

Politics of the Tribals of Manipur: Layers of Exploitation and Development

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Declaration

This Dissertation entitled "**Politics of the Tribals of Manipur: Layers of Exploitation and Development**" submitted by **A.G. Samuel** for the Degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

I recommend that this Dissertation be placed before the Examiners for evaluation.


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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Tribals: Conceptual and Analytical Prelude

67.7 million (1991 Census) of the 220 or so million tribal people in the world live in India. That makes India a country with the largest tribal population.¹ Constituting 8.08 percent of the country's population, the tribal people are distributed among the 461 tribes, also known as the 'adivasis'. While the tribal people are popularly recognized as 'Adivasi', the translation of which reads 'residents from the beginning' or 'first people', official documents classify them as the "Scheduled Tribes" which term refers to the Schedule of the Indian Constitution under which they are listed. For the State or the bureaucracy, the term is purely a political and administrative term to denote a backward group outside the caste structure, thereby distinguished from the other backward group within the caste structure, namely the Scheduled Castes.²

The tribals are not evenly distributed all over the nation's landmass, but are mostly concentrated in the hilly and forested regions of the country. They can be divided into two categories: (1) the frontier tribes and the (2) non-frontier tribes.³ The frontier tribes are those that inhabit the northeastern States of India, also known as the 'Seven Sisters': Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The non-frontier tribes are distributed over most of the States, though they are concentrated in large numbers in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttaranchal, Chattisgarh, Bihar, Gujarat, etc.

From etymological point of view, the term 'tribe' is derived from the Latin word *tribus*.⁴ Originally it was used to imply three divisions among the early Romans. Later on

¹ Third International Alliances of Indigeneous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forest (IAITPTF) Adivasi/Indigeneous Peoples in India: A brief Situationer, South Asian Regions, IAITPTF, New Delhi, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ Ghanshyam Shah, *Economic Differentiation and Tribal Identity*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1984, p. 1.

⁴ Jaganath Pathy, *Tribal Peasantry Dynamics of Development*, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 1-2.

it was used to mean 'the poor' or 'the masses'. In the English language, the word appeared in the sixteenth century, and denoted a community of person claiming descent from a common ancestor.⁵ The meaning of the word 'tribe' according to the Oxford Dictionary is "any primitive or barbarous people under a chief". However, the popular notions of tribes emerged only with the expansion of colonialism and subsequent emergence of racist stereotypes related to the peoples of Africa and Asia. Before colonialism, travellers, missionaries and explorers to these continents, spoke of 'peoples' or 'kingdoms' etc. and only exceptionally tribes. And by the late nineteenth century colonial administrators and anthropologists had labeled the peoples of most parts of Africa and certain parts of Asia as 'tribals'.

However, the term 'tribe' both in English and as represented by other languages, (in India the tribals are also known as the 'adivasis'), can have different uses. In ancient Indian literature, there seems to be no equivalent for the English term 'tribe', except for the Sanskrit word *janah* denoting "an agglomeration of individuals forming a large group of non-monarchical type with a definite territory, kinship, common ancestry and a common cultural pattern".⁶ Tribal people, government officials, and outside analysts have held different notions of the concepts, constructs and manifestations represented by the term and its local equivalents. Views from within did not necessarily coincide with views from outside. Many urban people viewed tribes as synonymous with bandits, thieves, and outlaws, whereas tribes people, who feared the loss of their own autonomy, thought of themselves as independent and loyal to their own groups.

From urban perspectives, the word 'tribe' often means nomads or rural people beyond the reach of the government. Governments tended to reify the concept of tribe to facilitate their own administration. In the words of Lois Beck:

"Officials considered the tribes (sic) to be actual corporate bodies with fixed memberships and territories. They produced detailed lists and charts of the

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Mamata Choudhary, *Tribals of Ancient India*, Indian Museum, Calcutta, 1977, pp. 7-8.

tribes under their supposed authority and acted in terms of them. Such attitudes and resulting policies created and fortified social, political, and physical boundaries. For the tribal themselves, who held clearer, probably more accurate notions of tribes than outsiders, the issue was not problematic. They lived within environments in which their own tribal identities and those of others were salient features and important ways of classifying people.”⁷

Prior to the British annexation, most of the presently called tribes in India were either unconscious of their ethno-tribal identities or called themselves as ‘people’ vis-à-vis outsiders, in their own distinctive speech. However, things began to change during the nineteenth century: colonial expansion began to face a formidable challenge from those ‘peoples’ who were later named ‘tribes’. After an initial phase of repression, the colonial power implicitly acknowledged the capacity of these people to fight for independence and initiated a series of protective legislations as well as special administrative devices.⁸ All these ‘communities’ were given different names and most of the tribes had become known in the literature by names they did not recognize themselves. While several mass of people were brought under a blanket nomenclature, a number of cognate groups were arbitrarily divided into several communities.⁹

Anthropologists who have worked among the tribes are of the opinion that, “they (the tribes)... differ from others in their social systems. They have retained their own marriage regulations: nearly all marry within their restricted local group, and are sometimes guided by their own elders or political chiefs in internal and external matters. In others they form socially distinct communities who have been designated as tribes and listed as Scheduled for special treatment”.¹⁰ Anthropologists themselves have understood the tribals in their own parlance of research and context. According to Dube, the understanding has been that a tribe is:

(1) geographically and culturally isolated;

⁷ Lois Beck, “Tribes and the States in the 19th and 20th Century Iran” in Philip Khoury et al, (ed.) *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., London, 1991, p. 188.

⁸ Jaganath Pathy, *op. cit.* p. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Tribal Life in India*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1977, p. 2.

- (2) relatively non-hierarchical and non-differentiated; and
- (3) economically backward with low level of techno-economic development.¹¹

However, tribal identities are neither exclusive nor fixed, for linguistic, ethnic, religious, regional, residential, and occupational categories and traits also identify tribal people. Crosscutting and overlapping composite identities make it impossible to speak of tribes as bounded, clear cut entities.¹² Moreover, the cultural boundary of a tribe is less well defined.¹³ Some argue that tribes owe their solidarity not to kinship per se but to “a myth of common ancestry”. To some, tribal solidarity was often based on a much more complex set of loyalties than kinship, actual or mythical. Political, social, cultural, ethno-linguistic and territorial bonds could produce tribal solidarity.¹⁴

What is surprising is that anthropologists, historians and political analysts have more or less accepted the term ‘tribe’ or ‘tribal’, and the ‘tribe’ listed by the government without critically examining it rationale.¹⁵ Some scholars are of the opinion that the term ‘tribe’ or ‘tribal’ is a pejorative one. In the words of Lalsangkima Pachuau: “the very choice of the term indicates the marginal existence of the people so-called ‘tribal’ and the oppressiveness of the structure that imposed the identity on them. To use the very term reveals the intent to dominate and oppress the people to whom the nomenclature is imposed.”¹⁶ She goes on to say that “the creation of tribalism is artificial; it is done for the convenience of the administrative system that is thoroughly influenced by the caste stratification mindset, and politically and culturally controlled by the caste Hindu society. On top of it all, this artificially constructed identity resulted in the intensification of the already existing identity crisis of the people.”

¹¹ S.C.Dube, “Introduction”, in S.C. Dube (ed) *Tribal Heritage of India*, Vol. 1, Vikas Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p. 2.

¹² Lois Beck, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

¹³ Pradip Kumar Bose, *Class and Class Relations Among Tribals of Bengal*, Ajanta Publications, 1985, p. 11.

¹⁴ Richard Tapper as quoted by Philip Khoury, “Introduction: Tribes and the Complexities of State Formation in the Middle East”, in Philip Khoury et al (ed.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East... op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Andre Beteille, “The Definition of Tribe”, in Romesh Thapar (ed) *Tribe, Caste and Religion in India*, MacMillan India Ltd, Delhi, 1977, p. 14.

¹⁶ Lalsangkima Pachuau, “ ‘Tribal’ Identity and Ethnic Conflicts in the Northeast India: A Christian Response”, <http://www.yomari.com/p-review/1999/05/270599/cor/html>.

The definition of a tribe by social and political scientists and anthropologists are not only dissimilar but in some cases contradictory to one another. The socio-cultural variations among those groups being very wide, studies in different communities resulted dissimilar conclusions. Therefore, it is clear that “the notion of tribe is best understood as cultural category that tribes people and others apply in a variety of situations and contexts and define situationally and contextually”.¹⁷ Emphasising more on the situation and context of time and space, according Lois Beck, “a tribe is an idea, a cultural construct evolving a set of principles that vary with the circumstance. Ideas concerning tribes have political, social and symbolic manifestations.”¹⁸ This shows that the term can be employed with some precision, not in general, but in specific contexts and periods. Richard Tapper describes a tribe in the following words:

“Tribe may be used loosely of a localized group in which kinship is the dominant idiom of organization, and whose members consider themselves culturally distinct (in terms of customs, dialect or language, and origins); tribes are usually politically unified, though not necessarily under a central leader, both features being commonly attributable to interaction with states. Such tribes also form parts of larger, usually regional, political structures of tribes of similar kinds; they do not usually relate directly with the state, but only through these intermediate structures. The more explicit term confederacy or confederation should be used for a local group of tribes that is heterogeneous in terms of culture, presumed origins and perhaps class composition, that is politically unified usually under a central authority”.¹⁹

D.N. Majumdar emphasizes the geographical factor and endogamous nature of the tribe in his definition. According to him, “a tribe is a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name, members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation

¹⁷ Lois Beck, op. cit., p. 187.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁹ Richard Tapper, op. cit., p. 5.

and have developed a well-assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations. A tribe is ordinarily an endogamous unit, the members of which confine their marriage within the tribe.”²⁰ In another context, he has defined a tribes as a “social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language and dialect, recognizing social distances with other tribes or castes...follow tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all, conscious of a homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration”²¹.

In the Indian context, the term ‘tribe’ has never been defined precisely and satisfactorily. It was used at one time to denote a bewildering variety of social categories that were neither analogous nor comparable. In later usage, it tended to be restricted only to the autochthonous, the aboriginal and the primitive groups. At no stage, however, did it have a set of clear indicators of tribalness. Most popular definitions of the term tended to see in the tribes, some, if not all of the following characteristics:

- (1) Their roots in the soil date back to a very early period; if they are not the original inhabitants, they are at least some of the oldest inhabitants of the land.
- (2) They live in the relative isolation of the hills and the forests.
- (3) Their sense of history is shallow for, among them, the remembered history of five to six generations tends to get merged in mythology.
- (4) They have a low level of techno-economic development.
- (5) In terms of their cultural ethos, language, institutions, beliefs, and customs, they stand out from the other sections of the society.
- (6) If they are not egalitarian, they are at least non-hierarchic and undifferentiated.²²

Almost on the same line, Jaganath Pathy attempts at putting the attributes of the tribals in Indian in the following words:

- (1) oldest inhabitants of the land but with shallow history;

²⁰ D.N. Majumdar, *Races and Culture of India*, Fourth Edition, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1961, p. 367.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 241.

²² S.C. Dube, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

- (2) common name, territory and language;
- (3) strong kinship bonds with endogamy and distinct taboos;
- (4) single social rank and political organization;
- (5) distinct customs, moral codes, religious beliefs and rituals;
- (6) youth dormitory, high illiteracy and absence of schooling;
- (7) common ownership or simple economic profession of subsistence level; and
- (8) low level of technological development.²³

In the present time and context, if all the above indicators and definitions are considered necessary for a community of people to be called a tribe, then apart from a dozen or so small communities, the rest of those listed under the Scheduled Tribes category cannot qualify to be called tribes. It is also evidently clear from the foregoing pages that social structure and change of the tribals have been a highly researched and considerably illuminated area in social sciences. However, due to the bewildering heterogeneity in the cultural configuration of tribal and proliferate communities, no study can be exhaustive or complete. Each tribal community functions in a special environment, has its own values, norms and kinship ties, and, accordingly, reacts to pressures and pulls of the environment in its own way.

Tribals and the Indian Constitution

The word 'tribe' or 'tribal' is nowhere defined in the Constitution of India, which has been content to declare, in its Article 342, that the Scheduled Tribes are "the tribes or the tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities" which the President of India may specify by public notification. As these communities are presumed to form the oldest ethnological sector of the population, the term "adivasi" ('adi' - original, and 'vasi' - inhabitant) has been common.

However, the notion of a tribe in India is determined primarily by the political and administrative consideration of uplifting a section of the Indian people which has been relatively remotely situated in the hills and forests and which is backward in terms of the

²³ Jaganath Pathy, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

indices of development. The Scheduled tribes have been identified in terms of the two parameters of relative isolation and backwardness.²⁴

Before delving into the specificities of the Constitutional provisions with regards to the tribals, it would be pertinent here to highlight the five guiding principles that helped shape the minds of the Constituent Assembly members and policy makers. They are:

- (1) People (tribals) should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional art and culture.
- (2) Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
- (3) We should try and train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
- (4) We should not over administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. Rather, we should work through, and not in rivalry with their own social and cultural institutions.
- (5) We should judge results not by statistics or the amount of money spent but by the quality of human character that is evolved.²⁵

The policy of the Government of India was to bring the tribals into the 'mainstream' in a phased manner. This is reflected in the various Constitutional provisions. The Constitution Drafting Committee took into consideration that there existed clearly vulnerable groups who were subjected to systematic exploitation. The establishment of an egalitarian social order with equity for all sections of the society, free from any form of discrimination whatsoever, on the grounds of religion, race, sex or place of birth was the stated goal of the nation. Therefore, equity for weaker section of

²⁴ K.S. Singh, "The Tribal Situation in India", in *Indigenous and Tribal Solidarity, Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP)*, New Delhi, 3rd General Assembly Meeting, 1997, p. 13.

²⁵ Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA, Northeast Frontier Agency*, OUP, Calcutta (2nd Edition), 1959. See the "Forward" by Jawaharlal Nehru.

the Constitution was the moving spirit of the Constitution. Considering the existence of iniquitous forces embedded in the socio-economic and political system, specific safeguards in their favour have been inserted in the Constitution to hold the Government responsible to act in their favour in specific terms.

Accordingly, tremendous flexibility has been built into the Constitution. The Constitution contains as many as 209 Articles and 2 special Scheduled provisions concerning the welfare of the tribals.²⁶

The Provisions

1. Classification as Scheduled Tribes (STs)

Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution provide for the classification of certain sections of the peoples as Scheduled Tribes (and Scheduled Castes) for the specific purpose of providing special provisions and safeguards to them. Under Article 341, the President of India has been given the responsibility to specify through public notification in consultation with the Governor of the respective States or Union Territories, “the castes, races or tribes or parts of or group within castes, races or tribes. Such notified castes or tribes or parts then, for the purpose of the Constitution, would be deemed to be Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes as the case may be”. Once such list has been promulgated, any changes can be made only by the Parliament according to Clause (2) of Article 341 and 342.

2. General Rights of the Peoples and Obligations of the State

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Clause (4) of this Article indicates that “nothing in this Clause shall prevent the State from making special provisions for the advancement of any socially and economically backward class of citizens or the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.” Article 19 stipulates that:

- (a) all citizens shall have the right freedom of speech and expression;

²⁶ Third International Alliances of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forest (IAITPTF), *op. cit.*, p. 30.

- (b) to assemble peacefully and without arms;
- (c) to form associations or unions;
- (d) to move freely throughout the territory of India; and
- (e) to reside and settle in any parts of the territory of India.

Clause (5) of this Article also stipulates that nothing in the sub-section (d) and (e) shall prevent the State from imposing reasonable restrictions of any of the rights conferred by these sub-clauses, either in the interest of the general public or for protection of the interests of the Scheduled Tribes. Article 46 relating to the Directive Principles of State Policy requires the State to secure a social order for the promotion of the welfare of the people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations. It further enjoins the State to “promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and protect them from social injustice and all form of exploitation”.

3. Reservations

Articles 330, 332 and 334 provide for reservation of seats for the Scheduled Tribes in the Parliament and the State Legislatures. However, such reservation of seats is not provided for the Rajya Sabha. Article 16 (4) and Article 335 provide safeguards to ensure adequate representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in services and posts. (In accordance with this, the percentage of reservation is fixed as 7.5 for the STs and 15 for the SCs). Reservation is extended to Public Sector Enterprises, Nationalised Banks, Statutory and Autonomous Bodies and institutions receiving Grant-in-aid from the Government of India. Similarly in the State Sector too, there are various percentages of reservations that are prescribed.

4. Tribal Development

A few multi-purpose tribal development programmes in a few blocks were launched in 1954. This was in conformity with the special provisions in the Constitution for the Scheduled Tribes as Articles 15, 46, etc. provide for the development of the tribals

and their areas. The Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) approach taking a comprehensive view of the tribal problems was launched in the fifth 5 Year Plan in 1974. This Plan operated in 18 States and 2 Union Territories.²⁷

Clause (1) of Article 275 states that the Government of India is obliged to provide financial allocation “to meet the cost of such schemes of development as may be undertaken by the State with the approval of the Government of India for the purpose of promoting the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in that State or raising the level of administration of the Scheduled Areas therein to that of the administration of the rest of the areas of the State”. Various Parliamentary Committees and Special Study Teams had been formed, and Parliamentary Acts passed for the promotion and implementations of the various schemes initiated both by the Union and various State Governments. (For example, The Renuka Ray Team on Social Welfare of the Backward Classes, 1959, 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts, Bhuria Committee, 1995, etc.). However, it is not within the scope of this chapter to go into the details of those Committee Reports.

5. Autonomy

Article 244 of the Constitution provides for the administration of the Scheduled Areas in accordance with the Fifth Schedule and the Sixth Schedule. According to Article 244 Clause (1), “The provisions of the Fifth Schedule shall apply to the administration and control of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in any State other than the State of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.” Clause (2) says, “The provisions of the Sixth Schedule shall apply to the administration of the tribal areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.”

Under the Fifth Schedule, the Governors of the States have been given unlimited powers. The Governor may (para 5) by public notification direct that any particular act of Parliament or Assembly of the State shall not apply to the Fifth Schedule Areas or amend a law enacted by the Parliament or Assembly. The Governor is empowered to frame new

²⁷ Bhupinder Singh, “Government and Tribals in India”, in *Indigenous and Tribal Solidarity...*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

laws and make regulations in consultation with the “Tribal Advisory Councils”. In particular such regulations may:

- (a) prohibit or restrict the transfer of lands by or among the members of the Scheduled Tribes in such area;
- (b) regulate the allotment of land to members of Scheduled Tribes in such areas; and
- (c) regulate their carrying on of business as money lender by persons who lend money to member of Scheduled Tribes in such areas. These laws or regulations, in order to come into effect, must be submitted to the President and assented to by him. It also extends the executive powers of the Union to giving of directions to the administration of such areas for the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes.²⁸

The provisions of the Sixth Schedule are specially meant for the administration of the tribal areas in the Northeast, particularly Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. According to the provisions of the Schedule, the District or Regional Councils are empowered to make laws regulating:

- (a) allotment of land other than Reserved Forest for any purpose likely to promote the inhabitants of the area and their use. However, the Government of India has powers to acquire any land under Article 31 (a) whether occupied or unoccupied.
- (b) management of forests not being a Reserved Forest;
- (c) the use of any canal or water course for the purpose of agriculture;
- (d) the regulation of shifting cultivation;
- (e) the establishment of village or town committees of the Council and their power and their administration including village or town police and public health and sanitation;
- (f) the appointment or succession of chiefs;
- (g) the inheritance of property; and
- (h) social customs.²⁹

²⁸ Third International Alliances of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forest (IAITPTF), *op. cit.*, pp. 38-9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

From the foregoing pages, it is evidently clear that there has been a concerted move to bring about an egalitarian society with eradication of social inequalities in all forms. However, implementation of these special provisions is altogether a different matter. In some cases, the provisions and safeguards got diluted or became nominal while the vulnerability of the tribals is still evidently clear or has even increased. While giving due credit to the merit of the provisions and safeguards, it is also clear that, in some cases, they are used as levers for oppression.

A Brief History of Manipur

Manipur is one of the smallest States of India with a total area of 22,327 square kilometers, and a population of 23,88,634 (2001 Census, Provisional figure) which is 0.23% of India's total population. Population density of the State is 107 per square kilometer. From time immemorial, it maintained its identity as an independent kingdom. It has a recorded history that can be traced from its chronicles as mentioned in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. It begins with the accession of Pakhangba on the throne of Manipur in A.D. 33.³⁰ Manipur has undergone a number of phases with several changes in its political status as an independent kingdom from the earliest historical period upto 1891, as a Princely State under the British imperial rule from 1891 to 1947, and as a Constitutional Monarchy from 1947 to until it merged into India on the 15th of October, 1947.

The Constitution of India, which was passed on November 26, 1947, and came into force on January 26, 1950 gave Manipur the status of a Part C State. The administration of the State had been entrusted to the President of India who would carry on the administration through a Chief Commissioner appointed by him. A Council of Advisors would assist the Chief Commissioner. Manipur got two seats (one for the valley and one for the hills) in the Lok Sabha and one seat jointly with Tripura in the Rajya Sabha. The Parliament reserved the right of making laws for the Part C States. Other

³⁰ S.A. Ansari, *Economic Geography of Manipur*, L.Trio Book Store, Imphal, 1976, p. 6.

features of the President's Rule were also applicable in the administration of Part C States.³¹

Formation of the States Re-organisation Commission created some apprehension in the political circles regarding the fate of Manipur. Ultimately, the 7th Amendment Act, (1956) of the Constitution of India converted Manipur, a Part C state into a Union Territory. Provision was also made for a Territorial Council of 30 elected members and two nominated members headed by a Chairman who enjoyed executive authority over those subjects vested upon the Council.³² After the General Elections of 1957, the Territorial Council came into existence and started functioning from 1957 to beginning of 1963. This was considered as an important step towards the formation of responsible government in Manipur.

The Union Territories Act, 1963 (the 14th Amendment of the Constitution) provided a Legislative Assembly of 30 elected members and a Council of 3 ministers for Manipur. Thus, under the new Act began the popular Government of Manipur Territory. The elected representatives of the people had to act under limitations and restraints. The experiment thus proved to be a diarchy in which the elected representatives formed a group of junior partners. It failed "because the rule by the executive is incompatible with democracy".³³

After the General Elections of 1967 discontentment against the territorial regime and demand for statehood caught momentum and started coming to the surface. The Congress Party in Manipur, which had been enjoying an unrivalled position in the valley since 1951, began to decline. This eventually brought about imposition of President's Rule and the dissolution of the Assembly. As a result, the years from 1968 to 1970 in Manipur proved to be the years of frequent "hartals, relay hunger-strikes, arrests, lathi-charge and firings". Prior to November 14, 1964, Manipur had been a single district

³¹ Jyotirmoy Roy, *History of Manipur*, Second Edition, Eastlight Book House, Calcutta, 1973, p. 151.

