholaHaokip (2013) Essays on the Kuki–Naga Conflict: A Review, Strategic Analysis, 37:2, 251-259, DOI: 10.1080/09700161.2012.755785

104 Kabui, G. (1981). Anal: A Transborder Tribe as cited in Stephen (2013). The Anal Kuki or Anal Naga. *E-PAO*. Available at http://e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.opinions.The_Anal_Kuki_or_Anal_Naga

hard to maintain an opinion so aggressively or behave suavely towards either side of the community considering the affinity of the above-given tribes. It is equally hard to overlook the points made by the Kukis considering their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic rhetoric of oneness which they often use in making their case.

Nevertheless, in all these commotions, what is by far the most important is to bring into context the contemporary expression of belongingness, an insider's perspective from those tribes whose ethnic identities are questioned. An example of one such perspective is from one President of the Anal Naga Student Union (ANSU) named David Hulang basically a revert message to the previous claim that was made by the KNF. In just the same newspaper, the ANSU President's statement openly rejects and terms the claim of the KNF as dubious. The excerpt of the press release by Mr. David in "The Freedom" dated on 21st May 1996 as noted in Thoring (n.d) is given below:

"The Anal tribe is one of the Pakan Naga tribes consisting of the Anal, Maring, Lamkang, Monsang, Chothe and Tarao. The above seven Naga tribes of indigenous inhabitants of the region have been living together in peace and harmony since time immemorial, time and again, the ignorant, landless barbaric, cultureless, nomadic, Makheng Kukis have tried to woo the Pakan tribes to join Kuki group by quoting Gazetteer and records of some ignorant alien/half educated foreign personnel. This clarification is issued by the information and publicity wing of the Anal Naga Students' Union (ANSU) to enlighten the ignorant KNF regarding the true identity of the Anal Naga tribe". (Thoring, n.d .507)¹⁰⁵

Going by the given view, there is no direct reference to be seen as for the claim by the ANSU president, but it is evidently perceptible of the strong resentment against the tribes being classified under Old Kuki tribe. It might well be possible that such an inference could have been easily drawn from the early historical record of the Royal Chronicle of Manipur as well as some

¹⁰⁵ S. R. Tohring. (n.d). Ethnic Identity of tribes in India's northeast: A case study of the Anal tribe. Man in India, 92 (3-4) p. 505-517. © Serials Publications. Available at <https://zapdoc.tips/ethnic-identity-of-tribes-in-india-s-northeast-a-case-study.html>

colonial writers like, Pemberton (1966)¹⁰⁶ and Grierson (1903)¹⁰⁷ that mentions about the affinity of these tribes with the Nagas. Taking the local narrative of difference furthermore, that the Lamkangs and the Anals (considered as one of the Pakan Naga tribe¹⁰⁸) are different from the Kukis can also be seen clearly defended as for example in Sankhil (2011: 2) and Thoring (n.d. 514-15). Their studies pinpoint the argument around dissimilarities pertaining to the cultural, lingual, marriage, customary laws, and political practices to dispel the notion of common ethnicity with the Kukis.

Thoring especially rebukes the connotation of the term “Old Kuki” and “New Kuki” group as a mere divisive plan of the British administration. Her writing further cautions the readers to take account of other sources of reference such as the historical record of the Royal Chronicle of Manipur 16th century which has mention of the “Anals” as Nagas and other oral histories besides merely considering the colonial literature alone. Even then, this kind of argument yet unconditionally sets the wheel of debate on a whole new level of endlessness. Proponents of the Kuki oriented school of thoughts often pose a counterargument by arguing the error in history where the Kukis were also once referred to as the Nagas.¹⁰⁹ Following all the contestation over identity, it is true ethnicity per se is no doubt an important question, but to reiterate once again, the whole point of ethnicity is that it is both objective and subjective. It does not have to be determining the fate and future of the people permanently like a destinal trait when the choice is closely open to maintaining a convenient flexibility more so in a democratic regime. Once again it needs to be reminded that the minorities too are constantly engaged in the politics of prospect for their better future although the elements of inequality will be there as part of the social struggle. Moreover, what assurance does the current identity of the Nagas, Kukis, or Meiteis have that it will never be dissolved, when historically it has proven that new nations emerge from old nations. Therefore, simply maintaining an inveterate stand to protect and enforce the identity without the will of the people literally does not make it any different from a forceful action.

106 Pemberton, R. B. (1966). *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*. Calcutta.

107 Grierson, G. A. (1903). *Linguistic Survey of India*. Vol. III, Part III.

108 Pakan Nagas are usually referred to the allied tribes consisting of Anal, Lamkang, Monsang, and Moyon Nagas

109 Stephen (2013, September 28). The Anal Kuki or Anal Kuki. *HueiyenLanpao*. Available at http://e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.opinions.The_Anal_Kuki_or_Anal_Naga (Para 15-16)

b) Religious Rhetoric in Ethnic and Cultural Assertion

A particular characteristic perhaps worth mentioning about the discourse often that accrues from such a debate is the religious invocation on either side of the party. Christianity being the major religion that is followed by majority members of both the tribes, it is not rare to come across biblical intonations blended in the rhetorical discourse of ethnic identity assertion and conflict situation. In an article by Stephen (2013) (Under Secretary of the Kuki National Organisation) titled “The Anal Kuki or Anal Naga?” the writer rigorously attributes the socio-political circumstances which have prompted the otherwise ethnically Anal Kukis into Nagas. He also quotes extensively from the verses in the Bible as an appeal to the people to take recourse to return to their real root which here implies recognizing their Kuki ethnicity. Some of the astute Bible verses which he refers to in this regard are from (John 8:32) which reads as “*the truth shall set you free*” and (Psalm 133:1) “*it is beautiful when brothers live in unity*”.¹¹⁰ The whole idea that the Secretary is intending to put across rather seems like a call for adherence to the basic tenets of Christianity not just in the matter of faith and eternal salvation alone. But somewhat, an appeal for its application even in a relatively mundane matter like an identity for what he put it as “Political salvation”, implying one about the need for mutual respect of one’s identity and territory.¹¹¹

Given this while is only a facet of perspective; a similar approach is not dearth even among the Nagas. For instance, Wolring (2012) in his article “*The history of Anals in the context of ethnic violence*” firmly predicates the Anals and its fellow brethren tribes (PakanNagas) as Nagas and contends no ethnic relationship with the Kukis other than their manipulative attempt to absorb them in their fold. Using quite the same approach as the former, he uses several quotations from the Bible as for instance, one of the verses is from Revelation (2:4-5) “*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp-stand from its place*”. The complete meaning and implication of this gesture is comprehensible

¹¹⁰ Stephen, 2013, *ibid.*,

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*,

especially when he calls upon with a reminder “to respect each other’s original history, rights of land and peaceful way of life”.¹¹²

While it will be irreversibly wrong to equate the use of gospel by various leaders and intellectuals in this manner as intending to misguide the people in its own right. It is true that the dominant role of the Church is pervasive as every organization that exists in the tribal society of Manipur is always in some way linked with it. The fact that the Church and community organizations are the two key institutional structures in Naga and Kuki societies in Manipur is undeniable (Ibid, 26). In fact, the church is one chief institution that has always made its presence felt in almost every developmental and non-developmental activities of the state bringing many positive reforms (Singh, 2008: 141-43). A remarkable example of the Church in this regard is particularly when in the height of the Kuki-Naga ethnic conflict and its aftermath in the early 1990s. The churches in Manipur in their attempt to restore peace organised a “Pulpit exchange program” in which Church leaders from one ethnic community were sent to areas of another ethnic community and vice versa to gain the confidence of the people.

However, for all the good deeds of the Church there are exceptions as we come across in Butalia (2008) who writes about the inextricable link and influence of the Church over every sphere of life among both communities, but this she asserts is the chief reason as to why it has not been able to maintain a neutral approach (p.25). Most of all collating all the above rather divergent views and placing them in juxtaposition is in no way an attempt to negate the faith of the people or condemn the institutional role of the church for that matter. However, this analysis somehow manages to present the blurry line of the ethnic assertion that has manifested in numerous rhetorical forms, causing it into a tussling situation of socio-cultural and political stalemate.

Considering all this development it may well be advisable to keep the door open to all possibilities without necessarily concluding in favor of the Nagas or the Kukis for that matter. But if we slightly bend our understanding of ethnicity towards Weber (1968) in brief, it is evident that he asserts the important feature of ethnicity as “the belief in”, and “not the fact of”,

¹¹² Wolring (2012). The history of Anals in the context of ethnic violence. *E-PAO*. Available at: http://e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.opinions.The_history_of_Anals_in_the_context_of_ethnic_violence

in common descent (Jackson, 1982: 6).¹¹³ Likewise, ethnic community according to him is largely the product of political action no matter how artificially organized the concept may be (Smith, 1996: 446). This idea is very well assimilated by Gangmumei Kamei, a historian from Manipur, who attributes the political aspirations as a determining factor to decide, the identity of a tribe and that the Anals have common political aspiration with the other Naga tribe.¹¹⁴ Looking at the prevailing situation then, perhaps the best way out is to accommodate and go by the general inclinations of the people because that how the identity of people are developed over time. Similarly, important to remember here is that change being a dynamic concept, its relationship with human identity prompts the later to continually construct and reconstruct their identity as it requires. Thus, under such circumstances in a multiethnic society often it becomes a prominent issue in tackling the question of what is right and wrong unless it is mutually agreed upon by respective members of the community. Overall it is the struggle for power that mandates and influences the outcome of the situation of what is to be regarded as the truth regardless.¹¹⁵

Keeping track of the prevailing discourse as a framework for understanding and reference, reconnecting the discussion back to the previous theme of venue, what then would the celebration of “Lui Ngai Ni” festival mean to the different communities in such a complicated state of ethnic contestation? It is based on one of research fieldwork discussion with the current Vice president of KSO (Kuki Student Organization) Delhi about the same festival in Chandel district that I think presumably manifests a good aspect of the popular opinion. Being from the district and a Kuki himself, Mr. Haokip without a sense of holding back plainly forwards his remarks in the following way:

“Lui Ngai Ni” is not a popular festival in Chandel district, and I have not heard about its celebration in the district even though I hail from the place. It might be celebrated only by some tribe like the Kabuis (one of the Naga tribe) with probably some other guest tribes from other community and that too it might be held somewhere away from the town areas. In Chandel he continues, most of the tribes who currently

113 Jackson, M. (1982). An Analysis of Max Weber’s Theory of Ethnicity. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Race & Ethnic Relations: Cross-Cultural Perspectives (FALL/WINTER 1982/83), pp.4-18

114 Thoring (n.d) Ethnic Identity of tribes in India’s NorthEast: A case study of the Anal Naga tribe. Sage Publications Man in India, 92 (3-4) : 510

115 Hall, S., &Gieben, B. (1991). *The Formations of modern society*, Cambridge: Polity Press. (p. 203)

*acknowledge themselves as the Nagas do so because of forceful coercion of the NSCN-IM, otherwise, there are still many leaders and elders who affirm that they are Kukis”.*¹¹⁶

While the celebration of festival need not necessarily be equated with popularity, it is the aspect of essence which it has for the people that is significant to be considered. Going by the stated opinion of the Vice President of KSO Delhi, it is obvious about his apparent inclination towards the “Old Kuki tribes” as most Kukis would have generally perceived in a similar way. Needless to explain his disclosure as it brings to the fore, the factor of forceful assimilation to which he attributes as the reason behind the identification of the former tribes with the Nagas. Even then, there are subsequent local narratives that proclaim and succour the identity of the “Pakan” Nagas as totally different from the Kukis considering all the customary practices and beliefs except for linguistic affinities (Monsang, W. S. 2015: 161). Moreover, on a slightly different note, to assert that the festival is celebrated mainly by Naga tribe like the “Kabui’s” alone appear to be not only subjective but dismissive and withdrawn from reality. For the fact is that the festival is celebrated by more than 16 Naga tribes¹¹⁷ of the state which includes all the Naga tribes (former old Kuki tribe) from Chandel district. Moreover, it is also the biggest collective cultural event for the Nagas in Manipur next to “Hornbill festival” in Nagaland and one of the largest tourist festivals in India. Concerning the venue further for clarification, in Chandel district, when the event was held in 2017, the venue was set right around the perimeter of the main town.¹¹⁸

Overall, concentrating the argument on the assertion of ethnic identity and deeming the maintenance of its purity through a historical or mythical stake of claim may seem inevitable as part of the process of social development. However, situating the whole understanding by being static and adamant to this point may rather become bland over time. The point is that identity

116 Excerpt from an interview with M. Haokip, current vice president of Kuki Student Organisation, Delhi at JNU campus on 2nd March, 2018.

