Chapter One

Introduction:
The Place of Culture in Tribal Society

Cultural practices of tribal societies are generally analyzed through the perspectives that are conventionally adopted while studying their society. Tribal societies have been considered as being located ‘outside’ the ‘civilized society’, therefore lacking in the finesse of developed world. Subsequently, artistic works of the tribes were considered as ‘low art’ and inferior to the ‘high art’ of civilized world. Thus, the cultural practices of tribal societies were construed as undergoing process of ‘evolutionary stage’ and at the same time ‘static’.

The thrust of this enquiry into tribal societies is to study the ‘cultural practice’ of one particular tribe, the Tangkhul Nagas, who had been categorized as ‘primitive tribe’ in the past. While the term ‘tribe’ itself has become a contestable category at the present time, it has become a symbol of identity for most of the tribals themselves, in the sense that it facilitates them in locating their position in the wider social spectrum – that of a ‘minority’ and underprivileged. The state’s patronage, efforts to develop, and give assistance to the tribal societies are some of the factors that have apparently made the usage of the term/category acceptable and more valuable. Recently, terms like ‘indigenous’ people have been proposed instead of the old category ‘tribe’; however, the usage of the term ‘indigenous’ have become more problematic than actually solving the problems in conceptualizations of tribal societies (Xaxa,1999). Virginius Xaxa points out that: “The designation or description of tribes as indigenous people had not emerged from self-identification or description by the people themselves” (Xaxa, 1999). Again, this description, like other terms and categories, are impositions on the tribes by the ‘outsiders’ (ibid). Here, the term ‘tribe’ is employed in the sense of ‘community’, and not necessarily with ‘reference to caste or the state or acculturation’ (Ratnagar, 2003).
The approach adopted in this study is ‘diachronic analysis’, which aims to interrogate the trajectories that have taken place in the cultural practice of tribal society. The intervention of colonial power and process of Christianization in tribal societies will be considered in the historical context. To arrive at the comprehensive understanding of cultural practice of a community, it has been considered as essentially important to interrogate the historical past. The historical trajectories served as the context and background to the cultural changes that have taken place in the community, which cannot be ignored.

The viewpoint here is that of an ‘insider’, an inquirer who is familiar with the people, locale, and has enough knowledge about the society being studied. The difference between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ in research is fundamentally in terms of ‘distance’ and ‘knowledge’ about the society being studied. Whether the researcher is an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’, there are subjective biases which have to be encountered. Although, the ‘insider’ has been considered as possessing certain advantages over the ‘outsider’, in terms of accessibility and familiarity. However, the position of an ‘insider’, who is studying one’s own society, has also been described as a ‘difficult position’ as he/she is ‘an insider who takes the posture of an outsider’ (Beitieile & Madan, 1975:149). While studying one’s own society, the question of ‘objectivity’ recurs throughout the research process. To take the position of an outsider, while studying one’s own society can be considered as an initiation rites into the complex journey of conducting fieldwork.

Recently, the position of ‘native’ anthropologist has been considered as the colonialist construction. Kirin Narayan argues that the “loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in a flux. Factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status” (Narayan, 1998). Even if one is an insider to the society being studied, the journeys that an individual has made from village to cities along with the advancement in education and lifestyle could create distance between the investigator and subject. Keeping these research problems in mind, the work has been carried out in Ukhrul district of Manipur.
Conceptualizing Tribal Culture: From ‘Static’ to Changing

Marshal D. Sahlins holds that ‘tribes occupy a position in cultural evolution’ and ‘they took over from simpler hunter’s societies; they gave way to the more advanced culture, we called civilizations’ (Sahlins 1968: 4). While categorizing human societies, tribal societies were conceptualized as still in the process of growth and development, and moving towards the ultimate stage that developed societies have attained. Sahlins holds that the differences between ‘tribe’ and ‘civilization’ lie in the societal ‘organization’ and ‘qualitative transformation of the culture type’ (ibid). What actually sets the tribesmen apart from the ‘civilized’ societies, according to Sahlins, is the difference between ‘war and peace’ (Sahlins, 1968: 5). There is lack of ‘law and order’ in tribal societies, they would indulge in violence without any genuine cause; thus, tribal societies were characterized by ‘war’ and chaos. Whereas civilized societies were marked by strong institutions, which is well organized, relatively ‘peaceful’ and orderly. In tribal societies, there was no watertight demarcation between various social institutions, which was completely the opposite of civilized world. The separation of political sphere from economic activities as such was not the conventional practices of tribal societies. However, according to Marshal Sahlins, in tribal societies there were ‘different functions of the same institutions’ (Sahlins, 1968). The categories that have been employed as analytical tools to examine culture in tribal societies by classical anthropologist were: ‘technology, social organization, and ideology’. And in the case of the tribesmen, not only the technological usages, but their social organization were also found to be in a state which was opposite to civilized societies. A substantive indication of this feature was that in tribal societies ‘segmentary social relations’ were closely intertwined with cultural practices (Sahlins, 1968).