³² N. Tombi Singh, "Indian Republic: A Remembrance", *Manipur Today*, Vol. XIX – No. 1, 26th January, 1999, Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Government of Manipur. P. 7.

³³ Jyotirmoy Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

territory divided into ten sub-divisions. On 14 November 1969, Manipur territory was re-organised into five administrative units, namely:

- (1) Manipur Central District Headquarters, Imphal,
- (2) Manipur East District Headquarters, Ukhrul,
- (3) Manipur West District Headquarters, Tamenglong,
- (4) Manipur North District Headquarters, Karong, and
- (5) Manipur South District Headquarters, Churachandpur

The movement for statehood continued in full vigour till the 3rd September, 1970 when the Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi announced in the Lok Sabha the acceptance by her Government of the principles granting statehood to Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya.³⁴ Statehood was conferred upon Manipur formally on 21 January, 1972. Thus after a long journey of more than twenty years through the process of constitutional evolution from Advisory Council to Territorial Assembly with a Cabinet of Ministers, and crossing the stage from Part C State to Centrally Administered Territory, Manipur finally emerged in the political map of India as full-fledged autonomous State headed by a Governor.

Elections were held to the State Assembly having sixty members in the year 1972: The first assembly did not last long; but sowed the first seed of instability, which the State has perennially been gripped till date. The second assembly formed after elections in 1974 showed frequent changes of political complexion with frequent change of Chief Ministers. The same trend continues even today.

Political instability surfaced many times during the three decades covered by full statehood so far many times. From the late seventies the law and order situation in the State took a serious turn towards the darker side. The eighties saw massive army presence with special powers to assist the civil administration to fight insurgency in the State. The State having fallen into a "Problem Zone" of the country (the Northeast of India) besides

³⁴ Ibid., p. 156.

it being a sensitive and a special border State with its unique problems accruing from people's hopes and aspirations finding expression in the voices emanating from different sections of the State populace.

Tribals in Manipur

A sizeable portion of the population of Manipur consists of the tribal people. According the Census Report of 1991, of the 18,37,149 population of Manipur, 6,32,173 (or 34.4%) are tribals who inhabit the five Hill Districts of Manipur: (1) Senapati. (2) Tamenglong. (3) Churachandpur. (4) Chandel and (5) Ukhrul.

Geographically the hill areas of Manipur are contiguous to Myanmar in the east and southeast, Assam in the west and Mizoram in the southwest. The land routes connecting Manipur valley with Myanmar, Cachar District (Assam) and Nagaland lie across these hill; but "very little intercommunication existed between the hills and the Manipur valley".³⁵

There are as many as 29 Scheduled Tribes registered according to the provisions of the Scheduled Tribes (Modification) Order, 1956. The tribal population consists of two major groups - the Naga and the Kuki-chin groups. As all the tribes of Manipur belong to the Mongoloid stock, there is not much difference in racial aspect between one tribe and the other. "The dividing line between one group and another is mostly based on difference in language. There are Kukis living in Naga areas for many generations, but the contact between them goes rarely beyond the individual level. They function as two separate groups and the relationship between them gets strained on issue of communal interest".³⁶ The two tribal groups fight fiercely to safeguard their interests and above all their freedom. As a matter of fact, inter-tribal fights were common. On occasion, the warring groups would enter into treaty and rapprochement. Their isolation from the 'advanced' plains people gave them little scope of contact with them. This was one of the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

³⁶ R.K Das, *Manipur Tribal Scene Studies in Society and Change*, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p. 19.

causes of their ignorance and backwardness.³⁷ In the hills, each tribal village “conducted itself like a republic”. The village headman had all the authority vested in him: executive, judicial and military. His word had the force of law. However, he would consult the village elders on important matters.³⁸

The Naga Tribes

1. Anal, 2. Angami, 3. Kabui (Puimei and Rongmei), 4. Kacha Naga (Liangmei and Zemi), 5. Lamkang, 6. Maram, 7. Maring, 9 Monsang, 10. Mayon, 11. Sema, and 12. Tangkhul. The Naga tribes of Manipur who are grouped under the Naga fold are “among the earliest inhabitants of the Manipur Hills”. The name Naga was given to them by the British administrators with “their policy of identifying and classifying the tribes of Nagaland and Manipur”.³⁹ The tribes like Zemi, Liangmei, Rongmei Mao, Maram, Thangal, Tangkhul and Maring who have strong tradition of common migration with the Northern Nagas of Nagaland on ethnological, linguistic and actual grounds had been called Naga. In other words, “ethnically and culturally the Naga tribes of Manipur have their affinities with the people of Nagaland”.⁴⁰ Some tribes like Anal, Chiru, Koireng and Kharam have linguistic affinity with the Kuki-chin but have cultural identification with the Nagas. They are “bridge buffer tribes between the Nagas and the Kuki-chins, who are attracted towards the Naga ideologically and who accepted the Naga identity”.⁴¹

³⁷ S.A. Ansari, *Manipur Tribal Demography and Socio-economic Development*, Daya Publishing House, Delhi, 1991, p. 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁹ Gangmumei Kabui, *Geneses of the Ethnos of Nagas and Kuki-chin*, Published by “The Committee on Protection and Restoration of Human Rights”, Naga Students’ Federation, Kohima. p. 10.

⁴⁰ P.S Vaiphei, *Church Growth Among the Hill Tribes in Manipur Northeast India*, (Second Edition), Trio Book Centre, Imphal (Manipur), 1986, p. 2.

⁴¹ B.K. Roy Burman, “Forward” to Gangmumei Kabui, *Anal: A Trans-border Tribe of Manipur*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1985.

District-wise Scheduled Tribe Population of Manipur (1991 Census)

District	Rural	Urban	Total ST Population	% of ST
Churachandpur	135250	29459	164709	8.39
Chandel	57900	2829	60729	3.31
Senapati	175206	-	175206	9.54
Tamenglong	83332	-	83332	4.54
Ukhrul	101878	-	101878	5.54
Imphal	14562	19338	33900	1.84
Bishnupur	8467	1108	9575	0.52
Thoubal	2335	509	2844	0.15
Total	578930	53243	632173	34.41

Source: Census of India, 1991, Series I, Final Population Total (Hill Districts), p. 53.

The group of the Liangmeis, the Rongmeis and the Zemis are highly concentrated in the Tamenglong District; the Maos, the Marams and the Thangals have high concentration in the Senapati District, bordering the Nagaland State in the north. The Tangkhuls occupy the Ukhrul District which is adjacent to Myanmar border in the east. The Marings, the Mayons, the Monsangs, the Lamkangs and the Anals occupy the Chandel and Thoubal Districts, bordering Myanmar.

The Kuki-chin Tribes

1. Aimol, 2. Gangte, 3. Hmar, 4. Paite, 5. Purum, 6. Ralte, 7. Simte, 8. Salhte, 9. Thadou, 10. Vaiphei and 11. Zou. The Kuki-chin is both a linguistic group and an ethno-cultural entity. Linguistically, the Kuki-chin is a sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman comprising the Kuki-chin and Mizo speakers. As an ethno-cultural entity, the term covers the Kuki, Chin, Mizo and other cognate tribes and clans.⁴¹ These tribes migrated to Manipur from Burma (Now Myanmar) beginning from the 16th Century. "Large-scale migration of the Kuki tribes on Manipur in the 18th and 19th Centuries is on record."⁴² It was a practice with certain tribes to occasionally shift their villages to live near *'jhum*

⁴¹ Gangmumei kabui, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁴² Jyotirmoy Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

fields'. "The custom of shifting villages flows directly from the custom of shifting fields. This is also the case with his clan or tribe. It only ensures slow and steady migration of population".⁴³ With the passage of time, there has been a change in the attitude towards migration in the Kukis, the most migratory people among the tribes. "The Kukis were semi-nomadic. They used to migrate from place to place, but now migration is not common among them."⁴⁴ Ethnically and culturally "the Kuki-chin family have their affinities with the chins of Burma (Myanmar) and the Mizos of Mizoram."⁴⁵ Before the arrival of the British, these people were migrating unchecked. The boundary lines and frontiers were not well defined. The British introduced the survey operations, delimitation and demarcation. In the course of time, several expeditions were organized to punish the offending tribes. The Kuki-chin tribes have high concentration in the Churachandpur, (Manipur South), Chandel and Senapati (Manipur North) districts.

Apart from the demographic variations, equally important or even more are the social and culturally differences amongst the component units of Manipur. The main ethnic groupings are the Meeteis, who account for over 60 per cent of the total population of the State, the Naga and the Kuki-chin tribes who account for about 35 per cent of the State's population and a small, but sizeable, population of Muslims largely concentrated in some pockets in the valley. In political, socio-economic, cultural and religious matters, tensions between the constituent peoples, in particular, between the Meeteis and the tribal people are of fairly long-standing and dare powerful factors in shaping the politics of the area. In religious terms, differences amongst the peoples are distinctly visible. The Naga and Kuki-chin people are largely Christians. Further, the tribal people are divided in several dialect groups inspite of attempts to standardise the dialects. The linguistic variations among the Nagas alone are considerable, not to speak of differences amongst the Kuki-chin groups.

⁴³ N. Saha, "Customs and Economy: A Study of Shifting Cultivation in Northeast India", in. S.M. Dubey (ed.), *Northeast India: A Sociological Perspectives*, Concept Publishing Company, Delhi, 1978, p. 337.

⁴⁴ P.S. Vaiphei, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 9

As in the other States, language is a major political problem and the domination of *Meeteilon*, which is accepted by the more numerous Meeteis has caused various political tensions. The Meeteis who call themselves *Vaishnavite* Hindus, thus, differ markedly from the tribal peoples in the vital sectors of religion and language. The marked differences in religion and language together with other cultural differences attendant on the difference in the mode of life of these peoples have weakened the feelings of integration and unity amongst the constituent units of Manipur. The effects of these ethnic groups having variations in demographic patterns and socio-economic conditions between the hills and the valley and between the predominant hill tribes have been manifold, particularly in the field of politics. Elections are fought and organised on ethnic or communal lines. It is pertinent to add here that in a small, somewhat isolated area like Manipur, national issues do not have much foray in the issues raised by ethnic based political organisations. The State has been besieged with its share of problems emanating from all sections of the people. This has made the functioning of democratic governing system ineffective. The aspirations and expectations of the people have been ignored due to the government's attention being diverted to issues of regional and ethnic or communal tensions.

In the light of the above, the main focus of this research is on politics of the tribals through the twentieth century shaped and influenced both by the forces of modernisation forced or imposed on the tribal society from outside and the forces of contradictions arising from within the various tribal or ethnic groups in the State. As the foregoing chapters will clearly unfold, in the course of the development of the different phases of politics in the tribal society, the layers of exploitation of the tribals by dominant groups of peoples over the less significant and marginal tribes, and by the brute display of powers of the advancing ruling institutions become a prominent feature all along.

The second chapter tries to extensively explore the development of tribal politics of Manipur with special reference to the Zeliangrong people of the Tamenglong District. The main focus of the chapter is on the process of change in the attitude and outlook from mere tribal polity to the adoption of regional and tribal based political consciousness

which shapes and contributes to the pulls and pressures of modern day democratic politics. The British imperial and colonial rule was followed by change of guards with India's independence in 1947. 'Village republics' was slowly but surely replaced by new governing institutions. The decreasing influence of the former has been accompanied by the rise of the latter the process of which has given rise to new challenges. The marginalisation of the tribals through this process of change is a significant aspect of this chapter.

The third chapter attempts at studying the different and varied forms of administrative structure and functions, devised through constitutional provisions both by the Manipur State and the Central governments. The post-independent structural-functional changes introduced and implemented have greatly contributed to the dramatic socio-economic changes in the tribal society. In fact, the administrative changes have both positive and negative aspects with wide ranging consequences to the multi-ethnic society in the hills of the State.

The fourth chapter deals at length the process of socio-economic development in the five hill districts of the State and its resulting impact on the political scene of the State. The various aspects of ethnic tensions between and amongst the three predominant ethnic groups arising out of disparities in socio-economic development between the hill and plain areas and between the districts have been given an analytical and critical view. In fact, the tribal participation and involvement in politics have been shaped and influenced by economic forces in more ways than one. The nature and content of socio-economic development in the State has been in sharp contrast to the ideals enshrined in the Constitution of the country as the schisms of fragile inter-tribal and inter-communal relationship have led to even greater fissures in terms economic and political opportunities. In the face of this development, the need to critically study the process of socio-economic change cannot and should not be over-emphasised.

The fifth chapter is a brief interpretation of the analytical and critical observations of the research with a view to have a closer examination at the trends and perspectives of

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the political life of the tribals in the face of stiff competition and challenges. In this age of globalisation and liberalisation, it is all the more important to identify the various circumstances and situations in which the tribals are currently placed. Some important prospects and challenges have also been suggested for a better understanding and development of the tribals in various aspects of life.

CHAPTER TWO

Development of Tribal Politics with Special Reference to the Zeliangrong Tribe

The term 'Zeliangrong' is the collective name of the Zemi, Liangmei and Rongmei including Puimei. It is also an acronym of the mentioned cognate tribes. The term was coined in February 1947 taking the prefixes of the tribes (Ze+Liang+Rong) to give a common name to the group. It may be noted here that "the Zemis, Liangmeis and Rongmeis are so alike as tribes that their similarity far outweighs their dissimilarity."¹ In the ethnic landscape of the Northeast tribals, the Zeliangrong people are a unique example of the evolution of a common identity of a group of cognate tribes who were, though of common origin, separated by hostile geography and history, followed by social non-communication and lack of common organisation. But now the same people have been united by the bonds of common origin, common kinship and common cultural heritage, reinforced by common experiences of suffering at the hands of the alien invaders.

The following pages will show how these cognate tribes went through the different phases of exploitation and suppression arising from within and without in the course of the development of their politics from "sovereign village republic" to modern democratic politics under the pulls and pressures of tribal and ethnic rivalries punctuated by alien invaders: the Meeteis and the British.

Totally rejecting their common and mutual interests, the Zeliangrongs were arbitrarily divided and placed under different administrative jurisdictions on the pretext of administrative convenience. The administrators used anything – the rivers, the hills and the valleys as the boundaries as lines of control between these brothers and made them minority wherever they lived. As a result, even though they are in a compact area,

¹ S.A Ansari, *Manipur: Tribal Demography and Socio-Economic Development*, Daya Publishing House, Delhi, 1991, p. 145.

they are flunked in the badly linked extreme corners of the three States of Manipur, North Cachar Hills District of Assam and Nagaland. The Zeliangrongs and their areas are today known as the most backward and the most undeveloped in the records of the governments of the three States.¹

The names 'Kabui' and 'Kacha Nagas' were imposed on the Zeliangrong people. "When the British came, Puimei and Rongmei were clubbed together and named as the 'Kabui' whereas Liangmei and Zemi were called as Kacha Nagas. They do not know why they had been named as such even today."² The Zeliangrong people did not know these terms themselves till the British came. The official names for the Zeliangrong tribes are different from State to State. In Manipur they are known as Kabui and Kacha Naga; in Nagaland, Zeliang is the official name, whereas in Assam, separate names like Zemi and Rongmei are used. The Zemis are concentrated in the Peren sub-division of Kohima District, Nagaland; North Cachar Hills District of Assam and Tousem sub-division of Tamenglong, Manipur. The Liangmeis are more or less confined to Tamei sub-division, Tamenglong and Sadar Hill sub-division of Senapati District, Manipur; whereas the Rongmeis are the most dispersed group, as they are found in Tamenglong District, Imphal plains, Cachar plains and in Nagaland. The Puimeis are concentrated only in nine villages of Manipur.

Though this chapter deals with development of the politics of the Zeliangrong people as a whole at different phases, more emphasis is laid on the Zeliangrongs in Manipur. The Zeliangrong tribe, being the combination of cognate tribes, is also an ideal one for the study of tribal politics in Manipur as a whole. Moreover, tribals in Manipur have passed through the different phases more or less in the same manner and context through different political climate. The coming together of the Zeliangrong people under one banner in the beginning to the time when they raised varied demands from the State and Central governments at different times; and how they are placed in the contemporary situation is the main focus of this chapter.

¹ Namthiubuiyang Pamei, "Preface" to his book, *The Trail From Makuilongdi: The Continuing Saga of the Zeliangrong People*, Gironta Charitable Foundation, Tamenglong, Manipur, 2001, p. IX.

² *Ibid.*

Pre-colonial Situation

The life of any Zeliangrong existed and centered around the village, which formed the center of his world. The sites of their villages were selected mostly on hilltops and founded with strict and rigid rules of the customary laws. The people had strong attachment to their villages and lands, and except under extra-ordinary circumstances, leaving their villages was regarded as degrading to themselves and their ancestors. Hudson quotes Mc Culloch, "To their villages, which are permanent, the Kowpoeis (Rongmeis and Puimeis) are very much attached. The village and its immediate precincts, and when... they have been obliged to desert their village, I have heard them more often expressed their wish to return to it, as being the grave of their ancestors, than it being their birth place."³

However, there were times when new villages were established by breaking up of a village. Establishing a new village was not an easy and frequent occasion. It was established only when it was absolutely necessary. Factors, which brought about the establishment of a new village were:

1. expansion of the village due to increase of population and consequent shortage of land for cultivation thereof;
2. rivalry or feuds among certain sections in the village where a section breaks away and established a new village;
3. cases where two or more person claim chiefhood and where consequently, one or more of the claimants along with his supporters establish new village;
4. rivalry or feuds between members of different clans either from one village or even among several villages; and
5. ideological differences and disagreement regarding religious matters.⁴

³ T.C. Hudson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1974, p. 93.

⁴ Gaichanglungliu Kamei, *The Zeliangrong Nagas: An Analysis on Some Socio-political Aspects with Special Reference to Their Movement*, M. Phil. Dissertation, JNU, New Delhi, (unpublished) 1993, pp. 108-9.

A Zeliangrong village was a natural social unit where different moieties or clans⁵ lived together. A village had its own boundaries; and the number of households differed from village to village. Irrespective of its size, every village existed as an independent unit without any interference from outside. Some have observed that a Zeliangrong village was an "independent and sovereign republic" comparable to that of a Greek City-state.⁶

Like all Nagas, the Zeliangrongs were also head hunters till as late as about a hundred years ago. Inter-village feuds, tribal warfare and head chopping became religious functions. This practice continued until the coming of the British rule in Manipur and Nagaland. It was a belief that the spirit of the energy, the essence of great power of man stays, in his head. If the head is cut off and brought into the village, the head taker is strengthened with the addition of the spirit of head. It was also believed that it would increase the fertility of the land and yield more crops. "Head hunting became the characteristic feature of the Nagas with their inter-tribal feud and fight. All Nagas were head hunters, their women being the chief inceptors to this pursuit as girls would not favour men who had not taken one or more or been in raid."⁷

For the Zeliangrongs there were two categories of head hunting - *Sangnori* and *Rihou*. In the *Sangnori*, only a section of individuals was involved, whereas in the *Rihou*, the whole village was involved. This practice is believed to have originated from feuds and strained relationship between neighboring villages due to land disputes and criminal cases like murder, arson and looting.⁸ But with the passage of time, it became a game of pride. As a result, life was not secured. Danger prevailed everywhere. Life at the village was not secure for surprise attack from the enemy could come any moment. Hudson observed that "the Kabui (Rongmei and Puimei) people have no idea of tribal solidarity;

⁵ The Zeliangrong society has two major clans with their respective sub-clans. They are: (1) Niumei, Gonmei, Abonmei, Panmei, Gondaime, Riamei, Thamei forming a group of clans, and (2) Pamei, Kamei, Phaomei, Kamson, Gangmei, etc. as another group.

⁶ Huchamjinang Gonmei, *Mairam (Torch): A Brief History of Dailong Baptist Church*, Good Will Press, Imphal (Manipur), 1980, p. 20.

⁷ B.C. Chakravorty, *British Relation with the Hill tribes of Assam*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1964, p.13.

⁸ Huchamjinang Gonmei, *op.cit.*, p. 27

owes no duty to the tribe; he enjoys no right as a member of the tribe; it affords him no protection against an enemy, and often than not, his worst enemies are those of his own village or tribe.”⁹ Though Hudson’s observation was an exaggeration in extremities, it was true to a certain extent. In order to protect the village from danger, walls were constructed and ditch dug around the village. On the wall, they placed a fence of sharpened and poisoned bamboo spikes and other poisonous thorns available. Village gates were closed at night and kept guarded by sentinels day and night whenever imminent danger was there.

The Zeliangrongs lived with no particular kind of geo-political organisation or union. Like most other tribes, each village was an independent unit of its own with no interference from outside in its administration whatsoever of any kind. Every village had either an appointed or a hereditary chief who was given a certain amount of authority, which he could exercise conforming to the traditional and customary norms, and in compliance with the wishes of the people. In most cases, the chief of the village was the person who established the village. He was called *Nampouh* (*‘Nam’* means village and *‘pouh’* means owner). In the event of his death, his eldest son, or if he had no male son, his closest male relative would succeed him as the new *Nampouh*. There was also some kind of a conventional practice that “the *Nampouh* should be blameless and without blemish physically and mentally and he should be a married man.”¹⁰

***Pei* (Village Council)**

The village council called *Pei* headed by the *Nampouh* governed the whole village. “The governing system was purely democratic though the *Nampouh* has got authority of traditional hereditary rights in the village.”¹¹ In the words of Graham Bower, “*Nampouh* was the village priest, the other permanent members chose elders to sit in the council at any given meeting. But he is not a director. The council could on occasion

⁹ T.C. Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

¹⁰ Dichamang Pamei, *Liberty to Captives*, Zeliangrong Baptist Churches’ Council, Platinum Jubilee, ZBCC Khongjaron, Tamenglong, Manipur, p. 47.

¹¹ Ramkhun Pamei, *The Zeliangrong Nagas: A Study of Tribal Christianity*, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996, p. 29

over-rule him, if public opinion was overwhelmed behind it.”¹² However, he enjoyed and exercised enormous power in the village. He summoned and presided over the meetings of the village council and gave the final decision on all matters. Defence of the village was his primary concern. He also enjoyed devotion and respect of the villagers.

Every village had a village council the functioning of which was “democratic...mingled with theocracy” as most of the village activities were based on religion.¹³ It is interesting to note here that the village council was where the village elderly people from every household representing all the clans convoked together and exercised their authority in all administrative matters of the village. However, women had no representation in the village council. Administration of the village was carried out according to the conventional and traditional laws. As the village council with *Nampouh* as its chief or head was the only and supreme governing organ, its decisions were final and there was no court of appeal. In the legal system of the Zeliangrong people, there was no capital punishment; the heaviest punishment was banishment of the culprit(s) along with his relatives from the village. This practice was called *Kapiu Phukmei*, meaning uprooting the clump.¹⁴

Though there was no written law, the Zeliangrong tribals strictly adhered to the time-tested customary laws handed down from generation to another. These laws “have deeper and stronger force in the minds of the people for these are inherent in their lives and society. Customary laws have such far reaching effects among the people that they dare not trespass the sanctions of the laws. This is, in one sense, a cohesive force in the society.”¹⁵

The village council dealt with external affairs pertaining to relations with neighbouring villages or kingdoms. It usually worked for good neighbourly relations and to enrich mutual understanding and harmony. If and when there had arisen any strain

¹² U. G. Bower, *Drum Behind the Hills*, William Marrow and Co., New York, 1950, p. 78.

