In the preceding chapter we have seen the emergence of the middle class and the simultaneous process of consolidation of the Tangkhul identity which cuts across the narrow village boundaries. The consolidation of this identity is, it should be noted, shaped by various forces and trajectories, of which one of the most important being the larger Naga nationalism and its demand for a separate independent Nagalim. Similarly, in the recent times there is apparently an unprecedented development and crystallization of various identity claims whether be it the Tangkhul, Naga or Kuki identity very prominently characterizing the landscape of Manipur. What could possibly be the cause for this phenomenon? Some are of the view that these identity claims in the state are reportedly the direct consequence of the social, political and cultural imbalances between the various groups inhabiting the state. The contention here is not that these imbalances are of recent origin. On the contrary, the divide between the hills and the plains and between the various groups has been in existence since time immemorial. What is significant is the emergence and ascent of the middle class at large as the new leaders with their more combative and vocal nature that have given a new twist to the existing imbalances between the hills and the plains and the people therein. The present chapter is concerned with the role of the middle class in the dynamics of conflict and negotiation in the state of Manipur.

The present chapter looks at the change that is happening beyond the village boundaries. It is specifically concerned with the emerging political situation in Manipur which is markedly characterized by the competition for scarce resources between the various groups inhabiting the state, the processes of negotiation and its consequences. The scope of the present chapter, thus, includes the relationships between the different communities within the state and the unit of analysis moves from Marou village to the wider Tangkhul level, and even to the still wider level of
the Naga and the ramifications these wider happenings have on the local situation, for instance, Marou village. But before proceeding right away with the analysis of the present political situation in Manipur it is the contention of the work here that the physical or the geographical composition and distribution of the various communities in the state has a major bearing on the nature of the emerging political situation in the state. Therefore, at the outset, it becomes pertinent to consider briefly the geographical composition and distribution of the various communities within the state.

The state of Manipur covers a geographical area of 22,327 sq. km, out of which 92 percent of the area is hills and mountains while the remaining 8 percent is valley. Administratively the state is divided into nine districts – five in the hills and four in the valley. The districts are further sub-divided into thirty seven Sub-Division and thirty eight Community Tribal Development Blocks. The total population of the state according to the Census of India 2001 stood at 23,88635. The scheduled tribe comprises about 34.2 percent of the total state’s population. It needs to be mentioned that the scheduled tribes in Manipur are in turn divided into different groups. The various tribal communities in the state are broadly divided into the Naga group and the Kuki Chin group. This is not a neat division though because there are still groups which are not represented within these two broad categories like the Hmar groups.

What is significant here is the disproportionate geographical and demographic distribution between two even broader groups, that is, the hills and the plains. The former is dominantly tribal while the latter is non-tribal. The people in the plains are the more populous and advanced, in terms of education, development and also political and economic standings. In a way, they can be loosely referred to as the people with the ‘great traditions’. On the other hand the people in the hills are those with ‘little traditions’. The paradox is that while the plains people, commonly known as the Meitei, are the major group in Manipur they occupy a very small geographical area within the state that is approximately only about 8 percent of the state’s total
geographical area while the rest is occupied by the minority tribal group, comprising about only 34.2 percent of the state’s total population as noted above. Added to this situation is the law against the acquisition of tribal lands by the non-tribal which is incorporated in the constitution of India to prevent tribal people from being alienated from their lands by the non-tribal or outsiders. It is against such a background that the present chapter seeks to analyze the emerging politics of identity in Manipur and its implications for understanding the trends and processes of social, political and economic changes that is being witnessed in a small and peripheral context like Marou village. In other words, the attempt here is to situate the emergence and the role of the middle class in the village as a response or an outcome of the wider changes which again points to the fact the village is no longer an insulated entity but thrown wide open to exogenous forces of change.

5.1 The Hills-Plains Intercourse in Manipur

The most lucid description of Manipur is highlighted in the often mentioned poetic expression which describes the plains/valley as the golden land (sana leibak) surrounded by hills which acts as fences (samban) and the hill-tribes as guards manning the fence. Till the arrival of the British colonial rulers and the Christian missionaries the hills and plains remained more or less independent of each other. While there was established ruling dynasty in the plains there are no historical records to show that similar arrangement existed in the hills. Most of them continue to live relatively isolated in villages which were ruled by the village chiefs with his council of village elders. And each village was more or less an independent unit for all practical purposes. Therefore it can be maintained that intercourse between the hills and the plain was limited in the past. Except for rare expeditions into the hills by the plains people for collecting materials for building the racing boats there exists no historical accounts of political domination or subjugation. All these changed with the colonial rule. Both the hills and the plains were brought under the colonial administration and for the first time and the various villages under their own village chiefs were subordinated to the British rule. The subsequent independence from the
colonial rule, establishment of statehood and the adoption of the Sixth Schedule in the hill areas of the state are some important landmarks that affected the traditional hills-plains relationship in Manipur in general.

Thus, today with the establishment of the common administrative and political systems the divide between the hills and the plains have apparently narrowed down like never before. There is increased intercourse between the hills and the plains. The general climate of political instability, economic non-development, the militarization and the social unrest characterizes both the hills and the plains and affect them one way or the other. Within this general climate of unrest in the state there are also sign of conflict and fissiparous processes which have again threaten to engender the hills-plains divide — perhaps this time with more dire consequences. For instance, to cite one common observation pointing to the growing divide between the hills and the plains, is the incidents preceding and following the so-called ‘June 18th Uprising’ of 2002 when some individuals lost their lives during the protest against the extension ‘without territorial boundary’ of the on-going ceasefire between the Government of India (GOI) and Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaac-Muivah) (NSCN-I-M). It needs to be noted the Naga national movement pre-dates India’s achievement of independence. In 1997 the GOI and the NSCN (I-M) entered into a formal ceasefire for ending the half a century arm struggle through peaceful and amicable solution for both the parties.