Various social institutions, that seem contradictory and segregated in other societies, were considered as functioning in tandem in tribal societies. Therefore, culture as such was conceptualized as closely entangled with politics and economy in tribal societies. Classical anthropologists had tried to analyze culture of tribes from various perspectives and they had deliberated about the usage of the term ‘culture’. The disparities between the empirical and theoretical usage of the term ‘culture’ was the dilemma that anthropologist has encountered (Goldstein, 1957). Leslie White and others have advocated that culture could
of different cultures' (ibid). These two different forms of culture change, change from within and through outside contact, have been termed as forms of 'independent evolution' and 'diffusion' (ibid). Thus, according to Malinowski, culture change through contacts with the colonial agencies is a process of 'diffusion'. And, this change was an outcome of 'impact of a higher, active culture upon a simpler more passive one' (Malinowski, 1945:15). However, this process of cultural changes was not a mechanical adoption of other cultures by the 'native' receivers. The typical phenomena of change in tribal societies includes 'adoption or rejection' of Western practices, the transformation of 'certain institutions', and the 'growth of new ones' (ibid).

Tribal societies, which were considered as 'evolving' by the anthropologists, began to undergo changes, but these changes were not in the manner which they had envisaged. Marshal Sahlins states that anthropologist, along with the rest of the so-called developed world, have been taken completely by surprise when 'New Guineans and their kind' did not became like the 'White Men' or end up in 'some other misfortune' (Sahlins, 1999). The anthropologist had believed in, what he termed as, 'despondency theory', which considers that 'indigenous culture' would collapse under the 'shattering capacity of capitalism', that 'natives' would be left 'demoralized and paralyzed' and that they would be 'historically motionless' and 'culturally void' (Sahlins, 1999). In contrast to this assumption, the 'natives' like the Maoris have constructed a new image, so that their political power will be enhanced (ibid). In order to assert their positions and establish their identity, the tribals have re-connected with their past and adapt the changes that are taking place in other societies.

The cultural changes which occurred after the advent of colonialism, according to Malinowski, creates three distinct orders: that of the 'natives', 'Western', and 'transition' (Malinowski, 1945:64). Whereas these 'three order or phases' are considered to be 'related to' or 'dependent on each other', Malinowski had warned against studying change by taking one of the determinants or both, as the 'phenomenon of change' is considered not just 'a mixture' and not 'even simple acculturation" (Malinowski, 1945: 64-65). The process of cultural changes in all the Colonized countries shares certain similarities. And, the tension between 'natives' and 'Western' practices constitutes one of the fundamental
phenomena. However, the generalized assumption that ‘natives’ are passive receivers and the agencies of Western societies as the ‘active’ agents of change is problematic. In this typology, the tribal societies were conceptualized as an un-organic system, which is not sufficiently equipped to adopt changes. Whereas, contemporary experiences in tribal societies has proved that ‘receivers’ of Western practices have been innovative in their adoption of other’s culture. Whatever cultural practices that are adopted from other cultures under a process of ‘indegenization’, through which such new practices are made relevant and conducive to the local society. The colonial experience of the tribal society reflected the process and substance of colonial encounters. It involves vital questions that continue to haunt their societies, such as the problems of domination, resistance, and community identity. Thus, the cultural changes which were implanted during Colonialism ushered a new form of social and cultural practices in the non-Western world – particularly, the emergence of modernity.

Tribes in India: From ‘Isolation’ to ‘Integration’?

There has been raging debate about the tribal society’s relations with the mainstream society in India. In India, tribes have been historically considered as locating outside the domain of ‘mainstream’ and ‘dominant’ society. In ancient India, the tribes were known as ‘dasa’, ‘jana’, ‘kiratas’ and so forth. The term ‘tribe’ began to be employed during the colonial period in their official accounts. The colonial rulers in the official accounts like Census and Gazettes have put the tribal society outside the fold of dominant Hindu society. This colonial classification of tribes and other societies in India have been contested by some Indian anthropologist who had nationalist fervor. Scholars like G S Ghurye (1995) have argued that tribes in India are ‘backward Hindus’. The social and cultural life of the tribal has been conceptualized as the precursor to a more advanced Sanskritized practices and social arrangements. G S Ghurye’s main contention had been that ‘tribal religions’ were being classified as ‘Animism’ in the official records and placed in contradiction to Hindu society (Ghurye, 1995).
The tribes in India have also been categorized from the vintage point of its relations with the larger dominant Hindu society. Although, some scholars have debated about the concept of ‘mainstream’, or often cited the tribal’s relations with the state and civilization, the implications of such analysis obviously falls on the dominant community in India. While arguing that the concept of tribe in India is different from the Western worlds, Andre Beteille described that ‘when tribe and civilization co-exist...being a tribe has been more of a matter of remaining outside the state and civilization, whether by choice or necessity’ (Beteille, 2008). Initially, Roy-Burman has classified tribal societies in India in ‘terms of their orientations towards the Hindu society’, mainly as: (1) incorporated in the Hindu social order, (2) positively oriented towards Hindu social order, (3) negatively oriented and (4) indifferent towards then Hindu social order (Roy-Burman 1970). The overarching emphasis on the Hindu social order and its differentiation apparently leaves the tribal societies with no alternatives, but to be seen and expected as in the process of turning towards Hinduism. Roy-Burman (1994) himself latter admits of ‘ethnocentric bias’ in conceptualization of tribal societies as moving towards dominant Hindu social order and argued that such formulations are not ‘correct at the empirical level’. Further, the assumptions that placed tribal societies in the ‘positive and negative orientations towards dominant cultural influences is not a rigidly fix pattern for all time to come’ (Roy-Burman 1994).