¹³ Dichamang Pamei, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

relations between a village and another, the councils of both the villages sat together and settled the matters. By means of reconciliation, compromise and agreement such relations were normalised.¹⁶

***Morung* (Bachelor Dormitory)**

The most characteristic feature of Naga social life was the prevalence of the *morung* system. Every village had *morungs* for both unmarried boys and girls. Some big villages had more than two. The *morung* for boys was known as *khangchIU* and the girls' *morung* was called *kailiu*. Hudson observed that "the institution of separate *morungs* for men and women emphasises the division of society by sex and age."¹⁷ It not only separated the unmarried men and women but even the married ones to some extent. "It was a noble act for a married man to sacrifice his stay at home with his wife and family by sleeping at the *morung* for the defence and security of the village."¹⁸

The *morung* was a tribal traditional social institution. It played an important role in the custody of cultural and traditional wealth of the society. At the same time it was also an educational institution where the young boys and girls were disciplined, and where the art of warfare, handicraft, music and dance, moral and social practices were taught and learned. It was the customary practice to send boys and girls to their respective *morungs* when they attained the age of puberty, to sleep at night. They organised dance and social work for the whole village.

Bower gives a clear picture of the young people's education in the *morung*: "The system teaches early the meaning of cooperation and responsibility. I have known and employed men trained by both methods of the *morung* and the home; and if choice existed, I chose the *morung* graduates everytime. They are of tougher fabric and the rough corners have been rubbed off. They are more self-reliant with common sense and better disciplined, and, above all, their loyalty and sense of service to a corporate body is well developed. They have not lost their individualism. They have a view of the world in

¹⁶ Huchamjinang Gonmei, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁷ T.C. Hudson, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

¹⁸ Gaichanglungliu Kamei, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

relation to themselves, a grasp of mutual duties as well as rights; a way of giving a fair deal for a fair deal, which is most refreshing.”¹⁹ She also observed that “an admirable institution, the *morung* disciplined and educated the young; united householders, who were the backbone of the village, and even an instrument by which the elders would control the body public. At once a privileged brotherhood and public utility, it was the most useful item in the social structure.”²⁰ Thus, the *morung* system was a significant and an important part having major influence in the lives of the tribals.

In matters of religion, the Zeliangrongs worshipped numerous spirits. They were superstitious; and all their activities had some connection in one way or the other with their religious practice. The Zeliangrongs “...believe in a Supreme Being who is benevolent. This deity is the creator of all things.”²¹ At the same time, “it would be simply unfair to describe the religious belief of tribal people as animism. No doubt, they worship many spirits, ... they should please them by giving sacrifices. *Raguang* (God) is worshipped so that their souls might go to another world and live.”²²

The economic system of the Zeliangrong revolved around the *jhum* (slash and burn) cultivation. In order that they had enough land to cultivate (they changed their field sites every year), the village boundaries were jealously guarded. “Anything affecting the fields will necessarily be felt throughout the social structure.”²³ Therefore, like all Naga tribes, the Zeliangrong people had strong affinity with their village sites. Even if they had to move under pressing circumstances, it was not more than a mile or so from the old site. “It is really wonderful to see the sacrifices they make to this love of certain localities.”²⁴

Colonisation, Structural displacement and Contradictions

Though Manipur was brought under the British administration on the 18th September, 1891 with the installation of Churachand Singh on the throne of Manipur, the

¹⁹ U.G. Bower, *Naga Path*, John Murry 50 Albemarle St., London, 1950, p. 83.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ R.R. Shimray, *Origin and Culture of Nagas*, Samsok Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p. 304.

²² Ramkhun Pamei, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²³ U.G. Bower, *Naga Path*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²⁴ Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*, OUP, Bombay, 1969, p. 409.

British started penetrating into the northern Zeliangrong area since 1832 in connivance with Manipur. E.R. Grange, "The Father of Assam Rifles", led the first expedition, and in 1865 created the Naga Hill District with its headquarters at Asalu, a Zeliangrong village in the North Cachar Hills. The Manipur sector of the Zeliangrong areas was brought under the British rule with their conquest of Manipur in 1891.²⁵

In the beginning, the British did not wish to get directly involved with the Nagas and left it to the Meetei kingdom of Manipur and the State of Cachar to keep them under control. But Cachar under Tularam Senapati pleaded inability to undertake any expedition into the hills. The British then turned to Manipur. According to Mackenzie, the Manipur State was supposed to exercise some sort of authority over the southern portions (particularly the Zeliangrong areas) of the Naga Hills.²⁶ At this point of time, the British interest in the areas was to develop a road link between Imphal and Assam, which required explorations and expeditions to the hills. So, in January 1832, the British led a 700 strong Meetei (Manipuri) force into the hills on an exploratory mission. The Nagas in between the two points (Zeliangrong area) did not like the intrusion and tried to obstruct the movement, leading to petty skirmishes. Exploratory marches through the hills continued the next year under Raja Gambhir Singh of Manipur with Lt. Gordon leading the force for him.²⁷ The British also wanted to use the tribal population as a screen between the newly acquired Indian territories and Burma (Myanmar).²⁸

With the arrival of the British, the social and political complexion of the Zeliangrong people was never to be the same again. The Manipuris and the Kukis were used as part of the British ploy to extend their rule over the hill people of Manipur. Exploitation, suppression and subjugation of the tribals with far reaching consequences affecting the social fabric of the tribal people began. The consequences of this policy are prominently being unfolded even in the present day politics of the tribals in Manipur as a

²⁵ Gangmumei Kamei, *Jadonang: A Mystic Naga Rebel*, SPN Associates Pvt. Ltd., Guwahati, 1997, p. 9.

²⁶ Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the Northeast Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1884, p. 102.

²⁷ Visier Sanyu, *A History of Nagas and Nagaland*, Commonwealth Publishers, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 88-89.

²⁸ Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*, Spectrum Publications, Delhi (reprint), 1997, p. 20.

whole. The following pages will show the development of tribal politics with reference to the Zeliangrong people to a new and hitherto never seen or felt dimension.

Colonisation of the tribal areas paved the way to a new era of suppression, exploitation and imperialism. With the British administration firmly established in Manipur in the last part of the 19th century, the British and the immigrant Kukis arrived almost together to the Zeliangrong areas. Thereafter, for the first time, the Zeliangrong came under the control of alien invaders. They were insulted by the British demand that the Nagas carry the luggage and provisions of various expeditions undertaken by the British to map and survey the hill areas for the purpose of establishing link road between Assam and Manipur. The attitude of the tribals was simple: 'This is our land, and we need not help you or be paid for our help by outsiders'. At gunpoint, many were forced to help in mapping and geographical expedition. But the resentment burned deep at being used like coolies. All it needed was a spark to ignite the anger to revolt against the alien invader.²⁹

It is pertinent to point out at this stage that "the Naga communities were never under any direct Indian ruler's control or jurisdiction. They developed a rudimentary but effective form of democracy with headman ruling on local disputes after discussing the problem openly."³⁰ With the introduction of the system of forced labour called *Pothang Bekari* by which the villagers were obliged to carry the luggage of the British officials free of cost. They were also compelled to offer their labour free of cost in the building of roads and bridges, the villages were seriously threatened of their independent existence. Yet, another measure forced on them was the *Pothang Senkhai* by which the villagers had to contribute money in order to feed the officials and their entourage.³¹

In the traditional tribal economy, the system of trade and commerce was very limited and insignificant. Whatever little trading they undertook was the barter system by

²⁹ Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist*, Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 1994, p. 95.

³⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 93-4.

³¹ D.P. Mukherjee, et. al. "The Zeliangrong or Haomei Movement", in K.S. Singh (ed), *Tribal Movement in India - I*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p. 68.

which they exchanged goods for goods. The traditional economic system was challenged when the British resorted to methods like imposition of house tax, the meaning or notion of which was alien to the tribals. House tax of Rs. 3/- per house was imposed. In the Manipur Administrative Report 1893-94, it is mentioned that “Good work was done by Mr. Crawford when on special duty in the Kabui Tract in the North-west of the State, no less than Rs. 7,000/- having been realised which had neither paid a rupee nor furnished a coolie since the occupation of the State in 1891.”³²

All these measures were carried through force of arm, particularly in the Tamenglong area, creating a climate of political agitation.³³ The tribal social and political structure was seriously endangered when the British discouraged the *morung* system. In the words of Hazarika, “The British, after their conquest of Assam in 1826 and the Treaty of Yandaboo with the Burmese King, decided that they would not allow the tribes from the hills to continue with one of their favourite pastimes.”³⁴

To the already utterly disturbed Zeliangrong people, another ploy of the British in the form of playing the Kukis against the Nagas to advance their colonial interests played havoc in the lives of both the communities. The British used the Kukis to suppress, subdue, and exploit the Nagas. “Driven from the Chittagong Hill Tract by the Chins, who were themselves driven out by the Shans, from Kabaw Valley in Burma (Myanmar), the Kuki migration continued throughout the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries. Besides the Zeliangrong areas, they also migrated to North Cachar-Mikir Hills, Tripura, Manipur and the Naga Hills (Nagaland), the Somra Hill Tracts and in Tangkhul Naga areas.”³⁵ In the course of their migration searching for suitable lands to settle down, the Kukis unleashed their savage nature upon the unsuspecting Nagas. “The disciplined Kukis under their autocratic chiefs swept down violently, intimidatingly and ferociously upon the well-permanently settled villages of the Zemi, Liangmei, Rongmei, Mao,

³² Asoso Yonuo, *Nagas Struggler Against the British Rule Under Jadonang and Gaidinliu (1925-1947)*, Leno Printing Press, Kohima, Nagaland, 1982, p. 14.

³³ D.P Mukherjee, et. al., *The Zeliangrong... op. cit.*, p. 68.

³⁴ Sanjoy Hazarika, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

³⁵ Gangmumei Kabui, *Genesis of the Ethnoses of Nagas and Kuki-chin*, Naga Students' Federation, Kohima, Nagaland, 1993, p. 30.

Maram... They also raided these areas periodically, burning villages, destroying crops in the field and slaughtering men, women and children with violence and brutality. They tried to extend their rule over the Nagas by forcefully exerting tribute from them.”³⁶

Some of the conditions which existed in those days, which the Kukis found advantageous, were that:

1. the Zeliangrong and other Naga tribes had no political unity and solidarity among them. They were constantly hunting heads and raiding other villages; and
2. the Meetei (Manipuri)-Naga relations, as they found it were not good. The former by their attempt to expand their rule into the Naga Hills; and the latter by their offensive or defensive acts.³⁷

The British saw in the Kukis an answer to their need for buffer communities both within and between their frontiers in India and international borders, especially Burma. The Kukis were provided with arms and ammunition and recruited into a battalion in the British India Army. The British requisitioned their services to bring the Nagas who were stoutly resisting them under their control. Moreover, Colonel Mc Culloch supplied the Kukis with rations and let them loose in the Naga Hills in what he called “The Policy of Planting Kuki Settlement in the Exposed Frontiers”.³⁸

With such a policy, the British administration conceded to the Kukis’ demand for land to be carved out from the Zeliangrong land. This severely affected the *jhum* cultivation cycle. “The political consequences were unfortunate. The alienation of their land, unwitting though it was, set the Zemis against the administration from the start. The more the government tried, as it thought to hold just balance between the tribes, the more it seemed to the Zemis to be tilted unfairly against them, and the more it seemed to the government that the Zemis were difficult and intransigent.”³⁹ The consequences of such a policy of the British were that “the economic results were even worse. There was

³⁶ Asoso Yonuo, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-9.

³⁷ Asoso Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas*, Vivek Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, p. 53.

³⁸ N. Samchon, “Nagas Under Attack”, *The Pioneer*, 31 October, 1992.

³⁹ U.G. Bower, *Naga Path*, *op. cit.*, p.151.

bitter competition between Zemis and Kukis for means to live, since neither side had enough land – squabbles, boundary disputes, trespass and sometimes more serious troubles.” As the years passed, the damage became apparent. “Throughout the area the level of prosperity fell. There were no more great feasts. First, the annual surplus dwindled and then the grain reserves, until, in the worst hit parts, there was no safety margin at all. Year by year more and more households could not grow enough to fend themselves, and a grim insecurity began”. However, despite their hardened life, “the Zemi, fearing government action, were only too glad to let go their land.”⁴⁰

Such were the state of affairs in the Zeliangrong areas in the later part of the 19th century. Meanwhile, the Kukis were posing be a continuous threat to the Nagas, especially to the Zeliangrongs due to their physical proximity. The British turned a blind eye to the Kuki atrocities and the British did not respond to the repeated appeals of the Zeliangrongs to intercede and protect them from the raids. This was the time when the first known collective effort taken by the Zeliangrong people to protest against the exploitative, suppressive and regressive measures enforced on them was started.

In 1917-19, there was an uprising against the British policy of raising forced labour and recruiting of soldiers to fight in foreign countries like France and Mesopotamia during the First World War. The insurrection started in December, 1917 and it lasted for a year and a half. In the name of liberating the hill region, the Kukis started the move against the British. This movement is known as the Kuki Rebellion. The Kukis tried to bring the other tribals under their control once again. The Zeliangrongs defied the call of the Kukis to join the rebellion. Then the Kukis realised that unless the Nagas were suppressed, they would not be in a position to face the British effectively. It was with this conclusion that they committed themselves to commit atrocities on the Naga villages. When the Kukis demanded taxes and foodstuffs from the Zeliangrong people, the latter refused causing even more victimisation and bloodshed. The Zeliangrong people’s appeal to the British to protect them went unheeded yet again. This repetitive failure on the part of the government, despite their loyalty to it, especially

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 151-4.

during the war, made them loose their confidence in the British rule and their sense of justice for once and all.⁴¹

The British treated the Zeliangrong people badly and exploited them. They severed fraternal ties amongst them and gave them separate nomenclatures. They changed the names of their villages and debarred them from joining the British army. As noted earlier, the British patronised Kuki settlement in the Zeliangrong country and gave protection to them. The Kuki Rebellion was basically against the British but hundreds of innocent Zeliangrongs were killed right under the nose of the British and the Meetei Maharajahs. They had not given any protection to the people but had come to collect house taxes.⁴²

The Kuki Rebellion was suppressed in 1919 with all their chiefs and surrendered about 1000 guns. At the end of the rebellion, the British established their Sub-Divisional headquarters at Tamenglong in 1919 with Mr. William Shaw as the Sub-Divisional Officer. By this time, the old form of social, cultural and political life had been disturbed to a great extent. A section of the Zeliangrong people wanted to fight for independent living. There arose another section favouring the new pattern of modernisation in their region. They took to new method of education, social and political changes. But it was certain that there entered among the people a sense of restlessness, discontentment and deprivation for their self-government and independent living had been taken and instead firmly replaced by the British rule.

The British continued to stay with all administrative functions absorbed into their hands till the time India gained independence in 1947. The British occupation brought a new era in the history of the tribals when their political consciousness was aroused in tandem with the rest of the world, albeit immature and fragile.

⁴¹ Gangmumei Kabui, *A brief History of the Zeliangrong Movement: 1927-1977*, Nagaland, 1977. pp. 2-3

⁴² Namthiubuiyang Pamei, *op. cit.*, p. XI.

Political Consciousness and Mobilisation

The British imperialistic rule, the influx of the Kukis and the subsequent Kuki Rebellion gave a serious blow to the well-being of the Zeliangrong people. The exploitative, suppressive and subjugative policies of both the British and the Kukis with different degree and intensity reigned supreme and unabated since the introduction of the colonial administrative systems in Manipur and Naga Hills (Nagaland) in 1891 and 1865 respectively. The periodic invasions of the Meeteis from the Imphal valley should be taken into consideration along with the above for understanding the seriousness of the political and social impasse of those days. These intrusions of outside forces not only brought about unprecedented miseries and sufferings to the people but also threatened their integrity and survival. The pristine traditional system was slowly being uprooted. It began to disturb and interfere in their social, economic and political life. Above all, it created discontentment and insecurity in the minds of the Zeliangrongs.

Political consciousness in the geo-political sense (beyond the 'village-state') did not come to the Zeliangrongs till the British firmly established their administration and dominion over the hill people, though the seed of which had been planted long before. In a nutshell, some important factors that contributed to the rise of political consciousness may be spelt out in the in the following enumerated points.

1. The Kuki influx served as an eye-opener to the self-contented Zeliangrong people (as also to other tribals) that they could no longer defend themselves against the onslaught without standing out unitedly.
2. Imposition of house tax, *Pothang Bekari* and *Pothang Senkhai* coupled with the repeated failure on the part of the British to protect the helpless villagers from the Kukis atrocities inflamed the anger of the Zeliangrongs to no end.
3. The coming of Christianity and the British rule had come into direct conflict with the ancient faith and freedom firmly held by the Zeliangrongs. Hence, the tribal people felt the need to preserve their traditional culture and religion and their traditional moral and social ethos.

4. The Meetei expansionist policy over the hill tribes by which acts of invasion and subjugation were perpetrated over a period of time. The *Vaishnavite* Meetei Hindus even categorised the hill tribes as 'untouchables'.
5. Arbitrary division of land and people against the wish and knowledge of the concerned people led to the necessity of standing united to thwart the divisive and exploitative policies of the invaders.

The extreme exploitation and oppression by the above mentioned forces created an unprecedented environment for the tribals to become united and to stand firm as a cohesive group of people. The old practice of head hunting and inter-village feuds gave way to inter-village and area associations under the rubric of tribal solidarity. The political consciousness of the tribals has to be seen from this background as their tribal way of life and superior forces have challenged their very survival. A new idiom of 'tribal ethnicity' or 'tribal solidarity' emerged because of the imposed inner contradictions and structural changes.

The above mentioned forces or factors were responsible for the founding of an organisation called *Chingsangmei* at Akhui village in 1917 during the Kuki Rebellion. A strong worded resolution was taken to oppose the Kuki Rebellion tooth and nail. "None of the Nagas was to render cooperation and help to them."⁴³ This organisation was the first ever of its kind in the Zeliangrong area outside the 'village-state' system. Henceforth a new era of political consciousness and mobilisation began to hold sway over the populace scattered over the length and breadth of the tribal inhabited areas.

It is pertinent to point out here that those acts perpetrated against the Zeliangrongs by the British, the Meeteis and the Kukis, which were nothing short of betrayal, turned out to be blessings in disguise. They united the Zeliangrongs and roused in them the feeling of brotherhood and oneness. Thereafter, the Zeliangrong socio-economic and political development took to an altogether hitherto uncharted path.

⁴³ Huchamjinang Gonmei, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

The Zeliangrong Movement

The Zeliangrong movement is one of the earliest tribal movements in the northeast of India in the modern sense of the term. As noted earlier, this movement was the result of the cumulative and piled-up discontentment against the intruders. The movement was conceived in the early 1920s. The political consciousness of the Zeliangrong people gained strength and vigour from the movement as much as the movement contributed to the same. The following pages will show how the movement helped the Zeliangrong people to come under the banner of togetherness and solidarity; and most notably under a single leadership.

When the movement was first conceived, it was rudimentary and unorganised as the people had never been to such culture before. In other words, it was an 'archaic type' found in the pre-capitalistic socio-economic formation.⁴⁴ Initially the movement was in many respects blind and groping as the people were illiterate to the core and were ill equipped. However, it was a very important and significant event in the history of the Zeliangrong people. As was the case with all early tribal movements, the Zeliangrong movement was epidemic rather than endemic when the people knew no other means of self-defence in a condition of tension, deprivation and disruption.⁴⁵ The movement was reformist in nature as it initially did not seek to establish a new order of society but rather the correction of abnormalities and injustice in a traditional order. However, in the course of its development, a new type of political and democratic consciousness crept in. With the changing socio-economic and political system, various other issues affected were groped into the movement. In the course of time, a new organisational structure emerged and the movement began to take a formal shape.

The Zeliangrong movement also comes under the rubric of messianic or millenarian movements that were led by various prophetic leaders who convinced their fellow tribals to make a "successful attack against their oppressors and external

⁴⁴ E.J. Hobsbawn, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th centuries*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1968, p. 2.

⁴⁵ See, *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

enemies.”⁴⁶ Such movements were the outcome of severe socio-economic problems faced by the tribals under the colonial rulers.⁴⁷ Gough has classified five types of tribal peasant movements during the colonial rule in terms of their goals, ideology and methods of organisation. These are:

1. restorative rebellions which were launched to drive out the colonial usurpers from the tribal areas and restore the earlier rules and social relations;
2. religious movements launched for the liberation of a region or an ethnic group under a new form of social relations free from oppression and which looked forward to a terrestrial state of righteousness and justice;
3. social banditry, a primitive form of organised social protest and injustice and oppression;
4. terrorist vengeance with ideas of meting out collective justice; and
5. mass insurrection for the redress of particular grievance.⁴⁸

With the exception of the third and fourth cited types of movements, the Zeliangrong movement incorporated the other three with varying degrees at different points of time.

Jaduanang, a “new messiah” who “promise to liberate the Nagas from the yoke of both Kukis and British”⁴⁹ started the Zeliangrong movement. “When there was a need for social unity, security from alien intruders, religious reform and political unity...Jaduanang came to the scene and vigorously launched a comprehensive movement touching almost all aspects of the Zeliangrong life: religious reform, social integration and unity, cultural revivalism and preservation and political freedom.”⁵⁰

With Jaduanang as their undisputed leader, the Zeliangrong people for the first time began to conduct themselves as a collective group. With the mass following and

⁴⁶ Stephen Fuchs, in *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements Indian Religions*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p. 239.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Kathleen Gough, “Indian Peasant uprisings”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, August, 1974, pp. 1391-1412.

⁴⁹ Stephen Fuchs, *op.cit.*, p. 151

⁵⁰ Gangmumei Kabui. *A Brief history of Zeliangrong Movement*, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

loyalty he enjoyed, Jaduanang set out to liberate the Zeliangrong people from the British rule and exploitation from the Kukis and others. He found an army of freedom fighters called *Riphen* (warriors) and sent them out to spread the message that he would lead them to overthrow the alien intruders. Funds were raised for purchase and collection of arms; young boys and girls were recruited to military training and supervision and the art of sending secret messages was taught; and songs and dances with patriotic and political tunes were composed and taught to his followers⁵¹.

