Chapter I

CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

It was assumed that with the advent of modernity or 'the age of reason' all the archaic and primordial aspects of human society would become redundant. Society would be singularly determined by reason and there was an underlying confidence that all human society would progress towards a common end largely shaped and driven by rationality, of which the modern industrialized western societies would be the models. And within such an understanding of modernity change was perceived as a process of progression towards the 'scientific end', whereby the non-rational and traditional would give way to the rational and the modern. Grand narratives of progress and development marked this particular phase of human history beginning from the Enlightenment period of the 18th century. Things, however, have not turned out the way it was presumed. Tradition far from being replaced by the scientific and the modern continue to play an active role in shaping and determining the course of human development and relationships even today and is likely to continue in the foreseeable future. Consequently, in the recent times grand modern narratives and approaches have come under severe criticism, particularly from the post-modern/post-structural approaches.

Notwithstanding the lack of consensus and clarity between what is 'modern' and 'post-modern' in the intellectual and academic circle the latter has no doubt brought about an epistemic change in approaching and understanding of the human society. Beginning in the literary and aesthetic studies post-modern approaches have challenged and 'deconstructed' the established knowledge about man and society. One of its most significant contributions is lending a voice to the marginalized section of the society. For instance, in the present context, it becomes possible to interrogate
the tribal discourse, which is rooted in the evolutionist and ethnocentric climate of the
nineteenth and early twentieth century western scholarships by adopting the
postmodernist perspective and viewing the situation from the native’s point of view. It
also further helps to address the nuances of the impact of more recent force of
globalization on the peripheries which has altogether generated a whole new series of
enquiry and approach. This is important because globalization and its impacts have
created new opportunities for the tribal, who are a people located at the periphery, and
there is an increase in the participation and interaction with the larger population. On
the other hand, the interaction has also led to sharpening of ethnic boundaries and
identities as globalization also accentuates differences based on ethnic and other
primordial symbols (of belongingness) as people attempt to maximize the benefits of
the globalizing world. Thus, these developments in the contemporary society not only
entails reassessing the situation but also developing tools and methodologies of study
which will be able to reflect the empirical situation much more closely. The present
study is geared towards such an end.

The work here attempts to look at the issue of change in the tribal society from
the perspective of culture as distinct from, though not necessarily opposed to, the
structural approach, which is dominant in most of the sociological and
anthropological study of change. Instead of the modernist conception of change as
simply the mechanical ‘taking over’ of the traditional by the modern or as a linear
progression the present study would focus on culture as a site of struggle and contest
marked by conflict and following varying trajectories. In other words, departing from
the structural conception of culture the work here would look at culture, and thus
identity, as something actively constructed and represented in the process of social
change allowing for the consideration of the pragmatic role of the actors, in this case
the tribe, as they attempt to reduce the losses, accumulate the benefits that accrues
from the changing environment and also maintain a certain sense of continuity and
coherence in defining and relating to one another within the group as well as beyond
it.
The aim of the present chapter is to formulate the theoretical background and define the key concepts for the work beginning with the notion of 'tribe'. This is necessary because very often 'tribe' is accepted and used in the academic and administrative circles without much of critical reflection. The tacit acceptance has undoubtedly eased the problem of individual classifications by clubbing varied social types into a single hold-all concept. But at the same time the hold-all nature of the concept has undermined the heterogeneous nature of the societies referred to as 'tribal' and inadvertently reduced them into an apparently homogeneous entity with similar history, culture, problems and aspirations which is not so in the empirical reality. Such an understanding has continually permeated most of the tribal studies with wide ramifications. The aim here is not so much to find an alternative to it but to bring out the incongruity of using the concept of 'tribe' to reflect the social reality and suggest an alternate way of conceiving it.

The chapter would also focus on the existing theoretical and conceptual difficulties in the analysis and study of tribe in the sub-continent which in turn have practical bearings on the empirical situation of tribe in the sub-continent. On the one hand, the tribal claims that they are the first settlers of the land and therefore are 'indigenous' people who have inalienable rights over the land and the resources therein. Yet, on the other hand, it is commonplace, since the colonial times, to find tribal communities being driven out of their habitats to make way for dams, mining projects, reserved forests, bio-reserves etc. often without adequate compensation thereby impoverishing them all the more. The response of the tribal to such developmental undertaking that regularly deprives them of the livelihood is varied and diverse ranging from organized political mobilization like the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) to armed resistance against the state in the northeastern India. Nevertheless marginality and powerlessness still remains the common experience for almost all the tribal communities in the sub-continent. As a consequence of this political as well economic marginality the overall socio-cultural milieu of the tribal in the sub-continent even today characterized by abject poverty, illiteracy and largely
non-industrial mode of livelihood. Significantly, with globalization and the boom in the global tourism the identity of tribe has acquired a new feature; that of showcasing its 'exotic' culture and tradition. Given such a situation the issue of tribal identity and change becomes all the perplexing and ambiguous in the sense development of tribal has become kind of rhetorical. In sum, the present chapter would attempt to provide answers to questions like: do tribal society change? What happens to its traditions and cultures? What happens to the group's self image when traditional values and other primordial markers of identity change? Do the traditional markers of group identity, along with the institutions, just disintegrate or adapt themselves to the change and survive? What are the consequences of the policy to integrate the tribal into the 'mainstream' society? These are some of the few queries and issues that the work here seeks to address.

1.2 Identity and Change

The theme of the present study, identity and change, seems an odd combination. On the one hand, identity is supposedly constant. It is assumed to be continuous through space and time. It is this static nature which apparently underlines both the collective and personal identity and gives a sense of continuity. It is often argued that if identity is changed or altered now and again there could not be 'identity' which conveys a sense of continuity and stability – the two primary features of identity. On the other hand, change is something inevitable that literally everything has to undergo. It is a process. Thus, from such an understanding identity and change appears poles apart. Yet in the actual existence of society or group identity and change is closely interrelated or intertwined with each other. Society or group continually rework and negotiate their identity in their everyday existence seeking to derive benefits entailing from the changing social situation or to put across the table certain agenda or perhaps to mitigate life crises etc. However, this close co-existence between identity and change is often ignored or glossed over in most of the studies, be it anthropological or sociological. Consequently identity is considered as constant or 'given' thereby legitimizing the notion that there exists a pristine/pure form of identity for every
group which can be retrieved, usually from the remote past, to overcome many of the ills that plagued the present society. This in turn gives rise to a class of selected individuals in the society admittedly entrusted with the task of retrieving the identity and ultimately being the guardians or keepers of that identity. In such a situation not only is the process of retrieving a problem but also the question of who should retrieve remains a moot point. It also veers dangerously close to Anson Shupe and Jeffrey Hadden’s definition of fundamentalism - ‘A proclamation of reclaimed authority over a sacred tradition which is to be reinstated as an antidote for a society that has strayed from its cultural moorings’ (Shupe and Jeffrey. 1989: 110-11). Moreover, in a situation where there is marked mushrooming of such groups of people the environment become replete with sharp identity claims that threatens to lead to potentially violent consequences.