117 See, KhelenThokchom. (16th February, 2018). Nagas celebrate festival. *The Telegraph*. Available at: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/nagas-celebrate-festival-208910> See also, Mawon, S. (2017). Continuity and change in Hao Naga Festival. *the south asianist*. Has mentioned 20 Naga tribes taking part in this festival which includes Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Kharam, Koireng, Lamkang, Liangmei, Mao, Maram, Monsang, Moyon, Poumai, Rongmei, Tangkhul, Tarao, Thangal and ZemeNaga community among others (p. 163)

118 Lui-Ngai-Ni, festival was held in Chandel district at Maha Union Government Hr. Sec. School ground, Japhou today. Available at: <http://www.ifp.co.in/page/items/37565/lui-ngai-ni-festival-held-at-chandel>

itself is not essentially an intrinsic quality. For, language, race, ethnicity, religion, geography, and culture, etc. all of them as a constituent of identity does not seem enough to represent and explain the phenomenon of identity as a fixed disposition (Phanjoubam, 2007: 188-89). Identity rather is what Benedict Anderson aptly described as an “Imagined” entity based on construct and formed values. Similarly, ethnicity, culture, and power broadly are all variable concepts, therefore, Identity most of all is a volitional choice than a destinal trait. However, in a multiethnic society with sectional interest, to explain a thing that seems as rational or logical might not be very simple. In this context, the Kukis, Nagas and the Meiteis are competing forces and the outcome of their struggle will decide the truth no matter how the current scenario seems to present the experience like a limbo situation.

What needs to be given particular attention in the discussion about this festival is the approach, intent and its intended projection. At the very first place, the question is why the Nagas would be willing to celebrate the festival in Chandel district if there is no held notion of Naga population present there as is often alleged by the Kukis. To contend with this perspective, it is important to take account of the existence of different political, civil, religious and student organisations that independently identify their tribes with the suffix of Naga. As for instance, in Chandel district, the Anal Naga Student Union, Maring Naga Baptists Association, Lamkang Naga National Council, Monsang Naga Students Union, Moyon Naga Students Union, etc. are evidence in support of this claim. This aspect of the fact cannot be ignored even if their identification with the Nagas might have happened more nascent than others. And apparent as it is, most of the entities mentioned above espousing the Naga identity today are harbingered by intellectual sections of the society. Therefore, restricting the whole notion of understanding the ethnic identification of these tribes with the Nagas to coercion or persuasion may not be a very significant currency in the present scenario with the change of time. Keeping this aside, Foucault also had a saying that “politics is everywhere”, and perhaps this can be an important parallel reminder in the case of Manipur. The point is, it doesn’t really seem irrelevant for any community to affiliate or disaffiliate depending on their choice although some conflict may be imminent at times in the process.

The second question is based on the seemingly implied meaning of the festival and the kind of relations that it is trying to create thereby strategically sharing the cultural venue. At the very

outset, festivals have become focal site for performing identity and fostering unity among ethnic Nagas (Mawon 2017: 163). In this regard, the 'Lui-Ngai-Ni' festival is invariably linked up to larger religious, economic, cultural and political processes that have wider implications for the future of the Nagas of Manipur (164). It seems like that the Nagas have deeply internalised the value of capitalizing on culture and heritage at a territorial level in order to be better prepared and accountable for future decisions. Using the cultural festival as a medium has multiple objectives for the Nagas on their end. It helps to flourish the ethnic spirit of Naga nationalism by perpetuating a sense of shared memories. It is also serves in preserving, promotion and perpetuation of a collective memory through the shared performance of culture and most importantly to harden and extend a strong cultural, political and geographical boundary.

c) Weaving a common Naga identity through themes and practices of festival

If one is to confine their attention only to the mere apparent externalities of cultural phenomena in order to understand the whole meaning of its larger affair. Chances are that they miss not only the important values of its essence but also the design and politics that is embedded further within. Culture is not neutral; it is relatively malleable and has a susceptible relationship with power and politics. Acknowledging these key features and keeping it as a referential framework. The point of cultural regeneration that has been increasingly sought by the Nagas in the present scenario is not solely based on a measure for its revival from degeneration alone. It has another major objective, which is to nurture the idea of a common Naga future. Nagaisation as a process is still ongoing and the fact about this cannot be discredited under any apparent circumstances.¹¹⁹It is no less true that the Nagas have several differences in culture, dialects, customs, practices and belief system.

In spite of this, there is a strong common thread of socio-cultural, ethno and political unity among the Nagas. This in return has inspired a strong solidarity and bond among its people. Yet, there are determinants mainly in the form of critiques from other communities that try to question the loyalty and harmonious identification of its unity as a hybrid ethnicity or identity.

119 Singh , A. K. (2008). Ethnicity and Inter-community conflicts. Akansha Publishing House. New Delhi. (p. 51)

Being aware of this, therefore what the Nagas are essentially trying to reify is that they are endeavouring to create a discourse. Broadly speaking, the significant discourse that is being sought after in this regard is for the solidification and consolidation of Naga sub-nationalism. There is a direct causal relationship between culture, ethnicity, politics, and nationalism which have been proven in many past studies and theories (Smith, 1996: 445-46). A commensurate exposition to this understanding, we also come across in the work of John Hutchinson's "*The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*" (1987) where he acknowledges the long-term impact of cultural factors in contributing the rise of the nationalist movement.¹²⁰

For the Nagas, it is in the culture that they seem to have taken a serious recourse for setting the framework of this discourse into action. Lui Ngai Ni festival for an example is made more significant for the Nagas in general by formalizing it into a state holiday and one of the officially recognised tourist festivals of India. The politics behind this is that people are better informed about the day being associated with their identity, it is about recognition and to be exact, a sort of line that delineates the Nagas for the rest. Considering this, it is simply not easy to overlook the challenges in getting the government to pass a day off in the national calendar. Perhaps from an analytical perspective, this is an obvious mark of progress for the Naga in its cultural movement for making it ostensible at a country-wide level in the prevailing quagmire of ethnic contestation. For what it takes to be answerable to almost everything at present starting from such a petty thing as naming a child, roads, places, institutions, and objects etc. The get together of Naga tribes in Manipur through this festival, no doubt serves a significant basis, a milestone from which the discourse of knowledge will be created.

In so far as Manipur is the concern, the concept of community identification or the sense of belongingness is deeply rooted in ethnicity. Talking about community consolidation through ethnicity, there are aspects of similarities and differences in the approaches maintained by different communities. While for the Kukis and the Meiteis (Non-tribal), the relevance of ethnic ties seem to be oriented more towards primordial elements through natural historicity as they believe in a common origin, have common language and traditions. This seems different in the case of the Nagas, though a common ethnicity is claimed and accepted, there are cultural differences that persist, therefore a bit of modern and ethno-symbolist philosophy appear more

120 Smith (2009) p.24

predominant. This fact is conspicuous particularly if we trace the history of Naga political movement in the formation of its identity till hitherto. The gradual assimilation of the tribes under the Naga fold has witnessed a growing change since its history (Kumar, 2007: 24-25). The actual number of Naga tribes appear clear and fixed to some on the one hand but variant and controversial on the other hand till today. On the whole, the point, however, is that a particular philosophy (Perennialism, Primordialism, Instrumentalism, Modernism or Ethno-symbolism) does not singly dominate the whole nationalistic paradigm of a particular community but a synthesis of each of these “isms” without which it would be untenable (Smith, 1996: 446).

Conceptualising all this past and impending changes, the current cultural assertion through the organisation of the festival also in itself is a task with multiple responsibilities. It is about creating and imagining a collective Naga identity by sharing its diverse performative and symbolic culture altogether. Festival provides a unique platform for promoting ethnic understanding and representing a cultural-historical process through which ethnic groups express themselves for the preservation and celebration of local culture, history and tradition (Chacko and Schaffer, 1993; Dunstan, 1994, cited in Derrett, 2003a; Frisby and Getz, 1989; Getz, 1991, 1997).

According to Smith (1996), to become national or community in this context, “shared memories must be attached themselves to specific memories are attached themselves to specific places and definite territories” (p. 453). It is said that members of the community feel connected through a given place as it enables them to construct and express their unique identity. Investing in the cultural festival for the Nagas thus provides an opportunity and space that is required for preserving their collective heritage, its continuity while at the same time enhancing their social cohesion and identity. The whole objective thus is to inculcate a sense of Naganess, reconstruct their ethnic ties and assert their territorial boundary through a shared cultural podium to flourish the spirit of Naga identity.

The new discourse of assimilation and its resultant development of assertion likewise become clearly perceptible in an event like the ‘Lui Ngai Ni’ festival. While analysing the festival, a particularly striking feature that emerges from an observant viewpoint is the theme that is associated with the event. There is a special duty that is assigned through the theme to perpetuate

the feeling of a common national and cultural imagery. Given here are some of the yearly themes that are associated with the festival. For instance, the theme of the festival in 2005 was “*Weaving peace through culture*”. In 2013 it was “*Towards common identity*”; in 2014, “*Our culture, our unity*”; in 2017, “*Sowing goodwill, reaping abundance*” and 2018 as, “*One culture, one goal*”. It is a known fact that both politics and culture influence each other. Putting this concept across the Nagas, it is obvious to note its relevance even from the above cultural themes in their effort to sustain their communal bond through a sense of Naga sub-nationalism. The strong urge for ethnic and cultural oneness of the Nagas as a whole has been a relentless process despite all the criticism which it encounters in the formulation of its identity. An excerpt from an article in “*The Northeast Today*” dated 16 Feb. 2015. Covering the speech of the United Naga Council (UNC) President Mr. Kamei during the “Lui Ngai Ni” festival seems to convey this matter pretty well. In his speech, he urged all to ponder over “*our adversaries which hiss out venom of separatism, groupism, self-interest and express it against the oneness of the Naga family*” and added, “*let us stand firm lest our adversaries get the upper hand.*”¹²¹

Politics and political institutions, as Weber argues, play a very important part in forging ethnic ties (Smith 2009). And this does not put away the influential role of culture in a much differentiable position. Citing an example from the “Lui Ngai Ni” festival is the notable presence of Naga political dignitaries (For example, Nagaland Chief Minister Mr. Rio in 2014 and T. R. Zeliang in 2016) from the neighbouring state of Nagaland among many others during the commemoration of this event. To articulate it in a certain way, the presence of these leaders itself becomes a symbolic manifestation of assertions in the construction of Naga identity alongside cultural and territorial lines. Though how much the current process of ethnicisation will help in actualising the political boundary remains to be seen in such a disputed state. What one needs to understand is the power that is generated through cultural and ethnic rhetoric, which in turn is manipulated in the use of languages and creating a discourse of legitimacy.

121 Lui Ngai Ni Festival Celebrated in Manipur. February 16, 2015. *Northeast Today*. Available at: <https://www.northeasttoday.in/lui-ngai-ni-festival-celebrated-manipur/>

III. Contemporary Perspective on Cultural Change among the Nagas

Change is the standard of time; it is the core principle of everyday human life as it is inevitable. In a human society, the trajectory of socio-cultural change is always determined by some amount of its dialectical relationship whether among themselves, with others or based on the influence of the natural environment. Every consequence of change for that reason has the potential to direct a profound impact upon the lives of those individuals or the society that are undergoing them. Yet, it is not necessary that the process of change will always bring about progress or positive reform in the society as it can even lead to retrogression. This is why understanding the context of change is important as every society has a different way of dealing with its consequences depending on the dialectics of its social interaction. Inevitable as it is for change to take place, the process always requires a fine balance to tune in within the tolerable limits of the society. For if the action of change is too instantaneous or even if too sluggish for that matter, it is likely to face the crisis and repercussion in several different ways.

According to Kinsley Davis, “cultural change embraces all changes occurring in any branch of culture including art, science, technology, philosophy etc., as well as changes in the forms and rules of social organisation” (Quoted in Chongloi, 2013: 19). In almost the same observation, Thankro (2002: 4) held “culture change as a modification in the way of life of a people, material and nonmaterial whether consequent of innovation, invention, and acculturation”. It is for all these facts about cultural change, that a general knowledge for the same is necessary for dealing more effectively with the consequences of its outcome both for the individual and society (William, 1990: 344). Much of the problem of traditional society in the face of change and modernity until today is the question of sustenance and continuity of its cultural knowledge system. Relating this perspective across the Naga society in Manipur, the advent of modernity is equated with the coming of the westerners. Yet, it cannot be disapproved that for all the existing problems of the people in terms of its cultural history is deeply rooted in the forced subjection and acculturation of the people by the imperialists. Leaving aside some of its impressive policies which helped in eradicating many irrationalities from the Naga society, the question that they have often overlooked is concerning the readiness of the people to change. Social change as many sections of the Naga society today often recount happened too rapidly under the westerners without a befitting alternative for the people to recuperate and rationalise the value of their own

culture. The side effect of this influence has created an immense gap in knowledge and practice leading to gradual loss of its traditional culture. While efforts are on to preserving the traditional cultural knowledge, there are challenges that one is faced with on numerous fronts. These challenges which present some of the negative and positive aspects, as well as the suggestions, are reflected in the excerpts during the fieldwork duration.

a) Dilemmas in reviving of traditional culture

A generally held axiom that the ‘loss of culture is a loss of identity’ is often reiterated by most people during the process of data collection. An interesting aspect about cultural reminiscence in the present Naga society is that it is not confined to a particular section of the society but depicted by people from broad arrays of background and profession. It is true that a serious sense of urgency about preserving and promoting cultural values is emerging evidently. On the contrary, there are tandem opportunities and constraints something that needs to be understood conversely. Educated Nagas today are looking at the persisting problem from all possible dimensions. An interesting observation to explain one of this phenomenon, is given by Dr. Antony, a prominent member of the Maram Naga Literature Society. According to him, *“although the spirit is very much alive when the talk concerns culture, it is not corresponded by action in practice as people are not serious enough”*.¹²² Being a historian himself, some of his concerns seem to be directly influenced by his discipline. Drawing the attention of the dwindling content of Naga history mostly it’s material culture, he is anxious that the problem lies in the practice of most of the Naga tribes. Many traditional assets of historical significance are lost as it is buried along with the dead as a result of which younger generation have lost touch with the material value of their culture. Whether this is done intentionally or unintentionally, according to him, people are taking part in the downfall of culture without thinking about it critically.