Jaduanang and his followers had gained the support of almost all the villages of the Zeliangrong areas. It was in the midst of all these activities that Jaduanang and his movement caught the attention of the British. Consequently, several measures were taken to quell the movement. Collective fines were imposed on the villages supporting the movement; those found guilty were fined or imprisoned; licensed guns were withdrawn and efforts to nab Jaduanang began at the right earnest. However, the movement continued unabated with greater intensity. It then reached a stage when it posed a serious threat to the British imperialism not only in the Zeliangrong inhabited areas but also in all Naga areas in Assam and even in Nagaland. The Kukis, who during the Kuki Rebellion, cut up and burnt many Naga villages came down to Imphal and began to settle there for fear for reprisals from Jaduanang and his followers.⁵² At this time, J. P. Mills, the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills (Nagaland) reported to the authority that Jaduanang had proclaimed a 'Naga Raj' between Imphal and Silchar (Assam). Based on the report, J.C. Higgins, Political Agent of Manipur, launched a military operation and got him arrested in February, 1931. He was wrongly implicated in a murder case and was hanged on 29th August, 1931 at Imphal jail.⁵³

The manner in which Jaduanang was persecuted enraged the people even more. His dreams were carried forward with more zeal and vigour by his trusted follower – Gaidinliu. She vigorously carried on the movement by organising her people to be ready

⁵¹ Asoso Yonuo (1982), *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵³ Achung Xavier Longmei, "Zeliangrong Movement: A Search for Identity", *North East Zeliangrong Naga Festival-cum-Seminar*, 9 – 12 December, 1995 (Souvenir), Imphal, 1995, p. 14.

for armed rebellion. Thereafter, the movement spread like wild fire and engulfed the whole Zelianrong country and from there, it widened its influence to the Mao-Maram Nagas and Angami Nagas who supported her actively. In latter years Gaidinliu wrote: "A girl of sixteen years of age has her own youthful dreams... but what the choice left to me was either to lead a normal peaceful life like any other girl, or to sacrifice everything in the world by taking up the leadership for the liberation of my people from the atrocities of alien rulers... I chose the latter for betterment and salvation of my people."⁵⁴

The movement became so widespread, so much so that it alarmed the British administration in Manipur and Naga Hills. Efforts to capture Gaidinliu and her followers began at the right earnest, but Gaidinliu evaded arrest for a considerable period of time by moving from village to village preparing for a showdown with the British administration. However, she was eventually arrested and imprisoned for life in 1932. Jawaharlal Nehru, the then President of the Indian National Congress, on his tour to Assam came to know about the life imprisonment of Gaidinliu for challenging the mighty British Empire. In his article, "Child of the Hills Now in Prison Cell", Nehru wrote: "... she dreamed of freedom of her people... and raised the banner of independence. But that Empire still functioned effectively and it took vengeance on her and her people. Many villages were burnt and destroyed and their heroic girl was captured and sentenced to deportation for life. And now she lies in some prison in Assam, wasting her bright young womanhood in dark cells and solitude... what torment and suppression of spirit they have brought to her who, in pride of youth, dared to challenge an empire... and India does not even know of this brave child of her hills, with the free spirit of the mountains in her... And a day will come when India also remembers her and cherishes her."⁵⁵ Deeply moved by the plight of Gaidinliu and her people, Jawaharlal Nehru, during 1938-39, tried his best to release her but it was not successful as she was considered by the British Government of India as a potent source of danger to the North Eastern part of their Empire.

⁵⁴ Rani Gaidinliu, *Memorandum to Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi*, 18th August, 1972, p. 2.

⁵⁵ As quoted by Achung Xavier Longmei, *op. cit.*, p.15.

During this period, the British took up the following repressive measures against the movement:

1. The Government stopped all developmental works for the Zeliangrong people so that they remained isolated, illiterate and uncivilised.
2. Following the policy of 'divide and rule' the Zeliangrongs were divided and put under three different administration – North Cachar Hills (Assam), Manipur State and the Naga Hills (Nagaland), and
3. The Zeliangrong people were brought to Imphal and Kohima, and employed in degrading occupations as sweepers, removers of night soil, etc.⁵⁶

The consequences of these policies are still prominently visible even today affecting the socio-economic and political life of not only the Zeliangrong but also all tribals in the hills. The towering control of the British was such that the movement suffered a serious jolt, and slowly declined in its intensity and vigour. However, for the Zeliangrongs and other tribals, the movement continues to remain as a significant and important landmark in their history. The political consciousness to the tribals in Manipur, therefore, has to be seen in the backdrop of the movement.

During the course of the movement, inter-tribal, inter-village feuds and the old practice of head hunting were relegated to the back burner never to resurface again. The 'village-state' system paved the way to collective associations and organisations. One such association was formed in 1927 known as the *Kabui Chingsang*, the inception of which brought about a sense of identity and cultural consciousness. Eventually the Zemis, the Liangmeis, the Rongmeis and the Puimeis were brought under the fold of a single association or forum. Thereafter, collective action-plan began to surface. On 7 April, 1934 the complete merger of the kindred tribes of Zeliangrong took place. "That auspicious day, brothers pardoned the wrongs and misunderstanding that existed in the past among them. In the history of the Zeliangrongs, it was a day of reconciliation when

⁵⁶ Gaichanglungliu Kamei, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

all hatred and suspicion that existed between their villages were ended and all brothers drank from the same cup and ate from the same platter.”⁵⁷

Some years later, during the Second World War, the Naga Tribal Council was formed in the Naga Hills to look after the welfare of the Nagas. The War was significant to the tribals in particular from several points of view. First of all, an area, which was isolated to a great extent, became an important theatre of war all of a sudden where soldiers from different parts of the globe fought each other. Physical, political and ideological isolation was broken and the Naga villages came to know about the armies, the objectives of the Allied and Axis powers. They woke up to the modern fighting weapons. The War also provided employment potentials in the form of joining the army or working as laborers and money was introduced with greater amount into the tribal barter system. The most significant impact was the change in the political attitude of the average tribals.

After the War ended, the tribal bond of solidarity was strengthened even more like never before. In 1946, another association by the name of Kabui Association was formed, primarily to clear the damages done to the tribals during the War. The people began to understand the value of money and the importance of education. Trading centers and educational institutions were established in the Zeliangrong areas. Meanwhile, the Kabui Association was given a new name as the Kabui Naga Association.

The horror of war induced the Zelaingrongs to forge a stronger bond between them as they were placed under different administrative units under the British Government. A series of contacts were established. And on 15 February, 1947, representatives from Assam and Manipur met for the first time at Imphal and formed a body called the Zeliangrong Council by putting the prefixes of the Zemi, Liangmei and Rongmei. The primary aim of the Council was to improve the economic, social and

⁵⁷ Namthiubuiyang Pamei. *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

political advancement of the Zeliangrong people. From that day, the Kabui-Kacha Nagas began to call and identify themselves as Zeliangrongs.⁵⁸

The Manipur Zeliangrong Union and the Zeliangrong Naga Union were formed to look after and push forward the socio-economic interests of the Zeliangrong people. Meanwhile, the Naga National Movement that began in the 1920s gained momentum at a greater pace in which the Zeliangrongs also began to actively participate. It is suffice to add here that the Naga National Movement also played a very significant role in arousing the political consciousness of the Zeliangrong people in the course of its struggle.

Thus, the few decades preceding India's independence in 1947 threw up various socio-political circumstances that educated the Zeliangrongs and the tribals politically. Political consciousness enabling them to assert their rights or identities was realised as the result of their plight by the presence of deprivation, insecurity or threat to their survival. The Zeliangrong movement resulted in the coming together of the cognate tribes which still stands today.

Crystallisation of Dissent: Contemporary Situation

The post-1947 developments opened up a new chapter in the lives of the tribals – social, economic and political. “Whereas in the western countries, the democratic system grew out of bourgeois societies and capitalist economics, in the tribal areas of the north-east of India, democratic political institutions have been transplanted to become instruments of social and economic change.”⁵⁹ With these developments, the political consciousness of the tribals have been modernised and politicised into a new dimension. The tribals, who neither had any political representation in any legislature nor had any experience in exercising the newly introduced Adult Franchise were exposed to a new political system of democratically elected institutions. This sudden change from one political situation to another led to an abrupt change in the attitude of the tribals

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.51.

⁵⁹ B.P. Singh, *The Problem of Change: A Study of The North East of India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987, pp. 152-3.

hampering the efficacy and functioning of the democratic institutions newly transplanted in their areas.

In the first two decades following India's independence, Manipur passed through different stages of government from centrally administered Provincial State (Part C State) to the status of Union Territory to full-fledged statehood in 1972. During this period many a changes took place with various groups in the State brewing up various demands from the State as well as the Central Governments. It is important, therefore, that these various demands are viewed against the background of increased political moderation and socialisation.

In the immediate years following India's independence, a wave of political demands cropped up in different parts of the State having far-reaching consequences and repercussions. Gaidinliu, who had been in jail since 1932, was released in 1947 from Tura jail in the Garo Hills District of Assam with some pre-conditions restricting her movements and activities. Jawaharlal Nehru was instrumental in the release of Gaidinliu with his strong argument that in free, India political prisoners of the British era had to be freed. Contrary to it would be negation of freedom. The release of Gaidinliu was significant in that the Zeliangrong movement, which began in the 1920s, was revived with new aims and objectives. In 1948, the Mao Nagas raised their demand for merger of the Mao areas with the Naga Hills (Assam). Defying the authority of the government of Manipur, they started their movement vigorously. In the same year, the Manipur Kishan Party launched a revolutionary movement in the Northeastern part of Manipur with the aim of establishing an "Independent Peasant Republic". On 15 October, 1949, Manipur was merged to the Indian Union and became a Part 'C' State to be administered by a Chief Commissioner appointed by the President of India. In the 1952 general elections, Manipur elected two members to the Lok Sabha, one each from the Valley and Hill constituencies. Ironically, the Meeteis' feeling of neglect and alienation or deprivation began to take shape during this period. With different sections of the State populace simultaneously rising up with various demands with different intensity, the seed of

discontentment leading to political instability and unrest, which incidentally is characteristic of the State politics, began to take root.

In the tribal dominated areas, a serious jolt was felt with the inauguration of modern democratic political institutions. New local leaders began to emerge to lead the villagers in the changed democratic set-up. The ideas of general elections and community development programmes were entirely new to the villagers. A few educated and influential individuals tried to utilise every opportunity to popularise themselves to get the leadership. Thus, competing politicians emerged as new village leaders posing a threat to the traditional village officers. The open competition in general election has replaced the spirit of consensus. The individual began to gain importance and the social organisation underwent a change. In this process, the universal Adult Franchise, the experience of elections of legislative and parliamentary bodies, for district local boards, community project committees and cooperative societies provided avenues to politically educate the tribals.⁶⁰

With the emergence of the new institutions and their leaders, some of the erstwhile traditional leaders had to swim with the new current, as there was fear of being drowned in the oblivion of the village masses. Some of such leaders greatly succeeded in the sense that they proved effective in establishing important links between the 'old' and the 'new' ideas, values and institutions and thus operated both in the traditional and modern institutions and social structures. Side by side, the tribals in Manipur began to take interest in educational institutions.

Along with modernisation and politicisation, the tribals were exposed to a complex modern civilisation. B. P. Singh aptly describes the sudden exposure of the remote tribals in the following words: "Head hunters were exposed to writing and debate, scantily clad tribes were initiated into the comforts of tropical woolen garments, nomadic tribes who had not even handled a bullock cart were trained to drive jeeps and trucks, the

⁶⁰ L. P. Vidyarthi et. al., *The Tribal Culture of India*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, (reprinted) 2000, pp. 226-8.

practitioners of slash-and -burn cultivation were introduced to permanent cultivation, high yielding crops and irrigation.”⁶¹ Though these imposed forces, it must be acknowledged in all fairness, were necessary and inevitable, some were at best, mixed blessings. The government officials who were non-tribals began to flock the tribal areas primarily to establish and run the government institutions. Though these officials who were sent to the tribal areas did not mean intentional harm, they, very often, in their misguided zeal sought to pack a couple of decades of changes which should normally have taken centuries. “These forces introduced abrupt changes and growth at an abnormal pace, and the results have been more revolutionary than evolutionary.”⁶² As all these happened in just a couple of years, a certain degree of conflict and violence was thus inevitable in the process of change. In the words of B.K. Nehru, “What is surprising is that these sudden and cataclysmic changes have not resulted in reactions of violence amongst peoples... more than they actually have.”⁶³

The 1950s saw a number of movements springing up in quick succession. The Naga National Movement under the leadership of A. Z. Phizo came up powerfully and started the independent movement for the Nagas. He sounded a clarion call to all the Nagas inhabiting under the different administrative units to stand united for the cause of Nagaland. The Meeteis under the leadership of a communist patriot, Irabot, a dedicated royal product, also started a movement to retain Manipur as an independent State, and established his own underground communist government. During this period, Gaidinliu became more seriously concerned for the development and welfare of the Zeliangrong people as they were very much backward than other tribals in many fields. In this connection, she met a number of Indian National Congress leaders and acquainted them with some of the acute problems faced by her people. At this time, Gaidinliu and her followers became very active with a view to creating a separate Zeliangrong Administrative unit within the Indian Union or in Nagaland.⁶⁴

⁶¹ B.P. Singh, *op. cit.* p. 153.

⁶² M. Horam, *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas*, Low Price Publications, New Delhi, 1977, p. 98.

⁶³ B.K.Nehru, “North Eastern India”, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 21 November, 1976, Bombay, p. 22.

⁶⁴ Asoso Yunuo, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-156.

With the creation of Nagaland State in 1963, the division of the Zeliangrong people and their land became even more glaring. In 1964, some Zeliangrong leaders decided to revive the already decayed Zeliangrong Council formed in 1947 with a view to achieving their integration. Their memorandum to the Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri in October, 1964 read thus: "Our people have been scattered over the three States because of political, historical and geographical matters. Though administratively scattered, the three constituent tribes have glaring similarities in culture, religion, custom, and language...It is the stand of the Zeliangrong people that we should all live in a common homeland with explicit right to develop ourselves...This can only be possible when we live in a separate Zeliangrong administrative unit."⁶⁵ Two years later, Gaidinliu along with some Zeliangrong leaders met the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with the problems faced by the Zeliangrongs. The Prime Minister expressed herself in favour of speedy developmental activities and coordinated planning in all Zeliangrong areas. Regarding the political demand for integrated administrative unit, she assured to "examine the question further and give serious thought" in the days to come. Mrs. Gandhi wrote in 1966 that "the welfare of the Zeliangrong people will always receive my greatest sympathy and prompt consideration."⁶⁶

When Manipur was granted full statehood in 1972, the Zeliangrongs demanded to live under one administrative unit received another serious jolt, and their identity was further corroded. They were placed in an acute and peculiar situation. The Central Government was kind enough to entertain the Zeliangrong with their varied demands, but it began to see the Zeliangrong problems in different light and perspective as they were scattered and settled under three States of the Indian Union. Resultantly, the Zeliangrongs began to assert their identity with greater intensity and degree. At a joint meeting of the Zeliangrong leaders held on the 7th and 8th of November, 1975 at Imphal, attended by members of the Legislative Assembly, District Councils, and leaders from various organisations and social workers, a resolution was taken for the formation of the entire

⁶⁵ Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri by Zeliangrong leaders in October, 1964.

⁶⁶ Indira Gandhi's letter to Gaidinliu, 9 March, 1966.

contiguous areas of Zeliangrong into one political unit.⁶⁷ With this resolution, people from all walks of life began to acutely feel the need to remain under one government; and they were convinced that it was the only solution to their problem.

However, with the passage of time, the Zeliangrongs began to feel alienated and exploited even more. "They were more stringently suppressed by the oppressive and repressive policies and measures than what was done to them during the British rule. They felt that they were treated as 'colonial and unwanted subjects' and that the authorities had desired to keep them illiterate, uncivilised, and backward, so that they might remain isolated from the mainstream of the Nagas and not pose a serious threat to the government."⁶⁸ On the same line, the aspirations of the Zeliangrong people for the integration and development of their areas were eventually played down to the level of an issue of development by the Government of India.

Despite the setbacks, the opinion of the people on the move to demand a common homeland grew unhindered. The Zeliangrong People's Convention (ZPC) was formed in 1986 under the chairmanship of Gaidinliu. The ZPC was the highest decision making body having the power to review the earlier political stand or to seek a better political objective. In a leaflet entitled, "Decide Your Own Future", the ZPC wrote: "Zeliangrong people have learned some bitter truth: the distinctive identity of Zeliangrongs has not been legally recognised by the state governments or by the Government of India... A big question arises: Who we are... In terms of economic progress and administration, the Zeliangrong people are the victims of colonial policy of the Government of India, which is a hangover of the British imperialism. How much do the state government think about the progress of Zeliangrong inhabited areas? Are they not exploiting our backwardness; our ignorance and our disunity? ... The Zeliangrong people must decide and determine our own political destiny."⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Namthiubuiyang Pamei. *Op.cit.*, pp. 151-2.

⁶⁸ Asoso Yunuo, *op.cit.*, pp. 151-2.

⁶⁹ Pamphlet issued by the Zeliangrong People's Convention.

With the passage of time, the disillusionment was writ large in all the Zeliangrong inhabited areas as none of their demands were met with. Neither did the promise of economic development come along. Their faith in the powers in Delhi and the state governments slackened with each passing day.

The 1980s and early 1990s witnessed the most disturbing period in the history of Zeliangongs in that the political aspirations of the people to live and grow under one administrative unit fluctuated pushing the people to the highest level of political aspiration and participation. It also saw the decline of their aspirations with pulls and pressures from various sections of the authorities as well as from other tribes. The other Naga tribes were conspicuous either by their silence or objection to the demands of the Zeliangrong people. As the Naga National Movement has been in the forefront captivating the political aspiration of the Nagas, the Zeliangrong People's Convention was accused of hampering the unity of the Nagas' fraternity, and consequently downplayed it. The death the Chairman of the ZPC, Gaidinliu, at the age of 78, in February, 1993 dealt a serious blow to the Convention in particular and the Zeliangrong people at large. The aims and objectives of the ZPC are now left to the powers-that-be in the concerned states and Union Governments, the Zeliangrong people included.

“The policy of isolation, exploitation and neglect of our people is unfortunately continued even in independent India of today... The political and administrative balkanisation have reduced our people into political minorities... to this are added administrative and economic exploitation by more advance sections of other populations; the civil services are manned and controlled by irresponsible state bureaucracy and consequently making our people extremely poor and educationally backward... It is sad but true that the Zeliangrong areas are amongst the most backward regions of the Northeast India.”⁷⁰

Crystallisation of their dissent and discontentment and the feeling of being exploited and alienated are prominently evident in that the British imposed names

⁷⁰ Declaration on Zeliangrong Homeland, 30th November 1982, Tamenglong, Manipur.

'Kabui' (referring to the Rongmeis and the Puimeis) and 'Kacha Naga' (referring to the Zemis and the Liangmeis), much against their wishes, have not been given the necessary corrections. The Zeliangrongs are today known and identified by those pejorative names.

The development or evolution of the tribal politics has been at a tremendous pace. Politicisation, modernisation and democratisation of the social, economic and political institutions of the tribals have come about all in the span of a century. The metamorphosis from 'village-state' to modern democratic polity has been due to the various socio-political circumstances that educated, modernised and politicised the tribals in Manipur. These factors may be broadly categorised into two: (i) Divisive Move and (ii) Formal Move. The plight of the tribals owing to the intrusion or invasion by people from outside their tribal conglomeration leading to exploitation, deprivation, insecurity or threat to unity and integrity of the people can be termed as the divisive move. The formal move or factors that helped the development of the politics of the tribals are the coming of western influence, spread of education, periodical state and national elections. As noted earlier, the pace of development has been so dramatic, that some kind of violence or conflicts between tribes or tribal alliances or between communities are inevitable as the resources of the State and land are scarce and the fight to acquire political power has intensified with each passing day. To put matters worse, the credibility of the governing institutions has been eroding putting the citizens' lives in a precarious situation. The fluid socio-economic and political situations (political instability and unrest) in Manipur is the result of the assertions of identities and rights from all the three pre-dominant ethnic groups and their tribal units of the State's populace.

CHAPTER THREE

Administration in the Manipur Hills

Historically and constitutionally, two principal characteristics of the administrative philosophy have been (i) separate administrative organizations for the hills and the plains and (ii) frequent changes in the nature and pattern of administrative framework, particularly in the hill areas of the State. Both these characteristics have influenced the evolution of administrative policy as well as institutional framework of the State all these years. The five hill districts of the State, exclusively inhabited by different groups of tribals, are governed and/or administered according to the separate constitutional provisions in order that the tribals 'develop themselves according to their own genius'. The four districts in the valley have separate institutional framework for administration. Thus, there is no uniform administrative pattern for the entire State.

The divergence in administration and organization and the administrative policy framed by the government and provided for in the Constitution of India is a fact of history, and an acknowledgement of the historical facts about different groups of the people having different ways of administering their respective territories. It is pertinent to note here that the plains, overwhelmingly populated by the Meeteis have always had greater administrative supervision and control than the hill areas. The administrative policy since the British days has been to regulate the affairs of the majority Meetei people more or less as in the rest of India and to allow the hill tribes to practice their own traditional codes of life.

The dual pattern of administration introduced by the British took a formal shape through the acts of the government. Under the 'dyarchy' introduced in 1919, the administration of tribal areas was among the reserved subjects left to the special care of the Governor and outside the purview of the Indian ministers. This continued under the Government of India Act, 1935. In this regards, referring to the Simon Commission's contention, B.P. Singh clearly maintained that "the tribals did not ask for self-

determination, but for security of land tenure, freedom in the pursuit of the traditional methods of livelihood and the reasonable exercise of their traditional customs.”¹ It is important here to recall the Bengal Frontier Regulation, 1873, that first brought into being the ‘Inner Line’ in some districts of Assam. A ‘Line’ was drawn beyond which no British subject could proceed without a pass from the Deputy Commissioner. The Regulation also laid down rules regarding the possession of land, trade, etc. beyond the line. The Inner Line was administratively significant because this meant that the political officers whose jurisdiction was beyond the Inner Line were to exercise only a loose political control in the affairs of the frontier hills, to collect house tax, and to take such measures as could be conveniently enforced. The tribals attracted reprisals only because of raids on and damage to the plains’ people, their cultivation and cattle. Even though the Inner Line Regulation was made applicable only in the North East Frontier Agency, the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) and the Naga Hills (Nagaland),² the administration in the Manipur hills cannot and should not be seen in isolation.