The oddity of the relationship becomes more glaring when identity of a society or a group is seen as deriving from the wider social, political, economic and cultural content beyond the individual idiosyncrasies. Given that these wider aspects of the society are susceptible to change the contention that identity, other than the personal one, is ‘given’ for all times and situations become both problematic and untenable as well. It is significant to note that today the issue of identity is putting the human society/world into a more precarious situation than ever before. How can something that supposedly exists only at the abstract level have such devastating material effects that threaten to tear the human society asunder? It needs to be seen why so many are ready to resort even to the most extreme means like genocide to maintain and assert one’s identity which is so ambiguous. For long development and a stable state apparatus is considered the solution for maintaining continuity and peaceful co-existence. However, recent experiences around the globe belie any such attempts to solve the issue of identity. With globalization and the perceived threat to smaller and marginal groups’ identities the problem only seems to have escalated further.
Notwithstanding the uneasy relationship between identity and change witnessed around the world it needs to be noted that not all manifestation of the problem are similar. It varies from region to region, perception of the opponent and their potential, position of the group in the overall social equation, resources at its disposal and also the degree to which the idea of common identity has been internalized by the conflicting groups. It is in this context of identity and change that the group of people commonly referred to as the 'tribal' presents a unique case for sociological analysis. Generally tribe/tribal is perceived as a group of people whose identity is marked by primitive traits, geographical isolation and distinctive culture or way of life, distinct from the non-tribal societies. Closely following from this formulation of the tribal identity there is also the definition of the tribal identities markedly by the conspicuous absence of certain traits which are pre-dominant in the non-tribal societies. For example, the tribal identity is commonly considered as an identity rooted in the remote past that continues to be uniquely constant even in the present period when that remote past is nowhere around whereas the non-tribal societies are apparently marked by the here and now. Significantly, in order to perpetuate the identity of the tribe attempts are being made to retrieve the remote traditional situation on which tribal identity is allegedly situated even in the midst of transformations dictated by technological revolution and other developmental efforts to bring the tribe at par with the more developed sections of the population. Hindsight reflection on the process would make it evident that the earlier theories and the old contention that tradition and modernity cannot co-exist is shallow and not clearly substantiated. Conversely, it brings to the fore the importance and urgency to understand and examine the dynamics of tribal identity rooted in such co-existence in the context of the tribal society in the sub-continent if one is to arrive at a less ambiguous identity of the tribe. And in the analysis of such dynamics it is important to understand that not only the tribal groups contributed to maintaining their unique identity but the state also directly or indirectly contributes to it especially through its means of distributing the scarce resources.
The approach to the tribal identity as frozen in the remote past has other ramifications as well. For instance, the attempt to freeze the tribal identity in time and space consequently limit the various attempts to understand and develop them. The attempt to develop these communities through economic and political interventions yielded limited results as it simultaneously attempts to preserve their 'unique' identity. Therefore, while trying to develop them there is also a simultaneous attempt to 'traditionalize' as well for the tribal to remain a tribal. The present study is an attempt to look into the uneasy relationship between identity and change, especially in the context of the tribal society in the sub-continent. A draft paper titled 'The National Tribal Policy' prepared by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. clearly spells out this uneasy relationship or 'dilemma', as it used in the paper. In the Preamble of the draft paper it states "[t]he dilemma in preparing any policy for the Scheduled Tribes in India is how to strike, the right balance between preservation of tribal identity, culture and values, protecting the tribes from being swamped by mainstream lifestyles, while increasing and ensuring their access to mainstream education, health care and income generation so that the quality of their life is improved." Given such a situation the moot question remains: Do tribe change?

The central premise of the present work focuses on the assumption that identity remains stable despite the changes happening in the society - culturally, politically and economically. Such an assumption is based on the acceptance that identity, especially the collective identity, is 'given' and independent of the processes in the society. There is supposedly a 'core' untouched by change in the society. The core is the reference point and the unseen power that is responsible for the resilient nature of most of the societies. The core is considered the repository of the entire authentic traditional and cultural heritage. Thus, as long as the core remains untouched the identity of the group or collectivity would remain despite the shifts and strains at the periphery. What is problematic with such an approach is that it begins with the assumption that a particular identity is given and there are certain markers which determines what belonging to that identity means. It overlooks the fact that the
particular identity as it exists now is the construction of varied historical forces. Therefore, it lead to a very de-politicized definition of tribal identity ignoring the various forces, both within and without, which shape something that we referred to as 'tribe'. Moreover, to accept the core would be problematic because it is difficult, if not impossible, to locate what or where exactly the core is without being at the risk of privileging the categories of identity markers of one particular group over the others. In India where 'unity in diversity' is the characterizing feature such a privileging would disturb the peaceful co-existence of the society. In contrast to such an approach, the work here attempts to look at identity as closely determined by, and also determining, the wider social changes and thereby focusing on the process which is referred to in the present study as 'negotiation'.

Wagner (2001) in *Theorizing Modernity* simply defines identity as “[i]dentity in current social science means ‘continuity of self” (2001:62). He adds “[i]n the social sciences the term ‘identity’ is used predominantly in two forms. As shorthand for ‘self-identity’ it refers to a human being’s consciousness of the continuity of her existence over time and of a certain coherence of her person.... The term ‘social’ or ‘collective identity’ expand the idea and refer to a sense of selfhood of a collectivity, or the sense of a human being to belong to a collectivity of like people” (Ibid., 63). Similarly Erikson (1968) in ‘Identity, psychosocial’, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* defines identity as “a subjective sense of continuous existence and a coherent memory” (1968:7). According to Wagner collective identity apparently emerges if and when a multiplicity of singular human beings draws a sense of significance for their self-identities from the same collectivity. Mahapatra (1986) in *Modernization and Ritual Identity and Change in Santal Society* points out vividly that “[i]dentity is more easily definable in a personal rather than a social or ethnic context. In the life of an individual identity is the sum total of those psychic, physical and mental traits which define his peculiarity and uniqueness...In a social context identity remains a somewhat undefined groups of characteristics...it involves references to a historico-mythological framework and attitude to life and death, inter-
personal and inter-family relationships. These in their turn are related to traditional inherited knowledge, the impact of new knowledge through modern education, and the result of contact with other cultures and other societies" (1986: 1-2). Karlsson (1977) in *Contested Belonging*, a study of the Rabhas, who live in the forests (duars) of the northeastern part of West Bengal, proposed cultural identity as "a social identity that is based on a specific cultural configuration of a conscious nature. History, language, race are all possible bases for cultural identity and they are all constructed realities" (1977: 37).

The issue of 'identity' occupies an important place in the social sciences, especially after the interactionist tradition traced primarily to Mead (1934), Cooley (1902) and Thomas (1934). At the same time, it is also a difficult subject matter to grapple with because they are not fixed, can be negotiated, contested and reformulated as categories of representation. Identity, as it would be used in the present work, closely follows the interactionists' usage of the term. Here, identity would primarily referred to the subjective sense of shared belongingness among the members of a group, also recognized and acknowledged by those who do not belong to that group. This subjective sense of shared belongingness is again premised on shared culture, language, tradition and worldview held by members belonging to the particular group and supposedly rooted in time immemorial. The present study is broadly based on the understanding of Hall (1991) that all identities, both personal and collective, are constructed and through relations; relations of dominance and resistance (cited in Karlsson Ibid., 36). Such a perspective on identity is succinctly brought out in Unnithan's (1997) study of the Girasia tribe of Rajasthan in India. In *Identity, Gender and Poverty New Perspective on Caste and Tribe in Rajasthan* she argues "[t]he ways in which the Girasia have come to be described as 'tribal' and their increasingly tribalised identity is related to the images which the non-Girasia project on to them, images which are informed by the notions of caste held by the dominant and powerful communities in India, specific caste groups, as well as by academics and government administrators" (1997:4). Unnithan's work is concerned with the complex issue of
identification and the processes by which communities and people choose to represent themselves, or conversely, are powerless in the ways they are represented by others. The book suggests that the different perceptions of Girasia identity, the ways the Girasia construct and negotiate their identities, the ways in which they and others insists on a seeing of themselves as different, and the ways in which they want to be the same, must all be seen in the context of their poverty, as well in the strategic use of kinship and gender relations in the region.