Tribal societies are not homogenous, even though similarities in their social order could be found across the world. Tribes in India are diverse and some scholars have employed various schemes to classify tribal societies, the above mentioned classification on the basis of distance with the Hindu social order being one of such. Tribes in India have been classified in terms of their mode of production and culture (Bose, 1971) and regions (Roy-Burman). Tribes in Northeast have been considered as distinct from the mainstream societies in India in various terms. K S Singh argues that the tribes in Northeast ‘region was not as completely integrated within the politico-economic systems of colonialism; it remained relatively isolated from the cultural systems of the mainland and the political upheavals of the freedom struggle’ (Singh 1985:165). The tribes in Northeast, unlike other tribes in other parts of India, have also been notified as ‘negatively oriented’ towards the ‘dominant Hindu social order’ (Roy-Burman 1970; Sinha 1981). And one of the distinctive features that differentiates tribes in Northeast with other tribes in India is that
'Sanskritisation has not been at work in the North east region' (Singh 1985:216). The absence of Sanskritic elements among the tribes in Northeast has actually thrown up a lot of debates and theorizations. The argument that absence of Sanskritic elements is an indication that the tribes in Northeast are 'ethnically' and 'nationally' different has also come from the tribal communities and outsiders. Even in the Northeast region, the difference between the 'plains culture' and the culture of the 'hill tribes' have been noted by various scholars. Furer-Haimendorf has described that: 'In the hill regions of the North East India which enclose Brahmaputra valley...Nagas, Mishmis, Apatanis ... were the sole inhabitants of vast region, of rugged mountain and narrow valleys into which the people settled in the plains of Assam had never penetrated' (Furer-Haimendorf, 1989: 135). In contemporary times, the differences between 'hill men' and those residing in the valleys, in social and cultural terms, have turned into the questions of identity and politics of ethnic assertions.

There are varying perspectives on the colonial policy towards the tribes in Northeast India. Some have argued that colonial intervention vitiated the close relationships that existed between the tribal societies and their neighbors, and the 'protective policy' of the colonial power like the "Inner Line Regulation" have created distance (Ghurye 1995). Whereas the other perspectives assumed that the colonization of the tribes and extension of administrative control to the tribes which were in relative isolation have facilitated towards the integration (Furer-Haimendorf, 1989:34; Singh 1985:10). The colonial interventions on tribal societies did bring various forms of changes, and some of those led to distanciation of tribes with their neighboring communities and mainstream. In Northeast, the adoption of Christianity by the tribes has been considered as one of the factors that has created a rift with the dominant Hindu society. K S Singh argues that the situation in Northeast where tribes are in possession of their land and forest have not created 'agrarian and forest based movements of the type that occur in middle India' (Singh 1985: 265). However, among the tribes in Northeast 'Christianity has emerged as the strongest factor of modernization, and has also given the tribals as it has done elsewhere a strong sense of identity' (ibid). Christianity was supposed to be considered as one of the factors that 'tended to uproot the tribals from their traditional norms', but it has also 'provided a basis for developing a larger scale of tribal unity than was observed in the traditional past' (Sinha 1981). Among the Nagas, church has 'provided a wide platform by recruiting people from different ethnic
groups and clans and fostered the emergence of an intra-tribal Naga identity (ibid). Therefore, the formation of pan-tribal identity would have been difficult to emerge without the aid of Christianity in tribal societies in the Northeast.

In my previous work\(^2\), I described how the colonial rule and missionary work in tribal societies had opened their society in an unprecedented manner (Shimreiwung, 2004). Before the advent of colonialism, the Western culture and religious practices were totally unknown to the tribes in North East India. The arrival of mission workers and colonial officers in their locality was therefore an ‘encounter’ between two different ‘civilizations’. The Christian missionaries were officially invited by colonial officers to propagate the ‘gospel’ among the tribes with the intention to subdue and control the Hill areas for administrative purposes (Shimreiwung, 2004: 53-55). Although, the colonial ruler and missionaries had certain similarities, especially in their attempt to civilize the tribes, their mode of interventions were different. While the colonial power tried to control the tribes and brought within the ambit of administrative governance through the use of force and legislations, the missionaries were working from below, interfering in their belief systems, educational institutions and social practices (ibid: 42). These two different modes of intervention from two different agencies from West contributed to substantive change in religious and cultural practices of the tribes in North East India. T K Oommen has argued that the ‘de-territorialization’ of religion during the colonial period created ‘Christian New World’, where various communities were ‘ethnified’ (Oommen, 1997: 93). The process of ethnification of communities in North East India can also be attributed to the advent of Christianity and Colonialism in the region.