On the eve of India’s independence, there were grave uncertainties about the future political management of the entire North-east India. The Constitution drafted soon after independence tried to accommodate the widely different groups of mainly ‘animist’ tribes by welding the hill areas into the body politic of India keeping in view the need for protection of tribal institutions and their way of life for full-scale development. With a view to look into the affairs of the North-east India, the Constituent Assembly constituted a sub-committee called the North-east Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi of Assam. Recommendations of this sub-committee were taken into consideration while incorporating the provisions for the administration of the North-east Indian States. However, Manipur and Tripura retained their individual identities in the new constitutional set-up resulting in the adoption of separate constitutions.

¹ B.P. Singh, *The Problem of Change: A study of North East India*, OUP, Delhi, 1987, p. 108.

² *Ibid.*

Review of the Constitutional Provisions (Manipur)

From 1947 upto the accession to the Indian Union, Manipur was under a constitutional monarchy. Just on the eve of British departure, a committee was formed consisting of the officials and non-officials to explicitly draft a constitution for the State. The elected representatives from the Imphal Valley and two representatives from the hills nominated by the President of the Manipur State Darbar under whose responsibility laid the then administration of the hills. The Constitution had two parts - the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 and the Manipur Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation, 1947. It may be noted that the drafting of the Constitution into two parts – one for the hills and the other for the valley was a British legacy. It was the continuation of the policy of ‘divide-and-rule’ between the valley and the hills and between the different groups of the hill people. In the words of Lal Dena, “It was the ulterior motive of the British administration to create a ‘barrier of wall’ not only between the hill-men and the plainsmen but even among the hill people themselves.”³

Even though the Hill Peoples’ (Administration) Regulation, 1947 has become obsolete, it shaped the future administration of the hill people in a very significant way. It was through this regulation that the hill administration which was “under the exclusive jurisdiction of the President of Manipur State Darbar was transferred to the Maharaja of Manipur with effect from August 10, 1947”,⁴ and was to be exercised in accordance with the Constitution Act of the State and provisions of this Regulation.⁵

The Regulation paved the way for drastic changes in the internal administration of the hill people. Under this Regulation, a new authority structure with new institution was introduced. The extent of changes was such that the old institutions and values began to lose ground. Nehru’s vision of allowing the tribals to ‘develop according to their own

³ Lal Dena, *British Policy Towards Manipur 1891 to 1919*, Churachandpur (Manipur), 1984, p. 33.

⁴ Ashok Kumar Ray, *Authority and Legitimacy: A study of the Thadou – Kukis in Manipur*, Renaissance Publishing House, Delhi, 1990, p. 87.

⁵ Section 3 of the *Manipur People’s (Administration) Regulation, 1947*.

genius' comes to one's mind when dealing with the minute details proposed and implemented according to the Regulation.

As and when the Manipur Hill Peoples' (Administration) Regulation was implemented in the hill areas, a new type of administrative structure emerged in the hills. The Regulation required that in "each village of 20 tax-paying houses or over, there shall be constituted a village Authority which shall be nominated in accordance with the custom of the village and shall consist of the chief or *Khullakpa* of the village with his council of elders if any. The village Authority so nominated shall be formally recognized by the Sub-Divisional Officer who shall be the final authority in matters concerning the appointment and constitution of a Village Authority saving that an appeal shall be to the Minister In-charge of Hill Administration from the decision of the Sub-divisional Officers in such matters."⁶

For administrative convenience, the hill areas were divided into 'Circles'. "In each 'Circle' there shall be constituted a Circle Authority which shall comprise the Circle Officer and a Council of five members elected by the Village Authorities falling within the Circle. The Circle Authority so constituted shall be formally recognized by the Sub-Divisional Officers who shall be the final authority in all matters concerning the election and constitution of a Circle Authority saving that an appeal shall lie to the Minister In-charge of Hill Administration from the decision of the Sub-Divisional Officer in such matters."⁷ Thus, as per the provisions of the Regulation, various layers of administrative institutions were created, overshadowing the traditional administration by a new hierarchy of official control over them. As such, the erosive impact of the Regulation cannot be lost sight of.

The Regulation of 1947 was enacted and enforced along with the Manipur Court Act, 1947. In matters of law and justice, the Court Act, 1947 made provisions for establishment of Village Courts, Circle Bench and Hill Bench. The constituted Village

⁶ Section 6, *Ibid.*

⁷ Section 7, *Ibid.*

Authorities were empowered with the “ordinary duty of police in respect of crime” and where such village authorities did not exist, such duty was endowed upon the Circle Authority.⁸ In fact, the Village Authorities so constituted were reduced to insignificance by keeping them as merely watching and reporting authorities in matters of all crimes, violent deaths and serious accident occurring within their jurisdiction or beyond. Such Village Authorities were empowered to apprehend any person for doing any serious wrong and the inhabitants were required to aid the Village Authority when required to do so for the maintenance of order or apprehending offenders and were liable to fine, for failing to give such assistance.⁹

The purpose of restricting the minimum number of houses to 20 was to check the fragmentation of the villages in the hills, which could also be convenient from the administrative point of view. It may here be recalled that the early policy of the British was also aimed at effecting centralization in the administration of the hill villages. The Regulation brought about a tight bureaucratic control over the constituted Village Authorities making them subservient to the higher authority. With this, a drastic step was moved towards curtailing the customary rights enjoyed by the hill people.

With the merger of Manipur into the Indian Union in 1949, the Manipur Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation ceased to operate.¹⁰ However, the administrative structures established as per the provision of the Regulation remained with some modifications. In January 1950, the Union Government had passed the Manipur State Court (Amendment) order of 1950, recognizing the civil judicial structure for the hills. The Court was renamed as the Judicial Commissioners’ Court. In the same year, the Hill Circles were abolished and in their place were created new sub-divisions and were vested with civil powers as regards the hill areas in the Sub-Divisional Officers.¹¹ Again, in May 1951, the Commissioner constituted himself as the Chief Court, and the Deputy

⁸ Section 15 (1), *Ibid.*

⁹ Section 20 (1), *Ibid.*

¹⁰ U. Dhananjay Singh, “Administration in Hill areas of Manipur”, *Manipur Today*, August 15, 1992, p. 15.

¹¹ S. K. Chaube, *Hill Politics in North East-India*, Orient Longman (Reprint), New Delhi, 1999, p. 211.

Commissioners as the Hill Bench, placing the Sub-Divisional Officers in a doubtful position.¹²

In 1955, the Manipur State Court Act was enacted and enforced. Along with the Act, the Criminal Procedure Code, the Indian Penal Code, the Indian Evidence Act and the Civil Procedure Code were also introduced and enforced.¹³ The Judicial Commissioner decided cases relating to criminal as well as civil. The judicial Commissioner in his civil writ No. 12 of 1960 passed orders to the effect that the boundary disputes between villagers, disputes regarding ownership of land in the hills, and recognition of village were civil in nature and the Revenue Officers like the Deputy Commissioner, Sub-Deputy Collectors and Sub-Divisional Officers were not competent to pass orders regarding these matters.¹⁴

With frequent changes in the administrative policy introduced by the government, confusion was all about with the implementers of policies and the villagers whose traditional power structure had been eroded or twisted beyond redemption.

The Manipur Village Authorities (Hill Areas) Act, 1956.

With Manipur joining the Indian Union in 1949, there was the need of revamping the administration of the hills of Manipur as well as that of the Village Authorities in these areas. This culminated in the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956. The Act of 1956 was to consolidate and amend the law relating to the constitution and function of the Village Authorities of the hill areas of the Union Territory of Manipur.¹⁵

The Act of 1956 also had many erosive effects upon the authority structure of the traditional chieftainship of the tribals in Manipur. Under this Act, a Village Authority was recognized but the Chief Commissioner was empowered to declare that a village should have an "elected Village Authority and thereupon the members of the Village

¹² Ibid.

¹³ U. Dhananjoy Singh, op. cit. p. 22.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ashok Kumar Ray, op. cit. p. 95

Authority of the village shall be elected in accordance with the provisions of this Act and the rules made there-under.”¹⁶

Under the Hill Peoples’ (Administration) Regulation of 1947, all the members of the Village Authority consisting of the Chief and his Council of Elders were nominated according to the prevailing customs. But under the Manipur (Village Authorities in the Hill Areas) Act, 1965, this custom was axed to a large extent. The Chief’s control over the Village Councils was also reduced. The resistance to the re-organisation was so great that the 1958 and 1961 elections to the Councils were nominal in some cases and were not held at all in some others.¹⁷ Quoting from the report of the Administrative Reform Committee, 1968, S.K. Chaube writes, “A total of 624 villages were notified in 1961 for constitution of Hill Village Authorities but these institutions have become defunct now.”¹⁸

From the very beginning of the implementation of this Act, there was no sincere commitment on the part of the higher authority for the right enforcement of this Act. The whole process exposed two vital things: (i) the inherent defect of the Act of 1956 and (ii) callous attitude of the enforcing authority.¹⁹ One of the reasons for the non-implementation of this Act and many others enacted and enforced by the State Government is because the traditional practices and customs of the tribals have been sidelined in most cases.

Two significant Acts of the State Government having the potential of altering the basic structure of the tribal society which have not been implemented due to strong resistance from the tribals have been the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, passed by the Manipur Assembly in 1960, and the Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chieftainship Right), 1967. In fact, the Manipur Land Revenue and land Reforms Act of 1960 did not apply to the hill areas of Manipur. It was fifteen years after that the Act

¹⁶ Section 3 (2) of the *Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill areas) Act, 1956*.

¹⁷ S. K. Chaube, *op. cit.* p. 212.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ashok Kumar Ray, *op. cit.* p. 99.

came to be extended to the hill areas through the amendment of the said Act in 1975. Even after the amendment, the Act could not be practically implemented in the hill areas in the face of stiff opposition of the tribals. As a result, land survey operations in the hill areas have not been possible. There is a clear hiatus between the government version and the tribals conviction about the nature of ownership over the land (including forests).²⁰ The tribals believe that 'traditionally land belongs to the people and not to the State and hence the revenue system is also seen as a system of working against their traditional interests.'²¹ In the same manner, the Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chieftainship Right) Act of 1969 was outrightly rejected by the tribals.

Referring to the Thadou-Kuki tribe, A. K. Ray observes: "Even in the present day set up the importance of a Chief in the hill areas cannot be minimized. The very fact that the Chiefship has not been/could not yet be abolished or for that matter there is no alternative and more effective arrangements to substitute the institution."²² The tribals in Manipur at large feel that these Acts have been promulgated to overrule the traditional practices of the tribals. The Acts per se may have been enacted with the intent of changing the face of the tribals according to modern practices of governance, and to facilitate all-round development. But the merit of these Acts have been downplayed due to ineffective implementation on the part of the authority coupled with the lack of trust in the governing institutions by the tribals at large.

District Councils

The year 1969 began a new era in the administration of the hill areas. Four hill districts were opened and a Deputy Commissioner was posted to each district. Thereafter, a new set of administrative institutions and officials began to take hold of the hill areas. Earlier there was only one Deputy Commissioner for the whole State, designated as the Deputy Commissioner, Manipur.²³ The districts thus opened were Manipur East District, Manipur West District, Manipur South District, Manipur North

²⁰ Ibid. p. 106.

²¹ *Manipur Research Forum Delhi*, Vol. I, Issue 3, November, 2001, p. 12.

²² Ashok Kumar Ray, *op. cit.* p.p. 103-104.

²³ *Manipur Today*, August 15, 1992, p. 24.

District, now known as Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Churachandpur, and Senapati district respectively. The fifth hill district Tengenoupal, now known as Thoubal was formed in 1974.

The district administration was transferred to the Deputy Commissioner who had been entrusted as the 'general administrator' of the district. According to a government order, "no district level officers should leave their respective headquarters without the approval of the government and the Deputy Commissioner concerned. The pay Bills of the district level officers should be accompanied by duty certificates countersigned by the Deputy Commissioner." Another related government order states that, "all development works executed in the district should be done in consultation with and with full knowledge of the Deputy Commissioner."²⁴ As the general administrator, he is responsible for maintaining law and order and keeping peace and tranquility. As collector of revenue, he looks after the working of the district treasury as well. It is pertinent to note here that until the achievement of statehood in 1972, Manipur had its services almost totally staffed by the Indian Administrative Service personnel, causing resentment among the local people.²⁵ These district officials were mostly from outside the State.

Neither the Fifth nor the Sixth Schedules of the Constitution of India covers the tribal areas in Manipur. The hill area of Manipur, comprising about 90 percent of the total geographical area of the State, is predominantly tribal in demographic character as the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act, 1960, allowing the non-tribals to own land in the tribal areas has been summararily rejected by the tribals. Administration of the districts took a significant step in 1971 with the passing of the Manipur District Council (Hill Areas) Act, 1971. According to the provisions of the Act, the following five District Councils were constituted:

1. Ukhrul Autonomous District Council,
2. Senapati Autonomous District Council,
3. Tamenglong Autonomous District Council,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ S. K. Chaube, op. cit., p. 207.

4. Churachandpur Autonomous District Council and
5. Chandel Autonomous District Council.

In view of the special nature of problems of the hill population, the administrative and financial powers given to the District Council were more substantial than either to the Panchayati Raj institutions or to municipal bodies elsewhere in the country.²⁶

The following works were entrusted to the District Council:²⁷ 1. Primary education, 2. Dispensary, 3. Market, 4. Water supply, 5. Irrigation, 6. Soil conservation, 7. Control of diseases of cattle, 8. Public health and sanitation, 9. Relief works, 10. Allotment of land, 11. Protection of forests excluding reserved forests, 12. Control of shifting cultivation, etc. Moreover, the district council also has the right to recommend for legislation on 1. Appointment of Chiefs, 2. Inheritance, 3. Marriage/Divorce and 4. Social customs.

It is to be noted here that the District Council is under the control of the Deputy Commissioner of the district. He can even veto a resolution to the District Council if he considers that it exceeds their power.²⁸ The Council has no legislative power. They can make recommendations to the government for legislations.

By the 27th Amendment of the Constitution of India in 1971, Article 371 (c) was inserted in connection with the hill areas of Manipur. The amendment provides for a “committee of Legislative Assembly... consisting of the Assembly members elected from hill areas” on the reserved seats allotted to the tribals. The Amendment further states that the President of India can modify the governmental rules of business and the rules of procedure of the Legislative Assembly and can provide for ‘any special responsibility’ of the Governor in order to secure proper functioning of such a committee.

²⁶ B. P. Singh, *op. cit.* p. 113.

²⁷ *Manipur Today*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

The District Council, as stated earlier, is a very innovative way of democratic decentralization. However, one cannot miss the sophistication and complexities of the layers of administration in actual functioning. The Governor as the agent of the President of India looks after the functioning of the District Council through the Committee (Hills) of the Legislative Assembly, which has a Chairman of its own. Then comes the Deputy Commissioner whose control over the Council is, to say the least, overwhelming. The Council with a maximum of 18 elected and 2 nominated members has its Chairman and Vice-chairman but has 'no provision for an executive committee.'²⁹ Another factor in this matter is when opposing political parties control the State Government and the District Councils, there are tensions between the two levels of power aggravating and vitiating inter-ethnic tensions. "It has been observed that the early progressive character of the District Council was lost when it became stereo-type of ethnic division."³⁰

Development Planning for the Hill People

The Concept of 'tribal development' has been a subject of attention for academics, planners and administrators since the British days in India. With the country gaining independence in 1947, a number of schemes and programmes have been drawn up and implemented, and specifically outlined in many constitutional provisions, with a view to enable the tribals to 'develop themselves in their own genius'. Impressive programmes and schemes exist for the improvement of the tribals in the Five Year Plans since planning started in 1951. Development implies a kind of structural change in all aspects of society. It entails that certain core process of change whereby a society or part of it is transformed in the economic sphere from subsistence production to mass production, from predominance of primary sector to secondary and tertiary sector, from use of animal and human power to inanimate power in production, distribution, transport and communication. In the social sphere, it entails a process of high social differentiation and specialization with respect to institutional structure and individual activities. At the political level, it means diffusion of power to an ever widening groups of society while being beneficiaries of the political process and the source of legitimacy and sovereign

²⁹ S. K. Chaube, *op. cit.* p. 230.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

authority. Culturally, it involves spread of literacy, secular education and complex of intellectual and institutional system for cultivation and advancement of specialized skills, knowledge and outlook. Finally, at the intellectual level, it refers to faith in the rational explanation of physical and social phenomena.³¹

The whole exercise of planning aims at effecting all-round development of the people. It is an integrated process in which all the sections of the society are expected to participate. As mentioned earlier, the tribals in Manipur reside in the hilly terrains and have remained socially and economically backward despite the fact that programmes and schemes have been specially designed and implemented for a considerable period of time. The phases of political and administrative development Manipur has gone through since 1947 with wide ranging impacts on the lives of the people of the State have to be seen in the background of these government sponsored programmes for the development of the country as a whole.

Development planning for the tribals in the State is briefly presented here through the development strategy chalked out by both the Central and State Governments. It may be noted here that emphasis is given more to the institutions or organizations of development planning rather than the statistical accounts sanctioned and implemented through different schemes and programmes over the years.

Development planning, like other agencies of governance or administration, is a multi-layered institution in itself. At the organizational level, the crucial task of development is within the sphere of activity of three agencies: the Central Government, the North-Eastern Council (NEC) and the local government of the States. All these three organizations at the top supervise the planning strategy and implementation of the same through the multi-faceted and bodies of governance and administration.

³¹ V. Xaxa, "Tribal Development in the North East: Trends and Perspectives," in Ashish Bose, et. al. (ed.), *Tribal Demography and Development in North East India*, B.R. Publishing, Delhi, 1990, p. 25.

A cursory look at the phases of political and administrative developments may give a clear picture of development planning and implementation of schemes and policies. Manipur merged into the Indian Union in 1949 and became a Part 'C' State to be administered by the Central Government through a Chief Commissioner or Lieutenant Governor. Part 'C' States (Laws) Act of 1950 made new provisions for legislatures and Council of Ministers, compliance with whose counsel/advice was not obligatory for the Chief Commissioner.³² It is important here to note that the "Parliament had legislative power relating to any subjects as regards the Part 'C' States, but the Constitution empowered Parliament to create a legislature as well as a Council of Advisors or Ministers for a Part 'C' State."³³ According to the provisions of the Government of Part 'C' States Act, 1951, A Council of Ministers was set up in Manipur to advise the Chief Commissioner, under the overall control of the President, and also a legislative assembly to function as the legislature of the State.³⁴ In place of the Part 'C' States, the constitution (Seventh Amendment) Act, 1956 substituted the category of Union Territories, which are also similarly administered by the Union. The Seventh Amendment Act of the Constitution in the same year altered Article 329, under which the Territorial Council Act of 1956 was passed, granting some autonomy in local affairs to Manipur. A Territorial Council was created with powers over education, public health, roads, transport, revenue works, animal husbandary, relief works, etc.³⁵ In the formation of the Union Territory of Manipur, the Union government was mostly guided by the consideration of defence and security requirements of this sensitive border State. According to provisions of the said Act, the Territorial Council of 30 elected members headed by a chairman who enjoyed executive authority over these subjects vested upon the council came into existence and started functioning. The creation of the Territorial Council had little substance to arouse any enthusiasm. Both in theory as well as in practice the entire territory continued to be governed by the Centre through the Chief Commissioner.³⁶

³² S. K. Chaube, *op. cit.* p. 205.

³³ D. D. Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, (10th Edition), Prentice Hall of India, New Delhi, 1983, p. 245.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ S. K. Chaube, *op. cit.* p. 205.

³⁶ Jyotirmoy Roy, *History of Manipur*, (2nd Edition), Eastlight Book House, Calcutta, 1973, p. 152.

Following the Constitution (Fourteenth Amendment) Act, 1962, also known as the Union Territories Act, a Legislative Assembly of 30 elected members and a Council of three ministers was installed. The State, however, remained under the Union government. The legislative practices and the procedures of the Assembly were similar to those of the other States Assemblies but all Bills passed by the Territorial Council had to be reserved by the administration for the President's assent, though the administration could recommend the demand for grants. However, the ministers of the Territorial Government enjoyed very limited financial authority beyond which they had to approach the Chief Commissioner to exercise his financial authority for the execution of any plan. In this respect, even the Chief Commissioner's authority was also limited and any proposal exceeding that limit needed prior approval from the Centre for implementation. The ministry could introduce the budget in the Territorial Assembly and got it accepted by the same. However, ultimately, it had to be passed by the Lok Sabha.³⁷ Appointments and the services were the beyond the jurisdictions of the Territorial Government. Even the elected representatives had to act under limitation and restraint. The experiment, thus, proved to be a diarchy in which the elected representatives formed a group of junior partners. It may be pointed out here that "Democracy is not worth its name so long as the representatives of the people do not have the absolute right to formulate policies, control of finance and lead the executive."³⁸

Thus, the administration of the State was run by the Central Government through its agent. With limited power that the State was given, that too with pulls and pressures, the Centre did the development planning for the entire State. Another notable matter is that until the attainment of statehood, Manipur had its services almost totally staffed by the centrally recruited administrative officers (All India Services) causing resentment among the local people. Referring to the over 200 Non-Manipur officials who controlled all key positions in the State, Achou Singh wrote in 1960, "the only justification for the denial of responsible government in Manipur seems to be the desirability of continued

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.154.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

employment of these officers.”³⁹ M. Horam also observes it in the following words: “speeches of goodwill made in Delhi, however, well-meant, can never obliterate the bitter and the frustrating experience of the poor and villagers to whom the district administration is the government.”⁴⁰

The establishment of the North-Eastern Council (NEC) under an Act of Parliament in 1972 was another significant step in the administrative arrangement in the North-Eastern region as a whole. The NEC came to be recognised as relating to socio-economic development of the region. The regional planning formulated by the NEC keeping in view, the common interests of the seven North-Eastern States is financed by the Council made available to it by the Central Government, as the Council has no financial resources of its own. Secondly, the Council has been given the task of being a source of ideas for development of the region for human welfare as the maintenance of security and public order.⁴¹ The NEC is more of an advisory body, as it does not have direct responsibility for the execution of developmental strategy and the plans. The NEC is an extension of the Central Planning Commission as the recommendation made by the former can be channelled through the Central Government at its direction under Article 257 of the Indian constitution.

After more than twenty years as the centrally administered State, Manipur became a full-fledged State on 21 January, 1972. Following the assembly election in March 1972, a popular government was formed in the State. Out of the 60 seats in the Legislative Assembly, 19 are reserved for the Scheduled Tribes and one for the Scheduled Castes. Since then, the State has its own Planning Commission and other administrative institutions necessary for a responsible State government. As noted earlier, the District Councils were constituted for the five hill districts according to the provisions of the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act. The Directorate of Tribal and Backward Classes was also established in 1976 which later became a permanent department of the government in 1982.

³⁹ As cited in S. K. Chaube, *op cit.*, p. 215.

⁴⁰ M. Horam, *Social and Cultural Life of the Nagas*, Low Price Publication, New Delhi, 1977, p. 15.