Rosaldo (2003) in *Cultural Citizenship in Island South Asia* explores the perspectives of hinterland ethnic minorities as they define the terms of their national belonging and struggle with coercive definitions of citizenship that emanates from state centers of power. It basically poses the crucial question how do so-called marginal groups remake their identities and perceive their emergent relations to the nation-state. The study also focuses on the conflict between modernizing states and the traditional loyalties-referred to as 'primordial sentiments' by Clifford Geertz - of the people. Rigg in *Southeast Asia* (1997) documents how representations of Thai identity and tradition have varied overtime according to the political purpose of those groups with the power to shape representation. He observes "[e]ven local visions are unrepresentative, are subjected to manipulations, have been created and moulded by powerful interest groups, and are subjected to constant change" (1997:36). The central problem of the present study is then to explore what happens when the premises upon which tribal identity, especially the cultural bases and institutions, undergoes rapid change. One probable answer to this problem is to aver to Hobsbawn's notion of 'invented tradition'. According to him the past two hundred years have been marked by an increase in invented traditions because societies have been experiencing more rapid change. Modernization "weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they are not applicable" (Hobsbawn 1983:4-5). While some traditions were swept aside by forces of change, others were deliberately rejected "as obstacles to progress, or even worse, as its militant adversaries" (Ibid. 8). Both scenarios, he reiterates, leads to the invention of
new traditions. But it is important to note that the invention of tradition, as in the construction of national culture, involves a struggle over whose cultural practice is selected to represent the nation, and on whose perspective this practice is enshrined as the truth. Following Nongbri (2003) in *Development, Ethnicity and Gender*, the present study is "not whether the emerging tribal identity is 'real' or 'constructed' but how this affects their position in the larger society. Whatever its source of origin it is this new identity within which tribes are clothed that has given them the bargaining power they never had before" (2003: 89). In other words, the focus is upon how identities have been invested with meaning and used both for maintaining the cohesiveness of the group/collectivity as well as in the social, political and economic strategies of the individual and communities concerned.

1.3 *Tribe: What and Who?*

This section will attempt to construct the identity of the tribe from the various definitions and general conceptualizations of term 'tribe'. The treatment of the issue seeks to proceed from the question of 'what is tribe' to 'who is a tribe'. Such an approach is necessitated by the fact that the growth and development of the category of tribe, especially during the colonial period in the sub-continent, was also an attempt to racially segregate group of people from others. After all if tribe is a type of social organization somebody has to populate it. At the outset it needs to be made clear that 'identity' as used in the present work will basically mean the 'sense of belongingness' to a group or collectivity. The present work is also based on the understanding that a group's or collective identity, and tribal identity in the present study, is not given but constructed. Identity is 'constructed' in the sense that 'it' is *created by or created for* the collectivity known by that particular identity through a constant process of negotiation with other groups possessing or claiming to possess such identities and the wider socio-political and economic changes in the society. Secondly, the work is also premised on the understanding that collective identity, tribal identity here, is socially determined. Therefore, it is neither constant nor fossilized in the past that can be conveniently retrieved when the need arises. Such an approach to the tribal identity is
imperative in order to comprehend and understand the empirical situation in the society where there is constant change and other similar processes of transformation. It also provides a vintage point of view from where the processes in the society like cultural revivalism, rights movements, inter-community conflicts, especially in regions like Manipur where the study is situated, etc. could be looked at afresh.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines tribe as ‘(in developing countries) a group of people of the same race, and with the same customs, language, religion etc., living in a particular area and often led by a chief’. Encyclopedia Britannica defines tribe as “[i]n cultural anthropology...theoretical type of human social organization based on small groups defined by traditions of common descent and having temporary or permanent political integration above the family level and a shared language, culture, and ideology.” It goes on to add that “[i]n the ideal model of a tribe, members typically share a tribal name and a contiguous territory” (Web. 1). Etymologically the term ‘tribe’ is a derived from the Latin ‘Tribus’, which in the Roman history is a unit of the Roman state. ‘In Rome the tribes formed the 3 (later 4, and still later 35) original divisions of Roman citizens’. These were on the basis of military levies, property tax, census taking and voting units in political assemblies. ‘Tribus’ for the Romans is referred to as ‘phylai’ in Greek. In both the societies they form a group of political and demographic sub-divisions of the population. In Greece the groups divided into tribes were distinct by location, dialect, and tradition, and they included the Ionians, Dorians, Achaeans, and Aetolians. In Attica, Cleisthenes replaced the 4 Ionian tribes with 10 new tribes, each of which was named after a local hero: these came to develop political and civic functions, including the election of the magistrates’ (Ibid.). Cultural anthropologists now usually apply the term to a unit of social organization that is culturally homogeneous and consists of multiple kinship groups, which are exogamous units. Similarly sociologists and social anthropologists have conceptualized tribe as ‘Regulated Anarchies’ (Weber, 1978), ‘Ethnographic heritage from Neolithic times’ (Sahlins, 1968), ‘Completely organized society in barbarian stage’ (Morgan, 1967). Primitiveness was another important marker of
‘tribe’ used commonly throughout the history of modern anthropology though the concept has been now abandoned because of the negative connotation that is associated with it.

From the above anthropological definitions of ‘tribe’ one can construe two broad meanings of what ‘tribe’ signifies. Firstly, the above definitions of tribe signify a particular type of society; and secondly a particular stage of a society—further implying a linear line of evolution of all known human societies. While it is theoretically more tenable to accept tribe as a particular type of society it is not similarly so to view tribe as a particular stage in the evolution of the human society. Perhaps with the demise of the classical evolutionary theories of social progression such approach for understanding or explaining human society has been abandoned. Not only was it problematic to view all known human society as progressing through a linear line of evolution but it was inadequate as a social theory to explain the various types of human society which has come to the present stage through other modes than the ones envisioned by the evolutionary theories. Moreover, the theory was unable to explain the abrupt halts and reverses or retrogressions which marked the history of human society. Neither is it certain that the present tribal societies would inevitably surpass the present stage nor that they would necessarily progress towards the next higher stage. Perhaps a reverse trend can also be anticipated. More importantly, it completely fails to state ‘after tribe what?’

Though the conceptualization of tribe as a particular type of society is more tenable as a theory yet it is problematic in the context of the tribal groups in the Indian sub-continent. In the sub-continent the tribal communities are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution of India and are referred to as the ‘Scheduled Tribes’ under Article 366 (25) of the Constitution. The population of Scheduled Tribes is 84.3 million and accounts as per the Census of India, 2001. They are scattered over all the states and union territories of India except Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and the Union Territories of Pondicherry and Chandigarh. They have
traditionally lived in about 15% of the country’s geographical areas, mainly the forest and mountainous inaccessible areas. As per the Forest Survey of India Report, 2003, about 60.04% of the 63% forest cover of the country and 63% of the dense forest lie in 187 tribal districts, though the geographical area of these districts is just 33.6% of the country’s geographical area. Besides the wide geographical spread of the Scheduled Tribes in India the category of Scheduled Tribes also includes a large number of heterogeneous groups in terms of dialects, customs, cultural practices and lifestyles, literacy level and so on. For instance, the category of Scheduled Tribes includes the Mizos of Mizoram, one of the communities in India with the highest literacy level as well the Chenchus or the Jarawas who are reportedly in the food gathering and hunting level of existence. In such a situation how do we conceptualize tribe as a particular type of social organization?