The official recognition of the Naga movement both at the national and international forum has unfortunately created an adverse response from the majority groups in the state of Manipur. Such a response is particularly marked by something akin to ‘cultural imperialism’. For instance, in the early part of the present decade some organizations based in the plains have banned the wearing of skirt as uniforms in the schools from class VIII onwards. Instead the girl students were compelled to wear sarong-like clothe which is supposedly an indigene style. The excuse for such a ban was that wearing skirts (even trousers) is ‘unbecoming’ of the ‘Manipuri’
identity. They argued that the younger generations are becoming increasingly subdued by the outside influences at the cost of forgetting one’s traditional roots. Still another argument has it that this ‘going back to roots’ is to protect against the cultural onslaught of the Indian state to wean away the younger generation of the state from upholding the right to self-determination by diluting and assimilating them into the larger whole. In short, the ban was claimed as a counter hegemonic response to the growing ‘indianisation’. Besides this Hindi movies and songs are publicly banned in the state since the mid 1990s citing almost the same excuse. In its place there is now a very vibrant and hugely popular local movie industry. Local stars are ruling the roost in the state which once was rule by the likes of Bollywood and Hollywood stars. Almost all the movie producing industries are located in the plains and also the actors are from the plains.

What is significant to note in the context of the above development is that it not only serve to ‘mark’ off one group of people from another - people of Manipur from the rest of India- but there is, simultaneously embedded within it, the deliberate process of absorption or assimilation of other groups, often the smaller and more undeveloped ones, in the state. This is problematic. In the attempt to define belongingness there is a deliberate process of privileging certain markers of a particular group’s identity at the cost of others. Thus, wearing of sarong, which is called phanek in Meitei, instead of skirt by the female students in schools and colleges or the ban of screening or selling of Hindi movies and songs in the state is not only an attempt to set apart the identity of the Manipuris but more importantly the construction of the Manipuri identity through the privileging of the characteristics of the major groups in Manipur, that is the Meiteis. That this is so can be gauge from the response of the hills, especially the Naga group of tribes in the state, to such attempts by the majority group in the plains. It is interesting to note that what is practiced in the plains is hardly followed in the hills. For example, female students in all the classes continue to wear skirts as uniforms in the school and Hindi movies and songs are
openly shown or played in Ukhrul district. Perhaps people now used to travel to the hills to purchase Hindi movies and songs.

Along with this open display of the items banned in the plains there is also a counter discourse emanating from the hills against the imposition of such bans. Many of the hills people felt that such a move by the plains people smacks of sinister means of promoting the economic interest of the latter by creating market for their products, for example the Manipuri films and songs. If one simply observe the growth and mushrooming of the local music and film industry post the ban the real intention becomes quite obvious. It is important to also note that the so-called Manipuri films and songs are in fact exactly the same in terms of style and composition with the mainstream Hindi movies and songs. The usual Hindi movie themes of lovers running around the trees, singing in the streets and so on and so forth are prominently present in the so-called Manipuri films as well. The only difference being that one is in the local vernacular and has local actors and actresses on it while the other is in Hindi with the mainstream actors and actresses. In such a situation the above argument given for banning the mainstream films and songs as corrupting and hegemonic in content becomes rhetorical and at the same time insidious. It is also entails the perpetuation of the same forces of corruption and hegemony to a much deeper level instead of countering it. Taking all these recent developments in the state it is not very hard to see through the hidden agenda behind the hue and cry of the so-called mainstream culture corrupting and undermining the local culture.

What is of significance here is the construction of the ‘periphery’ against the ‘mainstream’. While it can be accepted to a certain extent that compared to the great Indian civilizational complex the state as a whole is at the periphery. However, within the state the plains people are the ‘mainstream’ whereas the tribes inhabiting the hills are the ‘peripheries’. But the image of the ‘periphery’ constructed by the plains people undermined the composite nature of the state. The majority group in the plains came to be identified or attempt to be identified as the people inhabiting the state and thus
their culture and traditions subordinated the peripheries. As noted above, the response of the tribal ‘periphery’ to the non-tribal ‘mainstream’ in the state is also marked by opposition against the imposing representations, on the one hand, and the construction of a sense of belonging which is supposedly rooted in totally different traditions to convey a feeling of inevitability and authenticity amongst the members belonging to that particular group in opposition to the sense of belongingness emanating from the plains. And it is in this process of negating and establishing alternative identity or sense of belonging that the role and the importance of the contemporary middle class in the Tangkhul society are located. It also needs to be added here that the endemic conflict between the hills and the plains in the state is also related to economic and political issues. Unfortunately, it is the state which is also to be blamed squarely for the situation that the state is presently in because there is wide disparity between the hills and the plains in terms of economic, educational and administrative infrastructures and the state is completely indifferent towards solving the problem. This marked disparity between the hills and plains is further accentuated by the various ethnic loyalties demanded from the members of the various groups in the state. Coupled with this is the absence of other credible agencies or institutions besides the state government to provide a decent means of livelihood to its citizens. Since the state is the only employing institution within the state there is fierce competition among its citizens thereby sharpening the divide between the majority and the minority groups which in turn had wide ramifications.