There are other similar challenges that pertain in the oral culture such as folk songs, folktales and other oral histories. Changes are also perceptible following the traditional role of individual, family and other social structures as a discourse producing mechanism. Traditionally the society

122 An informal interview was held with Dr. Antony Kaba (faculty at History department) on 27th Feb. 2018 at his office in Don Bosco College, Maram, Senapati District Manipur.

depended on these factors for the primary responsibility of sharing traditional knowledge in their daily course of life. However, in the new discourse there is an attitudinal shift with the departure of society from traditional lifestyle. The old value-driven relationship based on respect and reverence for cultural knowledge is more or less replaced by a more casual attitude. This is a broad sign to suggest the changing pattern of socialisation process in the Naga society as the socio-cultural process of interaction has changed drastically towards modern convention.

Discussion with Mr. Rangongning, the current president of Tribal Languages and Literature Societies, Manipur begins by saying that “*When people die their knowledge dies with them*”.¹²³ As a cultural enthusiast working extensively in the field of tribal culture, he postulates that a close one generation or more has been lost which is crucial for bridging the existing knowledge gap in the Naga cultural history. Even an elderly persons in the age range of 80 years, as he divulges, are unable to sing if not sing properly or have sound knowledge about their culture. There is an unmet expectation and misconception among the youth as well as the elders who have knowledge of folksongs and tales. Retrieving the old oral culture under the current circumstances has become difficult tasks unless a consistent and extensive effort is propagated in research to take advantage of the existing resources unless it’s lost completely. There is a remarkable semblance of this view in Stuart Hall (1982: 77), who asserts that “there is a way in which culture becomes a dead language when it is taken for granted unless we are intentionally taking a critical stand, when we talk and act we are unknowingly reproducing discourse of oppression; and it’s the taken-for grantedness of culture that makes it appear naturally real”.¹²⁴ Therefore, unless a common consortium and a reasonable patronage is entrusted to revive the declining culture, it is due to perish gradually.

The next line of thoughts concerning Naga cultural revivalism is from the religious standpoint. One of the major reasons for the existing binary of misunderstanding between the Church and the traditional culture is because of the lack of uniform value for traditional culture among religious leaders. Interview with a local pastor Mr. Thiumai¹²⁵ sums up pretty obviously in this

123 Interview with Mr. Rangongning, on 10th/03/17 Serving president of CTLLSM) at his residence at Neikanglong, Imphal, Manipur

124 Halls, S. (1982). The rediscovery of “ideology”: Return of the repressed in media studies. In M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Woollacott (Eds.), *Culture, society and the media*. London: Methuen

125 Interview with Pastor Thiumai, Zeliangrong Baptist Church (combination of three tribe namely Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei) Christian colony, Senapati District on 13th Feb, 2018

regard. The Bible as he opines is translated as it is in the original text without considering the local context because of which people have a poor attitude towards their own culture. Such a disclosure is clearly suggestive of the influence implicated by various religious denominations as different Churches have a different theological style of interpretation. While some communities incorporate and identify with culture better than the other, many are still faced with the initial dilemma of coming to terms with both.

A particular case of a King's (Sagong) family in Maram Khullen village,¹²⁶ in Senapati District perhaps can be suitably related to this fact. Quite remarkably, the family follows a dual religious identity as the parents still practice the old traditional religion while the children are Christians. As part of the story, the King and his family were initially converted to Christianity but had to reconvert to the old traditional religion due to the insistence from members of the village who are followers of the old religion. Moreover, the King had the pressure to quit his position if he reconverts to other religion. What is specifically interesting is from the perspective of the King's own son, who admits about the prevalence of the stigma that is attached to their social relationship. At times, they are even rumoured to possess qualities of witchery and attributed as the cause whenever in connection with illness and diseases.

While this is part of the problem that reflects the contestations and contradictory nature prevailing in the religious sphere in a particular Naga village, the grey area of cultural revival in general seems to lie in the disjunction persisting in the cultural practices between a Christian Naga and Non-Christian Naga. But of all the most revered aspect of traditional culture which the present society is left with is the passing morality of the age-old society. In the olden days, people were prohibited to kill animals at certain stages of their life. Hunting and trappings are tabooed during the breeding seasons. Fishing and use of certain poisonous plants to kill fish during the spawning season are tabooed. Motiveless and unnecessary felling of trees and plants is strictly prohibited. Community-mindedness and essence of volunteerism was highly regarded and practiced. Such are the high values of traditional culture which are not replicated is an irony in a highly held present Naga Christian society.

126 Interview with 63 years old Sagong (King) Namba and his family at their residence in Sagongbam village, Maram, Senapati District on 18th Feb. 2018

b) Ongoing progress in Cultural development

Nevertheless, above all the varied concoctions of cultural transformation, there are promising signs of positivity in the cultural revival process. A growing number of church leaders and community elders besides the intellectuals are increasingly asserting the need for indigenisation of Christianity into the local culture. Earlier, the known approach was to modify everything traditional into Christian values, however, this process seems to be gradually adapting to changes with the revert pattern of harmonising Christianity in the context of local culture. Aside from the translations of the bible into local dialects, this can be seen in the translation and composition of gospel hymnals using in local folk tunes. Though the levels of identification with one's own indigenous culture differ in range from tribe to tribe or village to village, but generally, the importance of cultural sensitisation is manifesting faster than ever before.

Several mechanisms are at work in media, literature, music, festival, and different kinds of artists using different creative forums to create a greater outreach of cultural awareness. Various social institutions are likewise beginning to refurbish their approach to establish a strong culturally centered Naga identity. In fact, for Naga tribe like the Tangkhuls who were exposed to education through the missionaries much ahead of other tribes, have at least established a strong base of their culture through written literature and produced exponents of folk practitioners. Building on the creativity of their old traditional knowledge, they have reinvented certain new traditional art, music and even in fashion line that is ready for consumption in the global market. An example of this is the traditional musical instrument called “Yangkahui” and customised “Tengteila” (folk fiddle) which are ready to be patented for use.¹²⁷ These are the marks of identity through the culture that is also inspiring other Naga tribes about the essence of cultural capital. Cultural consciousness in this regard may be said to take place earlier in a community that is educated.

Currently, almost all the Naga tribes in Manipur have formed their own literature committees for the promotion of their culture. Recording of folk songs, documentation, and digitisation of history are side by side for the development of tribal language and knowledge. Development of

127 Chabungbam, D. (2012). Guru Rewben Mashangva: King of Naga folk Blues. *E-PAO*. Available at: http://e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=features.Profile_of_Manipuri_Personalities.Guru_Rewben_Mashangva_King_of_Naga_Folk_Blues

language is seen as one of the key prospect that is crucial for understanding and reconstructing tribal history. As English is increasingly getting prominence as the oral mode of communication in the tribal society, the lack of ability to share traditional knowledge in indigenous language has diminished much of its meaning and value. However, as a measure of this, most of the recognised tribes have immersed their indigenous language as a subject based on their culture in the state board of education. The lessons and curriculum for the same are prepared under the supervision and direction of local community members giving them the edge in the control and production of knowledge. Not only this, but many tribal schools in the hill districts are also taking part in reinstating the knowledge and practice of traditional culture. Children are encouraged to take part in cultural activities such as songs, costumes shows, dance and traditional art crafts during school programmes.

Overall, with all the general pattern of cultural revival, that is concurrent among other ethnic communities like the Kukis and the Meities, this may also be a factor inspiring other communities for ardent commitment towards identity building measure. Riegel and John (1976) have similarly maintained that “socio-cultural attitudes and identities are a function of the interaction of historical socio-cultural milieu, individual factors, and the physical environment”. (Cited in Chakraborty and Ghosh, 2013: 131) Congruently, the focus interest towards the preservation and promotion of indigenous culture has become even more compelling in the current face of increasing political complexities. But with all the affirmative action that is on in this manner to support culture, traditional indigenous knowledge as an educational resource is now much more readily available than it was in recent past.

CHAPTER 4

ETHNIC POLITICS AND CONTESTATION IN EDUCATION

In a multiethnic society, the question of dominance over identity, resources, power, structure, and participation among others is not unlikely due to an avid sense of common ethnic affiliation, difference, and competition. A very typical example of this is the case in northeast India as the region hoards people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Most of the complex problem that the region is faced with till today had its root primarily under the British administration. The colonial policy of divide and rule in the region had the entire pre-colonial understanding of its people, culture, and land altered and reorganised to serve the colonial interest. In general, this approach set the background by which the process of ethnic identity consciousness and subsequent interest in the creation of the ‘self’ and ‘others’ soon emerged. Further, upon the colonial scheme of exclusion, inclusion and explicit recognition of cultural identities based along the ethnic, linguistic, racial and religious line, the concomitant effect that resulted has led to a widening schism characterised by suspicion and distrusts in the region. More often than not, this has paved the path not just for cultural oppression and suppression but also led to overall discrimination in social, economic, and political dimensions.

The apprehension of the fragmented minority community particularly surfaced to its climax under the “Nation building” project of India. Most of the newly agglomerated communities under the union government of India at the time were still faced with a dilemma over the fate and future of their identity due to the constant threat of mainstreamising posed by other dominant cultures. The creation of elitism and subsequent containment of diversity under the fold of majority community was a common phenomenon both under the British and Independent India. To elaborate on this fact, most of the present north-eastern states except for Manipur and Tripura were once under the administrative division of Assam. On the obverse, the condescending and apathetic approach of the majority government conveyed a susceptible feeling especially among the tribals to imagine their own state based on their own administration.¹²⁸ Thus, the new states, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya came into being thereafter.

128 Changkakoti, N. (2007). Ethnic problems and Inter-state border problems in north-east and solutions. In Kumar. B. B (Ed.), *Problems of Ethnicity in the North-East India*. (pp. 157-58). New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company

However, the fear of ethnicity being blown apart by the politics of modern politico-economic institutions continues to generate a huge concern for the minorities about losing their cultural and political mooring. Compelled by the general political standard of affirming with the majorities based on appealing along the constituted line of categories such as ‘linguistic’, ‘ethnic’, or a combination of some or all of them, the circumstances of the minority communities inevitably is but, left with the ultimate choice to organise for its separate identity (Mahanta as cited in Kumar, 2007: 129-130).

For this same practical reason, almost all the ethnic communities in the region today are relentlessly engaged in building the credibility of their own identity by constructing their rhetoric based on the history of the land, culture, territoriality and various other elements of identity to legitimise their distinction. Usually, the claims from each of these ethnic groups are clear and concise but often the problem lies in the overlapping interest and contradicting worldviews over the subject matter of identity. For example, the Nagas who are divided into different regions under separate administration are struggling to create an alternative Naga history but are faced with a stiff resistance from other communities. However, this is not a specific case with the Nagas but applies to almost all the other ethnic communities in the region. It is in this increasing assertion over identity that the state is again faced with an enormous challenge of responding to the varied demands. The craze for ethnic exclusiveness has in the meantime created a tussle between the State and community on the one hand and community to community on the other hand (ibid. 132).

In most cases, for the government in order to avoid the distortion of the State, it has often adopted the ‘tribal to tribal’ approach by creating a number of tribal autonomous district councils. As for instance, the State of Assam has granted Autonomous Councils to Bodos, Rabhas, Tiwas, Misings, etc. In Manipur too, there are six autonomous district councils granted to the tribals, however unlike their counterparts in Assam, the operation of tribal council in Manipur is not full-fledged but centralised under the state despite the persistent demand by the tribals for its full autonomy. While similar discourse carries on, no community wants to subside without a fair share of equality in their daily multicultural existence. There are growing pressures from various other smaller tribes with a similar proposal for demand for greater political power and representation pressed against the government. In this context, the pertinent question to the

State from a wider perspective is how to put a cap to all this endless decentralisation thereby satisfying every community without disintegrating the State from within and without. Moreover, considering the complex geo-political situation of the contemporary Nation-state, the confrontation over identity is only likely to grow more in conjunction with the spread of democracy, increased mobility and global network system (ibid. 129). The stability of the region will be saved and determined only by successful handling of diversity through its inclusive policy. Following this, the statement from Dr. B. R. Ambedkar seem to square up the whole nut and bolt of an ideal multicultural society as he opines,

“As far as the ultimate goal is concerned, I think none of us need to have any doubt. Our difficulty is not with regard to the ultimate; our difficulty is with regard to the beginning. Our difficulty is how to make the heterogeneous mass that we have today to take decisions in common and march on the way which leads us to unity.” (Hazarika as cited in Kumar, 2007: 114).

Viewing from this perspective, it is clear that the potential splinterisation of the State or bigger community can be halted only by allowing every respective community to develop socially, culturally, economically, and politically. Thus, rather than perceiving the prevailing diversity as a problem, the approach need to change gear to adopt a suitable policy measure to address the heterogeneous structural issues. However, any policy cannot be fructified unless it is substantiated by a reasonable democratic practice other than that it has every chance to manifest a destructive impact. In this context, the chapter situates the ethnic Naga contestation over development and education in the state of Manipur.