There is yet another significant aspect of the concept of tribe in India. Some argue that the group of people presently referred to as tribal or Scheduled Tribes in India are the *kiratas* which is mentioned in the Hindu Vedic texts. Still-some argue that they are the ‘backward Hindus’ (Ghurye, 1944). The tribal preferred for themselves the term *Adi* or the original inhabitants of the land. Now what is observed in the above context within the sub-continent is a latent process of ‘peopling’ what originally was used to refer to a type of social organization in the Roman and Greek societies in the past. Loosely speaking this process in the post-colonial discourse borders the process which they define as the ‘Othering’ in which a binary and implacable discursive opposition between races is produced (JanMohamed 1985: 60). In simple words, it is an act of creating a mirror opposite of the self. Thus, following Ghurye’s formulation that tribals are ‘backward Hindus’ he is trying to imply that non-tribals are the forward or more developed people. Perhaps, more candidly, if tribals are backward Hindus then non-tribals, that would include the Hindus, are forward tribals! Nevertheless a binary opposition is created in the act. Consequently tribal become those people outside the Hindu caste fold and are further typecast with other pejorative qualifications. In particular they are considered
'wild/head-hunters' who need to be tamed and assimilated into 'the mainstream' society, quite apparently the caste society.

Thus, it can be seen that the concept of tribe acquires an added feature in the sub-continent through 'peopling'. The situation is further complicated in the present situation as these categorized groups begin consolidating and using the tribal identity to compete for the scarce resources and other similar ends. Therefore, it needs to be noted that the pre-occupation of the present study with identity is not so much about who tribes are but more importantly how 'tribe' is used or mobilized in the competition for scarce resources. How is identity used for material effects? Simultaneously, the concept of identity is adopted in the study to provide a vintage point of analyzing what holds a traditional society, like the tribal society, together in the present context when wide ranging change has almost swept the traditions aside. What role do individuals from the society play in this process of holding together the society? Do traditions still exist in its pristine uncontaminated form? What role does the state play in the consolidation and crystallization of identity through its various developmental interventions, especially in the tribal context?

1.4 Emergence and Crystallization of Tribal Identity

The premise that collective identity is created by or created for the collectivity known by that particular identity through a constant process of negotiation with other groups and the wider socio-political and economic changes in the society makes it imperative to look at how this process was done so through the history till the present period. This section is an attempt to contextualize the various definitions of tribe in order to show how wider forces in the society shaped and determine the conceptualization of tribe, especially in the sub-continent. Noting this particular aspect of the emergence and crystallization of tribal identity in India Nongbri (2003) in her work Development, Ethnicity and Gender clearly points out the various historical trajectories in the conceptualization of 'tribe'. She observe that "[i]t needs to be noted that a number of"
factors shaped the trajectory of tribal studies in India. First, the colonial system, which not only paved the establishment of Anthropology as an academic discipline in the country but also served as an important agent of modernization and change that broke the isolation of tribes and brought them face to face with the larger society. Second, the rise of the freedom struggle and mass political movement which weakened the hold of colonialism and invested sociology and social anthropology with strong political content and nationalist orientation. Third, the establishment of the Indian nation-state following the country’s independence with its firm commitment to democracy, social justice and development. Finally, the internationalization of the tribal issue by the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) adoption of the Conventions 107 and 169 and the United Nation’s intervention in the tribal/indigenous affairs through the Sub-commission of Human Rights Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in the early 1980s" (Nongbri 2003:20). We shall look at each of the trajectory briefly in the following pages.

1.5 The colonial Period

The emergence and development of ‘tribe’ as the identity to define certain communities in India have its roots in the colonial administration. In the sub-continent the emergence of the social category referred to as ‘tribal’ is closely associated with the demographical mapping of the colonial subjects. Tribe was first used in the Census report of 1881. In the sub-continent the colonial rule (administration) for the very first time introduced the notion of ‘tribe’ to categorize the ‘semi-civilized groups inhabiting the mountains and the forests’. Eventually with the consolidation of the colonial rule over these populations and areas intensive ethnographical study was conducted with active support and inputs from anthropologists of the time in order to map and classify the colonial subjects so as to help the colonial rule and administration in a cost effective manner. The colonial period produce an exhaustive volume of literature on tribe. Some of them are The Lhotha Nagas, the Sema Nagas, Nagas of Manipur, the Naked Nagas, and The Khasis etc. The extensive production of
large volume of literature in turn led to the development of what can be termed as 'tribal study' characterized by particular theories and approaches to analyze tribal society. What is significant in this context is the conceptualization of tribe in the colonial framework. Firstly, tribe was conceived as separate and outside the larger and more complex Hindu caste system prevalent in the sub-continent and treated tribe in a synchronic manner. Secondly, it needs to be seen that the conceptualization and approach to tribe as a social category in the sub-continent is largely tied to political administration. Many of the ethnographers and anthropologists who served under the British colonial rule were mostly military and civil administration personnel who were given crash courses on the disciplines alongside their military and administrative responsibilities. Therefore, without the rigorous training and acumen required for conducting studies in an alien society these administrative-cum anthropologists and ethnographers often let in their prejudices and pre-conceived notions into the study at the cost of recording the 'natives' from the 'native point of view'.

Of significance was the distinct mode of conceptualizing tribe by the anthropologist who were also often, as pointed out above, colonial administrators. Chana (1997) in “Introduction Tribal Policy Issues and Themes”, in Tribes and Government Policies, succinctly note that ‘[t]he early western thinkers developed a dialectical mode of thinking in which they always tried to understand something by that which it was not. The word tribe arises as an anti-thesis of the word non-tribe. In order to understand themselves and their own society which they labeled as civilization, western thinkers looked to an opposed category which would reflect back their own characters by default. It did not matter, as Kuper (1998) has aptly described that this opposite was only an illusion. Before a theory of civilization there were not tribes” (Chana 1997: XV). Similar approach was evident in Sir Henry S. Maine’s sociological and anthropological treatment of tribe in the sub-continent under the colonial scholarship as noted by Louis Dumont (1966) in ‘A Fundamental Problem in Sociology of Caste’ in Contributions to Indian Sociology. Such a dialectical mode of thinking was given further fillip by the dominant position held by the colonial rulers
and their scholars engaged in the production of knowledge and texts in general and about the tribe in particular. Coupled with the inadequate training in the discipline and the overarching responsibility of establishing control over the native population the dominant-subordinate relationship between the colonial masters and the native population further characterized the works of most of the colonial anthropologists and ethnographers. In sum, the colonial scholarship not only described and produced identities which are supposedly out there but also the need to legitimize their rule over the native population compelled them to adopt a paternalistic and patronizing approaches that produced and perpetuated the images of dominant-subordinate, ruler-ruled, civilized-primitive and modern-traditional.

Commenting on the close association of the emergence of tribe and the colonial rule Morton Fried (1975), a leading American Anthropologist, in the Notion of Tribe argued that there were no ‘highly discrete political units in pre-state societies’. His essential contention is that it was primarily the needs and interests of highly organized states, with clearly demarcated borders that led to the artificial conceptualization of loose groups as tribes in order to facilitate control over them. Fried’s position is that the intervention of the state, a tight, class structured political and economic organization, began a process whereby vaguely defined and grossly overlapping populations were provided with the minimal organization required for their manipulation even though they had little or no internal organization of their own other than that based on conceptions of kinship. The resultant form was that of the tribe.

Similarly Martin Chanock (1985) in Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia show that the British policies for Africa included, among other pre-requisites for indirect rule, the designation of Chiefs and headmen, through whom it would be possible to maintain control over the “lesser” members of their “tribes”. It was in the interest of the British colonial administration to recognize the existence of tribes in order to consolidate the power of the Chiefs.
who in turn benefited from the extra authority, power and honour that the European conquerors bestowed upon them. Leon Shaskolsky Sheleff (1990) in "A Tribe is a tribe – On Changing Social Science Concepts and Emerging Human Rights" in the edited book *The Protection of Minorities and Human Rights* add that in South Africa today the issues mention above have added pertinence: "the existence of tribes, traditionally recognized by political authorities and academic researchers, led to government policies which stressed the tribal differences among Africans as part of the Apartheid programme of separate development. Opponents of apartheid have argued that the more emphasis there is on the tribe the lesser the prospect of the sense of a common nationhood, common interest, common purpose and common fate" (1990: 302).