Having briefly noted the present and emerging situation in the state the following section looks at the implications of these wider changes upon the structures and functions at the micro-level. In doing so we look at the emergence of the institution of the Church in Marou village as an important domain where the middle class exercises it authority and dominance. Moreover, in the development of the church and its intervention into the secular and traditional domains of the office of the village chief and village council or what shall be termed as the ‘secularization of the spiritual function of the church’ in Marou village, the function of the middle class as
responding to the call of the Tangkhul in particular, and the Naga and the tribal community in general, against the ‘Manipuri identity’ would be located. This is to argue that the middle class even at the micro level like Marou village plays an active role in shaping and determining the sense of belongingness of the people which is opposed to the dominant representation through its active participation and control of the church within the village boundary.

5.2 Locating the role of middle class in Marou village

The role and importance of the middle class in Marou village is yet to be clearly determined. The heterogeneity of the class in the village continues to impede the development of an organized group within the village. Moreover, the remoteness and lack of heightened intercourse beyond the village boundaries still continues to limit their role though there are signs that they are gradually emerging as the key players within the village. One area where the role and importance of the middle class in the village is clearly visible is in the functioning and the growing influence of the Church in opposition to the traditional village council including the village chief’s office. In the previous chapter it has been mentioned that the emerging middle class in Marou village are mostly the first generation western educated villagers and their offspring. In general they do not have much stake in the traditional scheme of things in the village in terms of *khisa* or the traditional rights over certain portion of the land. They are generally the ‘landless’ section of the village population. However, with the acquisition of education, wider exposure and pursuit of non-traditional occupation and also to a certain extent through petty political connections this class of people in the village has established themselves as the emerging leaders within the structure of the village.

Along with the emergence of the new leadership there is also a search for an institutional base to ‘root’ their claim as the new leaders so that there will be a feeling of permanence and also for the common villagers to recognize their leadership as authentic and genuine in their everyday existence. In this search for an institutional
base the middle class in Marou village do not possess the privilege to turn to the traditional institutions like the office of the awunga or the village council which are based on laws of kinship. Therefore, they are apparently compelled to turn to an alternate institution for which the church presents them with the most readily available institution in the village. In fact, as noted earlier, in some of the contemporary Tangkhul villages the middle class have managed to override the traditional village council and the office of the awunga by establishing the 'chairmanship' post which functions more or less on the principles of the modern day administration like appointment through election for a specific tenure, specifying essential qualifications for the candidates and so on which is not found in the traditional institutions. There are attempts to bring about the same in some villages as well. Yet in Marou there are no such attempts as of now. In such a situation the church remains the only institution within the village through which the middle class can consolidate and influence the day-to-day affairs within the village.

One important indication that the church is becoming more dominant and its influence is spanning over the other traditional village institutions is found in the nature of its composition and its function in the village. For instance, the church is headed by the church pastor and his board of deacons who are appointed on criteria other than the tradition like education and charisma besides the spirituality matter. The village chief is just a member within the church structure, if he is not in the board of deacon or is the pastor; the pastor in general is an outsider 'employed' by the villagers for a regular pay and some other incentives in kind. The present Pastor of Marou Baptist Church is a Tangkhul from a village called Tuinem, which lies on the western side of the Tangkhul region. He is provided with a nominal salary of about rupees fifteen hundred per month. Besides, this he is extended the right to participate in the annual village lottery for proportioning out of the village land for jhum cultivation. The village also provides, once a year, his share of fire-wood and is also entitled to a share of the rice which is given to the church as tithe by the villagers at the end of the harvest every year. The issue of appointing the pastor had been a big
issue in the village prior to the appointment of the present one. The village was too poor and the tithe money was not coming in regularly from the church members. So for a long time the person credited with founding the church in the village offered his service as the pastor for a very nominal payment. But apart from such interruptions in almost all the villages the pastors are appointed from outside the village. For a small village like Marou the need to get someone from outside the village is necessitated by the fact that there are no trained or qualified theologians to take up the charge. But usually the underlying principle is that if the pastor is an outsider then he would be less inclined to interfere with the day to day secular issues and be able to administer his spiritual duties sincerely and optimally.

Practically the assumption that the pastor of the church would keep away from the secular politics is more often breached than kept. The growing importance and influence of church in the affairs of the village, on the one hand, and the gradual recession of the traditional institutions of the village council and office of the avunga to the background is significant to note. For instance, during the stay in the village an incident happened which undoubtedly showed the important secular role that church play in the village. A young girl from the village had eloped with a boy from another village a couple of months before. One Sunday morning they were presented before the congregation and the young girl came up to the dais and ask the ‘church’ for pardoning her wrong (for eloping) and restoring her membership. It is the practice today among all the Christian Tangkhul villages that not getting married with the approval of the church is one of the grounds for ‘terminating’ a person/s membership from the church, which is often extended to the village membership as well. To be terminated from the church’s membership is considered a pariah in the society. It is excommunicating supposedly for violating the spiritual sanctity of the institution of marriage. But this spiritual misadventure has secular ramifications in the sense that he/she ends up being excommunicated from almost all the spheres of the village life, secular domain included. In the present case also the young girl, since she had eloped without the consent and the approval of the local Marou Baptist Church, was not
admitted as member in her husband's church as well. She did not possess the necessary 'document' stating the approval from her natal church to be admitted to the church of the village she is married into. Thus, all these time she had been unable to live her live as full member in the new village that she is married into. In a sense, she was a pariah till she was pardon by her natal church for her 'spiritual' misadventure. Well, she was pardoned and the church issued her a letter of consent after she confessed and repent for her 'sins' in the church.