The historical encounters between tribes and Christian missionaries were marked by two distinct features: religion and culture. It was the encounter between two distinct sets of religion, which was characterized by folk-religion and beliefs pertaining to ‘locality specific’ on the one side and universal or world religion on the other. Accepting the other and discarding one ultimately leads to changes in various spheres of society. Moreover, the old traditional religion of tribes were closely integrated with social and cultural practices of

their society. The acceptance of Christianity created a rupture which was not confined to
the religious realms but also traditional customs and cultural practices. Among the Naga
villages, we have seen that when Christianity was introduced, the solidarity of village was
fragmented and broken into two distinct groups between Christian converts and followers
of old religion (Shimreiwung, 2004). And, the newly converted were compelled to leave
the original village they had been living for centuries and start a new village to practice
Christianity. Whereas in the new village, which was established to practice Christianity in
its ideal form, the social and cultural practices of the people were not only determined by
the teachings from the Holy Bible, but also Western cultural practices in various spheres.
The fundamental principle in accepting a new religion lies in the practical convention that
‘inner’ changes ought to be manifested in outward behaviors and practices (Shimreiwung,
2004: 103-104). Thus, when the newly converted tribals went to live in a new Christian
city, not only their inner beliefs, but also their lifestyle and cultural practices took a
different direction. The teachings of White missionaries on almost everything, from
housekeeping and dressing patterns to shunning of warfare, were followed by the converts.
We find that religious change was intertwined with adoptions of new lifestyle and practices
whenever conversion to a new religion took during the colonial period.

On the other hand, the major impact of colonial rule and missionary works were felt by
folk-beliefs and traditional practices. The age-old traditional practices which the tribals
were continuously practicing from the past became irrelevant after the transformation that
took place in their society. The transition from folk practices was not a smooth process
without barriers and oppositions. When the convert tribals started adopting new practices
and stopped participation in the communal rituals, there was social backlash and it had led
to violence which ultimately led to social segregations in the village (Shimreiwung, 2004).
Even among the converts, the process of forgetting old practices and leading a new life was
not an easy one. However, in the new social situation that had arisen, which was guided by
Christianity, the converts gradually began to consider discarding old practices as the most
viable option. On the more substantive level, the old institutions like morung became the
victims of new religion and culture. Basically, such institutions were not only denounced as

3 T. K. Oommen has described that the process of ‘civilizing’ and ‘Christianizing’ of the natives culminated
in ‘de-culturation’, where ‘they not only lost their own culture but fail to internalize a new one’ (Oommen,
'heathen practices', but subsequently it became irrelevant. Along with traditional institutions, folk practices like folkdance and folksongs began to lose significance in the cultural practices of the convert tribals. The rupture between traditional practices and adopted culture began to widen as tribal society moved towards the modernization process. In substitutions of traditional practices and social institutions, the missionaries with the support from colonial authorities introduced Western educational systems and practices in the cultural life of the tribal society.\footnote{Satish Saberwal has argued that the implementations of Western institutions in Indian society has led to the 'segmentation' and social crisis, and the consequences which are so 'numerous', 'substantial' and 'extensive' that this has long term long-term implications (Saberwal, 1995:6).}

The post-colonial period heralded substantive transformation in tribal society’s relation with the ‘dominant society’ in most of the colonial countries. The ‘new states’ that emerged from the yoke of colonialism began to face the task of ‘establishing an effective government’, and to ‘staff it with indigenous people’ (Shils 1963). And in the context of ‘plurality of a traditional societies’, the new states have to confront the problem of ‘legitimizing...before the people’ (ibid). The challenge of building a coherent political structure was faced by the ‘new states’. Edwards Shils described that the ‘societies’ in the new states ‘consists of relatively discrete collectivities—ethnic, communal, caste, religious, or linguistic—that have little sense of identity with one another or with the national whole’ (Shils 1963). In this context, the ‘new states’ were faced with the challenge of overcoming these ‘primordial’ relations and establishing a ‘political society’ (Geertz 1963). Faced with these tasks, the ‘new states’ began to formulate their national policy where the issues concerning the tribals came to the fore.

After the end of the Colonial era, the ‘independent states’ began to adopt varying policies in dealing with the tribal societies. The moot question that arises before the ‘post-colonial states’ was: whether they should be allowed to remain as they were (isolation) or they should be immersed with the mainstream societies (integration). Anthropologist like Verier Elwin, who had enormous concern for the tribal societies, emphasized that ‘in this [national] tribal policy, nothing has to be forced or imposed on the people, who were to be encouraged to develop along the path of their own tradition. They should come to terms
with their past and grow from it by natural evolution’ (Elwin, 1964: 297). The perspectives of leaving the tribals alone to develop themselves and in their own terms were shaped by the notion that the ‘people of India as a whole is marked by great variety and there is no standard of culture, religion or language to which the tribes can adapt’ (Elwin, 1964: 300). The apprehension that the tribal culture will be lost, if they were to be ‘integrated’ with the mainstream, was not only held by the anthropologist, but it was shared by the tribal communities themselves. In Northeast, tribal communities like Nagas and Mizos had already started a political movement for the establishment of their own nation right after India got independence. On the other hand, when India got independence, the ‘national leaders were very eager to help and uplift the tribals (Vidyarthi & Rai, 1985:36). The mechanism to safeguard the interest of the tribals was made through Constitutional provisions, the Sixth Schedule and Fifth Schedule in Indian Constitution aims to protect the land rights and various social and cultural rights of the tribals. Whereas, the policy that advocates ‘isolation’ was out-rightly ‘rejected and instead a policy of integration of the tribals with the rest of the people adopted’ (Vidyathi & Rai, 1985: 36). Anthropologists like Verrier Elwin were vilified for advocating the policy to safeguard the interest of tribal societies and suggesting less intervention from the state. Years later, Verrier Elwin argued that he did not stand for total ‘isolation’, but supported the inclusionist policy, but that the state ‘must help the tribes to come to terms with their own past so that their present and future will not the denial of it, but a natural evolution from it (Elwin 1964:302). The policy for tribal integration in India was adopted by considering various factors; the proponents of this policy hold that the colonial policy of ‘isolating’ and ‘protectionism’ of the tribes is not appropriate for the new Indian nation and that it was apprehended that the isolation of the tribals will lead to the political secessionism. Therefore, in the independent India, Nehru’s tribal ‘Panchsheel’ policy was prominently advocated as the fundamental principles of the India’s policy of tribal integration (Mann 1993: 36). Whereas, Nehru’s tribal policy was more or less similar to Verrier Elwin’s proposal is another matter that has been overlooked by most of the contenders in this debate.