I. Diversity and Development in Manipur

The state of Manipur presents perhaps a very suitable example to explain all about the sensitivity of ethnicity as a subject can be. Every rendezvous point of culture between the Nagas, Kukis, Meiteis and even the non-Manipuris has always proven with its pros and cons in determining the path of its social relationship and trajectory of its development. Ethnic intolerance has become a

massive threat to the coexistence of the people in the state as each community continue to view the other as an inhibition to their development. Almost every socio-economic and political organisation in the State is segmented primarily based on ethnic identities. Consequently, any discord or friction arising from this relationship has proven with a constant threat to fuel ethnic divide and conflict (Sharma, 2016: 13).

As already suggested, with all the extended phenomena of modern democratic politics and globalised world system, the scope for nurturing varied aspirations is magnified in accentuating their distinctive ethnic identity. Having mentioned democracy as an example, there is a point of advantage and disadvantage of having a constitutional right for cultural and ethnic recognition. On the advantageous side, it is one thing that justifies equality, rights and even unity to some extent. However, on the opposite side in the tribal context, the minority Nagas and Kukis insecurely anticipate this package of recognition at least with some sense of vulnerability. There are perils behind this force that tend to disunify the tribal unification movement as had happened with the Kukis with most of the former Kuki tribes breaking away from the nomenclature of the Kukis. In short, the fragmentation of identity gave way to ideological breakage thus weakening the momentum of the whole identity struggle.

Today, this is a reality eventuating as different communities and subgroups within communities are conscious to create and potentiate their own discourse to grasp their equivalent share in the politics of the state. This strive, however, should not be viewed as something entirely guided only by a selfish drive. Gaventa (2003) affirms that the paradigm of discourse can be a site of power and resistance, attempt to evade, subvert or contest strategies of power (p. 3). In the same manner, Smith (1998) held his opinion that, “The persistence for objective cultural distinctiveness in the periphery must itself be the function of unequal distribution of resources between core and periphery” (Smith, 1998: 59). For inequality breeds contestation which leads to resistance against the power structure. What the different ethnic groups are currently engaged in may either be openly seen as a way to defy their subordinate position or contest for power to manipulate their own manoeuvre. A very relevant exposition closely applicable in the context of Manipur is from Kothari (1994). While stating on the relationship between ethnicity and State, he writes that:

“When each community or caste or religious group interprets its insecurity as a result of the privileges of a competing group gained through favours and patronage from the state, the resulting conflict and violence does not aim at fighting another community but rather fighting the state, which is presumed to be dominated by or be preferential to the other community. The other community is perceived as a surrogate state”.¹²⁹

What we see prevalent in the current Manipur situation is nowhere different from the statement above, the majority Meitei community has always got the better of the state policy. There is discriminations prevailing on the basis of culture, language, economic, and political differences. In aggregate/semblance, the politics of core and periphery are actively at work, with the core Meitei dominated government in the valley controlling and influencing every major aspect of development in the tribal belt. The attitude of the government towards the development of the hill districts has always been a lackadaisical one. As a result, there is an increasing rift and overall detachment between the hill and valley residents due to valley centric development programme constantly favouring the majority community.

However, this is not to articulate that the development activities are completely absent in the hill areas, or that it ought to be equivalent with the valley, however, it cannot be denied that the overall scale of development in the hill areas and allocations of resources has been disproportionately low and neglected. For the same lack of parallel development in the hill areas, it is often alleged at the incompatibility of the tribal people and their leaders without restrospecting the prevailing structural inhibition. Acknowledging the existing mismatch in development, Sharma (2013) also views that, “Development works even if carried out by the government seem to be biased and the disparity between the hills and the valley is stark. Non-inclusive growth has led to unemployment, under development and disenchantment amongst the people in the hills and is one of the reasons for continuing insurgency in Manipur for many decades in spite of abundance of natural resources and human resources” (p. 11).

Politically too, the Meitei domination widely persists in the State due to their size of their population thus giving them overwhelming advantage in the decision making process. However, even here, one needs to be cautioned that the state government has made deliberate attempt to

129 Chakraborty & Gosh (2013), p. 141

discount the population of the tribals particularly the Nagas in the Census report of India on a number of occasions in the past. A particular case happened way back in 2011 as three Naga sub-divisions of Senapati district, namely, Mao-Maram, Purul, and Paomata were excluded from the official figures of the government Census.¹³⁰ The problem over the census enumeration of the tribal population had happened even earlier around the year 2001 to 2004 as the State government cited irregular figure of the tribal population which was consequently dissented. The politics of suppression accruing from such an event like this one has put a barrier on development in the hill areas whereas it has only given more edge to the Meiteis residing in the valley. And whereas, the central government taking note of the growing population amongst the tribals has ordered for delimitation of the state Assembly based on the census report of 2001. The Meitei dominated state government has wilfully stood against the central order by obstructing it to be implemented till date.

The whole situation is caught in confrontation between two extreme conditions one from the hill residents and the other from the valley. Perspective from the hill communities is directed in complaint against the state officials for limiting the decadal growth to suppress their population. On the other hand, the former Chief Minister of Manipur, Mr. Okram Ibobi Singh, himself along with the public and organisational support base of the valley Meiteis has reiterated the complaint against the Delimitation Commission in 2003, terming the abnormally high growth rates in some of the hill sub-divisions.¹³¹ The crux of the problem lies in fear that the “Delimitation Act” once implemented would automatically require reducing the Assembly constituencies in the valley to 35 from the current 40 seats and subsequent addition of 5 seats to the existing 20 in the hill districts. This situation is however fraught with a serious danger as both the hill and the valley people are unable to come to any agreeable term insinuating potential ethnic clash. In the midst of this problem in contestation, a study by Dolly Kikon (2006) through her review of class VIII Social Science textbook of Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (BSEM) is definitely worth mentioning as it raises a lot of suspicion against the plot of the Meiteis related to this debate. The author identified certain questions that can be considered as value loaded such as: “Which

130 NPO unhappy with non-inclusion of Senapati sub-division in census records. *Imphal Free Press*. 18/Jul/2013. Available at <https://www.ifp.co.in/page/items/15641/15641-npo-unhappy-with-noninclusion-of-Senapati-sub-division-in-census-records/>

131 The Gazette of India: Extraordinary. Part II-Section-3-Sub-Section (ii). New Delhi, Friday, february 8, 2008.

district in Manipur has the highest literacy rate?” and “Why do hill districts of Manipur have low density of population?” (p. 17). Example from these questions clearly exposes the politics of the Meiteis who are engaged in conspiring to portray the tribals very differently from the reality. It is a simple way to justify indirectly why the Meiteis have higher representation in the political system. Questions such as these also carry a great potential to condition the mind of the younger generations to develop a faulty knowledge about their own society and that of the others.

On the whole, sensing the criticality of the problem and potential risk of the situation that may spark ethnic violence, the President of India has deferred from passing this act to obviate any problem.¹³² Such an apparent discrimination against the tribals from acquiring their fair representation in the structure of the state system has only added more hatred against the Meiteis and fuelled instability. Even the central government mechanism seems to be powerless when it comes to intervening in such a situation. Following this, talks about peace and unity in the state have rather seem like a delusional topic justifiable only from the standpoint of one’s own specific community without a conglomerate agreement.

The gap of developmental disparity as a result of discrimination is also perceivable in the administrative field. Rocky and Kamei (2013) has compiled these facts in their study. In addition to the uneven representation in politics between the hill and valley, they argue:

“There is a complete imbalance in the field of administrative set-up and development between tribal areas and valley Districts of Manipur. For instances, there is one Block Development Office (BDO) for every 837 sq.kms and 160 sq.kms in hill areas and valley areas respectively; one Police Station for every 670 sq.kms and 90 sq.kms in hill and valley area respectively; and in case of healthcare services, there is one PHSC for every 85.48 sq.kms catering the needs of 3754 person in hill areas whereas the figure for valley area is 11 sq.kms and 6887 person” (p. 36).

Aside from concentrating all these development activities in the valley, the Meitei majority government has many a times set the breach of law by transcending the rights of the tribal communities through their violative policies. The government is yet to operationalise the policy

¹³² Ibid.,

of reservation and quota set for the tribals and revise them according to the upgraded census (2013: *ibid.*). Following a recent incident in 2016 in Manipur University, the All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM) and its allied tribal unions have strongly resented against the curtailment of reservation by the state for not fulfilling the directory of the Central Educational Institutional Amendment Act, 2012 which gives the right of reservation of 31% for the ST.

Furthering it has also been found in the study conducted by Manipur University Tribal Student Union (MUTSU) in 2014 that “there are no STs amongst the 70-odd professors in the University. There are also no Associate Professors from ST out of the 40-odd Associate Professors in the University.¹³³ In practice, this kind of inconsistent policy of the state government base on their own discretion has put the tribals into a very inhibitive position detrimental to their development (*ibid.*). Adding to the woe, it is even found that the Governor of the State who is considered to the guardian of the tribal people has remained silent to comment on the reservation policy in the state since the Manipur Legislative Assembly in 1972 till date.¹³⁴ The domain of suppression upon the tribals also spread over unregulated impositions of unwanted legislations to diminish the structure of their age-old culture.

It is thus obvious that the state has always been more in favour of the majoritarian and it has equally failed to address the tribal plight on a fair trial. However, to term the ethnic situation as the sole justification for the government to let the minorities compromise their right may overtime compound the problem and lead to distort the status quo of peaceful existence as it is already happening. Provided at present where almost every public resource has become a competing site of multiple interest, assessing the position of identity in the power relations is viewed as not only crucial but inevitable to understand the whole process of social and cultural reproduction and that particularly in the modern age of mass literacy and education.

133 Aphun, K. (2016). Understanding Manipur University Fiasco: Tracing the Root Cause. *Imphal Free Press*. Available at: www.ifp.co.in/page/items/34992/understanding-manipur-university-fiascotracing-the-root-cause/
134 *Ibid.*,

II. Education as a site of Political and Ethnic Contestations

When it comes to educational initiatives that are intended to have beneficial impact on inter-group relations, a useful starting point is the recognition that one size never fits all. In some cases, one size fits no one” (Bush and Saltarelli 2000. p, 25).

In Manipur, the system of education is deliberately politicised and ethnicised. The system is corrupted and dwells on money and power rather than on maintaining equality and quality. Every community is engaged in projecting their significant interest rather than prioritising a collective goal and wellbeing. Since the Nagas, Kukis and the Meiteis are all engaged in the process of reviving their traditional cultural values with a hope to sustain them for the future generation and so this emphasis redirects them to contest for a suitable space in education. The political practice in the state is closely interlinked with ethnicity, the outcome from it has unconditionally implicated on all the systems of education. As beyond the general subjective matter of education, the lives of students are frequently affected by regular bandhs, strikes, and institutional shutdowns. In short, educational institutions and students have become more like a collective tool to for political and ideological resistance, a buffer zone between contesting parties to pressurise the government with their respective demands.

According to Smith (2003) “there are number of way in which state education system can add to tension or fuel conflict. These include system of governance, particularly as they relate to participation and policies on such things as the language of instruction, access, curriculum content, and pedagogy. It is necessary to ensure that the provision of education is consistent with human rights principles and practices” (Smith, 2003: 2). What we find lacking in Manipur currently by broadly considering education is the absence of a conducive, multicultural policy. While the whole north-eastern states including Manipur are raising hue and cry terming the negligence by the central government for development in their respective region.

A similar intention and retrospection is at least not found applied in dealing with the various forms of diversity and crisis prevailing in the state. There is an imbalance state of growth and development in the state which is one factor leading to conflict between the two sections (hill & valley) of the people. Amartya Sen (1999) in his book ‘Development as Freedom’ puts forwards

that, “It is important to support the effective functioning of democracy: formal rules are not enough without good democratic practice”.¹³⁵ Likewise, policy though much needed, the new change need to facilitate a practical multicultural policy, one which requires people to think out of the box, problematise the problem together and converge their interest in a democratically soluble term and condition.

a) Hill and valley disparity in education

In Manipur, the collective sense of oneness or unity among ethnic communities within the state as part of the state is still a difficult thing to comprehend. Therefore almost every social space has become a site of competing and contesting interest giving laspe to a multicultural policy. However, it is the voice and presence of the Meitei majority that has always seems to sustain decree over the wish and will of the tribals.

Education comparatively is maximally developed in the Meitei dominated valley area whereas the minority tribal areas are lagging behind by minimal educational development.¹³⁶ The concept of democratic approach towards education is out of question in the state and so inclusive participation considering the tribals is almost non-existent. The standard government school in tribal areas lack adequate infrastructure, facilities and faculties.¹³⁷ A study by Kengoo (2012) suggests that in 2005, out of the total 57 colleges in Manipur only 16 colleges are located in the five tribal districts whereas 41 colleges are located in Meitei dominated valley districts. This specification is made clearer by Raile and Kamei (2013) as their study highlighted the bias attitude and the unparallel projection of the State towards the development of the valley areas. Their finding report is as follows:

135 Amartya Sen (1999). *Development as freedom*-Amartya Sen. Oxford University Press. A book review by [Danny Yee](http://dannyreviews.com/). (2003). Available at <http://dannyreviews.com/> (para 11).

136 Kengoo, K. S. (2012). Education System in Manipur: a Comparison between the Tribes and Non-Tribes. Available at www.nagajournal.com/articles/education-system-in-manipur-a-comparison-between-the-tribes-and-non-tribes/

137 Kengoo, K. S. (2009). Education and Conflict: A perspective of Manipur. *Journal of the Anthropological Society*. Volume 44 Number 3 November. (pp. 299-306).