What is significant in the above context of determining membership within the village is the major role that the church plays. The traditional practice of adoption regarding new individuals or households from other village is still prevalent. In such cases, the adopted individual or the family has to kill an animal, preferably a hog, and hold a feast for all the villagers into which he/she/they is/are being adopted into. In case if the individual/household cannot afford to have such a big feast at least the village chief and members of the village council should be treated to a feast which involved the shedding of blood. It is still popularly believed that only through the shedding of blood that full membership is achieved. But besides this tradition of granting of membership into the village one also observes, from the case mentioned above, that the approval and recommendation from the church equally plays an important part. Though it is too early to maintain that the church has completely undermined the role and position of the traditional village in Marou village it can nevertheless be reiterated that the former has made significant inroads into the domain of the latter. What is especially interesting in this particular context is the close association of the rise of the church and the middle class on the one hand, and the fading in significance and role of the traditional institutions in the village. It is tempting to look for the reason of such a trend in Marou village in the spiritual realm dissociated from the secular domain. In this way the role and function of the emerging middle class in the village is glossed over. But when the role of the middle class of the village is taken into account while analyzing the growing influence and importance of
the church within the socio-political structure of the village it become more sociologically significant in explaining the processes of change in Marou village.

As noted above the institution of church in Marou village is emerging as an alternative site which manifestly opposed the traditional institutions in the village. For instance, in terms of organization and the functioning the church is more bureaucratic and formal. At least for some of the positions in the structure of the church certain qualifications are necessary as well as essential. There is also a process of selection and also remuneration on the lines of modern bureaucracy. Notwithstanding these characteristics which points to the departure from the traditional institutions in the village, it can be substantially argued that the church, and thus the middle class occupying the various position and performing diverse roles within the church, in practice reinforces many of the practices and values that characterizes the traditional institutions. Take for instance, the position of women in the church. First and foremost, they are never the pastors; secondly, the head of the deacon is also always a male. The only concession being that there is a women society within the ambit of the church. However, the functions of the women society are largely under the patronage of the overall institution of the church with male members occupying the key positions. This is to say that the women society does not have an independent existence, and so are their functions. In fact to a certain extent the church seems to be enforcing a stricter gender code which is biased towards the men in the society through the biblical teaching that the man is the head of the family and women should respect their husbands. Thus, it can be plausibly argued that the church reinforces the values of patriarchy and also give the gender relationship a spiritual sanction which makes it all the more difficult for the people in general to think otherwise in terms of gender equality. In sum, the church exercises a patriarchal hegemony further entrenching the low position of women in a patrilineal society like Marou village.

Furthermore, the gradual waning of the traditional institutions on the one hand, and the emergence of the church as an important institution in the village, on
the other, has also affected the social differentiation that exists in the village. In place of the traditional markers of social differentiation, like age, sex, genealogy, the \textit{khisa}. time of arrival in the village etc. there is now differentiation between the villagers on grounds like employed versus non-employed, nature of employment, government versus private, income, educational achievement etc. Similarly, change is visible also in the values held by the villagers. For example, ‘wealth’ which used to be defined by distribution now has undergone value change. Nowadays wealth is something which one accumulates rather than distribute. Closely following this kind of change in the value attributed to wealth it can be argued that there is a transition from the communitarian to the capitalist type of society. In the past, as it is noted in the previous chapters, the spirit of the community was very pronounced. Social institutions and practices like the feast of merit existed in the remote past which reinforces the spirit of the community upon the individual members of the society. Now that spirit is altogether sidelined and a capitalist individualism is on the rise even in a small village like Marou. Whether the situation in the village could be explained by the same parameters that ‘the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of capitalism’ that Max Weber talked about is yet to be explored but at cursory glance there is quite a semblance of it in the process of change that is observed in Marou village. This could be indeed an area which needs to be explored in detail in the days to come.

For the present analysis the significance of the emergence of the church as the important institution within the structure of Marou village closely linked with the middle class in the village lies in the discourse generated through it. On close observation it is found that the church through its linkages and associations beyond the bound of the village boundary actively functions in fostering a pan – Tangkhul identity which in turn is again linked to the Naga national identity\textsuperscript{6}. Perhaps looking back into the past it can be argued that the establishment of Christianity is one of the most powerful forces which brought together the feuding Tangkhul villages of the past and consolidated them into one common entity – the Tangkhul – which presently includes almost two hundred villages, both big and small, speaking almost an equal
number of dialects. This function of the church continues till today. What is new in the contemporary context is the growing prominence of its presence in the day to day affairs of the society. And it is precisely in this nature of the church that it is able to generate a discourse which cut both ways. This is to say that the discourse generated by the church, or to be more precise by the middle class within the church structure, seeks to foster a broad identity or sense of belongingness cutting across the village boundaries. This identity which is being promoted by the church is again explicitly or implicitly determined by the larger response of the Tangkhul to the imposing identity being propagated by the majority group in the state. For instance, while being merely a member of the village in the traditional way supposedly restricts an individual to the bounds of the village, church membership transcends the village boundaries. This is precisely the reason why the young woman, whose case I mentioned above, was not accepted as a new member in the village that she married into. At the same time the church also functions as the medium through which a sense of belongingness is promoted through holding of special prayer/fasting programmes for Naga national leaders/workers, through sermons where the boundaries between the different groups are reasserted and also by giving the whole political issue a tinge of morality so that members becomes oblige to uphold the cause.