Nehru’s tribal ‘Panchsheel’ policy emphasized that “(1) ‘People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture; (2) Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected; (3) we should try to train and build up a team of their people to do the work of administration and development; (4) we should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with multiplicity of schemes…(5) we should judge results not just by statistics or amount of money spent but by the human character that is evolved” (Mann1993: 36).
‘Hindi’ popular and a substitution of it by western idols and signs” (Swain, 1996). The absence of Sanskritic elements is only in tribal communities who are following their traditional religion and those who have converted to Christianity. However, in the case of those communities who have adopted Hinduism the presence of Sanskritic elements are strong. According to Nirmal Kumar Swain, “None of these two dominant varieties of culture in the lifeworld of such people, but it is a politics of culture in which the marginalized identities asserts themselves” (Swain, 1996). The aversion to dominant Indian culture has also do to with language and education systems, most of the tribes in Northeast are educated in Convent schools run by the Christian Missionaries, therefore their aesthetic tendencies hover more towards the Western cultural practices. On the other hand, the tribal communities and various other social communities have tried to define their ‘identity’ by taking recourse to their ‘own past cultural traits’ (Swain, 1996). The approach to define community identity through past traditions and primordial elements are found not only among the Christianized tribes, but it has also taken place among the Hinduized communities like the Meiteis in Manipur. Recently, the Meitei revolutionary organizations and civil societies have imposed a blanket ban on Hindi films and Music, and promoted Manipuri films as the alternative for mass entertainment. Further, the Meiteis civil societies have launched a movement toadopt the ancient Meitei script instead of the Devanagari script which has became the backbone of Manipuri language and literature. Nagas in Manipur have also resorted to banning Manipuri films and music in their district in-order to keep their community safe from the influence of Manipuri culture, which they consider as different from their cultural identity. The interesting part in this act of politicizing culture is that while local communities have banned Hindi movies and songs, no such bans are imposed on Hollywood films and other foreign films, or Western music. The assertion of identities in the Northeast is taking place at various levels, with national and regional identity, and again these forms of cultural resistance again gets aligned with the ‘political discourse’ (Swain, 1996). Some scholars have construed that the conversion to Christianity by the tribes in Northeast have been perceived as the ‘other’ by the dominant religious group in India (Biswas, 1996). The construction of ‘otherness’ in the case of tribes in Northeast India is apparently happening in both ways: by the dominant religious

7 In Northeast India, the Hinduized communities in the Manipur and Assam, who occupy the valley areas, have strong presence of Sankritic elements; whereas most of the tribes in hill have embraced Christianity which is manifested distinctively in their cultural practices. So far, the classification of ‘tribe’ is used mainly on the hill-dwelling communities. And, there have been fairly less inclinations to adopt Hinduism among the Northeast tribes.
community and by the tribes themselves as well. Religion, culture, and the political issues have emerged as the crux of these ideational constructions.