“All important infrastructure and facilities in the state are located in the Imphal valley; tribals have limited access to them. For example, Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Development, Central Agriculture University, Government Polytechnic, Indian Council of Agriculture Research, Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Science, Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, Manipur Institute of Technology, Manipur Central University, Multi Stadia Complex, National Institute of Technology, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Rice Research Centre, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Institute, Soil-Testing laboratory, Sports Authority of India and State Institute of Rural Development are all located in Imphal” (Raile and Kamei, 2013: 35)

In the name of development, what we see from this is a highly preferential treatment towards the valley areas. The lack of access to quality education and availability of vocational institutions in the hill areas has coerced many students to drop out of school before acquiring any meaningful education qualification (Sharma, 2016: 3). The majority and minority complex is nurtured because of the non-inclusive development policy which is also driving many into unemployment and promoting disenchantment among the tribals.

Policy makers and people in the board of development never seem to be bothered by the fact that such an attitude of one sided concentration can only lead to division, alienation and convey a sense of hegemony. The so called progressive system of education and its policy has prevented and distanced the tribals from its full potential participation. While it makes sense that some of the departments are located in the capital Imphal valley, nevertheless this does not explain why almost all of them need to be concentrated in the valley. Looking from this perspective, the development model and policy of the state lacks contextual understanding of the hill region and its people. The top down approach of development does not necessarily mean that all the state infrastructural capital and other center of social and political importance is located solely in the capital city. On the contrary, it is quite obvious the Meiteis who are strategically located in the middle of the state has taken the big advantage knowing the disunity embedded between the Nagas and the Kukis. Such an unfair manner of development without a democratic policy has only widened the rift between the hill and valley divide not only imminent but inevitable.

b) Corruption in recruitment of teacher

Recruitment of government teachers is another area that continues to be guided by partiality in favor of the Meiteis. Following a source from Naga Youth Front (2010), it states that, in recent recruitment of teachers under the district council of the hills, out of the 1600 vacant posts that were reserved for the tribals 552 posts were appropriated and given to the Meiteis.¹³⁸ The method of gaining the ticket for selection to the teacher's post however is commonly known to be decided by the political leaders and bureaucrats depending on the cash offers of the candidates. This clearly explains why many unqualified teachers are gaining entry into this prestigious profession fostering the future careers of the students in jeopardy. Further owing to the lax system of government regulation, there are regular teacher absenteeism and proxy teachers provoking a massive quality concern in education.

The practice of bribery for job however is not limited to the education sector alone but is prevalent in almost every government department. Building on this fact, Singh (2011: 12) reports that, the average rates for various posts are decided in the backstage and normally range between 3-4 lakh for primary teacher, Rs 10-15 lakh for a sub-inspector in police and 15-25 lakh for even more in the case of other higher state civil services post. Recently an ultimatum was served by a collaboration of some Naga and Kuki student associations through a press release addressed to the Chief Minister and Education Minister for implementing the recruitment of 42 lecturer posts for nine tribal languages (MIL) in compliance with the cabinet ordinance on 12th March, 2018. Despite of this, the state government issued a notification for a number of lecturer posts, but in a great injustice to the tribal students as tribal language lecturer posts were excluded. Agitated by the prolonged delay and exclusion with no action taken so far, it has threatened the government with an indefinite bandh in the state. In this regard, it also demands and serves notice to the government to conduct the recruitment based on strict norm that is laid down as per the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) 2014.¹³⁹

138 Webcasted on 02 June 2010, at www.nagalimvoice.com.

139 Joint Media Communique, Imphal, the 4th July, 2018. Subject: Indefinite state-wide bandh starting from 6th July, 2018. A joint notification served by Liangmei Naga Katimai Ruangdi (LNKR), Thadou Students' Association (TSA), Rongmei Naga Students' Organisation, North East India (RNSO-NEI)

But interestingly for all the plight of the public in general due to this corrupt practice, the cycle of blame game from bottom to the surface continue to seem as if it is the answer to everything. For instance, the students blame teachers, in return teachers put their blame on the education department, likewise, the sequel continues with the later blaming the ministers and so on and so forth without any pertinent change. Moreover, concerning the prevailing problem of education in the state, it is not just the majority who are perpetrating exploitation on the tribals. The tribals who have most of the time stood for social unity to fight against the dominant trait of the society are also majorly responsible for intensifying the problem faced by them due to the narrow politics and profit mentality informed by their own people in power.

The concept of inclusion and exclusion in this context seem to have only evolved with more shades of colour. This is evident from the trending nature of politics in the state amongst the tribals especially in the context of the Nagas. The power perspective is reverted with a similar oppressive style by tribal elites. Having internalised the power structure as to put it in a Freirean language, the former oppressed emulate the style of the oppressor and thus become the prescriptor rather than a liberator of their people which again tantamount to subjection in vain. To sum up this understanding with an example, intra-tribe preference and nepotism based on corruption and bribery are still pervasive in employment related matters and other benefits related to various social schemes. Certain social or tribal groups are able to get the merit of better access at the expense of the other.

c) Problem of insurgency in Education

Next, is the problem of insurgency, the intervention of insurgents in the field of education is a massive factor that continues to cause barrier to the efficient development of education in the state. It is said that more than 40 insurgent groups and 350 Indian military stations are currently operating in the state¹⁴⁰ Manipur has literally become a battle ground where no sphere of life is

140 More than 40 insurgent groups operating in Manipur: Deputy CM.TOI updated Oct. 19, 2015.
https://www.google.co.in/amp/s/m.timesofindia.com/city/guwahati/More-than-40-insugent-groups-operating-in-Manipur-Deputy-CM/amp_articleshow/49457845.cms
See also, Education in the midst of violent conflict in Nagaland and Manipur. An exploratory study conducted by Aman Trust, New Delhi. p. 54

left unaffected. Decades of militarisation in the region has massively disrupted the normal functioning of the education system. This problem is further aggravated by the unquestionable amount of powers that is allotted to the security forces as regular frisking of local people including students for interrogation based on suspicious ground are not uncommon.¹⁴¹ Daily psychological fear and inhibition caused by mob violence, hartals, school shutdowns, gun fires, and kidnaps, etc. continues to be the routine part of life. In Manipur, various insurgent groups maintain their power almost like a parallel government especially in their area of control. Taxes are collected from the government employees and educational institutions on a regular basis. The Meitei militant groups for an example are involved in regulating the school examination system in the valley as a watchdog with a term to efface corruption in the education system as the past incidents have noticed several unfair means where parents, teachers, and relatives are involved in helping the students illegally.

A faction of militant group by name of KYKL (Kanglei Yaol Kanba Lup) as for a specific example on 27th February, 2006 served a statement to any misfit that try to defy the examination code of conduct or any obstruction during the examination with a staunch warning of debarment from appearing in exam for five years to capital punishment in the extreme case. The same militant group also conducted review and search for teachers appointed on corrupt basis and those individuals who were involved in holding more than one government post using fake identities. In the worst cases those individual found guilty in the radar of their justice were shot in the leg or in a more lenient way forced to retire (Kengoo, 2009: 13-14). The faction of KYKL has also been very adamant in imposing the use of Meitei Meyek in the state and especially in the valley areas. Often it passes stricture for the use of Meitei Meyek (Meitei Language) in schools, television, newspapers, government offices, and even on every vehicle license plate. In Manipur, a ban is also imposed on Hindi commercials and films as a sign of resistance against what they called “India’s cultural invasion” since 2000 by its various militant outfits.¹⁴² In 2014 when the movie “Mary Kom” was released, the movie was banned from broadcast in the Imphal valley. It may however be important to note that, even the Naga insurgents in the hill districts

141 Kashani, S, Kanth I, and Fazili G, ‘The Impact of Violence on the Student Community in Kashmir’, for Oxfam (India) Trust, New Delhi; under The Violence Mitigation and Amelioration Project, (2003).

142 Singh, N. I. (6th Sept. 2014). Manipur: Why should we lose out? Home state misses biopic. The Telegraph. Available at https://www.telegraphindia.com/1140906/jsp/northeast/story_18806122.jsp

have recurrently put a ban against Manipuri cinema, cassettes, and other Meitei products from flourishing in the hill depending on their political relationship. On the other hand, some civil society organisations have often rebuked the involvement of the insurgents demanding non interference at least in educational matters. Nevertheless, there continues to be intermittent activities of various militant outfits pervasive in various spheres of daily social life.

Of late, a coincidence during the fieldwork on 6th February, 2018, Christian schools across Imphal valley remained closed for several days due to threat received from Meitei insurgent groups to shut down. According to a priest who is also the principal of one senior secondary school in Imphal,

“Certain uncensored threats like this one are not to be taken likely as there have been enough instances in the past where school authorities were shot and killed”.

Although the priest hesitated and declined to share more information which is understandable considering all the vulnerabilities that looms large, but at one point during our conversation he mentioned that,

“The Meitei militants don’t want the missionaries to carry out their activities in the valley and that is mainly the reason behind why they have thrown several false allegation against us”.

Again on my question about the responsibility of the government in such matters, the priest reiterates,

“Despite of the security assurance of the government, the question is how long until the matter is resolved with a clear understanding, till then, the apprehension of the teachers and students cannot be called off. One need to be very careful as the whole situation is like a tightrope walk where you cannot be simply taken away with confidence by the mere approval of the government”.

Evident as it is from above, the role of insurgents is ubiquitous but their presence is a direct question to the credibility of the state government considering the synonymous role play of their constitutional duty by the insurgent groups.

A similar disclosure regarding the activity of the insurgents among the Nagas emerged during one of my discussion with the Principal of Saklim School in Senapati district. As an experienced individual in the field of education who also served as the former President of the All Private Schools' Association Senapati. He declares that the excessive intervention of the insurgent groups in educational not an exaggeration. In most cases, the school authorities are not allowed enough liberty to negotiate their concern. Schools and students become the soft target and an extra layer of security based on which to enforce their petty agenda. For any problem that has to do with the insurgent groups, it has become a common trend to entrust the students on the frontline in the mass protest by disrupting the normal functioning of school. Several rounds of financial demands by different factions of insurgents to schools and other institutions is a rampant phenomenon. Discussion with the principal also revealed that some teachers are prompted by the insurgent leaders to corrupt resources who are later protected by them. This has a huge negative impact especially towards government schools in the hill areas as those teachers using the safety net of the insurgents and local politicians are later the one who neglect their duties towards education.

Elaborating further this point is the territorial contest among different factions of insurgents to increase their area of dominance basically to raise fund for sustaining the organisation. But the pursuit for power and money is a concurring practice even within various sub-divisions of the same faction. An example to this is once again narrated by the principal, as during a particular period of the year in 2006, a circulation was served to all the schools in Senapati district to comply with the tax demand in the name of National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak, Muivah (NSCN-IM). However, on a resentful note, members of the All Private School Association Senapati' (APSAS) travelled to Dimapur (Nagaland) to convey their grievances to the education Kilonser (equivalent to Minister) of the NSCN-IM. Thereafter, the matter was clarified that the order was not issued from the central administration of the organisation but by its regional division. The following year in 2007, a similar order of demand of fifty thousand rupees from every private school in the district was called by cadres of the National Socialist Council of

Nagaland – Khaplang (NSCN-K).¹⁴³ However, in almost the same twist, the demand was rejected as bogus on further enquiry as it did not bear any official head-letter from the principal organisation of the outfit.

All these activities of the various insurgency groups simply sum up to clarify the due constraint on the education system. In many cases schools in the hill districts are bound to pay several illegal taxes to the insurgents as they are overwhelmed by the authority of their threat. Moreover, as every insurgent group represents an ethnic identity, their ideology and style of operation are constantly focussed towards demarcating and enforcing their own culture and power within the specified territory of their control. Overall, it can be divulged that boundary is a very crucial factor that is always present whether directly or indirectly not just in the civilian movement but also amongst the various insurgents. There is also a heightened chance to aggravate cultural intolerance under the lead of the insurgence because of their rigorous adherence and competition to control the cultural, economic, and political system of the state. And from this point, it is also apparent that school is singly one of the most crucial entities which are targeted by various insurgency groups as part of their funding and to mobilise their movement.

IV. Curriculum and Linguistic dominance in education

According to Staurt Hall *“We all want to do the very best for our children. But what is education if it is not the process by which society inculcates its norms, standards, and values—in short, its “culture”—into the next generation in the hope and expectation that, in this way, it will broadly guide, channel, influence and shape the actions and beliefs of future generations in line with the values and norms of its parents and the prevailing value-system of society”* (Cited in Giroux, H. A. 2010:157).

Education in a particular society reflects the major aspect of the social and cultural relationship that is embedded within that society. But it is there within education that curriculum plays a vital role in addressing and balancing the nuances of the society. The formulation of curriculum bears

¹⁴³ NSCN-IM and NSCN-K are two Naga insurgent outfits that have been fighting for the political sovereignty of Nagaland.

a direct effect in the domain of cultural expression, representation, social control and dissemination of cultural knowledge. Ideally speaking, curriculum reflects the conjoined interest of the society and exemplifies social harmony. Building a curriculum therefore requires a profound attention and collaborative effort so that it does not give rise to any undesirable predominance other than equality based on social justice.