In sum, it can be argued that the middle class in Marou village, through the agency of the church, plays a vital role in fostering a sense of belongingness which surpasses the traditional boundary of the village, and at the same time opposed to the imposing identity promoted by the majority group in the plains. The church has not only come to determine belongingness but has also helps the sense of belongingness transcend the village boundaries thereby fostering a larger Tangkhul identity. It also reinforces the sense of belongingness through its own narratives by constantly drawing the boundaries of being an insider as opposed to being an outsider. Finally, it needs to be seen that the growing stature of the church, the emerging middle class in Marou village and the larger issue of identity politics in the hills versus the plains in Manipur is closely linked through the constant construction of ‘us’ versus ‘them’.
following section of the chapter looks at the impact of change on the most vulnerable group of the society – the youth. What does it mean to be a youth in a society undergoing rapid changes? What does growing up in such a situation entail? Are the youth inherently restless or is it the restless society that is affecting the realization of a coherent and stable self among the youths? Most importantly, do tribal societies have youth?

5.3 Locating the Youth in a Changing Environment

In the above pages I have so far dealt with the significant changes that are observed in Marou village. Here, in this section, I would like to mention what it is like becoming a youth where there are rapid socio-political and economic transformations happening all around. But before preceding any further it needs mention that substantive sociological work done on the youth in general and the youth in the tribal society in tribal society, at least in the sub-continent, is conspicuous by its absence. Judging by the way they are being treated, mostly by journalists or social activists, the youth are only capable of either being a nuisance for the society or potential consumers for the industrial products. Some represented them as confused, violent and indiscipline while a liberal few regard them immature lot who needs to be ignored. In general the problem of growing up and finding a foothold for oneself in the fast changing world seems to be completely ignored. At best the youth are always made the scapegoat for all the ills facing the society – violence, drug abuse, immorality, vandalism etc. Is the youth not capable of something better than these things? Are they eternally condemned lot or is there hope at the end of the dark tunnel? These are some of the issues that this section would touch upon while dealing with the youth.

The term youth primarily refers to the broad and somewhat non-specific ‘younger generation’, including children and young adults. The concept is universally applicable since all societies normally have a younger generation. But at the same time, due to the non-specificity of the term confusions and complications arises in its application. Kenneth Kenniston studies the increasing members of young men and
women who experience a particularly delayed entry into full adult status. As he saw, they move into an emergent stage suspended between adolescence and adulthood. He called this stage ‘youth’ and applied it to the population falling between eighteen to twenty-six age categories. Presumably these young adults are psychologically mature and meet the psychological criteria of adulthood: identity is resolved; capacity to work established, proficiency for love relationship proven. However, they have not yet made commitments to the primary social institutions of the establishment such as marriage, family, and vocation. Hence the prime sociological characteristics of adulthood are lacking (Kenniston 1968: 10-11). On the other hand, Eiseendadt argue that “[t]his is the stage at which the individual’s personality acquires the basic psychological mechanism of self-regulation and self-control. It is also the stage at which the young are confronted with some models of the major roles they are supposed to emulate in adult life and with major symbols and values of their culture and community” (1972: 17).

Similarly, David noted “[y]outh is a dependent status, which means that it suffers from special liabilities or penalties and enjoys special protections, indulgences, and privileges” (1998: 193). Thus, youth is a period in the temporal ordering of the society. It is a period whose beginning and end are more or less explicitly punctuated. According to David (1998), “[t]he social indications of the start of youth in general have included publicly or privately visible aspects of biological pubescence. Moreover, the beginnings of youth are indicated in the partial subsiding of parental dominance and a concurrent license to utilize guardedly one’s new sexual equipment in some pale or playful imitation of adult heterosexuality. Finally, in many modern societies the beginning of youth is indicated by a license—not a right—to engage in some imitation of adult work. Thus indicated youth is a step, albeit a halting one, towards a socially defined adulthood” (Ibid. 192). He goes on to add that the “[c]onclusion of youth is obviously the assumption of adult status and, within the limits set by other prevalent systems of stratification, the ascription of first-class citizenship. Excellent and persistent social indicators of the time at which the
assumption of adulthood is warranted include the formation of new kinship ties by marriage, the begetting of children, the entrance into the labour force by taking or searching for full time and permanent employment, and the establishment of a new and separate place of residence" (Ibid).

There is an added difficulty while dealing with youth in the tribal society. Not only is there a complete lack of sociological researches done on it but also there is an attempt to overlook the existence of youth in the tribal societies which is simple in nature compared to the complex post-industrial societies of the west. For long the sociological approach has considered youth as the product of the post-industrial revolution characterized by complex division of labour where the younger generation needs to undergo intensive training or preparation before taking up the complex adult roles in the society. Moreover, such complex post-industrial societies are characterized by the separation of work from home. The family in such societies ceases to be the centre of production. Since the tribal society is considered as the opposite of such a complex society the presence of youth has been denied on the ground that there is no complex division of labour as it is found in the complex modern societies thereby not requiring the intervening period of training, that is, youth.