⁴¹ B. P. Singh, *op. cit.* pp. 116 – 117.

It is pertinent at this point to have a cursory look at the Five Year Plans (From 1 to 9) initiated and implemented at different levels by both the Centre and the State. The first four Five Year Plans were carried out under the direct supervision of the Central Government. Beginning with the fifth Five Year Plan, Manipur planning Commission began to have a say in matters relating to planning and implementation of schemes and programmes under the guidance and supervision of the Central Planning Commission.

The First Five Year Plan (1951–56)

The First Five Year Plan sought to rehabilitate the economy from the ravages of war, famine and partition and to formulate policies and build up institutions that would help the economy in the desired direction.⁴² Whereas in other parts of India priority was given to agricultural development with emphasis to grow more food, in case of Manipur the emphasis was on development of roads. The total outlay for the first Plan for the state was Rs. 155 lakh out of which about 73 per cent was diverted to development of transport and communication. Second priority was given to social service sector which shared about 19 per cent of the plan outlay.⁴³

The Second Five Year Plan (1965-61)

The objective of the Second Plan for the country as a whole was to carry the process further, accelerate the growth and initiate a strategy which would assist in bringing about such structural changes in the economy as secured to be necessary if the long-term objectives of development were to be achieved.⁴⁴ The Second Plan outlay of Rs. 625.11 lakh for Manipur was four times that of the First Plan out of which Rs. 79.87 lakh was invested for the development of the tribals.⁴⁵ During this period Manipur became a Union Territory. Consequently, a number of subjects were transferred to it for

⁴² L. P. Vidyarthi and B.K. Rai, *The Tribal Culture of India*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2000 (reprint), p. 446.

⁴³ S. A. Ansari, *Tribal Demography and Social Economic Development*, Daya Publishing House, Delhi, 1991, p. 170.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴⁵ Caroline Ngailiankim, "The spread of Modern education and its Impact on the Tribal Society of Manipur", in Gailangam kamei and Gina shangkham (ed.) *Change and Continuity in the Tribal Society of Manipur*, Manipur University Tribal Students' Union, Imphal (Manipur), 1999, p. 66.

control and management. Following the socialistic pattern of development planning 36.7 percent was allotted for social and community services; the transport and communication was given Rs. 34.5 per cent.

In Manipur, at the end of the Second Plan in 1961, the tribals constituted 31.93 per cent of the total population. Care was taken for the development of the hill areas as the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes attracted the attention of the government. It was looked at the district level by the Additional Deputy Commissioner, Tribal Welfare, who functioned under the overall charge of the Development Commissioner.⁴⁶ A new strategy was also adopted at the end of the Second Plan to make development work for the scheduled Tribes more effective. The fund allotment was divided into two sectors – State and Central. The expenditure under the State and the Central sectors for the year 1960-61 was Rs.28.79 and Rs.17.18 lakh respectively. Development heads were divided between the two as:

State Sector: (i) communication, (ii) technical education and aid to voluntary agencies, (iii) medical and public health, (iv) education, (v) agriculture and animal husbandary and (vi) cottage industries.

Central Sector: (i) shifting cultivation and (ii) additional schemes for the *jhumias*.

The Third Five Year Plan (1961 – 66)

The Third Plan was conceived as a first stage of a decade of more intensive development leading to a self-reliant and self-generating economy. It was postulated that, as a first step toward equality of opportunity for every citizen of a socialistic economy should provide for the basic necessities in particular for food, work, opportunity, for education, reasonable condition of housing and a minimum level of income to ensure tolerable living standards. The third plan allotted Rs. 1287.56 for Manipur out of which Rs.124 lakh was spent for the welfare of the tribals in Manipur.⁴⁷ The priority sectors were again transport and communication and social services. During the plan period, Manipur was brought under intensive community development activities. There were 14

⁴⁶ G. K. Gori, *Changing Phase of the Tribal Area of Manipur*, B.R. Publishing House, Delhi, 1984, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁷ Caroline Ngailiankim, *op. cit.* p. 66.

development blocks out of which were in the hill areas. The tribal development took up the following types of works.⁴⁸

- (a) construction of jeepable roads, inter-village roads, wooden bridges, culverts, improvement of inter-village paths into jeepable roads;
- (b) repair of rest camps;
- (c) construction of water reservoirs, etc.

From 1966 to 1969, planning was done on annual basis. Here again the annual plans gave first priority to development of transport and communication.

The Fourth Five Year Plan (1969 – 74)

In the Fourth Plan Manipur was once again given a very ambitious plan with an outlay of Rs.3025 lakh for the State. During this period many significant political developments took place: statehood granted to Manipur (1972), the North-Eastern Council (NEC) was established (1970) and Autonomous District Councils were granted for the hill districts. Education and social service schemes initiated in the previous plan were continued. However, special emphasis was once again, given to transport and communication.⁴⁹

The Fifth Five Year Plan (1974 –79)

During the Fifth Plan the main thrust was aimed at securing the twin national objectives of removal of poverty and attainment of self-reliance.⁵⁰ Keeping in view the wide disparity between hill and valley development, the Tribal Development Department tried to bring about balance growth in the State by adopting a two-dimensional approach: (i) promoting development programmes through planned efforts and (ii) protection of the interests of the tribals. The first Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) of the State was introduced during this period. A committee for the welfare of the tribal was also constituted in 1976 to examine the welfare of the tribals and recommend remedial measures. It was proposed that all the schemes to be implemented in the tribal areas had to be examined in detail by the Deputy Commissioner of the concerned district in co-ordination with the local heads

⁴⁸ S. A. Ansari, *op. cit.* pp. 176-177.

⁴⁹ G. K. Gori, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁵⁰ S. A. Ansari, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

of development department.⁵¹ However, by the end of this period, it was found that the fifth Plan was one of the most unsuccessful Plans as far as development of the tribals is concerned.⁵²

The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980 – 85)

The Sixth Plan started off with an outlay of Rs. 240 crores. Fully aware that Manipur was one of the poorest states in the country, and the ever widening level of income and consumption between the people living in the hills and the valley creating social tensions, an all-out effort was given to accelerate the process of development. The increase in per capita income of all sections of the state populace through developmental schemes was the main target of the government. Another significant development during this plan period was the establishment of the Command Area Development Authority in January, 1983. Schemes under their authority were sponsored and financed by the Centre and the state on equal basis. The NEC also took up a number of development schemes during this period.⁵³

The Seventh Five Year Plan (1985- 90)

During this period, the plan outlay for the development of the tribals was Rs. 1395 lakh (including Central assistance) out of the State outlay of Rs. 430 crores. Emphases were given on education, arts and culture, agriculture and horticulture, housing, transport and communication and water supply.⁵⁴ In view of the rising number of unemployment in the State, which was considered to be an important cause of unrest and tension prevailing in the State, the National Rural Employment Programme was introduced during this period. This was especially designed to help the small farmers, artisans and those below the poverty line. In spite of the fact that the previous six plans had given special emphasis on development of transport and communication, it was still found that, even during this period, the greatest impediment to planned development was the “absence of adequate

⁵¹ G. K. Gori, *op.cit.* pp. 66-68.

⁵² Caroline Ngailiankim, *op. cit.* p. 76.

⁵³ S. A. Ansari, *op. cit.* p. 191.

⁵⁴ Caroline Ngailiankim, *op. cit.* p. 67.

infrastructure in terms of availability of transport and communication, power, irrigation, etc.”⁵⁵

The Eighth Five Year Plan (1991- 96)

The Eighth Plan had set the following objectives: full employment, containment of population growth, universalisation of elementary education, eradication of illiteracy, provision of safe drinking water and primary health care facilities including immunization, accessibility to all villages and entire population, self-sufficiency in food, and development of infrastructure to support growth process on a sustainable basis.⁵⁶ There were not many changes in the planning strategy in Manipur during this period.

The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997- 2002)

Due to lack of development or failure of the earlier plans, planning in India has been more or less on the same line since planning started in India. The ninth plan places its main focus on the following seven basic minimum services: drinking water, primary health services, primary education, housing to the shelterless, mid-day meals in primary schools, connectivity of the villages and the public distribution system.⁵⁷

It is very clear from the above plans that had all the plans born the desired results, socio-economic status of the people would have been at a much higher level. The fact that there have not been much benefits accrued to the tribals in Manipur in comparison to the majority community is in itself a sad commentary on the effectiveness and credibility of the democratic system of governance. The next chapter will touch upon the nature and content of development in Manipur with special reference to the tribals inhabiting the five hill districts of the state.

⁵⁵ S. A. Ansari, *op. cit.* 202.

P. Dash Sharma, “We Must Start From Somewhere: Planning the Plans in Tribal Areas” in D.K. Behera & Georg Pfeffer (ed.), *Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies*, Vol. 3, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1999, p. 57.⁵⁶

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Institutional Transformation

Since the British administration spread its tentacles over the tribal areas in Manipur, there has been no stopping to the process of change in the lives of the tribals. Their social, economic and political life have been transformed at a fast pace within a span of about a century. However, the post-1947 developments have had a direct impact on the changing scenario in the tribal areas of the State, as also elsewhere in the country. It also needs to be highlighted that the phenomenon of temporal change in the North-Eastern part of the country is a little different from that of the other parts of the country. "The advent of the 'Industrial Revolution', the development of 'communication' and the remarkable 'cultural renaissance' that characterize the rest of India from the second half of the eighteenth century, all these did not make any significant impact on the North-East India till the twentieth century."⁵⁸ Although the plain areas were the first to receive modernization ideals, this new breeze did not reach the masses till Independent India established government institutions even in the far-flung areas, hitherto considered inaccessible.

Manipur, which the British left to be administered by the Princely orders and the large tract of the hill areas, which were more under the Christian missionaries than of the British administrative system, could not become active participant in the new cultural, nationalistic and scientific movements even as late as the second quarter of the twentieth century. The British policy of minimum administration in the hills kept the hill-men virtually uninvolved in the national freedom struggle and its liberating social impact. On the other hand, along with the merger of Manipur to the Indian union in 1949, the administrative institutions and personnel from the mainland India occupying their areas seemed more of a sudden influx of 'outsiders' to their region threatening their very existence. At the time of independence with the exception plain areas in Assam, the North-East India was far behind the rest of the country in education, political awareness and administration and the entire region was economically backward. Yet, all the political and administrative changes in the country, which were introduced in the 1950s, found their application in the region.

⁵⁸ B. P. Singh, *op. cit.* p. 2.

The introduction of adult franchise for election of representatives to the Territorial Council (now Assembly) and the Lok Sabha, the setting up of district administration in tribal areas and deployment security forces, had an unprecedented impact. The introduction of community development schemes in the 1950s not only took the State apparatus to interiors of the tribal areas but also made the latter come to terms with democratic polity and governance for the first time bringing about a sea-change in the political and economic consciousness and outlook.

The role played by Christian missionaries in effecting institutional transformation in the tribal areas cannot and should not be undermined here. "It is an open secret that neither the Manipur Maharajas nor the Chieftains who had practiced a system of governance of the hill tribes could effect the changes that have occurred... ever since the missionaries set foot on Manipur soil."⁵⁹

With India's independence, the converted tribal Christians began to understand that their missionaries (hitherto western missionaries) would not remain with them permanently. The reflection on this situation awakened the Church to a new sense of selfhood. As a result, the Church began to belong to the local people. This caused the Church to become quite dynamic and forward looking. During the 1950s, "Churches were planted throughout Manipur as the Gospel of Christ spread like wild fire. The missionaries had organized all the different groups to come together as the great need was felt for unity in the love of Christ."⁶⁰ Under the banner of the Manipur Baptist Convention (MBC), tribal Baptist Associations with sub-units at different levels were established. Each tribal association was affiliated to the MBC which was affiliated to the Council of Baptist Churches in North-East India (CBCNEI) in 1955. The positive impact of Christianity was so much so that the internecine feuds and the "bitterness between tribes and villages" were relegated to the back-burner. With this strong sense of Christian

⁵⁹ L. Jeyaseelan, "Impact of Christianity on the tribal Society of Manipur", in Gailangam Kamei and Gina Shangkhram (ed.) *Change and Continuity in Tribal Society of Manipur*, Manipur University Tribal Students' Union, Imphal, 1999, p. 91.

⁶⁰ Ramkhun Pamei, *The Zeliangrong Nagas: A study of Tribal Christianity*, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996, p. 93.

unity regardless of tribes, languages and culture, they mixed freely and accepted one another.⁶¹

The spread and propagation of Christianity was, to say the least, dramatic and all encompassing. Several Christian denominations began to take roots in the hill areas of the State, nestling churches among all the tribes of Manipur. The major Churches operating in Manipur are:⁶² 1. The Baptist Church, 2. The Presbyterian Church, 3. The Catholic Church, 4. The Seven Day Adventist, 5. The Salvation Army, 6. The Independent Church of India, 7. The Assembly of God Church, 8. The Evangelical Free Church of India and 9. The Evangelical Convention Church.

Christianity had taken a firm footing among the tribals that their original way of life and culture slowly but surely began to die out as most of their practices were considered associated with 'paganism and immoral practices'. Western Christian culture began to take root. The *morung* system, which the tribals considered the center of all activities, and the village *Pei* (Council) were taken over by the Church leadership. Resultantly, power shifted from the village Chief to church leaders. The practice of head-hunting and wild superstitious nature of the tribals were brought to a complete halt.

With Christianity, education was kickstarted in the tribal areas. This helped the tribals to "study their origin, migration and settlement and are discovering their identity like 'Naga', 'Kuki', 'Mizo', 'Zomi', etc."⁶³ The emergence of this identity has changed their outlook, thought pattern regarding their neighboring tribes and communities and their standing in the matrix of tribes in relation to each other. This in turn has made them ethnically and politically conscious of their rights and duties. Changes have occurred from mere tribal polity to the embracing of the national and regional political ambitions. Consequently, they began to form certain apex bodies to ensure their ethnic interests. The Tangkhul Long, the Kuki National Assembly, the Zeliangrong Union, the Vaiphei National Organisation, the Zomi National Congress, the Hmar National Union,

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² L. Jeyaseelan, op. cit. pp. 80- 81.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 85.

the Paitei National Union, just to name a few, were all formed to have a say in matters concerning their welfare. In the light this discussion, it is understandable that “the Church has made significant impact on the ethnic process of North-East India. In general way, it can be stated that it has helped in uniting some of the small and marginal groups into a single broader entity, but there are always occasions where it has caused divisions.”⁶⁴

In the background of the above discussion, the institutional transformation in the tribal areas since the merger of Manipur into the Indian Union may be briefly discussed here.

As pointed earlier, all political and administrative changes, which were introduced since independence, found their application in the tribal areas as well. This development has a far-reaching consequence in the politics of the North-East. Several tribes and communities began to treat the new State and its institutions as an intruder and instrument of subjugation. The Nagas and the Mizos revolted against the new order and claimed independence. It is a well-known fact that “the goings-on in Nagaland are of absorbing interest to the ‘Manipur Nagas’, who looked to Kohima rather than to Imphal in political matters.”⁶⁵ The same is true with the Kuki-chin groups’ affiliation to the Mizo of Mizoram who they considered as “blood relatives”. In Manipur, especially the Meeteis (Manipuris), there was “disappointment and unhappiness to the post-merger political trend” for having placed the State under Central administration as a Part ‘C’ State. The first reaction against the policy of the Central Government came from Manipur National Union in 1953. It strongly asserted that statehood be granted to Manipur at the earliest. In fact, the first few years after independence may be treated as “the gestation period of the development and growth of separatist tendencies among the younger generation group of people of the State.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ B. K. Burman, “Christianity and Development among the Hill Tribes of North-East India”, *Journal of Indian Anthropological Society*, TISS, Bombay, 1998, p. 207.

⁶⁵ M. Horam, *op. cit.* p. 103.

⁶⁶ N. Joykumar Singh, “Growth of Separatist Tendency in Manipur: A Historical Perspectives”, Paper Presentation at a *National Seminar on Conflict Resolution in the North-East*. IIC, New Delhi, November 6, 2001.

The emergence of the Naga, Mizo and Meetei (Manipuri) 'nationalist' movements resulted in the introduction Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act, 1958 which came into effect in all of Manipur from the 5th of April, 1958. The Act was formulated to confer certain special powers to the members of the armed forces in the 'disturbed areas' of Manipur and Assam. The Act gave a free hand to conduct and arrest without warrant and to give order to shoot and kill just on mere suspicion.⁶⁷ Thereafter, heavy deployment of Central para-military forces has been institutionalised in the State along with other democratic governing institutions. The said Act, described as "the greatest blemish of the image of India which is supposedly the greatest democracy in the world"⁶⁸ and which was applied to contain the 'Underground' upsurge took a heavy and unprecedented toll on the villagers who had never known the art of modern warfare. "Normally life in the villages was replaced by fear, anxiety and an uneasy calm. There were no more schools and even church services were seldom conducted for the absence of Pastors" who had gone "into hiding or simply because the army has occupied the church building."⁶⁹ Acknowledging the sufferings of the villagers trapped in the crossfire between the 'Underground' and the Indian army, the Chief of the Army Staff issued an order to the concerned subordinates: "You must remember that the people of the area in which you are operating are fellow Indians... You are not there to fight the people of the area but to protect them – their lives and properties."⁷⁰

It is suffice to add here that India gaining independence meant a beginning of a new era to the people of the North-East as a whole: an era of unprecedented violence and exploitation involving people different culture, religion and race. The trend started off in the 1950s continues to hold sway over the whole landscape with wider involvement at a much wider scale affecting the entire political, socio-economic and cultural aspects of the tribals, as also of the non-tribals alike.

⁶⁷ See *The Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act, 1958*, No. 4 clauses(C&D).

⁶⁸ Nehemiah Panmei, "Naga Movement and its Ramifications", in *Nagas at Work*, Naga Students' Union Delhi, 1996, p. 97.

⁶⁹ Namthiubuiyang Pamei, *The Trail from Makuilongdi: the Continuing Saga of the Zeliangrong People*, Gironta Charitable Foundation, Tamenglong (Manipur), 2001, p. 82.

⁷⁰ As cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 81- 82.

Post-statehood political developments in Manipur have thrown up a picture of two extreme possibilities in the functioning of the democratic framework designed by the framers of the Indian constitution. Firstly, wide participation of the State's populace in the elections both in the hills and the valleys has been a remarkable feature of the State politics. Voting percentage at State Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in the State has always been one of the highest in the country. Secondly, the number of imposition of President's Rule in the State has been one of the highest in the country. In the State better known as the hot-bed of insurgency and repressive counter-insurgency interplay, no political party has won an absolute majority in the State assembly since the first elections in 1972, even after having conducted eight Assembly elections. After each election, coalition government has always been the only answer. Internal dissent and leadership struggle added to the woe of the struggle and, thus, paved the way to premature death of ministries or rather to let the center take over the reign of state machineries.

President's Rule has been imposed for eight times in the span of three decades – in 1969 and 1973 due to defection, 1975 due to emergency; 1979 and 1981 due to defection; 1992 due to withdrawal of support; 1993 due to bad law and order situation, and 2001 again due to withdrawal of support. Hence, frequent imposition of President's Rule and ever presence of the Central paramilitary forces in the state simply meant that the state has been run by the central government for most of the years in the past few decades.

In the same period, leaders have held the post of Chief Minister from all the major social or communal groupings- the Meetei, the Naga, the Kuki-chin and the Pangal (Manipuri Muslim). Looking at the functioning of the state government, the evidence lies that ethics of democratic governance has been thrown into the winds. The state projects the upsurge of underground activities as "impediment to industrialization, growth and development" while it has miserably failed to win the confidence of the people through drastic economic and political reforms. Thus, the credibility of the ruling institutions remains tarnish. "The core of the problem in Manipur is not so much with the activities of

insurgents or the presence of the Army, but the failure of the structure and functioning of governance which has proved unsuccessful several times.”⁷¹

The power struggle among the leaders at the state level percolates down to the district governance and administration. Political instability coupled with insurgency and counter insurgency running concurrently has its toll on the credibility and accountability of the entire state machinery. The worse sufferers have always been the hill people whose representation in both politics and bureaucracy has been overshadowed by the sheer weight of the majority of non-tribal in the state at all level. “As cases remain pending both at tribunals, district courts and the High Court for some reasons or the other, insurgence began to play the role of dispenser of justice by interfering in solving issues related to alcoholism, disputes, clashes, etc.”⁷² This indicates the picture of total chaos and mis-governance of the state. Commenting on the prevailing situation, the following statement aptly captures the real picture, “there were no to ring worth mentioning by the government officers to the districts. All engineers, doctors and teachers were concentrated at the state administrative headquarters, Imphal. Those posted in the hill district sneaked back and stayed illegally at Imphal. Resultantly, development programmes were absent and ministers took very little interest in these areas (hills). In fact, they would do anything to be as far as they could from the trouble-torn hills.”⁷³

To sum up, one can surmise that the closer interaction of the tribals induced by the ‘unity in the love of Christ’ in the early post-independent years has not been able to do away all the bitter experiences of the past. In face, new areas of conflict and enmity between and among the various communities and tribal groups have re-surfaced with even greater force. This process has contributed a good share of political, social and economic problems affecting the whole process of governance of the State. However, it would be of catching interest to know if the State is more of the perpetrator of violence and confusion rather than the guardian of the people at large, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it can be stated with certainty that, the credibility and efficiency

⁷¹ *The Liberty Post*, “Editorial”, Vol. I, No. 3, New Delhi, July 15 – 31, 2001.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Namthiubuiyang Pamei, *op. cit.* p. 83.

of the State to govern according to the well-laid provisions of the Constitution has eroded and on the waning side over the past few years. Therefore, the institutional transformation from 'village republics' to modern democratic form of governance has been, to say the least, to merely change from one form of governance or administration to another with problems and grievances of the people remaining more or less the same. In other words, the degree and intensity of oppression and exploitation of the stronger over the weaker has also increased with overwhelming consequences.

Recent Developments

In order that representative democracy become a reality even at the grass-root or village level, several steps have been incorporated in the Constitution through amendments, especially the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts. Among others, special emphasis has been given to decentralization, greater federalism and recognition of regional interests and ethnic aspiration in the framework of governance and broad acceptance of coalition of politics.⁷⁴ However, unfortunately, these ideals do not mean anything to the tribals in Manipur. The valley districts have constituted the Panchayati Raj institutions and regular elections conducted at regular intervals. However, for the hill people, even the District Councils constituted under Article 244 of the Constitution have been defunct since 1988 depriving of the power of the tribals to govern or shape their own administration themselves.⁷⁵ The provisions of the Sixth Schedule, dubbed by some social scientists as a 'political toy' in the hands of the State and Central Governments rings true in the hills of Manipur. This makes a mockery of the clarion call of "making the people the principal agents of social transformation, from the bottom onwards."⁷⁶ Against this backdrop, the demand of the hill people for creation of a strong framework for participation from the grassroots upward, within the framework of representative politics and public administration is justified and understandable.