1.6 *The period of Freedom Struggle*

The colonial conceptualization of tribe as independent and distinct social category in the sub-continent was strongly challenged during the freedom struggle and mass political movement which weakened the hold of colonialism. During this period of freedom struggle and widespread anti-colonial movement tribe was conceptualized as closely related to caste and not separate from the latter. Such conceptualization of tribe as opposed to the colonial period was rooted and determined by the political desire to build an independent nation-state. The political aspiration was eventually borrowed and reflected in the works of the emerging Indian scholars and intellectuals where an attempt to trace the position of tribes in the 'Indian civilizational complex' was made by turning to the Hindu sacred texts. Nongbri observe "[t]hus in sharp contrast to the conventional (colonial) view which perceived tribes and castes as dichotomous categories, studies made by scholars such as L.P. Vidyarthi, D.N. Majumdar, N.K. Bose, Surajit Sinha, D.D. Kosambi, Niharnjan Ray and Andre Beteille point to the contrary. Taking note of the active process of acculturation that characterizes tribe-caste relations in the contemporary period, many of these scholars turned to the Hindu sacred texts to trace the position of tribes in the Indian civilizational complex" (Nongbri 2003: 30). She continued "[a]lthough the exact
identification of these concepts with the present day categories of tribes and castes remains a moot point, this claim has given rise to a number of theoretical frameworks to explain the various ways in which tribes are transformed into castes. Notable among these are D.D. Kosambi's and N.K. Bose's Brahminic-cum-technological model, Surajit Sinha's Rajput or kshatriya model with M.N Srinivas' Sanskritization model interspersed between the two" (Nongbri, Ibid.).

Another significant aspect of this period was the spontaneous development and the growth of sociology as an academic discipline with its primary focus on caste and village in the sub-continent. On the other hand, anthropology in the tradition of the colonial rule was on the wane because the emerging national scholarship suspects the discipline to be hand in glove with the oppressive colonial rule. Anthropology was believed to have aided the colonial project. The imbalanced in the growth of the two disciplines was further accelerated by the anti-colonial mood and the desire to developed new and indigenous categories of analysis. This had a wide ramification for tribal study. The unequal growth of the disciplines mean that the subject matter of Sociology overshadowed that of Anthropology both in terms of volume of literatures produced and resources allotted for the research and production of literatures. When anthropology, and subsequently the focus on tribe, made a comeback in the later post-colonial period in India it was but natural to compare and be guided by the large volume of literature, concepts and theories established from the studies on caste. Thus, tribe continues to be conceptualized as 'What caste is not' even in many of the recent works of tribe in India. For instance, if caste is marked by hierarchy, the opposite, that is egalitarianism, would mark tribe and so on. Commenting on this issue Unnithan explicitly stated that "[e]venthough 'tribe' has been treated as a category separate from caste in most studies, it has nevertheless been influenced by the way caste has been conceptualized" (Unnithan 1997:7).
1.7 Post-Independent Nation Building Period

The conceptualization of tribe during this period did not undergo a sharp change. Perhaps tribe continues to be conceptualized within the larger project of nation-building. The only visible dimension added during this period is the ‘scheduling’ of the tribe as the “Scheduled Tribes” as per the statute of the Constitution of independent India and granting special treatment to them which popularly referred to as the positive discrimination. The act of scheduling and extending the special provisions under the Constitution was justified on the ground that the Scheduled Tribes (STs) have been victims of oppression and marginalization for ages resulting in their backwardness and other forms of un-development vis-à-vis the rest of the society. During this period large numbers of community were scheduled and various affirmative actions were extended to them for their empowerment and development so as to be able to participate as equal citizens of independent India. Thus, there are provisions made available in the Constitution which aims at protecting and alleviating the condition of the tribal in the country. For instance, Article 15 prohibits discriminating Scheduled Tribe/ Scheduled Caste communities on grounds of religion. “race”, caste, sex or place of birth; Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in matters of public employment; Article 36 promises to secure a favorable social order for the promotion of their, that is Scheduled Tribe/ Scheduled Caste, welfare; Article 46 ensures their educational and economic interests; Article 330 reserved seats for their elected representatives in the Parliament of the country; Article 332 makes provision for reservation of seats for their elected representatives in various state legislatures; Article 334 makes provision for decadal extension of the constitutional protective discrimination facilities to the Scheduled Tribe/ Scheduled Caste and other weaker sections; and Article 335 provides for reservation in services and posts.

This period also marked the major shift in the policy of the state towards the tribe. From the earlier attempts of assimilation and acculturation as envisaged in the theories of sanskritisation, brahmanical-model etc. there was a shift towards integration. But what is striking is the absence of a national policy towards the tribe.
Very recently a draft paper entitled ‘National Tribal Policy’ has been prepared by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. As the name suggests it is still a draft which is yet to be a law with legal bindings. Strangely enough in the absence of such a national policy for the tribals Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s *Panchsheel* mentioned on the Preface of Verier Elwin’s work *A Philosophy For NEFA* acted as the official guideline/policy for the state toward the tribe in India. Ghanshyam Shah in the edited book *Determinants of Social Status in India* (1986) argues that “[t]he Government of India Act 1935 used the term ‘Backward Tribes’. Prior to this, they were labeled ‘Depressed Class’. The Indian Constitution replaced the word ‘Backward’ by ‘Scheduled’. The Constitution did not define the term. It (Article 341 and 342) empowers the President to specify certain groups as ST. The Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes or the All India Anthropological Survey has so far not given any satisfactory definition of the term. ‘Scheduled Tribes’, according to the First Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, ‘belong to different strata of culture’ but the term is not defined further”(1986:181-182).

In the absence of commonly agreed upon definition of tribe in the academic and the administrative circles there are different shades of opinion. It ranges from those who view tribe as divorced from caste to those who view tribe and caste as closely related in a symbiotic relationship; still there are who dispute the authenticity of the concept of tribe itself. However, all seem to agree that tribe belongs to the powerless and discriminated section of the population that needs special patronage and policies to alleviate them from their present underdog position and bring them at par with the more advanced section of the society. One very important parameter in this context, that is indispensable to the analysis of the identity of tribe in the sub-continent, is Unnithan’s observation where she clearly state that “[t]he ways in which the Girasia have come to be described as ‘tribal’ and their increasingly tribalised identity is related to the images which the non-Girasia project on to them, images which are informed by the notions of caste held by the dominant and powerful
communities in India, specific caste groups, as well as by academics and government administrators” (1997:4). She went on to add “[i]dentities may be forced and imposed as a result of wider inequalities of power, as in the way the label of ‘tribe’ has become attached to the Girasia” (Ibid.:6).

Therefore, the issue of ‘Who defines’ and the relationship between the one who defines and the other who is being defined is very critical in understanding the concept of tribe. For instance, consider B.S Guha’s classification of the Scheduled Tribes on three characteristics: one, the primitive way of living; two, habitation in the remote and less easily accessible areas; and three, nomadic habits and love for drinking and dancing (Shah, 1986:181-82). Shah reiterated that “[t]hese characteristics are applicable to all the Scheduled Tribes but all tribes do not live a similar type of life to make them one cultural entity. All tribes do not necessarily live in remote and less easily accessible areas.... Probably because of cultural and social differences among the tribes, they have failed to form an all-India tribal organization despite several attempts made by political leaders. So far there is no all India tribal leader who can command influence over all of the tribes” (Ibid). Unnithan concludes by adding that “[t]he administrative classification of communities as Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes, the history of which precedes independence has played, perhaps, the most significant role in the construction of tribal identities in independent India. The process of classification have led to often violent claims and counter claims about identities, both with regard to increasing social status and in terms of accessing economic benefits. This has made the classificatory process itself an exercise inaccuracy (Beteille 1986) and has been a debilitating for poorer communities such as the Girasia, who because of their social marginality and poverty are unable to address the issue of their classification” (Unnithan 1997:17).