It has been argued further that, in the tribal societies the transition takes place directly from child to adulthood surpassing the youth. And it is on such grounds that tribal societies are seen to be lacking the ‘youth’, that is the stage of preparation. However, the presence of youth’s dormitory, longshim, for the Tangkhul, which is a well developed institution for training the youth, as it is in most of the known tribal societies, implies a different situation. Moreover, many of the tribal societies also possess terms to categorize the different groups of people according to their age role and expectations. For instance, the Tangkhul have different words for the various stages of life: anga-nao for the infant, nao-shinao for the children, yaron-nao or ngala-nao for the youth, male and female respectively, kahar-nao or parei-nao for the
adult (married) male or female respectively and finally kasar-nao or ayi/awo for the aged persons. Likewise they occupy different statuses and also perform different roles while also commanding varied expectations according to which particular stage a person is at the particular moment of time. Besides this, there are also festivals, like the yarra, exclusively for the youth. Coincidently this festival is celebrated in the month of March (called Mayo in Tangkhul), the spring season that is universally associated with youthfulness and gaiety. One Naga scholar noted succinctly that “...taking all aspects of an individual’s life into consideration we can call ‘Naga youth’ to those who are in the age group of 16 to 35, have crossed the pre-secondary educational level, are mentally and psychologically active and responsive to situation arising in society, are socially and economically (relatively) free from family responsibility and are able to involve actively in the processes of social, economic and political development of the society of which he or she is a member” (Yaruingam 2002: 49-50).

Social change entails large scale alterations in the ideological, technological and economic system within societies and these changes have significant implications for the youth. For instance, social change can affect the structure and dynamics of social context such as the family, peer groups or the school etc. It can also alter the social institutions and belief systems that surrounds and determine the youth in a particular social situation. The effects of social change on youth becomes all the more crucial because youth, being more than just a sexual maturation, is also a social process whose fundamental task is the formulation of a clear and stable self identification. Furthermore, the society in which the youth has been brought up and live shapes the youth’s fundamental task: what he will feel guilty about, what he must strive for, what particular battles he may have to fight and win to achieve adulthood, what are the symbols of achievement, status and acceptance as well as the duration and the intensity of the experience — all these come from the wider environment as much from the individual experience and interaction. In other words, the youth, apart from being merely a biologically conditioned, is also shaped and its development
determined by the prevailing social and cultural factors of the society that one is located in.

Rapid social change affects the rules, values and beliefs systems of the society. The family, clan and other groups which the individual used to depend for his or her self identification and development and other purposes are fast diminishing altogether. Unlike in the past the youths no longer have the privilege of the long established ways of doing things since change has permeated every sphere of the society. Eisenstatd, while analyzing the impact of change on the youth noted that “[a]ge groups in general and the youth group in particular tend to arise in those societies in which the family or kinship unit cannot ensure (it may even impede) the attainment of full social status on the part of the members. These conditions appear especially in societies in which family or kinship groups does not constitute the basic unit of social division of labour” (1972: 20). According to him several features characterized such societies. First, the membership in the total society (citizenship) is not defined in terms of belonging to any such family, kinship group or estate; nor does such a group mediate it. Second, in these societies the major social, political, economic and religious functions are performed not by family or kinship units but by various specialized groups (political parties, occupational associations etc.) which individual may join irrespective of their family, kinship or caste.

In these societies therefore the major roles that the adults are expected to perform in the wider society differ in orientation from those of the family or the kinship group. The children’s identification and close association with family members of other ages does not assure the attainment of full self identity and social maturity on the part of the children. In such cases there arises a tendency for peer groups to form, especially youth groups, which serves as a transitory phase between the world of childhood and adulthood.
5.4 **Growing Up In Marou Village**

In the contemporary situation in Marou village one cannot fail but notice the changing attitudes and values among the younger generation reflecting the larger changes that is happening in the society as a whole. These changes are especially evident in the areas like the dress patterns, aesthetic taste be it in music, recreation, leisure etc. On the whole, there is undoubtedly a major shift in the values and attitudes away from the traditional society. Along with this shift there is the associated conflict between the younger generation and their parent generation. However, it also needs to be noted that the analysis of the problems being faced by the youth in Marou village needs to take into account the wider affects of the structural changes. Rather than confining the analysis merely in the generational conflict it is always better to explain the problem of the youth as a symptom of the institutional changes and the failure of arranging suitable alternatives on the part of the society. Such an approach would desist from the assumption that youth are inherently spoiled and averse to social control.

It has been observed that “...an undefined and confusing social situation will have a corresponding repercussion in the personality of the individual who goes through it. A vacuous or inconsistent social environment is a poor bet for the development of a stable identity, whereas a clearly defined and consistent socio-cultural environment is prone to yield a stable identity” (Sebald 1977: 5). The above statement holds true for the situation of youth in the present day Marou village which is undergoing rapid transformation. The longshim which used to be the most important institution in the village for socializing the younger members of the village has been transformed so much so that though vestiges of its existence are still visible it no longer functions like it used to in the remote past. The longshim, some say, was a miniature village where all the life skills, relationships, mores and aesthetics were imparted under a single roof to the upcoming generation by the older generation. Ao notes “[t]he state of the morung indicated the state of the village itself; if it was decaying it means a decaying village. But if it was well kept and well used it meant a vigorous and healthy community” (1972: 482). It ensures the continuity of the village...
from one generation to another. Not that every new generation in the recent past think alike or were successfully schooled to think alike in the longshim. But the pace of change was not so fast or rapid as it is now that it successfully incorporates the changes and manages to maintain the stability and continuity of the village across time. Perhaps due to this apparent stability in the structure and function of the longshim that many anthropologists and sociologists misconstrued that youth was absent in a simple society like the tribal.