Acknowledging the pluralistic nature of the country, the education system in India gives right beyond the individual to every social group to coexist and flourish. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 throws important guidelines to strengthen and nurture the cultural heritage and identity of every social group in the interest of the larger national identity. According to (NCF, 2005: 2), “Education must be able to promote values that foster peace, humaneness, and tolerance in a multicultural society”. Likewise, it informs the educational agencies to develop and implement locale-specific programmes and contents by contextualising the regional needs based on secular values. Most importantly, it calls for the devolution of roles and responsibility among educational stakeholders to identify new areas of attention in the preparation of textbooks keeping in line with the pluralistic context of the society (NCF, 2005: 3).

Based on this derivation, the most practical way to go about for system of education in a state like Manipur clearly is to give importance to the values of diversity as assigned above. In short, a multicultural educational curriculum that best incorporates the cultural interest of every community in the region besides the common core of the national cultural heritage. While we discuss education and curriculum, a basic question may be considered as to how the education system in Manipur is catering to the interests of its diverse population. Answer to this kind of question may keep altering its form with time as part of the developmental discourse. However, on a more certain and specific note, the education system in Manipur has always given more privilege to the Meitei communities. In other words, equality in the inputs and outputs of education has never really favored the tribals at par with the Meiteis. Going beyond the material dimensions, the ideological hegemony propagated by the Meiteis in the field of education continues to serve a major concern particularly for the Nagas. This is even when the Nagas does not pose any objection to the promotion of Meitei script and history in educational curriculum they have been denied equal opportunity in return.

Writing about potential outcome from such a scenario, Smith (1998) has very aptly articulated it as follows,

“if at some initial point acculturation did not occur because the advantaged group would not permit it, at a later time acculturation may be inhibited by the desires of the disadvantaged group for independence from a situation increasingly regarded as oppressive. This accounts for the cultural ‘rebirths’ so characteristic of societies undergoing nationalistic ferment. It is not that these groups actually uncover evidence of their ancient cultural past as an independent people; most often such culture is created contemporaneously to legitimate demands for the present-day goal of independence, or the achievement of economic equality” (Smith,1998: 50-60).

Thus, the discontentment arising from the unwilful acceptance of the Meiteis to incorporate or acculturate minority culture in the mainstream state education system has incited the tribals to develop a sectarian aspiration and demand for separate administration of education and affiliations.

a) Language imbroglio: Nagas in Manipur sought for affiliation to Nagaland Board

Cultural and linguistic domination of the Meiteis over the tribals in Manipur is not a nascent phenomenon. It has already been an issue ever since the creation of the state in 1972. Officially the issue ranging over language in the state first erupted in the 1980s when the state government tried to make Meitei language as a compulsory subject in class X (Haokip, P. 2011: 80). However, this was later settled to make the Meitei language as an alternative for the tribal students in lieu of additional english or those few tribal languages that has been recognised by the state. The issue of textbook curriculum to be specific in this regard came a little while after the linguistic concern was first raised. However, the two cannot be categorised or viewed as

separately because the so called Manipuri textbook prescribed for schools in the state has no components of tribal culture and history leaving aside their language which is foreign to them.

The second innings of the Meitei language campaign and subsequent problem between the minority and majority erupted with the successful insertion of the Meitei script in the Eighth Schedule in 1992 (ibid. 81). What followed later was a grievous problem as the UPSC for an instance tried to impose Manipuri language as a compulsory paper in civil service (mains) examination for the all candidate hailing from the state (Horam, R. 2015: 82). Yet again, this was interrupted by Gauhati High Court to exempt the tribals from writing in Meitei Language (ibid.). From a readers perspective this is a clear sign to indicate the attitude of the Meiteis as well as the central government towards the tribals that tries to symbolically suppress them as their subject rather than consider them as their equals. Simultaneously, this situation can also be understood as a complete disregard to the cultural context of the tribal society and a test to their temperament or a pilot study to the feasibility of the dominion state project.

Despite of all the grievances and resentment among the tribals because of the imposition of Meitei culture in education, ignoring the rights of the tribals and subduing their interest through forceful legitimisation has become a perpetual phenomenon in the state. Furthering the overwhelming Meitei dominant state government through its cabinet decision in 2005 yet again went further to make Meitei Meyek (Meitei Script) as a compulsory subject in the state board. But in the same vein for such an unbearable stricture, the Nagas made a counter-move under the lead of its various student and civil society organisations to affiliate all the private schools in the four Naga dominated hill districts of Manipur to Nagaland Board. Subsequently, in its protest against the state organised by Naga Private Schools Forum, Naga Students Federation, and ANSAM, their placards reads: *“We respect Meitei’s history, please respect our history too”, “Nagas want to study common syllabus” “Give us freedom to decide our future”*.¹⁴⁴ By June 2006, all the private schools in the four hill districts were fully affiliated to Nagaland board without the consent of the Manipur government. Across the four hill districts BSEM textbooks were set ablaze openly as a mark of resentment against Meitei chauvinism.

144 Students rally in Naga dominated districts to break away from BSEM. (2006, Aug. 26th) at *NSCN Online*. Available at <https://nscn.livejournal.com/274036.html>

On its defence, the Naga community through its various apex bodies such as the Naga Student Federation (NSF), Naga Hoho, United Naga Council, (UNC) and ANSAM, etc. forwarded several rationales for their affiliation to NBSE, some of which are as given below:

1. That the state government and its linguistic policy not being serious enough to address the concerns and aspirations of the tribal linguistic minorities in the state by imposing Meitei language in the school education.¹⁴⁵

2. That there has been an exclusion of Naga history in school textbooks and that the few portions that are there are highly distorted and misrepresentative of Naga history, culture and its people.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, the content and language of the textbooks are filled with political overtones to undermine the Naga nationality and glorify Meitei kingdom.

3. That the imposition of Meitei Phanek (wraparound) dress code on all college girls in the Imphal valley and exclusion of the culture, literature, history and contribution of the tribals in the textbooks as not acceptable.¹⁴⁷ Such ethnic indoctrination was tantamount to an insidious form of ethnic cleansing which cannot be tolerated.¹⁴⁸

4. Last but not the least, the Nagas also questioned the bar placed on private schools in the state from seeking affiliation to CBSE or ISCE and deemed it as an imposition of valley community's will over the tribals.

Despite of this strong uproar by the Nagas, the state government and the education department did not budge a bit to affirm any part of the problem as a result of their shortcoming. Instead the then Chief Minister Ibobi Singh government firmly maintained its ground and alleged the whole situation as a plot set by the NSCN-IM in its endeavour for greater Nagaland movement.¹⁴⁹ In just the same manner, the BSEM and COHSEM also sent across a steadfast warning to all the

145 Support Affiliation of Schools to NBSE. (2006, Aug, 13th). *NSCN Online*. Available at <https://nscn.livejournal.com/259636.html>

146 Ibid.,

147 Naga private schools fuel book row. (2006, Aug, 18th). *NSCN Online*. Available at <https://nscn.livejournal.com/266225.html>

¹⁴⁸ Student rally for Naga Syllabus. (2006, Aug, 27th) *NSCN Online* Available at <https://nscn.livejournal.com/273228.html>

149 Valley bodies urged not to interfere in affiliation process. (2006, July, 27th). *The Sangai Express*. Available at <https://nscn.livejournal.com/249510.html>

private schools in the hill districts to be de-recognised if they consider affiliating to Nagaland Board. Furthermore, it threatened that the state government would not recognise the pass certificates of the students issued under such circumstances. While the first batch of Naga students from Manipur numbering about 3665 students appeared their class X exam under Nagaland board in 2007.¹⁵⁰ The matter was soon resolved with the intervention of external central and regional agencies that no state would be allowed to interfere in the internal jurisdiction of another state.

For most of the communities other than the Nagas, the whole problem surrounding the agitations against the state government is seen as directed towards attaining their political goal of territorial integration other than their actual campaign against the intrinsic problem in the state education system. The Kukis on their part has clearly remained more or less a silent spectator favouring the Meiteis during the whole episode despite of being faced with a similar discrimination. As another group of minority having overlapping territorial conflict with the Nagas, it is a matter of certainty for them to be gripped with insecurity as their solidarity with the Nagas could mean compromising with their own interests.

Contending against the Nagas move for affiliation, Dr. TS Gangte a Kuki Scholar, argues that the demand of the Nagas was a result of some few vested interests and that it would never materialise. Further he also purports that the syllabus prescribed by BSEM was in no way lesser than any other boards in the country whereas it points out that Nagaland state does not even have a literature of its own.¹⁵¹ But, for the critic himself, his viewpoint is far too much deviated from the central theme of the discussion as he does not argue against the fact that the Kuki culture are represented far lesser than the Nagas in the school textbooks. Added to this, he for one does not seem to be much bothered by the impact of language imposition on the tribal communities or that he is more insecure if the cause of the Nagas is fulfilled.

150 3665 State student enrol to NBSE. *E-PAO*. Available at www.e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=1..51106.nov06

151 Singh, A. K. (2016). Reviewing Unification Politics of Manipur naga Through Ethnicisation of Education (2006-2008). Available at www.imphaltimes.com/it-articles/item/7424-reviewing-unification-politics-of-manipur-nagas-through-ethnicisation-of-education-2006-2008

Discussion with the former General Secretary of Kuki Students Organisation, Mr. Lamcha Chongloi carries a brief reflection to this point. He opines that, “the call for affiliation to Nagaland Board was certainly an application set by the NSCN-IM. However, the move by the Nagas in this regard served a very important lesson to the Meiteis because of their monopolistic attitude”.¹⁵² As mentioned, there is no doubt that the Kukis too are very much affected by the discrimination of the Meiteis just as much as the Nagas. Nevertheless, to the point whether the Naga movement for affiliation has really taught the Meiteis the needed lesson may need a deeper analysis by keeping track of the developmental discourse in education till hitherto.

According to Amar Yumnam, an eminent Meitei economist from Manipur following his article entitled “*Syllabus of another State: Cons yes, pros not sure*” in the editorial page of *The Sangai Express*, dated, 28th, June, 2006, “the Naga call for affiliation has nothing to do with education. It all comes in a context wherein it is being proposed as a means to sharpen the political mobilisation and has nothing to do with strengthening the education scenario”. Such is the attitude and perception of the Meitei majority by taking advantage over the disunity between the Nagas and the Kukis that they have deliberately failed to appreciate the problem and prospect of the current situation.

On a rather optimistic note, Pradip Phanjoubam (2007) another Meitei scholar put his point across quite differently. For him, as he advised, the Nagas call for school affiliation could be seen as the beginning of the kind of “new imagining” and as he puts it a “non-territorial imagining” (p. 186). However, the suggestion given by the author about “new imagining” may or may not be very realistic. However, the point is considering the global situation of the 21st century, schools in any part of the country can affiliate to another board without any issue, just as the affiliation of schools to CBSE is a common thing. Then why does the state government of Manipur have to be fearful about inhibiting the wish of the Nagas to affiliate to Nagaland board? Thus rather than seeing the whole situation as a problem gripped with scepticism, the focus in such an ideal situation should be to retrospect the probable improvement that can be made by contextualising the nitty-gritty of the prevailing educational system that is causing people to dissociate further.

152 Interview with Mr. Chongloi was held at Senapati district court complex, near post office on 2nd March, 2018.

Overall, the worst side effect of the whole language and curriculum row had its toll on the student communities. This point is clarified by a principal of a school (incognito) in Senapati district who also served as the former President of the All Private Schools Association Senapati (APSAS).¹⁵³ According to him, the whole transition happened too suddenly and there was not enough time both for the teachers as well as the students to prepare for the examinations. The syllabus and the pattern of exam were altogether very different and the students were too hard-pressed psychologically and mentally. The students were also faced with numerous other problems ranging from food, lodging, to improper accommodation and long travel distance to the examination center, etc. Thereafter, the results, of the students were low beyond expectation and many students including those from his school failed. And those who managed to pass the examination could not get admission into the college of their choice because of their low percentage. In short many good careers were lost because of this incident. But of all the most remarkable gesture at least from the Manipur state government after the whole board issue was that it allowed the students to take the compartmental exam in the state.

b) Education in the State after 2007

It is hard to say that there really have been any phenomenal changes in the field of education in the state after the post 2007 education board imbroglio. There are reports in numerous documents and different news sources that openly exclaim that Meitei Meyek (Meitei Script) is not imposed on the students in the state.¹⁵⁴ However, one is taken by surprise considering the fact that the whole school in the valley areas has the Meiteilon as compulsory subject for all the students till up to class VIII. How then does one justify with any reason for such a claim when the whole issue in the state has majorly centered on this topic. My discussion with the present Secretary of the Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur firmly asserts that the state is following the guidelines as per the National Curriculum Framework 2005 in the formulation of

153 Incognito, Interviewed with a Principal of a private school in Senapati district 29th Feb.2018

154 State's tough posture on text books rule. (n.d). *E-PAO*. Available at www.e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=3...060806.aug06

its textbooks and language approach in education. Here are some existing problems based on the derivation from NCF guidelines in relation to that of the actual practice in the field.