⁷⁴ Rajni Kothari, "Principles, Power and Politics in Contemporary India", in D. D. Khana and Gert W. Kueck (ed.), *Principles, Power and Politics*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1999, p. xxi.

⁷⁵ Paper Presented by the Zeliangrong Union (Assam, Manipur & Nagaland) at special Seminar on *Problems of Development in Tamenglong District*, Tamenglong (Manipur), November 10 – 11, 2000.

⁷⁶ B. K. Burman, "For Overcoming the Schizophrenic Alienation of the North-East: Outline of a Comprehensive Approach", *Mainstream*, October 27, 2001, p. 15.

The last decade has seen the crystallization of dissent of each communal or tribal group adding to the crisis of governability in the State. The multi-‘national’, multi-ethnic, mutli-lingual, multi- religious and multi-cultural landscape of Manipur, strategically situated in the easternmost part of the country has confounded policy makers and implementers both at the Centre and in the State to no end. The State has been perpetually gripped by political uncertainties since statehood was conferred in 1972 the causal factors of which are not far to trace – violent assertion of communal feelings, institutionalisation of corruption and criminalisation in the polity, utter indifferentness to the nature of the grievances of the people by the political and ruling class and the nature of social composition of the people with their loyalty and affiliation to organizations and associations which are operational various States of the North-East.

The last decade of the 20th Century has seen the culmination of the simmering tensions between and amongst the three predominant communities based on communal and ethnic lines, which enhances the ever widening schisms between communities. This trend has been evidently exemplified in the unprecedented Kuki-Naga conflict since 1991. The clash between section of the Meetei and Meetei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) in 1993; between section of the Kukis and the Paites in 1997 and the recently averted face-off between the Meeteis and the Nagas in the wake of the Ceasefire extension ‘without territorial limits’ between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) in 2001.⁷⁷ The forces unleashed by these communal groupings are still hovering thick in the air, and even a spark could ignite the communal passion with the capability of, once again, throwing the entire state machinery out of gear.

It may be recalled here that the imposition of President’s Rule to the state in 1993-94 (31 December, 1993 – 13 December, 1994) was due to the oft-quoted reason of ‘bad law and order’ situation in the state following the spurt of the Kuki-Naga conflict. During that time, the R.K Dorendro Singh’s Ministry was widely blamed for failing to

⁷⁷ Ito Tonbram and Danabir Laishram, “Conflicts and Civil Responses in North Eastern India: Polemic and Perspectives”, a Seminar Paper Presentation on *Dilogue and Conflict Resolution in the North East: Search for a Civil Society Initiative*, IIC, New Delhi, November 6, 2001.

effectively deal with the prevailing situation in the state. Whenever there was a breakdown of law and order in the state, the contention of the State government had always been that the Centre did not respond to the plea for para-military forces to deal with the situation promptly and in the desired measure. On the other hand, Mr. Rajesh Pilot, minister of state for internal security, who had been visiting Manipur to oversee the situation, was exasperated by the state of adrift and inaction by the state government in containing the violence.⁷⁸ That was just another of the many instances where both the Centre and the state governments pointing an accusing finger to each other, that too without going in to unravel the root cause of the conflict.

In the light of the above discussion, it is understandable that administration at all levels has been severely affected. This in turn has resultantly invited the tribal groups to be always on their toes to face any eventuality with or without the involvement of the state machinery. Therefore, developmental programmes have been relegated to the back-burner, and they remain as a piece of official document which does not mean much to the poor tribals, especially those in far-flung areas.

⁷⁸ *The pioneer*, January 1, 1994.

CHAPTER FOUR

Socio-Economic Development: Path to Tribal and Ethnic Consciousness

Socio-economic development has been deemed positive and progressive ever since the concept of development gained ground, particularly after the European Enlightenment.¹ This western modernist position on socio-economic development has been the main driving force of development planning in India, albeit with a tinge of socialist tradition. Out of this came about the concept of 'Rural Development' and 'Tribal Development' schemes, especially designed to effect progressive and positive socio-economic development of the weaker sections of the society. Five decades have passed since the Constitution came into effect with numerous provisions to direct and supervise the path of development in the country. From this vantage point, one can clearly see the impacts and consequences of 'tribal development'.

The developmental schemes and programmes launched by the government have definitely brought about positive changes in the socio-economic sphere of the tribals, especially of those who have the access to the power structure of the governing institutions. However, the fact that only a section of the people from various tribal groups have been able to see the light of development, leaving the bulk of the population groping in the dark is an established one. Even the policy makers have come to realize this fact the hard way. The regional, state, district and community disparities in terms of socio-economic development have thrown up a considerable proportion of conflict and social tension endangering the well-being of both the haves and the have-nots. In the face of such 'development', even members of smaller tribes have come out of their traditional social niches, and have mobilized themselves with a view to have better access to State power. As the State is the only agent of socio-economic development, the various demands from these quarters of the society have been directed towards the State. Not

¹ Sing C Chew and Robert A Denemark, "On Development and Underdevelopment" in Sing C Chew and Robert A Denemark (ed.), *The Underdevelopment of Development*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1996, p.1.

surprisingly, therefore, access to the power of the State is bitterly contested not only for political ends of exercising power but also as a source of livelihood and rapid upward mobility; and also to challenge what they perceive to be unjust domination and exploitation by members belonging to larger social groups or communities. In the light of the above, the nature and content of development in the tribal areas of Manipur is briefly examined and analysed here.

Nature and Content of Socio-economic Development

The majority of the scholars, administrator and politicians with interest in the tribal areas, particularly in the North-East, view its development from the same perspective. The dominant trend of the perspective, as clearly indicated in the Five Year Plans, that is in vogue for the development of the tribal areas, lies in an increasing emphasis on such features as industrialization of the region, exploitation of mineral and forest resources, tapping of rich natural resources for sources of energy and power such as thermal, hydraulic or atomic, etc.² In agriculture, which provides the livelihood for more than 80 percent of the population, the emphasis had been on changing from shifting to settled agriculture, introduction of new methods of agriculture such as use of new technology, irrigation facility and high yielding variety of seeds and fertilizers, besides shifting from subsistence to commercial crops. Moreover, much emphasis has also been laid on raising the productive capacity of the economy by encouraging income generating activities like horticulture, animal husbandary, social forestry, etc. Urbanisation and growth centers are also viewed as an important part of the socio-economic development. To bring about this market-oriented mode of development, building of road and communication has been given special emphasis in all the Five Year Plans.

The thrust of development carried through these processes of change clearly reflects the following points³:

² V. Xaxa, "Tribal Development in the north-East: Trends and Perspectives" in Ashish Bose, Tiplut Nongbrih and Nikhlesh (ed.), *Tribal Demography and Development in North-East India*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1990, p. 27.

³ *Ibid.* p. 28

1. Certain groups or strata of society form the major vehicle of change and development despite a claim (made to the contrary) that development revolves around benefiting people as a whole rather than the status group. Thus, the owners of capital in the urban areas and influential individuals in the rural areas have become the major agents of development and consequently the object of subsidies and incentives.
2. These are further reinforced by the objectives of production, which lay emphasis on production for market and profit. Correspondingly, more and more stress is laid on the cultivation of commercial and plantation crops like potato, jute, coffee, tea, etc., besides horticulture.
3. This being the major thrust of development work, education, medical and social service facilities have become commodities to be purchased in the market.

This path of development has led to gradual increase in the privatization of land (a concept alien to the tribals not so long ago) even in the predominantly tribal areas, capital productivity and market orientation. But this kind of economic development and the underlying socio-economic arrangement is not necessarily in tune with the spirit of genuine needs of the tribal people at large. This has to be understood keeping in view the fact that because of inadequate infrastructure facilities in the form of assured irrigation, and an efficient network of communication in the hill region, market oriented path of development has led to a stagnant economy. In the absence of these pre-requisite infrastructures, the age-old system of sustenance farming continues to be the only option available to the tribals at large. Moreover, "the State (Manipur) does not have large and medium industry of its own."⁴ Therefore, the suggested form of development has failed to take off not just in the hills but also in the valley area either.

This process of development planning has given special emphasis on generation and allocation of resources on the assumption that the owners of capital will act as the major agents of economic development. Sure enough, a class of contractors, merchants,

⁴ S. A. Ansari, *Tribal demography and Socio-economic Development*, Daya Publishing House, Delhi, 1991, pp. 191-192.

traders and businessman has consequently grown in the State over the past few decades. Even at the cost of repetition, it is important to note here, once again, that, the economy of the State is controlled and regulated to a great extent from outside the State is becoming more evident as the years passed by. N. Joykumar Singh observes that “the free-flow of non-Manipur traders from outside the State, who the local people call the ‘mayangs’ meaning ‘outsiders’, has produced a new shape in the economic life of the (local) people.” He goes on to say that “the (local) people are not happy about this development but they cannot raise their voice as the traders from ‘outside’ get a blanket protection from bureaucrats of the State Government constituted mostly by the non-Manipuri officers from outside the State.”⁵ The presence of central paramilitary forces have also encouraged the traders from mainland India in many different ways ignoring the wishes of the local populace. Resultantly, “a large number of government contractors and military officials along with money-lenders and traders entered the tribal areas... The dominant encroaching non-tribal money-lenders and contractors started exploiting the tribal folk and continued to bind them in perpetual indebtedness. Under this conditions, the majority of the tribals were unable to cross over the level of unskilled.” Moreover, skilled labour and technicians from outside the State have come in from outside leaving few or no room for the local people.⁶

Predictably, the contractors and entrepreneurs do not invest their capital in the State, let alone the hill areas. Whatever little they invest is done basically in areas that yield quick and easy profits but do not necessarily enhance long term social and economic development. This has eventually accentuated social inequality. That the benefits of all those impressive schemes and programmes have not percolated down to the target groups and becoming more of a rule rather than exception is an established fact. Viewed from this perspective, it can easily be gauged from the emerging trends that the government developmental plans have become more of an agent of social and economic inequality rather than of bringing about an egalitarian society. Moreover, they have

⁵ N. Joykumar Singh, “Growth of Separatist Tendency in Manipur: A Historical Perspectives”, Paper Presentation at a *National Seminar on Conflict Resolution in the North-East*. IIC, New Delhi, November 6, 2001.

⁶ M.N Karna, “Aspects of Tribal Development in North-East India” in Ashish Bose... *op. cit.* p., 13.

destroyed the traditional socio-economic arrangements of the tribals largely. This path of development has, in fact killed the initiative of the people in general and has led to the growth of what may be called a 'sponsored society'. It has also brought about disintegration and decay of indigenous industries by introducing commercialization in the economy. Thus, the crucial element in such developmental measures has been a shift from 'primitive independence' to 'complete dependence' due to the non-involvement of the local people in the process of development.⁷ Under these circumstances, the traditional village solidarity and social harmony have been replaced by differentiated heterogeneous communities creating strong vested interests both from within and without the tribal communities. Most programmes have met the requirements of a handful of people who could align themselves with the dominant groups. Consequently, the general mass of the people has been left to fend for themselves and/or at the mercy of the dominant groups.

Promotion of balanced regional development has been a long-term stated objective of planning in India. Ironically, imbalances in development have grown wider in the various regions of the country. It may not be too much of an exaggeration in stating that, "According to policy makers of the Indian government, it is neither feasible nor advisable to establish heavy industries in a border State like Manipur. The refusal to provide facilities for setting up of heavy industries for the overall development of the economy on the one hand, and destruction of the traditional economic system on the other, is nothing but to force the people of Manipur to adopt the habit of 'parasite culture'...if Manipur is not allowed to get the requisite facilities for industrialization because of her geographical location, how does none explain the industrial facilities granted to other border States like Punjab, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal, etc...the real attitude of the leaders of the Central government has not been in favour of the welfare of the people of Manipur."⁸

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁸ N. Joykumar Singh, *op. cit.*

In the tiny State of Manipur, one of the poorest States of the country, balanced growth and development is a far-cry. Apart from the hill-valley disparities, the five hill districts are also not on equal footing in terms of socio-economic development. It has always been the contention of the hill people that the slow progress in the hill areas is because of 'the absence of transport and communication, power, irrigation, divergence of proportionately higher plan outlay to the valley area to the comparative neglect of the interest of the hill.'⁹

As there has been strong emphasis on development of transport and communication in the state as one being the pre-requisite infrastructure for all round development, the following table will indicate the extent of the reach of roads in the hill districts of the State.

District-wise Length of Extra-Municipal Roads in the Hills of Manipur in 1992.
(in Km)

District	National Highway	State Highway	Major District Roads	Inter-District /Village Road	Other District Roads	Total
Senapati	93.83	128.00	33.00	199.00	69.00	522.83
Churachandpur	-	340.00	438.10	211.00	2.00	991.10
Ukhrul	-	93.00	88.00	242.00	16.00	409.00
Tamenglong	192.50	69.00	193.00	22.40	11.50	689.50
Chandel	64.40	18.00	32.00	225.00	38.00	377.40
Total	350.73	648.00	784.10	899.40	136.50	1989.83

Source: Lalzagou, "Development of Road Transport System in the Tribal Areas of Manipur", in Gailangam Kamei and Gina Shangkhram (ed.) *Change and Continuity in the Tribal Society of Manipur*, Manipur University Tribal Students' Union, 1999, p.101.

The disparities in the length of roads of various kinds are clearly seen in the table above. It is found that the extension in kilometer length is maximum with major district roads for Senapati and Churachandpur districts. Only Senapati, Tamenglong and Chandel

⁹ S. A. Ansari, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

Ukhrul districts have longer major district roads. The developmental level of these districts depends on the road length as it helps in the execution of the developmental projects.

In order to have a closer look at the district level socio-economic development, the figures of the Tamenglong District provided below give the degree of development.

The road coverage in the district is very poor by any standard, and maintenance is even poorer. It may be pointed out that even within the district there is considerable disparity. For instance, 44 percent of the villages of Nungba Sub-Division has not been covered by any road at all whereas in Tamei Sub-Division, only 20 percent of the villages are without any road.¹⁰

Road

Type of Road	Number of Village	Percentage of Village
Black topped	34	16.43
All weather road	29	14.01
Fair weather road	71	34.30
None at all	73	35.26

Source: Moses Challai, Deputy Commissioner, Tamenglong District, paper presented at a seminar on "Development of to Tamenglong District", Tamenglong (Manipur), 10-11 November, 2000.

Power

Of the total of 207 villages in the district, only 99 villages (48 percent) have been electrified. Electricity has not been provided yet to 108 villages. Only 48 percent of the villages has been electrified against the State average of 89 percent. It is further noted that due to poor maintenance, even the 99 villages do not receive regular power supply.¹¹

Health

¹⁰ Source: Moses Challai, Deputy Commissioner, Tamenglong District, paper presented at a seminar on "Development of the Tamenglong District", Tamenglong (Manipur), 10-11 November, 2000.

¹¹ Ibid.

The District Hospital at the Tamenglong Headquarters is the only one for the entire district which has only four doctors with no speciality service available. Even basic necessities like x-ray, operation theatre and other basic infrastructure are not available, and drug supply is almost non-existent. The following table tells the sorry tale of the district.¹²

Indicators	Tamenglong	Manipur
Population per bed	819	914
Population in '000 per hospital	2.4	4.03
No. of doctors per '000 population	0.19	0.23
Doctors per square kilometer	0.31	- -
Infant mortality rate	71	28

Source: Moses Challai, Deputy Commissioner, Tamenglong District, paper presented at a seminar on "Development of to Tamenglong District", Tamenglong (Manipur), 10-11 November, 2000.

Even in other areas of modern development, the district lacks even the basic minimum infrastructures. Telecommunication available in the district is very primitive and confined only to the district headquarters leaving it beyond the reach of the masses. There is only one working commercial bank for the entire district. Three others had been closed down due to "apprehensions about security". To make matter worse, bureaucratic posting at district level is taken as 'punishment' by many of the government officials.¹³ In such a scenario, feeling of alienation and exploitation by other predominant groups as well as from within the same tribal group is inevitable. This leads to considerable social tension in the district and at the State level as well.

The above figures indicate that development schemes introduced with a view to uplift the socio-economic status of the tribals have not borne the desired results. There are inter-tribal, inter-district and rural-urban disparities in wide proportions. This backwardness has formidable consequences in the nature and intent of the social organizations of the people. The utter failure of the State is also evidently manifested in

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

the figures provided above. It only demonstrates and encourages stratification among the tribals in terms of economic privileges and control of political. The inter-district variation is especially significant because in Manipur the district populations broadly correspond with distribution of population on tribal or communal lines. As indicated earlier, modern development has sharpened the stress and strain of social inequality in the State. Since the districts delineate division of the tribal and non-tribals between the hills and between them different tribal groups, uneven development accelerate social inequality along ethnic or tribal line. Historical reason may have a hand in it, but it is a poor reflection on the democratic system of government and administration.

Emergence and Role of the Middle Class

In the modern advanced societies, three distinct classes or strata – an upper, a middle and a lower – can be classified. This classification or stratification of the society has been conceptualized from the Marxist point of view that the formation of classes was determined by the sole factor of economic interests. However, it is not easy to detect such distinct stratification in the tribal society as the tribals are relatively backward and their primitive or agrarian traditional practices still hold dear to them. As such, it is but natural that in trying to trace the origin and growth of such a class in tribal society, one is bound to encounter diverse problems. The absence of caste as a factor in tribal social life, the relative unimportance of land (at least till recently) as a ladder to social and political power, and the more or less egalitarian build up of the tribal society are but a few points which tend to make the issue complicated. This is not to say that there is no ruling or elite group in their society, even though their elite is not comparable to the modern concept of elite. At the same time, it has to be kept in mind that the middle class that finally emerged in the tribal social life had its roots neither in the landed aristocracy as common in other parts of the country, nor did it evolve through commercial development.¹⁴

The growth of this class in the tribals society was inextricably linked with the spread of western education primarily at the initiative of the Christian missionaries and

¹⁴ Udayon Mishra, "Naga Nationalism and the Role of the Middle Class", in B. Datta Ray (ed.), *The Emergence and Role of Middle Class in North-East India*, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983, p. 163.

the rise of modern profession. This class is obviously a product of adaptive socio-economic change and is made up of small entrepreneurs, rentiers, middle level technicians, and salaried bureaucracy of various professions. The introduction along with the coming of market-oriented economy with money as the means of exchange as opposed to the barter system greatly changed the social landscape of the tribals. The literacy rate of the tribals shot up to a considerable extent enabling them to join the government services and other modern occupations. Along with these developments, the traditional power structure that was led by the elders in the past has slowly given way to modern ruling institutions. "With the emergence of new institutions and their leaders some of the erstwhile traditional leaders of tribe tried to swim with the new current as there was fear of being drawn in the oblivion of village masses."¹⁵ Thus, the educated and those having the levers over financial control eventually form into a class by itself and it is the middle class.

It may be noted here that since there is no landed aristocracy in the tribals area, technically, the term 'middle class' is not very appropriate in connection with the tribals, because there is no other class above, although there is one lower. But sociologically, it is correct because by 'middle class' it is understood as a certain class of people who earn their livelihood by taking up positions in the social ladder. Therefore, in the tribal society of Manipur, the middle class is in fact the top class and cream of the society and brain behind its socio-economic and political activities.

In the absence of industry worth the name and the basic minimum infrastructure for adopting the market oriented economy, the educated and salaried people form the middle class. In such a tribal society, it is not very difficult to pinpoint the composition, the nature of emergence and the role it plays. The following three tables will give a clear picture of the approximate number of middle class people in the State as a whole since 1901.

¹⁵ Vidyarthi and Rai, *The Tribal Culture of India*, Concept Publishing Co., Delhi 1977, pp. 203-31.

Literacy Rate in Manipur (1901-1991 Censes)

Year	Total Population	Decennial %	Male literacy	Female literacy	Total	Literacy%
1901	284465	--	2596	62	2658	0.9
1911	346222	21.71	6889	217	7106	2.1
1921	394016	10.92	14396	291	14678	3.8
1931	445606	16.04	13806	689	14495	3.3
1941	512069	14.92	24339	1594	25933	5.0
1951	577635	12.80	25933	6962	65895	11.4
1961	780037	35.04	174656	62620	237276	30.4
1971	1072753	37.53	249383	103707	353090	32.9
1981	1420953	32.46	384261	203387	587618	41.4
1991	1887149	29.29	560884	355808	916692	59.9

Source: Gailangam Kamei and Gina Shangkham (ed.) *Change and Continuity in the Tribal Society of Manipur*, (Souvenir), Manipur University Tribal Students' Union, Imphal (Manipur), 1999, p. 74.

In 1901, the literacy rate of the entire State was a mere 0.9 percent of the total population of 2,84,465. During this time, if there ever was a middle class in the tribal society, it was the Village Council members composed not on the basis of their economic or intellectual standing in the society, but by virtue of their being elders of the village. As pointed out in the second chapter, the village chief was, on most cases, the one who founded the village. Studying the literacy rate of the State, one can surmise that till 1961, the same trend continued more or less the same as the literacy rate was just 30.4 percent in the entire State. Thereafter, the educated tribals slowly began to hold sway over decision-making process in the society which made possible due to the gradual decline in the power of the village council, and also because of the prominent emergence of the Church leadership. The ensuing decades showed the literacy rate over the 50 percent mark. Another remarkable feature is that the literacy rate of the female population caught way behind that of the male literacy rate.

District-wise Literacy Rate (1991 census)

District	Number of Literates			Literacy Percentage		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
Tamenglong	36039	22289	13750	50.16	59.92	39.68
Churachanpur	85355	50597	34758	58.17	66.38	49.00
Chandel	27711	17920	9791	46.68	57.39	34.80
Thoubal	126361	83057	43304	52.47	68.33	36.31
Bishnupur	82063	51525	30538	54.94	68.59	41.13
Imphal	421725	250368	171357	70.74	82.80	58.32
Ukhrul	56391	34724	21667	62.54	72.11	51.57
Senapati	81047	50404	30643	46.04	55.26	36.13
Manipur	916692	560884	355808	59.89	71.63	47.60

Source: Caroline Ngailiankim, "The spread of Modern education and its Impact on the Tribal Society of Manipur", in *Change and Continuity in the Tribal Society of Manipur*, (Souvenir), Manipur University Tribal Students' Union, Imphal (Manipur), 1999, p. 69.

The above figures clearly show the composition of middle or elite class of each district. As the districts were carved out on the basis of social composition the elite class of the three distinct ethnic or communal groups of the State can be easily identified.

Class-wise Distribution of Manipur Government Employees as on 1st January, 1992.