Today, the situation is totally altered. The emergence of the new middle class with its commitment to a totally new sets of values, aspirations and lifestyle which does not have much roots in the local traditions and practices, the accelerated social, political, cultural and economic intercourse transcending the traditional village boundaries and the emergence and demand to conform to new issues and causes have altogether changed the landscape of the village. Within the village where the church has managed to establish itself as the most important institution over and above the traditional institutions the fate of the longshim is not spared either. It is noted that the longshim is replaced by the Christian youth society (CYS) but this does not mean that the situation remains the same nevertheless. Uprooted as the CYS is from the traditional bases of the village life and being non-materialistic in its orientation it literally fails to replace the traditional institution of the longshim in socializing the younger generation of the village.

Even if it does so the young become all the more alienated from their material existence. For instance, many of the younger generation in Marou feels disillusioned that the way they are being socialized does not prepare them or help them to mitigate the real life problems. Most of the youth in the village are school drop-outs and equally many of them are illiterates who have not attended any school in their life. These youths feel that they are condemned to life of penury. Coupled with this is the complete absence of other avenues besides cultivation where their illiteracy could at least be put to a productive use to earn a decent livelihood. Such a situation is
apparently causing more disillusionment among the youths because, on the one hand they realize that things are changing and they have to adapt to it but, on the other hand, there is none adaptive mechanism available for them. Added to this is their poverty and subsistence livelihood. With the passage of time it may gradually become meaningful for the people but at the moment when the traditions of the past have not completely died out and the new one has not fully established itself well the role of such institutions like the CYS will continue to be alienating.

Thus, the plight of the youth in Marou is not very appealing. They feel that they have been cut down too early too soon in their lives. They see changes all around them, affecting them but as pawns in the chessboard not having any agency to act upon it and put it to their advantage of deriving a decent livelihood. This is frustrating for them. Some resort to unsocial behaviors, some become anti-socials and yet still some gave up haplessly. In a way, conflict has, with the changing environment, become quite a feature of growing in the village. But surely it is not this kind of conflict that one anticipates when it comes to the development of a coherent and stable identity among the youth. And with this kind of conflict so rampant the society is not going to get more modern or complex. So what is needed urgently to curb the rot is not necessarily going back to traditions which perhaps may be more devastating than the present situation but opening up new avenues and opportunities where the raw talents and potentials of the youth could be best put to fruitful use. This would mean of course improving the overall economic standing of the people, setting up of institutional infrastructures to promote entrepreneurship, improving the transportation facilities and educational level of the people. Surely this will be a painstaking task but the challenge lies in initiating one.
References


End Notes

1 There are thirty two recognized scheduled tribes in Manipur. They are namely: Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Kharam, Koirao, Koireng, Kom, Lamkang, Mizo (Lushei), Maram, Maring, Mao, Monsang, Mayon, Paite, Poumei, Purum, Ralte, Sema, Simte, Salte (Sukte), Tangkhul, Tarao, Thadou, Vaiphei and Zou.

2 Boat racing was a popular sport in Manipur besides polo or sagon kanjei as is known in Manipur among the Meiteis. Boats for such purposes are carved of large trees. And because there were no large trees in the valley they used to go to the hills to collect it. It is said that during such trips the plains people come into contact with the hills people who were at times hostile. Fights happened during such occasions but it never resulted in political or territorial conquest. There is a popular story in Marou. Once during such visits the Maharaja of the plains fell in love with a beautiful maiden from Marou village. Her name was Luiyila. The Maharaja approached the father of the maiden and asked the father to name anything in exchange for his daughter. To this the father asked the Maharaja to give him a bagful of dry fish. It was granted and the maiden was taken to Imphal against her wishes along with the Maharaja. How and what happened to her is not mentioned any further. But till this day some use to sing, especially small children while pounding rice, about how Luiyila was exchanged for a bag of dry fish.

Similar to the above story, there is yet another story of the Tangkhul describing the kinship relationship between the hills and the plain. Long time ago, two brothers of Hundung village used to keep a sow. One day the sow left the village. The younger brother went out to look for the sow and found it near the bank of river Iril in the plains adjoining the foothills and named the place as oaknepokpi meaning where the piglets are born. The place is now called Yainganpokpi and lies on the way to Ukhrul about 20 Km from Imphal. The younger brother on finding that the land there is more fertile than in the hills settled down while his elder brother continue to live in the hills. In the initial years the younger brother who was now settled in the plains maintained cordial relations with his brother in the hills by sending many of the things that he cultivated as gifts. However, as time passed the younger brother stop sending the gifts and the relationship drifted apart.

3 The Naga nation comprises approximately forty and plus tribal groups inhabiting the contiguous tri-junction between India, China and Burma (now Myanmar). Within the sub-continent the tribal groups belonging to the Naga nation is distributed in the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Officially the ceasefire agreement signed between the GOI and the NSCN (I-M) is restricted within the state boundaries of Nagaland. This has been a controversial issue between the two parties. While the NSCN (I-M) want the ceasefire agreement to be operative in all the Naga inhabited areas the GOI has refused to do so citing political considerations. However, after much negotiation between the two parties the ceasefire was sought to be extended to all the Naga inhabited areas without territorial
limit' in 2002. Many states in the region reacted strongly against the move by the GOI, the most violent one being enacted in Manipur. The majority community felt betrayed by the GOI and came out strongly protesting against the ‘division’ of the state’s territory. There is presumably one reason why the protest in Manipur, to be more precise in the capital, Imphal, turned out to be so violent. In case if the negotiating parties in the ceasefire agreement comes to some sort of amicable solution then Manipur’s status as a state within the union of India felt threatened because there would be hardly any geographical area left for it to called a state. Moreover, it was a direct threat to their dominant status within the present arrangement and they stood to lose such a privileged position. Post the 2002 incident the majority group has engaged themselves with numerous tactics and mechanisms to propagate an image of the state to the outside world as predominantly ‘manipuri’ where the identity or existence of the Naga group, or for that matter any other tribal community who are a threat to their position, is denied. Such tactics and methods range from cultural impositions to direct denial of services and other developmental opportunities.