With the development in education, adoption of new lifestyle, and new sense of social identity the tribal communities in the Northeast India have entered the threshold of modernity. Roy Burman observes that the interventions from the 'exogenous' forces and growth from the 'endogenous' factors have led to modernization of the tribals in the border regions in India (Roy-Burman, 1973). The exogenous forces are identified as pertaining to 'advanced technology and complex political and social organization introduced in the area in an area or among a group of people, while the endogenous factors are seen as 'growth of society the synthesis of its inherent contradictions' (between tradition and modernity) (ibid). What needs to be noted in the case of modernization in Northeast is that the historical experience of encounter and intervention by the colonial power and conversion to Western religion are some of the exogenous factors (Sinha, 1993). The groundwork for most of the changes had already been prepared during the colonial period. However, the actual process of modernization occurred in the post-colonial period. Some of the 'exogenous factors' that have transformed the tribal societies in independent India, according to Roy-Burman are: (a) Impact of Special Provisions of the Constitution’, which brought ‘political mobilizations’ and the ‘emergence of para-community among the tribes’; (b) Impact of the Extension of the Orbit of Activities of the Nation State in the Border areas’ which led to the ‘assertion of equality of the erstwhile subdued community’, ‘atomisation of old social boundaries and emergence of new ones’, and the ‘Emergence of socio-cultural minorities in tribal areas as a political category’; (c) 'Impact of the Expansion of Communication and Transport’ which resulted in ‘adoption of outward accessories of modern life without drawing upon traditional sources’, ‘formation of capital and new skills outside the traditional sectors’, and ‘diversification and impersonalisation of social interaction’; (d) ‘Impact of Establishment of Urban Centres’ which led to emergence of reference groups; (e) ‘Impact of the Introduction of Improved Technology and Welfare Measures’ which brings the ‘conversion of land into commodity and undermining of kinship obligation’, change in the ‘nature of relationships with land from sacred category and political category to economic’ and changes in the social stratification of society; (f) ‘Impact of the Spread of Education’ which brought ‘new aspiration without adequate preparation’, consideration of the ‘past as a lever for the future’, and ‘diversification of the
sources of the tradition'; (g) 'Impact of Extension of Medical and other Facilities' which led to the 'shift from tackling the supernatural to secular authority' and led to emergence of new elites' (Roy-Burman 1973). The exogenous forces of changes that have been recognized by Roy-Burman are exhaustive and comprehensive, but not complete as a lot of changes have taken place in the last two decades or more. In the case of endogenous factors, Roy-Burman has only recognized the 'Ethnic Identity Movements of the Tribals', which is apparently less comprehensive and adequate considering the fact that 'indigenization' of 'other cultures' and new forms of civil organizations and artistic works have taken place among the tribals societies.

The crux of modernization process among the tribal societies, as it has been pointed out by Roy-Burman, lies in breakdown of rigidities of past traditions and social relationships and the willingness to accept new changes in every sphere of their socio-cultural, political and economic conduits. It does not necessarily mean discarding and denial of the past, but past traditions are modernized and modernity is traditionalized (Shils 1963). So far, the tribes in Northeast have not only been receptive to changes and modernity, but also attempt to revive past tradition and maintain distinct identity. The inclinations to modernity and efforts to retain cultural identity have emerged as one of the contemporary social dilemmas in the Northeast India.

Conceptual Frameworks

Representations and Culture

Representations, in a general understanding, would mean 'to represent things other than itself', or 'to substitute things present for things absent' (Marin, 2001: 352). Representations have been conceptualized as 'a mental or intellectual idea – a picture or projection held in mind' (Pickering, 2000). In this sense, representations are 'mental entities', mental pictures or projections. Further, representations have been construed as representations of phenomena of the social world. Where it relates to the social world, representations are not just ideological reflections or representations of various social
orders; the claim is that they picture the social order as an objective expression of the system of ideas.

The social significance of representations goes much beyond than mere ‘reflections’ or expressions, it has a force that affects the entire members of a community that share similar cultural practices. Emile Durkheim describes that: “Representation is not a simple image or reality, a motionless shadow projected into us by things. It is rather a force that stirs up around us a whole whirlwind of organic and psychological phenomena” (Durkheim, 1984:54). Further, he distinguishes two types of representations: Individual representations and Collective representations. Individual representations are sensations, images, and dispositions generated in our mind (sensational representations); whereas collective representations are exterior to the individual mind (impersonal), these are concepts and ‘work of the community’ (Durkheim, 1968:433-434). Collective representations, according to Durkheim, ‘originate only when they are embodied in material objects, things or beings of every sort — figures, movements, sounds, words — so on — that symbolizes and delineate in some outward appearance’ (Pickering 2000). According to this perspective, representations could be in varied forms, which has ‘material existence’, symbolizes, and communicates. In totemic society, according to Durkheim, the ‘emblem’ is useful as a rallying-center for any sort of group (Durkheim 1968: 230). An ‘emblem’ serves as an expression of ‘social unity’ in a ‘material form’. Here, the ‘emblem’ as a symbol and representations does not only clarify the sentiment society has for itself; it also creates such sentiments (ibid: 230). Therefore, cultural symbols and representations serve as mechanism to strengthened social cohesion. The social significance of symbolic representations lies in the fact that they are socially constructed, shared by all the members, and it signifies their ‘common existence’.

In the domain of art and expressive culture, representations take a different form – it plays a substitutive role. However, representations are much more than imitations. In art, according to Roland Barthes, *representation* has two meanings: (a) ‘representations designate a copy, an illusion, an analogical figure, a resemblance product’; (b) representation is merely to return to what has been presented (Barthes 1986: 228). In art, representations have been conceptualized as an integration of these two dimensions: semblance product and returning to origin. Taking a subjectivist view, Louis Marin put
forward that representations consists of (a) ‘reflexive’ (presenting oneself) and (b) ‘transitive’ (presenting something) (Marin, 2001:352-353). Representation in art is a process of encoding and deciphering. Here, ‘imageries’ and ‘icons’ play a pivotal role. It also involves codifications – an analogic mirroring of one set of phenomena (event) with another set (symbols). Symbolic representations can be made through varied forms: material as well as non-material. Material representations can be made through objects such as ‘totem’, sculptures, and figure etc. Whereas, non-material representations are made through the medium of oral descriptions, sound, literary works etc. Here, the relationships between the ‘images’ (signifier) and the ‘concepts’ (signified) are arbitrary, and socially constructed, and relative to the specific social context. What is represented in terms of ‘sign’ and ‘symbol’ is not ‘empty space’; rather they consist of encoded social ‘events’ and ‘experiences’.