Group/Class	Total State Employee	Total No. of ST Employee	% of ST to Total State
A (Class I)	2612	332	12.71
B (Class II)	1671	227	13.58
C (Class III)	25023	6828	27.29
D (Class IV)	14575	3437	23.58
Total	43881	10824	24.67

Source: Gailangam Kamei and Gina Shabgkham (ed.) *Change and Continuity in the Tribal Society of Manipur*, Manipur University Tribal Students' Union, Imphal (Manipur), 1999, p. 74.

The table gives a clear picture of the salaried class of the State that incidentally forms the bed-rock of social, economic and political activities. Since the tribals have few or very marginal presence in the class of contractors, businessmen, the salaried class shown in the table continues to be the most influential group in terms of social and

economic status and educational level. However, the educated unemployed youths may be also taken as being in this class.

Role of the Middle Class

Formal State power at the all-India level is largely in the hands of the professional, bureaucratic and politico-intellectual groups. The top politicians and bureaucrats preside over the State apparatus in formal and informal alliance with members of the bourgeoisie and the top peasantry. This group of people broadly termed as the 'intellectuals' have an alliance between and among them which is legitimised by the framework of the mixed economy. The process of planning has led to an absolute economic leadership and control over the economy.¹⁶ This clearly reinforces the Marxist contention that those having monopoly over the economic resources control State power.

While the activities of the middle class of advance societies centre around a cleavage, mainly economic in character, the activities of the tribal middle class cannot be immediately explained in terms of any conflict having an economic content alone.¹⁷ The impact of the colonial rule gave a sudden jolt to their economic, social and political organisations. The British policy of 'least interference' in the tribal way of life while educating them with modern ideals opened up new avenues for the tribals to indulge themselves in. The exploitative, subjugative and suppressive regime paved the way for standing up in revolt against the challenging forces. The Kuki Rebellion (1917) and the Zeliangrong Movement of the 1920s are just some examples.

As pointed in the third chapter, the post-independent developments were not taken by the tribals, which resultantly paved the way for 'nationalist' movements in the areas. In all these revolts, the traditional power structure acted in concert with the few educated or intellectuals. As the years passed by, the middle class abetted and supported by the general public led the formation of tribal, ethnic and communal organisations. Now that

¹⁶ Thomas Pantham, "Elites, Classes, and the Distortions of Economic Transition in India" in Sachchidananda and A.K. Lal (ed.), *Elite and Development*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1980, p. 85.

¹⁷ Ashok Kumar Ray, *Authority and Legitimacy: A study of the Thadou – Kukis in Manipur*, Renaissance Publishing House, Delhi, 1990, p. 111.

the traditional power structure has slowly given way to the modern institutions – both government and non-government – the educated elite along with the salaried class are taking control of the socio-economic and political affairs of the society. The rising number of educated-unemployed youths is a serious matter as they direct their time and energy more to ethnic and tribal interests, which are political in nature and intent. Thus, in the surcharged communal and ethnic environment that the State is in presently, the role played by this class has a wide and overwhelming consequence affecting the people of all hues.

Ethnic Consciousness and Tribal Identity

In the aftermath of the British colonial rule, the Northeast has seen a spurt of ‘nationalist’ movements in the twentieth century, the prominent ones being the Nagas, the Mizos, the Meeteis and the Assamese movements. Besides these, there are a number of movements emanating from almost all ethnic alliances. This has resultantly raised the whole issue of what a nation is, and consequently what is meant by nationalism. Scholars have closely studied these ‘nationalist’ movements in the Northeast, and some are of the view that of all the forms of nationalism, “ethno-nationalism” best fits in to describe and understand these movements. “The concept of ‘ethno-nationalism’ best defines the self-understanding to ethnic groups in the North-East India in the various forms of their struggle for identity.”¹⁸

Ethno-nationalism refers to the phenomenon of political movements launched on the basis of ethnic identity. Carmen Abubakar defines ethno-nationalism as “ethnic groups claiming to be (or to possess) nations and States in the past or that have the potentials of becoming (nations or states) are now demanding and asserting these claims (historic) rights to self-determination for local autonomy or independence.”¹⁹ The phase of ethno-nationalism is characterised by “regional or sub-national reactions and

¹⁸ Lalsangkima Pachuau, “ ‘Tribal’ Identity and Ethnic Conflicts in the Northeast India: A Christian Response”, <http://www.yomari.com/p-review/1999/05/270599/cor/html>.

¹⁹ C. A. Abubakar, “The Moro Ethno-nationalist Movement”, in D.Kumar and S. Kadigarmar (ed.), *Ethnicity, Identity, Conflict and Crisis*, Arena Press, Hongkong, 1989, p. 109.

resistances to what is seen as an over-centralised and hegemonic State.”²⁰ In the case of Northeast, the very notion as well as the movements of ethno-nationalism clearly reflects a crisis of identity. The ethno-national self-understanding displays the experience of being pulled between the notion of identity and national identity.

Moreover, geographically and racially, the region is situated between the Indian sub-continent and the South-East Asia. This geographical-cultural condition, with strong influence from both the sides is an important for the crisis of identity. It was only since the British period that the entire region came to be associated with India politically. It has always been the contention of the leaders of the ‘underground outfits’ that the political integration of the region to India was done without the approval of the people themselves. Importantly, the lack of culture relations, especially of the tribal culture, weakens the new political associations and the racial and cultural difference. Against this backdrop, the role of defining and protecting self-identity comes to play a vital role. The impression that they are politically Indian but racially and culturally Mongoloid does not hold them in good stead.²¹

In the light of the above discussion, the ethnic consciousness and the consequent assertion of identity by the various tribal or communal alliances in Manipur may be briefly touched upon.

Since India’s independence, the State has not seen a decade of calm political atmosphere in the State. The seed of discontentment had been laid during the British days (this fact has been already with at length in the second chapter). Each decade saw new dimensions of political unrest with more intensity and wider proportions than the preceding one. Insurgency, the most violent form of political upsurge, has rocked the State, as also other States in the Northeast. The ‘nationalist’ movements are pervasive in nature in that the people, especially the tribals of the State, have close cultural and social

²⁰ Stanley J. Tambia, “The Nation-State Crisis and the Rise of Ethno-nationalism”, in E. N. Wilmsen and P. McAllister (ed.), *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premise in a World of Power*, The Chicago University Press, Chicago and London, 1996, pp. 128-129.

²¹ Lalsangkima Pachuau, *op. cit.*

ties with the peoples in the neighbouring States. The inward-looking self-definition of identity not only effects the tribals' relations with the 'outsiders', but also inter-ethnic group relations within the State. The expectations to achieve economic and political liberation on the basis of ethnic groups have led to feuds between and among the tribal groups. In the process, the more numerically and technically powerful neighbouring groups came to be identified as obstacles. The Naga-Kuki clash in the State in recent years clearly showed this trend.

Tracing the cause of the rise of ethnic consciousness in the tribal society, Yogendra Singh opines that the decline of traditional organisations, "the phenomenon of ethnicity shows a remarkable rise in strength in terms of (new) social organisations...consciousness and movement." He goes on to say that "ethnicity at its root lies in the consciousness of identity and cultural self-awareness of a community or communities...due to acute consciousness of alienation and exploitation and uneven levels of developmental opportunities."²² The socio-economic and political dimension of ethnicity affects the entire social structural formation with wide ranging and overwhelming consequences.

The ethno-nationalist movements being raised against the dominant State apparatus is at a wider scale in terms of approach and mobilisation of the people. In Manipur where the social composition is at a precarious balance because of the divisions in tribal and non-tribal, and between ethnic groups, the interplay of these ethnic forces has a pervasive effect on the well-being of each tribe. In an attempt to assert and ultimately preserve their identities, even smaller groups have begun to mobilise themselves so as to challenge what they perceive unjust exploitation and subjugation by the numerically dominant or powerful community. The elements of these assertions are manifestly seen in all political, economic and social spheres. Even elections are fought on communal or tribal ethnic ties which result in even further polarisation of tribal groups.

²² Yogendra Singh, *Culture Change in India: Identity and Globalisation*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 211-212.

The Nagas have their powerful organisations active in all spheres of life. So do the other two prominent groups of the State – the Kuki-chin and the Meetei groups. Moreover, each tribe has its own independent and affiliated organisations and associations. These are political in nature and content in one way or the other as all or most of these organisations work towards controlling the political power of the State, district and even at the village level. The United Naga Council (UNC), the Zomi National Council (ZNC), the All-Manipur United Club Organisation (AMUCO) are apex bodies of the Naga, the Kuki-chin and the Meetei groups respectively. At the tribal level are the Tangkhul Long, the Zeliangrong People's Convention, the Hmar People's Convention, etc. These are powerful pressure groups having considerable influences over the political institutions of the State. The interplay of these groups and associations with a view to either assimilate or even terminate the others has been responsible for the violent clashes resulting in the further polarisation of people of ethnic and communal lines.

To sum it up, rise of the ethno-nationalist movements in the North-East of India operating in the small but contagious geographical area various ethnic groups scattered over the landscape and communities have tremendous impact on the political, social and economic spheres. The oppressive nature of the State cannot be undermined here both at the Central and regional levels. This inevitably leads to the need of protect one's interests and identities. In such a scenario, the layers of exploitation of the weaker tribes and communities by the dominant and more powerful ones are perpetuated and even stage-managed in various forms and manners. This is even truer in Manipur as the State politics is determined by the role played by the distinct three groups of peoples.

Tribalism and Polarisation of Tribal Groups

Tribalism has become one of the major ills of the State. The tiny State of Manipur inhabited by multi-ethnic groups or tribes with different cultural practices, the inter-tribal relationship has always played an important role, sometimes detrimental to the all-round development of the people at large. This inter-tribal relationship has been reduced to what

is called 'tribalism'. All reactionary activities affecting the democratic functioning have been attributed to this phenomenon.²³

As with case of the term 'tribe' or 'tribal', 'tribalism' is vague in its meaning, and its current usage embodies a number of separate concepts. One may describe a man as a 'tribalist' if he adheres to the norm of his traditional society, however inappropriate those norms may be to the modern situation. Some use the term to describe a man who does not adapt his behaviour to modern situations, yet retains his ethnic loyalty that parallels or transcends loyalty to the new State.²⁴ In another sense, tribalism may also mean a hostile attitude to member of some other ethnic group. It is a kind of expression signifying fear that one group is establishing dominance over others.²⁵

It may be deduced from the above that tribalism, which is a complex urban phenomenon, has the following characteristics:

1. primordial attachment to the basic tribal system – kinship, inheritance, traditional ceremonies and customs, strong bonds of blood relationship;
2. ethnic loyalty or ethnic solidarity; and
3. elitist conflict and competition among different ethnic groups within the framework of emerging socio-economic change.

In Manipur as in other Northeast States, the forces of modernisation do not completely disrupt tribal solidarity. The old traditional practices may have died down, but the bond of communal or tribal solidarity continues with even greater intensity. For instance, different tribals who have permanently settled in the urban areas continue to organise themselves based on tribes or communities. Ethnic based political parties or voluntary associations have emerged in the State polity, which are responsible for development of ethno-nationalism. As and when occasion demands, these parties and associations come out strongly to protect or promote their own communal interests. This

²³ Lal Dena, "Tribalism in Manipur" in Gailangam Kamei and Gina Shangkham (ed.) *Change and Continuity in the Tribal Society of Manipur*, Manipur University Tribal Students' Union, Imphal (Manipur), 1999, p. 66.

²⁴ P.C., Lloyd, *Africa in Social Change*, Penguin Books, Delhi, 1972, p. 289.

²⁵ Lal Dena, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

has always resulted in development of inter-ethnic contradictions in the already fragile inter-ethnic relationship where one ethnic group tries to eliminate or compete the others in socio-economic and importantly in political matters.²⁶

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that cohesive groups based on ethnic considerations have come to occupy a prominent feature in the State. Under the generic Naga level, a number of tribes have come together, and even within this group, each tribe has increasingly sought to define their borders and villages into cohesive cultural elements.²⁷ Here one need not make a substantial statement to show that the cohesive group formation on ethnic lines is true to all ethnic or communal groups in the State. In fact, the growth of ethno-nationalism in the entire Northeast has its roots in such coming together of tribes and communities. The political, social and economic implications will be briefly highlighted in the following pages.

The social composition of the tiny State of Manipur is very fragmented and the inter-relationship of these groups has been shaped by two significant factors – the rise of ethno-nationalism in the wake of the coming of the British and later the post-independent developments and tribalism. With these developments, the activities of the insurgency or ‘under-ground’ gained ground dictating the political scene of the State. In the face of this, polarisation of tribal ethnic groups becomes a glaring feature catching the attention of people from different walks of life. The table below gives the latest demographic patters in the State.

Demographic Pattern of Manipur (Census India – 2001 Provisional)

Community	Population
Meetei	13,61,521
Meetei Pangal (Muslims)	1,67,204
Naga	3,39,647
Kuki-chin	2,98,399
Unspecified Tribes	75,768
Others	1,46,096
Total	23,88,635

Source: Manipur Research Forum, Delhi, Vol. 1, Issue 1, October, 2001, p. 13.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Achung Xavier Longmei, “Zeliangrong Movement: A Search for Identity”, *North East Zeliangrong Naga Festival-cum-Seminar*, (Souvenir), Imphal, 1995, p. 11.

The people of the State are broadly organised into two groupings – the hill people and valley people. The former in turn are further organised or divided into two broad groupings – the Naga tribes and the Kuki-chin tribes. Officially, there are 29 Scheduled Tribes and most of them are Christians. The valley people who form the non-Scheduled Tribes population of the State consist of the Meeteis (who form the majority of the population – around 55 percent of the total population of the State) and Meetei Pangals. Majority of the Meetei population are *Vaishnavite* Hindus while some practice the indigenous religion known as *Sanamahi*. Besides this indigenous population, there are also people from other parts of the country (locally known as *mayangs*).²⁸

The communal or tribal tension built up over the years snowballed into an explosive dimension in the 1990s. It was a culmination of the communal politics increasingly affected by politicised collective identities. It may be pointed out here again that identity formation is not the function a single process. Various factors influence it. Elements like race, religion and language provide the institutional frame in the first place; and cultural perception of the community towards other groups, lead to crystallisation of identity consciousness.²⁹ In a multi-ethnic society like Manipur, the reaction to challenges arising out of attempts by the dominant groups towards assimilation, growing economic competition among different groups, and political and developmental process enforced by the State reinforce identity formation.

In the light of this understanding, the clashes between the Meeteis and the Pangals in the valley and the ones between the Nagas and Kukis have to be seen and understood. The claims and counter claims between the contending groups, and the ensuing clashes between them saw the emergence of the ‘underground’ politics as an active ingredient in the politics of both the hills and the valley. This identity based politics in the State has ominous portents to all social, economic and political spheres of the people of all groups

²⁸ *Manipur Research Forum, Delhi*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, February to March, 2002, p. 8.

²⁹ M. N. Kama, “Ethnic Identity and Socio-economic Process in North-East India”, in K. S. Aggarwal (ed.), *Dynamics of Identity and Inter-group Relations in North-East India*, Indian Institute of Advance Studies, Shimla, 1999, p. 29.

and stratas. Due to this phenomenon, gradually, the ever-widening schism between the hill and valley people has also been on the rise.

To substantiate the point further, the 2002 State Assembly elections have seen the extent of identity-based politics, which further polarised the people of the State on ethnic and communal lines. “The palpable ethnic tension based by politicised collective identities between the Nagas and the Kukis and on the one hand and the Naga and the Meeteis on the other, the elections for the Eight Assembly were held under unprecedented ethnic divide among different communities of the State.”³⁰ Therefore, one can say that even the very institution of democratic governance has been used or even contributes to further the ethnic and communal polarisation making each group into rigid identity. This trend has the capacity to continue for a very long time to come as the process that shapes it is not corrigible in a short span of time.

³⁰ *Manipur Research... op. cit.* p. 9.

CONCLUSION

The study of politics of the tribals in Manipur is also simultaneously a study of the social, cultural, religious and economic systems of the tribals shaped and influenced by the process of change over a period of time. Since the beginning of the twentieth century and, particularly in the post independent era, the process of change sweeping over the tribal society has tremendously altered the politics of the tribals. The development of tribal politics is not one of natural evolution but that evolved without their knowledge as part of the social transformation elsewhere and here.

The British Colonial rule introduced the first dose of modern administration and the Indian government carried on with some modifications the present structure and functions of governance little realising that the illiterate tribals were not equipped or were not capable of realising the meaning and import of modern governmental institutions and their imperatives at that time. Thus, the political, social and economic transformation led the process of change induced and operated from within and without. Thereafter, the socio-economic and political spheres of the tribal society have definitely changed in many different ways which was inevitable. There have been a number of positive impacts that have enlightened the tribals to forgo some of their practices and beliefs detrimental to modern civilised living. On the other hand, some negative traits have developed through this process of change having overriding or overwhelming consequences not only in the tribal society but also in the neighbouring areas.

During this period, the following features came into prominence:

1. Customs of centuries, music and the arts, production and consumption patterns have undergone radical transformations. These were, however, never static; the process of their transformation got hastened.
2. The swift monetisation of the economy helped the tribals to interact with people from outside their exclusive domains. This led to the interactive relationship between the traditional and the modernity projects.

3. A phenomenal expansion of the middle class, the intelligentsia, professionals and the bureaucracy has been a significant feature.
4. The efficacy of the traditional political institutions has either died down or got adapted to the modern form of democratic government.
5. The spread of education has increased manifold the capability of the population to interact with economic, political, cultural and administrative organisations operating in their areas and elsewhere.
6. These organisations themselves are multiplying in number and are widening their areas of operation.
7. The political consciousness of the tribal folks has expanded with ideals of modern politics known and practised the world over.

In the traditional system and institutions, only the village elders were involved in the process of decision-making and had control over the administration of long-established customary practices of the entire village or area. These elders had little or no contact with the neighbouring villages at all normal times. Rules of administration were based on traditional theories of governance evolved over a period of time, and orally passed on from generation to generation. In a span of a century, this long established tradition of governance has been obliterated with the implementation of the modern democratic form of governance, which, theoretically, the participation of all individuals irrespective of any distinctions whatsoever.

It does not need much emphasis to state that even before the coming of the British, there was little or no inter-tribal relationship. On the other hand, due to the practice of head-hunting, the enmity between tribes (even between villages, in some cases) was even more severe. However, the reasons for this enmity were confined only to protection of the villagers and preservation of individual integrity in the tribal realm, and not so much on protection of the whole tribe or community as a whole and the land they occupied. In the latter stage of the development of tribal politics in the State, community or tribal interests gradually became the overriding concern of each tribe and community. This shift in outlook and attitude in their politics was reinforced by the

British colonial rule which vehemently decried almost all the traditional tribal practices as being 'barbarous' and 'inhuman' and 'uncivilised'. Thus, modern civilisational values had destroyed these traditional practices and with it had gone the underlying cultural notions that sustained ethnic civilisations.

Since the coming of the capitalist version of economy after India's independence, individual growth became the driving force as opposed to the traditional economic system. Inevitably, in the competition for resource accumulation and concentration of wealth, each tribal was posited over the other in individual terms as well as each tribe over the other in tribal terms. The world of progress and development in a haze left quite a few tribals and other groups out of the general rush towards affluence and spatial security. Many in the margins or the periphery began to realize the need to re-consolidate their strength through cultural models of adaptability and difference. Ethnic identity was thus sharpened through social and political practices foisted by forces from outside the tribal society. The need to get to political power combined with instrumental use of these cultural or ethnic symbols is a characteristic feature of the politics of the tribals in Manipur, as do the other tribals elsewhere.

The creation of Nagaland and Manipur in 1963 and 1972 respectively left the Nagas in Manipur insecure and vulnerable as their loyalty and social-cultural ties had been disrupted. This development brought unprecedented upsurge in the Naga national movement with wide participation of Nagas from Manipur. On the heel of this, many 'underground' groups from the other pre-dominant cluster of ethnic alliances mushroomed up in the span of the last three decades. Claims and counter-claims of legitimacy of the 'causes' they raise in opposition to the stand of the other groups have led to bloodsheds in a number of occasions. The fact that most problems of the State have been the result of the failure of the State to meet the aspirations of the various groups of the people has been sidelined when it takes up the 'counter-insurgency' role. Violation of human rights in by the State forces have been more of a rule than exception bringing about untold miseries to the people, especially in the hill areas of the State. This indicates the vicious circle of chaos and confusion due to the failure of the government

on one hand, and the assertion of identity by tribal groups on the other hand, all at the same time.

In the light of the above, it becomes quite clear that the politics of the tribals, or for that matter, the entire human race, has been shaped to a great extent by socio-economic forces. Therefore, the State is fully responsible for keeping the governing institutions with a view to effect atleast the bare minimum necessities of the people. The demand for efficacy of the political system is of even more significant in a State like Manipur where the problems of the people are of various proportions touching upon all aspects of development, and are closely related to tribal or ethnic identity. An increasingly large number of far-reaching events is taking place in the State of Manipur and it is necessary to distinguish between those which carry fundamental messages and those which are transitory in nature. Many of the initial administrative and political failures in dealing with it could be attributed to this lack of appreciation. Collective decision-making is the essence of political leadership and essential for the advancement of long-term social and economic goals, but this has been lacking in the State.

At the present reckoning, the crucial issue continued to be the need to strike a balance between the conflicting claims of different ethnic and linguistic groups. Much depends on the vision of the leadership of each political unit both at the Centre and at the State, and the enlargement of equal economic opportunities in the State. Regrettably, there has been a sharp decline in the quality of the leadership of all the tribal groups, of the State and of the Central government to remedy the ills of the people(s). Yet, the demands on them are no less severe than before, even if they have to work in different environment and situations. The managers of change, who have at their command the modern information systems and media, will be respectfully heard and followed only if seen to be truly concerned with the problems of the basic social categories of the populace – the villager, peasants, artisans and labourers of all communities without any distinctions. The existing social pressures and absence of feudal norms in the State, could lead to the emergence of an interactive leadership today's morass. This would help ease

the stress and strain of social and economic development, particularly amongst groups who have felt that they are being left behind.

However, the State has been into all sorts of problems ranging from political uncertainty, frequent imposition of president's Rule, frequent elections and post-poll defections and horse-trading. These have led to high level of corruption, interference of insurgencies in the political matters of the State that most politicians use to their advantage, and the perpetuation of the presence of the Central paramilitary forces in the State. Moreover, the socio-economic conditions of the tribals have not seen much improvement – a major cause of social tension in the State. Therefore, it will be a long time any semblance of normalcy is restored in the State.

This research is in no way exhaustive. For a threadbare and exhaustive introspection of the many dimensional problems of the State with a view to better understanding the simmering differences among and between the ethnic groups, and to consequently bring about a blueprint for the resolution of all outstanding and contending issues, a minute study of the socio-economic and political aspects of each individual tribe is warranted and called for. Then, the prospects and challenges of each tribal group can be critically examined and analysed and put in their proper perspectives.

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