Firstly, Chapter one of the guideline talks about the devolution of decision making and participation among teachers, administrators, and other agencies in the design of syllabi and textbooks. But the reality in the field presents a completely different picture altogether. A close survey of the BSEM textbooks from class VIII to X has almost absolutely zero participants from the tribals. All the writers and participants in the review of textbooks are majorly Meiteis and non-tribals. Among the tribals, there is only one such individual, namely, Late Professor Gangumei Kamei whose name appear in the list of writers for Class IX and X Social Science textbooks. Now the question is how does evidence as this explain the case of democratic and decentralised participation in curriculum formulation if it follows the NCF guidelines? Forget about contributing in writing textbooks if the Nagas or the tribals are considered as not capable enough but to have absolutely no tribal participants even in the review panels is a surest sign of monopoly by the Meiteis.

Secondly, following the summary section of the NCF 2005, it suggests that “a renewed effort should be made to implement the three-language formula, emphasising the recognition of children's home language(s) or mother tongue(s) as the best medium of instruction (p. 127). The three-tier language system as per the National Policy of Language in education is namely: 1. English, 2. Hindi, 3. Mother tongue. A major question here is which language should be treated as a mother tongue for tribal children? Certainly the answer cannot be Meiteilon as they are not Meitei. Then, why are the tribal children made to forcefully learn Meitei language till up to class VIII in the valley areas? According to Horam (2015: 80) “this leads to studying another language which then becomes a four-tier language system (including mother tongue and Meiteilon)”. And whereas learning the Meiteilon (language) textbook prescribed by the board is one side of the problem, on the other side, the content of it remains concentrated only to Meitei culture and history thereby ignoring the tribals.

Third is the problem of misutilisation and misrepresentation of the term Manipuri. The term in its actual sense would mean a common reference for everyone belonging to Manipur. It is over exceedingly used in such a way as to suggest its equivalence solely with the Meitei identity.

Phanjoubam (2007) has forwarded a very relevant question in this regard as he asks: “why cannot the Manipuri Sahitya Sabha have a non-Meitei language section where literatures in these languages are sought to be developed?” To add to this question, currently the BSEM offers its students the following MIL subjects, namely, Mother tongue (any recognised tribal language), Elementary Manipuri, Elementary Hindi. The problem here is with elementary Manipuri, the use of the term “Manipuri” is not justifiable when the whole content of such a textbook ignores tribal culture and history as well as tribal participants in the formulation of the same. Pushing the topic further, the official recognition of the should be “Meiteilon” or “Meitei Meyek” as “Manipuri language” in the Eight schedule under the constitution of India is also problematic and oversimplified considering the diverse tribal languages in the state. The objection here is not against “Meitei Meyek” which has all the credentials to fit in the eight schedules as well as the official language of the state but the point is against the demeanour of the term which seem too overrepresented.

On his second question the author Panjoubham (2007) also asks, “Why cannot the “Manipuri” cuisine, as and when projected outside during cultural festival etc., include a meat category?” (p.202). Likewise another close example to this regard is the All Manipur Students’ Union (AMSU), an organisation which functions as one of the apex student bodies in the state but has no tribal students in the organisation. Therefore to label the organisation on its front as “Manipur” is not only deceptive but misleading unless it is made specific as Meitei. Ignoring the rights of the minorities and underestimating the reality of cultural and ethnic diversity in this manner can only be destructive to the peaceful coexistence of the state. Therefore, unless a more composite and a knowledgeable reference of the term “Manipuri” is made, it would simply mean in usurping the larger identity of Manipur by that of the Meitei identity as a subset altogether.

Another example to showcase the monopolistic domination of the Meiteis in the educational sector is the preoccupation of almost all the positions and portfolios in the education department by the Meiteis. To support the argument in this regard is from the latest profile of the Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur (COHSEM). After twenty years of existence from 1992-2017, the council has represented only two tribals, (one Kuki from 1992-1995 and one Naga from 2014-2016) for a very brief term to serve as the Chairman out of the total of sixteen

members so far who are all Meities.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, for the post of Secretary of the Council, out of the fourteen members who served in the position so far including the current one. There has been only one tribal, a Naga, to occupy the post to serve for 8 months and 11 days specifically.¹⁵⁶ In the same manner, the post of Controller of Examination of the council has so far had no representation from the tribals till date since its inception. All in all, the tribal representation in the educational administration both in the BSEM as well as the COHSEM has remained relatively miniscule. All the tribals currently serving in the two given education departments are none from the secretary level other than those few working as a section officer and clerks. Expressing its discontentment over the method of selection prevalent in the education department, the APSAS and ATSUM in its memorandum submitted to Chief Minister Ibobi Singh on 23rd March 2014 carries the following: “The government’s appointment of a retired police officer as chairman itself deserved to be condemned. Education is such a complicated issue that only experience educationist must occupy the hot seat of the Chairman and Secretary of BOSEM.”¹⁵⁷

The latest development in the field of education is the language imbroglio once again brought up by the BSEM in its attempt to scrape away additional English from the school curriculum starting from 2014. The whole objective of the move initiated by the education department in this regard has been to make Major Indian Language (MIL) a compulsory subject for all the students throughout the state. However, this raises several concerns for the tribals on numerous grounds. Firstly, the directory from the BSEM has clearly set the timeline for tribes without recognised languages to come up with their own literature within the span of two years.¹⁵⁸ This is nothing less than a blatant imposition equivalent to despotism on the part of the Meitei dominated government knowing it very well that the said task is impossible to be achieved in such a short period. Out of the current 33 tribal languages groups in the state, 18 languages are currently approved languages meaning at least with some literature already in use in school and college.¹⁵⁹

155 25 Years Silver Jubilee 1992-2017. Souvenir & Annual Report 2017. Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur. (p. 71-78)

156 Ibid., pp.79-85

157 Memorandum submitted to Shri O. Ibobi Singh on 23rd March, 2014. Submitted by All Private School Association, Senapati (APSAS) and All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM)

158 Memorandum submitted to the Chairman, Board of Secondary Education, Manipur on the 12th November 2014 by Hill Districts recognised Private School’s Association Manipur (HIDIPSAM)

159 Gangmei, R. (2017)

Even most of the tribes with approved languages are still in the process of developing their literature. As for instance, the Maram and Maring tribes have developed textbooks for children from class I to VIII in the year 2016 and efforts are underway to bring out textbooks for class IX and X.¹⁶⁰ Still the worst is in the case of those tribes who are unable to make any progress in the development of their own literature. Considering these factors as a ground reality, the current notification by the BSEM is nothing more than a harassment for the tribals as the mere absence of literature for every classes on their part would mean having to opt for Meitei language (MIL) or Hindi (MIL).

The question of language in school education and its consequent dialectics in Manipur has proven to be a long unsettling dispute between the tribals and the Meiteis. The enforcement of MIL subject and its subsequent attempt to do away with additional english has created a lot of disharmony and confusion particularly for the tribals. The COHSEM notification dated 25th May, 2016 redirects the whole school affiliated under its wing to strictly follow the stricture on MIL and write the names of institutions in Meitei Meyek. In response, the All Private Schools' Association Senapati (APSAS) express their most grievous concerns in the following manner:

*“That the Hill Private schools draw students from not less than 20 communities from all over the state coupled with students from neighbouring states like Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram etc. It is therefore impossible for a private school or even a government run school to appoint language teachers for all the languages and also for other states' language”.*¹⁶¹

It is hard to conceive any rationality in the policy and plans of the state government and its concern education department. For when the orders relating to the enforcement of MIL in education are passed from the Imphal valley, the least expected from the government by the general public is that it provides all the necessary support basically in the forms of language teachers and others for the advancement of children's learning. On the contrary, there are no adequate tribal language teachers for all the MIL subjects (mother tongue) even in the

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 66, 76

¹⁶¹ Application forwarded by All Private School Association Senapati (APSAS) to the Secretary Council of Higher Secondary Education, Manipur. Ref no. 01/APSAS/16. Dated 29/08/16

government schools in the capital Imphal. Forget about the private schools anywhere in the state under such a circumstance as to find teachers for every different tribal child in the school is impossible unless it restricts their admission policy to opt out tribal kids which again will be a mere violation of human right. But having said this, the government is well aware to abstain from exposing their hidden agendas too explicitly. The policy of their approach is to contain the Nagas (as almost all the Kukis have similar understandable language) especially by catering support from the Kukis and disintegrate them internally using every possible route to success.

Given this condition, if the government is still very much fascinated to mandate MIL subjects in the schools across the state, firstly it should be readily accountable to supply with sufficient language teachers for all the 33 tribal languages in the government schools to set an example. Based on this condition only should they be able to have their expectations on the tribals otherwise. It needs no substantiation to explain that the tribals are not one homogenous entity but the deliberate and impractical policy of the state government in this manner is a clear intention to create more disharmony and disjunction in the tribal society. To support this point with an example is the case of Don Bosco College Maram in Senapati district. According to a particular teacher from the high school section of the college, all the students in the school till up to class VIII are mandated to learn Maram language even if the students are non-Naga or are from other tribes of Naga. The rationale behind this is held by the President of Maram Student Union Mr. Livingstone who contends that mandating the language in school is necessary to promote the language of the people who belong to the region.¹⁶² But for all the dark side of the state language policy, this is exactly what the Meiteis want, to create destabilisation of the Naga identity by fostering tribalism among the Nagas.

Switching the standpoint of this argument by imagining that the Nagas are Meiteis and vice versa through the same dictative system, would they have not seen the whole situation as unwanted and oblivious to their cause? The whole answer to the politics of the Meiteis concerning the language issue lies in the ability of the Nagas to see the situation by adopting different perspectives to the problem. Overall, the price for ruthless and intermittent order of the government that overlooks the tribal contexts is borne by the tribal children as they are forced to

162 Interview with Mr. Livingstone (president of MKS-Maralui Karalimai Suijoikang) at his residence in Katomei village Senapati on 2nd Feb. 2018

learn the subject mostly on their own. In Senapati district for instance, the teachers for MIL (mother tongue) subjects were organised by respective community Church and youth organisation mostly on charity basis. Students from each respective tribe were given extra classes outside the school because it was not possible to do it in one go considering the diversity of the population. But for more reasons to the difficulty of the students, it posed the maximum challenge in transferring the lessons as the voluntary teachers were not trained.

Keeping track of all the developmental issues in education especially the linguistic ones, it is obvious that the state government is heavily reliant on it as a political tool to suppress the tribals. It is a means to dissuade the Nagas movement for a common administration from the best realm of their power position. The majority in the state however seem to keenly insinuate the idea of “state Integrity, and peaceful co-existence”, it has lagged behind in appealing for emotional integrity especially with the tribals. Thus the state administration is on its own defeating the very idea of the “*COMMON FUTURE*” of Manipur by denying the rights of the tribals.

c) Language and literature development among the Nagas

As far as language is concern it plays a very crucial role in identifying and connecting ourselves as similar and different, as insider and outsider. Language and culture encompasses everything in the lives of the community, they are their most emotional heritage. It is the repository of culture and history of the people based on which they derive their identity. Language is the most primary tool by which to conduct historical investigation and to make sense of the rich oral history. It is only through language that society can ensure the survival of their culture. In India, the importance of language especially that of the minorities is constitutionally recognised and the responsibility of it lie with the central as well as the state government. Article 29 of the constitution states that “Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same”. Likewise, article 350a and 350b of the constitution also assures the necessary protection for the safeguard of the linguistic minorities in the country.

Language for the Nagas like for many others is the epitome of their identity and culture because traditionally their history is based on oral source. It is in the traditional folksongs and folktales besides others where it resides the history and knowledge of the Nagas. Knowing the history by relating through these resources as a measure for construction of identity has become an extremely important duty for the Nagas. This is so, especially in the contemporary political scenario in a state like Manipur where every ethnic group are engaged in building the legitimisation of their identity. The discourse of knowledge emerging from this is later use in succouring the right of the people over resources and common cultural identification. The urge for protection and promotion of language and literature in a way is also influenced by social and environmental factors. The Meiteis who have rich written cultural history have been fostering their cultural revival in order to maintain the indigeneity of their identity. But for this very reason they have clearly taken advantage over the tribals by imbibing their culture in the educational curriculum for many decades. In return for the tribals particularly the Nagas, the need for cultural revivalism is not out of the sheer need to develop their literature and collate it in textbooks.

There are two important dimensions to understand the current urge for cultural development among the Nagas in this regard. Firstly, the history of the Nagas mostly for its many sub-tribes is in the peril of endangerment because of the lack of cultural knowledge and practice. There is already an ostensible amount of acculturation taking place with other dominant culture by missing the root of their history. Having said this also means that, the smaller tribes amongst the Nagas are being agglomerated with the cultural and linguistic identity of its larger tribes. The rediscovery of cultural knowledge among the Nagas also pose a difficult task even with the availability of oral resources due to challenges facing in deciphering the meaning of its language. Nevertheless, promoting the tribal culture in the form of literary documentation thus remains the only hopeful way out to halt the further degeneration of its culture. Overall the question facing the Nagas today is whether to discard traditional culture with knowledge or without knowledge. And clearly it is the former that they have taken note of by engaging in cultural revival and subsequent purification. Coming to the second point, promotion of Naga tribal literature at the mass level is also seen as a measure to rule out the dominance of Meitei culture in school education. It is a way to assert their identity as a unique culture and save to the generation from being bankrupt from cultural knowledge.

d) Challenges in the development of tribal literature

There are numerous challenges that the Nagas are faced with when it comes to developing their literature. Currently as mentioned there are 18 approved tribal languages by the state for introduction in the education system. The approval of languages for education well means that it should entail the allocation of funds in the state budget. But no fund is earmarked for tribal languages in the State education budget thus far.¹⁶³ This is why the tribal linguistic communities have remained disconnected with the state administration since the inception of the state till today. The safeguard of tribal linguistic minorities as enshrined in the constitution is clearly ignored by the state administration. And whereas the Majority Meiteis, whose language is included under the Eight Schedule find themselves suitable to criticise the government for not giving equal importance to their language.¹⁶⁴ In return they have bluntly failed to re-evaluate their own attitude towards the language of their tribal brethren. While the neighbouring states like Nagaland and Sikkim has adequately ensured to appoint at least 1 language officer, 1 assistant language officer, 1 office assistant for each approved language to work for the development of language and preparations of textbooks. And while there is a proper language policy that directs the state to allocate budget for each and every approved languages, on its part the state government of Manipur has forthrightly rejected any of these facilities to the tribals. Ragongning Gangmei (2017: iii) the serving President of tribal languages in Manipur in the opening of this book *“Rediscovery of Manipur”*, begins by questioning,

“Do the tribal people of Manipur have a place of PRIDE and HONOUR in the state they live concerning their languages which is their everything, their lives, identities and future?” Down in the same tone he also outrightly points out that, *“Animals are preserved and protected. But tribal languages are made endangered and are sooner vanishing from the soil of Manipur in absence of state patronage”* (ibid.,).