1.8 International Labour Organization: ‘Indigenous People’
The conceptualization of the identity of tribe in the Indian context was further complicated by the internationalization of ‘tribe’ with the adoption of the Conventions
107 and 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nation's intervention in the tribal/indigenous affairs through the Sub-commission of Human Rights Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in the early 1980s. While the question of recognizing the Indian tribes as 'indigenous' is yet to be ratified by the Indian state it has nevertheless changed the equation of conceptualizing the tribal identity. Till recently the tribal identity was created for categorizing the 'semi-civilized groups inhabiting the mountains and the forests' but in the contemporary period the tribal identity is consciously created by the tribal themselves to achieved certain political, economic or social benefits. Such a situation is particularly marked by the birth of new tribal leadership unseen hitherto. The new tribal leaders are more educated, politically conscious and vocal in demanding their needs.

The internationalization of tribal issue added legitimacy to the aspirations and demands of most of the tribal groups around the world and the sub-continent as well. Under the new tribal leadership and the glare of the international community the tribal demand for their rights to land, resources, rights to decent livelihood and other related demands is gradually being recognized though it is too early to tell if it is being implemented at the empirical level. However, what needs deeper analysis is the growing tendency to organize around sharp and often conflicting markers of identity in the attempt to achieve their varied demands. This has now and again resulted into deep fissures and tensions in the society which many a times manifested itself in the form of (ethnic) conflicts punctuated with widespread killings and destructions. What is of significance here is that the markers of group's identity are apparently becoming less traditional in the sense of something being unquestionably rooted in the past. Rather, the importance now is in the process of rooting that something in the past thereby making it traditional. Though there are constant claims and appeals for falling back on the primordial ties like blood and common descend in their quest for coming together many of these groups apparently uses and organizes 'primordiality' in a different way. For example, it is no longer the real descend from a common ancestor
which marks the identity of many of the so-called tribal or ethnic groups. On the contrary, it is the perception of a common or shared destiny as deeply rooted in the primordial past that matters. Thus, there is shift from ‘primordiality’ per se to the process of how ‘primordiality’ is constructed.

The significance or the importance of the shift in the focus is incomplete without considering the emergence and the role of the new leadership within the tribal societies. Their leadership has given a new meaning and vigor to the struggle for addressing the tribal problems and issues. What is of significance of the new tribal leadership is that they are also trapped in the same tension, that Chatterjee (1986) argued, lies at the heart of the post-colonial nationalism itself which is the cause of the nation-state’s problem: “the unresolved tension between the claims of nationalism - that the ex-colony is essentially different from, and at the same time equal, if not superior, to the west - and nationalism’s justificatory structures, which are firmly rooted within Western conceptions of universality” (cited in Schech and Haggis 2000:119). A coherent and primordially rooted identity of the group must be established which unites the groups and at the same time differentiates it from other similar groups. At the same time for the group to function smoothly and progress towards achieving the common destiny it should recognize and represent all the members of the group which means adopting liberal and democratic structures which are totally non-traditional. This is the tension that most of the new tribal leaders are caught up with. Since the group, ethnic or otherwise, is brought together by the shared destiny and not necessarily common descend or blood the process of determining its primordial roots for the group becomes problematic. Not only is it possible to satisfy all the members there is also privileging of a particular group’s ‘history’ or ‘past’ over the others. Given such a situation it is doubtful if the claim made by the new tribal leadership of countering injustice is true. To a certain extent they have in fact become indistinguishable from the exploiters who supposedly belonged outside the tribal society.
It can be concluded from the above observations that the conceptualization of tribe in India from the beginning is closely tied to the political interest of the rulers be it the colonial rulers or the independent Indian state. Due to the close association of the study of tribe with the colonial interest in the sub-continent and the subsequent continuation of the colonial approach even in the post-colonial period the study of tribe has faced certain limitations. Firstly, in India the category of tribe has not developed, as a conceptual category, independent from administrative practices. Secondly, most the study of tribe in India has remained synchronic and descriptive ignoring the economic and political transformations that affected the tribal society. The 'reconstructive ethnography', which is also sometimes referred to as 'salvage anthropology' dominated the study of tribe in India preventing a diachronic approach to tribe and tribal society. From this perspective indigenous cultures are seen as broken residues of past traditions that have to be rescued as if they were museum specimens. A perception of culture as social and historically conditioned is absent. Indigenous cultures are supposed to have succumbed under the impact of 'civilization' and been reduced to the category of 'traditional remains.' These cultures are seen as static, and their living carriers often ‘without a culture’ (as this is considered to belong to the past) or with a lesser form of culture. The research focus under the tribal study was the loss of culture and not the adivasi as the creators of culture.

Furthermore the reproduction and re-imposition of the paternalistic and dominating position of the colonial masters in the study of tribe during the colonial period is evident even in the post-colonial experience of the tribes. The dominant-subordinate position in the production of fixed identities is explicitly stated in Unnithan's (1997) study of the Girsia tribe in Rajasthan. In her work cited above she argue that “[i]dentities may be forced and imposed as a result of wider inequalities of power, as in the way the label of ‘tribe’ has become attached to the Girsia” (1997:6). In the end ‘the” scientific” texts have not only resulted in a mode of knowing reality but often ended up acquiring credentials as ‘the’ actual realities they attempted to
describe' (Devalle, 1992: 26). Thus, the colonial rule not only led to the emergence of tribe and tribal study in the sub-continent but also contributed in idealizing tribal identity as fixed and separate from caste with its dialectical mode of thinking and the power of producing knowledge and rendering it as ‘true’. The idealized and paternalistic approach to tribe continues to mark the present day approaches to tribe.

1.9 Statement of the Problem

Before stating the problems of the present work a general background of the region needs to be formulated for better comprehension of the problems. It needs to be noted that the negotiation and construction of identity within the Tangkhul society is not a new phenomenon but that has been occurring since they were brought under the British rule roughly a century back. The colonial rule introduced new principles of governance and divisions within the Tangkhul society, and also inadvertently reinforced certain traditional principles more poignantly. For instance, the establishment of the British rule ushered in a new form of governance which at one level opposed the traditional political structure represented by the village chief (Awunga/Ahaoa) and the village council (Hangva/Hopva). While the latter form of governance was based on tradition, especially patriarchal values, the former was modern and allegedly based on rational principles of rule of law. However, it needs to be reiterated that in the actual operation of the colonial rule much of the traditional political structures of the Tangkhul were only co-opted with little or no modifications into the modern system of governance. This is evident from the number of legislation pointed out in the above pages which ‘isolated’ tribe from the rest of the population. More importantly, the colonial rule put an official stamp recognizing the legitimacy of the traditional political structure. The colonial rulers initially introduced the Tangkhul to the idea of modern principles of governance base on rational rule of law but nothing substantial was done to change the existing traditional political structure. On the contrary, the traditional political structure was revitalized and re-imposed by extending to it additional responsibilities like the collection of house tax and other revenues as well as maintenance of law and order. Such delegation of responsibilities
and duties further necessitated the strengthening of traditional institutions for the colonial rulers to ensure the regular return of the state revenues. Similarly, Christianity and western education as such did not bring about remarkably widespread transformation of the patriarchal political structure of the Tangkhul society through the process of co-optation followed by the colonial rulers. Indeed the new developments in the Tangkhul society implicitly sustained and reinvigorated the old traditional structures which continue to exist hitherto.