Social experience, according to James Fernandez, could be represented through three distinctive modes: enactive, iconic, and symbolic (Fernandez, 1982: 277). First, experience is represented in ‘habitual action in our muscles’, as we produce certain chain of actions ‘we enact them according to a complex system of signals, often non-verbal’ (ibid). Secondly, ‘experience can be represented by certain mental images – sign-images or icons – that we preserve out of the past, and that we employ in order to recognize and confront or relate to a new experience’; finally, experience can be represented in symbolic mode – here, experiences are represented in an abstract symbolic mode (ibid). These are various modes of representations, where experiences are formalized and encoded into signals, signs, and symbols. Although, ‘all these mode of representations are employed by all peoples of all cultures; different cultures put emphases on different modes’ (ibid). According to James Fernandez, in Western society the symbolic mode is emphasized: the scholasticism and scientific method, and their attempt to solve problems, have resulted in ‘self conscious rules of operations – on genericizing’ (ibid). On the other hand, traditional culture (non-Western), which has no problem solving engagement, tends to use enactive or iconic modes of representations (ibid). In the latter, society primarily relied on actions or images of experience previously represented to handle new experiences. They employ

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iconic representations such as proverbs, as guidance and directions for their course of actions.

Representations are made functional and relevant because of the prevailing 'symbolic consensus' in society. Fernandez has employed the concept of 'symbolic consensus' in two different ways - social consensus and cultural consensus. Social consensus relies on the 'acceptance of the necessity for interaction', the 'agreement to direct actions to one another' (Fernandez, 1965). This 'acceptance' and 'agreement' involves the consensus over certain set of signals and signs that give direction and orientations to interaction. Cultural consensus, on the other, relies on the understanding that one holds for symbolic meaning in common (ibid). Unlike 'social consensus' where 'acceptance' and 'agreements' are formed at ease, 'cultural consensus' is problematic and replete with differences of opinion and understanding. The focal point of cultural consensus is on the framework of 'logico- Meaning' of the symbols. It pertains to one's own interpretation and appropriations. In any forms of symbolic representations 'meaning' play a pivotal role. Derivations of meaning are not just cognitive exercise, but it has to do with the object of realities that exist outside our mind.

In 'expressive behavior', according to Edmund Leach, meanings act as the transcending medium between 'observable patterns in the world out-there' and 'unobservable patterns in the mind (Leach, 1976: 17). Whereas, the relationships between 'concepts in mind' and 'sense-image' are 'intrinsic', the relationship between 'sense-image' and object in the external world are 'arbitrary' (ibid). The relationship between 'external world' and 'sense-image' is always 'metaphoric' (symbolic), and when it 'stabilizes by convention and habitual use it becomes a sign' (ibid). Symbols, thus, can be transformed into signs through habitual use. The derivation is a social construction; therefore it is relative to the specific culture context where 'symbols' occurs. Our understandings of the representations are determined by our cultural conditioning. Leach argues that 'the artistic representations of common objects follow widely different conventions in different cultures', and 'every

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9 James Fernandez has propounded the concept of 'symbolic consensus' (synonymous to collective representations), as it was practiced by the Fang reformative cult (Fernandez, 1965). Among the cult member there was a 'consensus' about the rituals symbols and their social significance (ibid).
individual perceives his world to be what his or her background suggests’ (1976:21). Representations are relative to the cultural context and are more than the ‘images’, it has a social force which can impinge on the members of a particular community.

Culture, from being conceptualized as ‘complex whole’ and ‘way of life’, has been redefined as a ‘signifying system’ through which necessarily (among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored (Williams, 1983:13). From the anthropological perspectives of ‘culture’ as a ‘whole way of life’, the concept of culture as ‘signifying system’ was derived, and it denotes all ‘forms of social activity’ (ibid). Further, all forms of ‘social activity’ includes artistic and intellectual activities, which again refers to all forms of ‘signifying practices – from language through the arts and philosophy to journalism, fashion, and advertising’ (ibid). Culture, here, is construed simply not as a way of life, but as ‘expression’ that communicates, which also contains symbolic significance. Even within the domain of anthropological study of culture the symbolic significance of culture has been interrogated.