Despite of the repeated appeal by the council of tribal language committee to the state government, it did not agree on the part of financial allocation. Of late, a memorandum to the

163 Gangmei, R. (2017). p. 8

164 Singha, M.N. (2012). Manipuri Language in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution. *Pratidhwani-A Journal of Humanities and Social Science. Volume-I, Issue-II, October-2002* (p. 268)

new Chief Minister N. Biren Singh was submitted for the same reason in 2017 for allocation of the proposed budget of Rs. 3, 17, 88,000/- for the development of 33 tribal languages. But in response to this request for financial assistance the government sanctioned a sum of Rs. 6, 00,000 or Six Lakh for the 18 recognised languages.¹⁶⁵

Overall, the language development of the tribals thus far has been supplemented mainly based on meagre community resources and partial assistance from Tribal Research Institute (TRI). Now the bigger question in this juncture is how does the community go about supporting their own mother tongue education in the absence of state aid? How does the state want to achieve the goal of compulsory mother education in school without assisting any financial grants to the tribals for their development? Therefore, the need of the hour is to evolve a sound language policy so that every ethnic group can share the goal of a Common Future of Manipur.

¹⁶⁵ Government of Manipur Secretariat: Education (S) Department. Order by the Governor of Manipur, Imphal, 16, February, 2018. No.18/7/2016-SE(S)

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The study set out mainly to investigate education and the paradigm of its development by situating the Nagas in the context of a larger multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society in Manipur. In broad concept, the fundamental idea of education is that it is an utmost human right which is required for every individual to progress in the society. It is a value addition to human life and an important synergy to culture necessary for reproducing socio-cultural identity. Theoretically, education in brief is an ideological tool to perpetuate the sustenance of a cultural identity in the larger interest of the society.

It is argued that education as a concept has the dual liability to turn for and against the society depending on the way in which it is projected. This is to say that education is not a value-free concept but inclined to incorporate and react to every changing situation considering the action laid by those who manoeuvre it. A manipulative education system can lead to a dominant display of hegemony by a particular group of people which may later incite contestation and discord among the masses whose rights are being suppressed. The tendency of this phenomenon is particularly strong and imminent in a multiethnic and multicultural society when the policy in education is not complementary with an efficient democratic practice.

By considering this general understanding about education, the study brings to fore the brief history of socio-cultural transformation among the Nagas in Manipur and the role that education played there within. It then discussed the reason for problems persisting in the present educational system of Manipur. The aim is to understand how education is catering to the idea of diversity in a multi-ethnic society. To understand this, it takes note of how the broad socio-political relationship amongst different ethnic groups has its effect on the collective participation in education. From this point, the study examines how education is more than an agent of change and becomes a privilege for some and subjection for others as a result of the politics of multiple identity. Basically, the idea here draws the line between the tribal minorities mainly the Nagas and the Kukis and the Meitei majority in the control of knowledge production in education. Following this the study examines the discourse of contestation in the field of education between

ethnic communities over equality in sharing of resources, opportunities, rights and representation.

The study began by contextualising the Nagas in the backdrop of its socio-cultural change by sharing a brief historical perspective. This is to expose an aspect of the problem that has manifested its effect as fallout in the contemporary educational system. The Naga society has undergone a tremendous extent of change through forces acting both from outside and inside. The study shows how the social and cultural transformation among the Nagas largely began with its encounter with the colonial forces. The presence of the westerners set the beginning of the whole new structural change of the traditional system and the demeanour of the Naga outlook. While on one hand it led to extensive manipulation of traditional culture in a negative spotlight and projection of western values as a superior and ideal one. On the other hand, it brought about certain reform that were prevalent as irrational practices in the Naga society and encouraged them to modernity from their otherwise backward state.

The exposure of the Nagas to western education for one thing did not just end in serving the colonial purpose alone. The impact of it in fact yielded in introducing a new favour of aspiration and ethnic consciousness in the construction of their identity. The consolidation of Pan-Naga identity was in a way made much easier and widespread because of Christianity and western education. The growth of intellectuals among the Nagas through western education proved a major impetus in their pursuit for distinct political identity and demand for separate administration.

Culturally, though the initial orientation was highly directed towards following the ideals laid down by western values at the cost of annihilating their own culture. Eventually, this was realised that culture more than anything permeates the utmost value in cementing the bond of relationship among the Nagas which is required for pursuing their political goal. The early educated Nagas were in this regard instrumental in reconceptualising the importance of cultural history for their identity as well as for the emotional integration of the Nagas. Following this path, at present the new generations of Nagas seem to have at least imbibed a higher appreciation of culture not just for the expressions of their daily identity but also within the context of the larger geopolitical situation.

The study has also shown that the political movement among the Nagas is side by side accompanied with cultural revivalism. For the Nagas, the prime focus of their movement is aimed at achieving the territorial integration of all the Naga hill areas under one separate administration. Yet, the bigger challenge to this task lies in the intersecting understanding of territory and counter claim posited by the Kukis and the Meiteis. The discord arising from territorial issue has further implicated the growth of ethnic based insurgency groups to defend the cause of their disputed territorial boundary.

Every ethnic community has meanwhile developed a tendency to give colonial reference to assert their indigeneity add along with their traditional worldview of their rights over the land. This perspective is held by Vanhanen, (2014), who states that, “ethnic conflict belongs to the legacy of colonialism” (p. 144). This view can be held as valid in the context of Manipur at least from two perspectives. Firstly, the introduction of new religion, namely, Christianity; and Hinduism in the region lead to gradual distancing among the native and added mutual distrust among each other. Secondly, the present territorial issue and confusion has its root largely in the colonial system that segregated the people and region based on their petty administrative convenience. The complexity of the existing problem over territorial control and ownership is such that none of the ethnic groups are willing to budge an inch from their own directed standpoint of claim. The Nagas who proclaim their authority over the major part of the hill areas exercise their power to pressure the state government utilising their territorial advantage. The Meiteis likewise having the control over the state political administration play their part to counteract to the situation. The whole problem in this manner has rather become a preposterous situation with no sign of progress as the issue is extremely entangled. However, the fierce contest over territory and political representation continue to be seen by all the ethnic communities as the only legitimate solution to their problem.

This study has firmly argued that territory is regarded by all the ethnic communities as an important part of their culture. It is within territory that the lived reality of people takes place and history inherited. Therefore it is always associated with memory and prestige that needs to be protected. Among the Nagas, this is evidently expressed in their present practice of cultural territorialisation and revivalism. The narrative of cultural oneness appears to be the key watchword in the ongoing process of their identity construction. Politically although the Naga

struggle has not resulted to their desired goal nevertheless this has not inhibited them to take measures in solidifying their identity through culture.

This we see is reinforced by promoting a comprehensive performance of cultural identity through the promotions of cultural festivals like “Lui Ngai Ni” strategically across the Naga inhabited districts in the state. This is a new way in which the present Nagas are engaged in capitalising on culture to recast their identity and articulate their distinct but commonly accepted heritage of the Naga culture. The performance of traditional culture for the Nagas however is not aimed at reviving the age-old culture in toto. Socalled purification of culture in this regard is ongoing and held synonymously through authentication in terms of its original history and reappropriation of the same in the relevant modern context. An event like this however, is embedded with larger political overtones. The emphasis on cultural unity is implicitly a way of asserting the Naga rights over their ethno-cultural boundary.

This study confirms that the present problem persisting in education in Manipur is largely due to identity contestation over territorial and political control. The Nagas, the Kukis and the Meiteis are interest groups with relative resources in their disposition and at a loggerhead with each other. According to Esman (1975), “the proportion of conflict and cooperation depends on the resources at the disposition of each group. These resources are demographic (relative number); organisational (degree of mobilisation and capacity to put resources to political uses); economic (control of finance, means of production, or trade channels); technological (possession of modern skill); locational (control of natural resources and strategic territory); political (control or influence over the instrumentalities of the state); and ideological (the normative basis for group objectives)” (cited in Singha and Singh 2012: p. 10).

The insecurities arising from this control of resources have thus manipulated all the outreach of developmental activities in the state. Most of the developments related to education are initiated in the Imphal valley and the hill areas remain neglected. The politics of majoritarianism has clearly served the purpose of the Meitei majority however it has inhibited the potential development of the Nagas. The ethnic distrust accruing from this factor has lead to an irreconcilable relationship between the tribals and the Meiteis. The Nagas and the Meiteis largely perceive each other as a threat to their security. The advancement of political movement among

the Nagas is not wanting by the Meiteis. Conversely, the domineering attitude of the Meiteis over the tribals is equally unwanted to the Nagas. In its attempt to advance and elaborate their rights, the Meitei community has been recently seen demanding for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status and changes for implementation of law to change the pattern of landholding. The Nagas have been denied their genuine and proportionate political representation in the state legislative assembly. This way both the parties require the power base of each other in order to settle their respective issues, however, the challenge lies in neither wanting to give up their expedience.

In education, the imposition of Meitei centric cultural knowledge and language has caused a major distraught particularly among the Nagas. The concept of multicultural education though exists in theory with the policy that the state refers to has coherently failed in practice. The deliberate transcendence of the dominant Meiteis over the constitutional rights of the tribals such as reservation, land right, and financial assistance, etc., has made the Nagas feel like foreigners to assert their independence in their own place. We may recall, consensus and dissent are a healthy way to go about for a progressive society, but in the case of Manipur this is not tolerated especially by the Meiteis in the field of education.

Overall, education has remained one of the exclusive domains of the Meiteis, as they take control of all the inputs and outputs the administration. The policy adopted by the state government seems to lack the contextual understanding of the tribal society. For example, making the tribal mother tongue subject compulsory in school as part of the three language formula may be viewed as a successful step to equality. However, in practice, the Meitei dominant state government has not shown support in providing the tribal students with adequate language teachers which is hampering their studies. The imposition of language without teachers also indirectly bears its effect in segregating the students based on their ethnicity because it becomes hard for tribal students to study in the Imphal valley. Another major finding from this research is the structural exclusion of the tribals not just in the matter of educational content but also in terms of participation in curriculum formulation. Dwelling the politics based on cultural difference has lead to ethnic nepotism in accessing certain opportunities which later contribute to prejudices and stereotypes. The study also confirms that currently all the administrative positions at the secretariat level at least in BSEM and COHSEM are occupied only by the Meiteis except for some few tribals who are working in the sectional and clerical level.

In addition to this, the existing turmoil in education is further complicated by the insurgent groups as they raised illegal taxations and demands from the school to support their movement. Often the students and educational institutions are seen as soft targets by the insurgents in fostering their goal by letting them carry out strikes and hartals forcefully in disguise of public interest. The presence of insurgents is one factor that is accentuating division based on ethnic lines in the state because of their orthodox stance to impose their respective ethnic culture in education. Mention about this point is evident from the example of the KYYL Meitei based insurgent faction who is strongly adhering to impose Meitei Meyek (language) in school education across the state.

In a similar manner, the Naga insurgent groups in the hills have been firm in support for demand of separate administration. Additionally, the past instance has shown them rigorously campaigning for affiliation to Nagaland board. To sum up these varied developmental discourse in brief, it will be most apt to describe the current scenario of education in the state is highly politicised and ethnicised therefore has failed to cater to multi-cultural and multi-ethnic interest.

Overall, the current study highlights the intensity of the problem facing educational system due to ethnic politics between the tribals and the non-tribals. The effect of their social relationship has clear implication in policy formulation and implementation in education. This study suggests the need for strengthening the existing social relationship between the tribals and non-tribals and for which education may be deemed as the most important point to begin with. The findings also give insight about the greater need to evaluate the structural gap inhibiting the collective participation of the tribals.

This research also indicates the struggle by the tribal minorities against the mainstreamisation of education mainly due to the fear of their culture and language being corroded at the behest of Meitei dominant culture. Promotion of culture and language through literature serve the best hope for the survival of tribal culture and this study clearly exposes the apathy of the state government that has evidently undermined the tribal rights. Last but not the least, the findings from this study adds a perspective about the necessity of appealing for emotional integrity as a device for unity rather than relying on forceful campaign and ethnic dominance and patronage.

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