The post-colonial state in independent India adopted similar policy and approaches towards the tribe in general. Tribe in general was for long set aside to ‘develop according to its own genius’ with least external interference keeping in view the pluralistic format that the nation chose to follow after the independence. However, the changed political situation with independence from the colonial rule, and especially the need to consolidate the nation-state through the nation-building process necessitated the extension of the process to the tribal societies like Tangkhul, which lie at the ‘frontiers’. Thus, conflict was built into the approach towards the continuity and development of tribe in independent India. In addition to this overall situation of tribe in the sub-continent, immediately following the formal independence from the colonial rule, the north eastern part of the sub-continent in particular exhibited some markedly different situation. This was primarily due to the long period of colonial rule with its policy of ‘excluded area’ together with widespread proselytizing activities of the Christian missionary who were also the pioneers of western education. Ultimately it gave birth to various aspirations for a sovereign nation-state apart from India. In response to such developments the Indian state adopted direct interference through military means alongside the other more integrative forms of nation-building mechanisms, which still continues in the present period. In sum, the Tangkhul region presents a unique situation where neither the ‘exclusion’ nor the ‘integration’ policy of the state could be clearly delineated. Thus, the widespread instability, economic un-development, social tensions and cultural conflicts endemic in the region as a
whole today is not very strange and it is precisely in this ambivalent state of the society that many issues have emerged which merits sociological study.

There is a lean volume of works on the Tangkhul at the moment; M. Horam (1977) *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas (The Tangkhul Nagas)*, R.R. Shimray *Origin of the Nagas*, W.A. Sothing (2000) *The Tangkhuls*, Khasim Ruivah’s (1993) *Social Change Among the Nagas (Tangkhul)*, T.C Hudson (1911) *Nagas of Manipur*. Freepaothing (1994) *Status of the Tangkhul Women* are some ethnological/anthropological works worth mentioning besides passing references by other authors. In all these accounts change has been emphasized. However, what is dominantly evident in these works on Tangkhul is the treatment of change in a very descriptive and synchronic manner. They are apparently more concerned with describing the manifested end results of change rather than analytically approaching the problem by focusing on the latent contradictions and oppositions within the Tangkhul society. The effects of the spread of British rule, western education and the influence of Christian missionaries in the past, and the more recent forces of change like the consumerist culture, political participation, etc. have been regularly mentioned as the major forces of change in the Tangkhul society. But how these forces of change threw up new players and avenues of authority and power that either directly or indirectly challenges the traditional authority structure of the Tangkhul has been neglected. Therefore, there are many important aspects of the Tangkhul society still left unanswered till date. For instance, what are the aspects of the Tangkhul that are most prone to change? And what are those aspects of the Tangkhul which shows the most resilient character over the course of conflict and negotiation? What are the effects of the urge to accumulate the positive benefits of development, on the one hand, and the need to safeguard those traditional loyalties that contributes to a unique Tangkhul identity, on the other hand? What determines the necessity to construct/re-invent loyalties from the past shared traditions? Which particular sections of the Tangkhul are engaged in this project? These are some of the few unanswered
questions that could prove extremely important in analyzing and understanding the changing profile of the Tangkhul society.

Christianity, under the patronage of the British political rulers, gave rise to new players (for example pastors and the deacons) and avenues of powers (religion) which challenge the extant traditional structure within the Tangkhul society. Similarly, western education produced a new class of Tangkhul who are generally modern oriented. In the contemporary times, the processes generated by nation building sustain and perpetuate these contradictions and conflicts by creating new power centres and players. The global phenomena of consumerism criss-crossing the globe through the pervasive media equally affects even a remote society like the Tangkhul promoting new ideas, values and other material markers of conflict. In sum, the course of transformation followed by the Tangkhul society since the contact with the British rulers to the contemporary period has been a process of politically, culturally, socially and economically negotiating the Tangkhul identity, of continually defining 'tangkhulness' (locally referred to as 'tangkhulnao'). This critical aspect of the Tangkhul society has been left unattended for a long time. Equally, if not more important is the delicate balance that has kept the society going in spite of these strains. How is this possible? To be able to explain this it becomes pertinent to understand the role of the middle class in the Tangkhul society in the process of negotiation and reproduction of the sense of belongingness.

Sociological analysis of change in the contemporary Tangkhul society has acquired an added necessity, especially for two important reasons. Firstly, the recent move to replace the traditional office of the awunga (headman) by the post of the village chairman. It is reported that the new post has been in force in a couple of Tangkhul villages. The move has generated deep fissure within the fabric of the Tangkhul society. The headmen of several Tangkhul villages have come together under a common platform to oppose united against the move. The fear of losing their privileges and benefits has been translated into upholding the tradition that gives a
unique identity to the Tangkhul. On the contrary, those who supported the move strongly asserts that the traditional system is 'undemocratic' and has also become an impediment to development, as most of the village headmen are illiterate and ignorant of the intricate ways modern day government functions. Thus, they are committed to establishing a more democratic post that will be elected by the villagers for a specific tenure and function on modern lines of administration. This group of Tangkhul who supports the replacement of the office of the headman by the post of chairman belongs to the more modern, politically active or conscious and who have attained certain level of education to make them conversant with the affairs beyond the village's physical boundary. Just as the collective body of headmen attempted to construct a traditionally rooted identity of the Tangkhul the latter group also attempts to construct a modern, democratic and advanced Tangkhul identity while also trying to retain those traditions, especially those that do not come in the way of realizing their social, economic and political interests. And it is in this conflict that the wider picture of change within the society needs to be located.

Secondly, the existence of the wider Naga national movement further generates a process of negotiating the Tangkhul identity, which at the same time points to the contradictions and conflicts between the various forces of change in the Tangkhul society. The Naga national movement is founded on the principle that the Nagas historically have a unique political and cultural identity and by virtue of which they should be given the right to exist independently outside the Indian union. However, the state (India) responded to the movement as manifestation of economic deprivation until very recently. Therefore, the state's approach has been to create economic opportunities where the people would not feel the need to resort to violent forms of protest. There have been an all out attempt to lure away, especially the youths and the younger generations from the movement by announcing and dispatching appealing economic packages and opportunities.
In this way development, technology-driven and otherwise, is made to be the key solution to the movement and implemented with patronage from the state. However, whether deliberate or unintended, such developmental activities further fuels and create divisions in the Tangkhul society owing to the unequal access to these economic opportunities. And in the perception of the Naga nationalists the unequal access to the resources covertly fosters a ‘un-tangkhulnao’ attitude among the members of the Tangkhul society. There are stringent decree issued by those involve in the movement to check such attitude which they fear would erode the very base upon which the movement is founded. For instance, there is a prohibition from getting judicial redresses from the modern law courts of the state (both Manipur and India) for disputes within the Tangkhul (Naga) themselves. Instead the disputing parties are to refer to the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL), the apex body for the Tangkhul for settling disputes. But it is a matter of concern whether the decisions made by such bodies will be judicious enough given the patriarchal bias of many of the so-considered traditional institutions.  