It is significant to note that the assertion or the regularity of the use of the Manipuri identity has become more popular in the period immediately following the 2002 incident. Manipuri identity is a broad homogenous identity propagated by the major group in Manipur. It directly denies the existence of other groups like the Tangkhul, Moas, Thadous, Hmars etc. In sum, it is a political charged identity being pushed forward rigorously by the majority group in the state. It is also equally important to note that most of the tribal community in the state prefers to identify themselves outside the Manipuri identity. Manipuri identity implies the majority centric identity and is not accepted by all the groups inhabiting the state.

One very interesting thing regarding the ban of Hindi movies and songs was observed during one of my travel from Guwahati to Imphal on the bus. Hindi songs blared loudly inside the bus which was mostly occupied by ‘Manipuris’ without any signs of protest from any of the passengers. The same thing continued even after the bus crossed the plains of Assam and entered the hilly terrains of Nagaland. The Hindi songs continued after we crossed into Manipur at Mao where the bus usually halts for meals. I even noticed some lady passengers hurrying of to a small shop selling movie CDs and picking couple of Hindi movie CDs. However, as soon as we left behind the hills at Sekmai, about 25 kilometers from Imphal, the bus handyman suddenly removed the Hindi cassette and replaced that with a Manipuri cassette. Then, one passenger candidly said ‘Ah! We have finally reached Manipur’. I observed a similar incident while returning to Delhi from Imphal. Again the change in the songs happened as soon as we left the plains. What was different this time was that someone in the bus suggested coyly that since ‘the bus is now out of Imphal why don’t we listen to some good old Hindi melodies’. 

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6 Marou Baptist Church is affiliated to the Southern Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association (STNBA), the apex body of all the Baptist churches in the southern region of the Tangkhul territory covering about seventy to seventy five villages. Theoretically STNBA is again associated with the Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association (TNBA) which is the highest body for all the Tangkhul. But due to some past incident the STNBA continue to exist autonomously. Nevertheless, the church is more widely connected than the traditional village institutions.

7 Psychologist Stanley Hall created the term ‘adolescence’ and attributed dependence, pre-pubescence, sexual learning and pre-legal preparation for responsible social roles as the central elements of this age group (Manning and Truzzi 1972: 3). In terms of etymology adolescence comes from the Latin word ‘adolescere’ which means ‘grow up’ or ‘to grow into maturity’. The reference to the growth is non-specific and could conceivably apply to physiological, psychological or social growth. Adolescence in the sociological sense refers to the experience of passing through the unstructured and ill-defined phase that lies between childhood and adulthood. In other words, adolescence refers to the crisis of discontinuity of statuses, which creates a social environment with uncertain diffuse guidelines. In short, it means social existence without a clear blueprint for behaviour. However, the purely sociological approach does not complete the portrayal of the adolescence experience. It illuminates only the social aspects of the individual. The concurrent psychological aspects deal with the ‘crisis of identity’ which, according to Erikson (1968), deals with the relationship between what a person appears to be in the eyes of others and what he or she feels he or she is. It refers to the dynamics of the search for an inner continuity that will match the external social conditions.

Furthermore the stage of adolescence is marked by protracted conflict between the individual and the society. Conflict between the individual and the society is inherent in the development of personality by the standard of the Western man and it is in the adolescence that this is critical to individual development. ‘Adolescence is the period during which a young person learns who he is and what he really feels. It is the time during which he differentiates himself from his culture, though on the culture terms. It is the age at which, by becoming a person in his own right, he becomes capable of deeply felt relationships to other individuals perceived clearly as such’ (Friedenberg 1969: 9). Thus, it is maintained that adolescence is this conflict no matter how old the individual is when the conflict occurs. Adolescent conflict is the instrument by which an individual learns the complex and subtle, the precious difference between himself and his environment. ‘In a society in which differences is not permitted the word adolescence has no meaning’ (Trilling 1955: 13). ‘But this conflict is not war: it need not even involve hostile action. It must, to be sure, produce some hostile feelings among others. But there be no intent to wound, castrate or destroy on either side. Conflict between the adolescent and his world is dialectical and leads, as a higher synthesis, to the youth’s own adulthood and to the critical participation in society as an adult’ (Ibid: 13).
Acquiring membership in the Longshim is based on age and sex. Generally, a boy is ready to go to the Longshim while he is quite young – say about the age of 12 or as soon as he attains puberty and he remains a member of the Longshim till he marries and sets up a home of his own. In the beginning the new entrant is obliged to perform certain tasks such as running for errands, collecting fuel from the forest for the hearth and so on. And on the basis of his performance of these tasks which is in fact a test of one's skill, courage, loyalty, co-operation, bravery and discipline, full membership of the Longshim is extended to him. Thereafter, he shares in all the activities of the Longshim without any discrimination whatsoever. But as the Tangkhul converted Christianity and have given up many traditional practices, which include the initiation of the young into Longshim.