1.10 Objectives

First and foremost, the research seeks to address some of the methodological issues confronting the tribal discourse in the sub-continent. It has been observed that there is a ‘caste centric’ stereotyping while explaining the tribal situation in the sub-continent. So, most of the scholarships about the tribal society are limited to whether the tribal society either conforms or opposes the caste paradigm and nothing much beyond that. The opposite features of Hindu caste society conspicuously present in the tribal society are presented to be the reality characterizing the latter, say by default, while ignoring those inherent features of the tribal society. Therefore, there is an attempt to construct an image for the tribal which is asymmetrical with the tribal society in reality. Why is the tribal society treated as a society based on the principles of egalitarianism when there are so many differences, economic, social, political, etc. within the tribal society? Why is the tribal woman said to be enjoying high status in the society when she is being subordinated by the patriarchal society etc.? In the
process new conceptual tools and perspectives of comprehending the tribal situation would be explored.

Furthermore the understanding of the conflicting processes of negotiating identity within the Tangkhul society can also help in understanding the youths of the society, their aspirations, problems and predicaments. It needs to be noted that sociological study of tribal youth in general in the sub-continent are awkwardly few, let alone of the Tangkhul youth which is non-existent at the moment. Perhaps, it is argued that ‘youth’ as a social category is a prerogative of the industrialized societies characterized by complex division of labour. Youth, it is maintained, as a ‘preparatory stage’ before taking on the complex role of the adult in the industrialized world is absent in the non-industrialized tribal societies because the path of an individual’s growth is assumed to be straight from childhood to adulthood. The argument is unfounded from the fact that within the contemporary Tangkhul society the internal conflicts and dynamics of contradictions are affecting youth the most. They are undoubtedly bearing the full brunt of the unbridled pace of change and transformation within the Tangkhul society. Many of them are confused, disillusioned and retreating from the society. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to ask: Are the Tangkhul youths confused and disillusioned by nature or is their confusion and disillusionment reflection of the finer contradictions prevalent in the wider structure of the Tangkhul society? How do they perceived the structural contradictions and negotiate the same? How aware are the Tangkhul youths of their traditions and cultural values? What are their aspirations and goals?

1.11 Methodology

The initial methodological build-up for the present study is mainly derived from literature survey on issues of tribal identity and change. Though there is substantially large volume of works on tribe in general it was found that nothing much was available for the group of tribe which the present research is concerned with. This particular aspect I have also mentioned above. Secondary data like the State
Gazetteers, Economic Surveys annually published by the state government, books, journals, local newspapers etc. were referred to besides the standard texts. Moreover unpublished sources in the form of the village Church records, diaries and other records maintain by the village council were taken into account. The literature survey laid the basic foundation upon which the rest of the work is built. It needs mention that while undertaking such a research into a new area or universe it definitely helps to be a member of the group under study. I had this advantage. The respondents were relatively more forthcoming in their responses and also the scope of exaggeration or false reporting is minimized. It is with these advantages in mind that Marou village was chosen for the study. The sample population consists of entire 61 households of Marou village, Ukhrul district Manipur. Out of the 61 households two-third are engaged in agriculture related activities and the rest are engaged in non-agriculture activities like small time businesses, government employees, politics etc. The respondents for the present study are the head of the households. Usually the head of the household is the man given the patriarchal social set-up. However, it needs to be noted that some of the households are headed by woman due death or separation or absence of the spouse at the time of interview.

The collection of the primary data for the present work is done extensively through field work for five months in two phases. In the first phase a pilot study of the village was done in the month of May 2006. A sample of three households practicing agriculture activities and two households practicing non-agriculture activities were randomly selected and interviewed using specifically designed questionnaire (Appendix 1) related to their culture, economic situation, social politics etc. This helped in formulating and generating the necessary tools that was ultimately used during the intensive fieldwork in the second phase. In the second phase of the survey which began in August till the end of October 2006. This was the peak agriculture season in the village. They had just planted the paddy fields while the rice plants in the jhum fields were already knee high. October was a season of heightened agricultural activity because for most of the villagers who went for both the terrace
and the *jhum* type of cultivation the harvesting of rice in the latter type and the appearance of (rice) ears in the former type meant total engagement. Due to other engagements the survey was could not be concluded during the above mentioned period. So, in April 2007 the researcher again visited the field and finally completed the survey. April is relatively a relaxing time in the village. The *jhum* areas has been slashed and burnt and the rice are almost sprouting. During this time of the year most of the villagers are either seen going for hunting or fishing or preparing for the approaching paddy cultivation in the *jhum* fields like re-thatching the huts, making the ploughs, finding people to plough the fields and so on.

The primary tool for collection of data is through the use of questionnaire and personal interviews. This was necessitated because of the low literacy level in the village. Many of them could not fill the questionnaire, and sometime many just did not have the time to do so. Sometimes the researcher joined a group of villagers in the evenings and discussed the issues and problems in an informal manner and as they view it. At other times some older villagers are requested to narrate the stories and folktales of the past. Many a times it is the male members who sat down and narrated these stories. Women folk are not so readily forthcoming. They either said they do not know or the male members know better and could tell better. Only a few of them say they do not have the time. Besides this, household survey of the village was also conducted for collecting the socio-economic data of each household in the village. In sum, the collection of data for the present study is through fieldwork and participant observation. In addition to this the researcher’s status as a member of the village also tremendously contributes to the analysis and presentation of the work.

1.12 Chapter Overview

The following chapter, *Universe of the Study*, as the name suggest is a description of Marou village in Manipur, where the study is located. *Chapter III: The Ideology Of Tribe: Land And Egalitarianism (Some Methodological Issues)* critically looks at the concept of tribe. For instance, some of the issues that would be addressed in the
The present chapter are the common belief that tribal women in general have high position in the society or that there is no private ownership of property and so on which hardly corresponds to the empirical reality. The whole chapter is organized around the question of how the tribal discourse itself help not only to conceal but also perpetuate the internal structural differences like the patriarchal values and prejudices by glossing over the finer nuances of the Tangkhul society. Chapter IV: Tribal Identity: Tradition And Change is concerned with the emergence of the middle class in the society as a result factors like the colonial rule, the state’s developmental and administrative interventions; how the emergence of the middle class has altogether taken the issue of identity and tradition to a new level by acting as the modern myth makers. Chapter V: Dynamics of Change and Negotiation looks at the wider picture within the state of Manipur and the politics surrounding the various claims and counter claims; the hill versus plains rhetoric; the majority versus minority competition for state’s scarce resources and so on.
References

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**End Notes**

1 The postmodern challenge to conservative epistemology was based on essentially two arguments. First, that knowledge is not acquired through the abstraction of an autonomous subject from a separate object but rather that knowledge, along with subjects and objects, is constituted collectively through forms of discourse. The second argument defines knowledge as “plural and heterogeneous” as well questions the existence of a single, true method of acquiring such knowledge. The concepts of subjectivity and objectivity therefore become problematic and the goal of acquiring “objective knowledge is no longer a desirable one” (Thapan, 1998: 3-4).

2 This is to argue that the state also helps in the identity specification through its various forms of group identification for the allotment or distribution of state’s scarce resources. A clear example is the reservation policy adopted by the state where the population is divided into different groups and unequal shares are allotted to each group.

3 Geertz, Clifford: by primordial sentiments he includes language, culture, race, religion and regional.

4 They were the Titienses (Tities), Ramnenses (Ramnes), and Luceres.

5 During the fieldwork in Marou in the summer of 2006 I was told about a unique form of tax paid to the ‘Englishman’ stationed at Ukhrul. Every month a man from Marou trekked all the way to Ukhrul carrying with him earthworms which he paid as tax to the Englishman. The earthworms, it was told, was for feeding the fishes which the Englishman kept in his pond in Ukhrul.

6 Such a method of dispensing justice or settling disputes in the Tangkhul society has been criticized of lately because of the dominant patriarchal nature. It needs mention that the composition and the verdicts passed by it are overridden by patriarchal considerations. Women have no voice or representation in the affairs of the apex body of the Tangkhul society.