Culture has also been conceptualized in terms of the semiotic, consisting of ‘meaning’¹⁰ (Geertz, 1973:5). ‘Culture’, according Clifford Geertz, denotes a ‘historically transmitted pattern of meaning, embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop the knowledge about and attitude towards life’ (Geertz, 1973: 89). By ‘symbols’, Geertz mean the ‘object, act, event, quality, or relations that serve as vehicle for conception – the conception of symbolic meaning’ (ibid: 91). In this sense, ‘symbols’ are not static, or unchanging ‘images’, but it also includes ‘acts of behavior’. The emphasis, however, is on the symbolic meaning that such ‘acts’ and ‘images’ signify, it also synthesizes peoples ethos, their character and quality of life, moral and aesthetic style, and their worldview. Therefore, ‘culture’ as a ‘complex system of symbols’ is comprehensive of all expressive behaviors and images, and also conceptualization of the world around. Culture plays a vital role on the construction of collective life by engaging symbols in the complex web of events and persons which are the specifics of social relations. From these two varying

¹⁰ Here, ‘meaning’ is understood as socially constructed and contextual.
concepts of culture – as ‘signifying system’ and ‘complex systems of symbols’ – one could find a certain homology. Therefore, culture cannot be conceptualized merely as a distinct/whole way of life, but also as an ‘act of communication’, involving the process of ‘signification’.

The sociological approach towards culture has undergone ‘convergence’ of approaches as well as paradigm shift. Instead of focusing on the ‘implicit’ characters of ‘culture’, it has moved to analyze the ‘explicit’ nature of cultural practices. Diana Crane (1995) has highlighted the paradigm shift that has/is taking place in sociology of culture. The study of ‘culture’ has moved from the emphasis on the conception of culture as certain sets of ‘values, norms, beliefs, and attitudes of the entire population or sub-group’ (Crane 1995: 2). In modern society the emphasis on ‘implicit’ or ‘unrecorded’ cultures has been regarded as inadequate towards the understanding of culture. Now, the perspectives on ‘culture’ has turned towards ‘explicit culture’, where ‘culture’ is ‘expressed and negotiated almost entirely through culture as explicit social constructions or products, in other words, through recorded culture, culture that is recorded in either print, film, artifacts or, most recently electronic media’ (ibid: 2-3). To understand the role of culture, therefore it becomes imperative to analyze the content and effects of recorded culture as well as factors that effect recorded cultures. With the emergence of ‘recorded culture’ the production and consumption of cultural goods/products have become common phenomena in modern society. Appropriation of recorded culture has generated a form of social practice whereby ‘people use these forms and technologies to construct, articulate, and disseminate ideologies about community, difference, nation, and politics, and with their impact on social relations, social formation, and social meanings’ (Mahon 2000: 469). For the ‘tribal people’ who have experienced colonialism, the tool of ‘recorded culture’ has become an instrument to strengthen their indigenous ideologies, and establish their own worldview. It also has facilitated as ‘signifying practices’ grounded on the routine of their contemporary social existence. It also has opened-up new spaces for the representations of their cultures, and construction of identity. Representations is not only the ‘expressive plane’, it also plays a ‘formative role’. These forms of various cultural productions – visual arts, music, film, literature, theatrical performances etc. – have begun to represent and construct social categories, and social histories. Through narratives and images, articulation of shared experiences have created new subjectivities, and constructed social identities (ibid: 470).
process of the artist: he takes the work of art, perceives its structure, relationships and meanings, and finally come to an experience of his own, that maybe similar to the artist’s experience [ibid]. Thus, the task of perception, which can be put as consumption, involves a process of deciphering and decoding. Pierre Bourdieu states that “Any art perception involves conscious and unconscious deciphering operation” (Bourdieu, 1993:215).

The sociology of art is concerned mainly with the practical effects of art on society and the way society effects art. Sociologists have studied art from varied perspectives: many studies have focused on art as an attempt to understand it from a sociological point of view; others have focused on the possibilities that investigation on the arts may contribute to the growing sociological knowledge. Some recent studies have focused on the ‘power relations’ and the ‘domination’ manifested in art. Bourdieu has argued that “the sociology of art and literature has to take its object not only as material product but also symbolic product i.e. the production of the value of work, or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of work” (Bourdieu, 1993: 37).

Art is a ‘collective term for a wide variety of aesthetic products, including literature, visual arts and music, as well as the combined form of drama and opera’ (Albrecht, 1970: 1). Art has been considered as ‘social institution’ [ibid]. As an institution, art fulfills numerous functions. Basically, art fulfill ‘aesthetic needs’, and it has been differentiated from ‘essential art’, although applied art is an exception. Further, aesthetic forms could be employed in various social contexts: as political propaganda, as religious icon, as sales pitch, as commemoration of public figure, directly or indirectly it may also bolster the morale of a group, or create a sense of unity, of social solidarity; as used by dissident groups, it may also create awareness of social issues, and provide a rallying focus for action and social change’ (ibid: 30). Further, in certain societies, art can be employed to criticize as well as maintain social order, by heightening or symbolizing essential social values. In society, art occupies a significant position.

The work of art has been considered as ‘collective action’, in the sense that there is cooperation between the artist in the creation of the work and with the audience when it is
incorporated. To give priority on one aspect of music over the other would be incomplete and inadequate; therefore the two approaches have been adopted simultaneously.

Singing, according to Alan Lomax, “is a specialized act of communication, akin to speech, but far more formally organized and redundant” (Lomax, 1968:3). Singing attracts and holds the attention of groups; indeed, as in most tribal societies, it involves group participation (ibid). Whether chorally performed or not, the chief function of song is to express shared feelings, and mould join activities of some human community. It is expected, therefore, that the content of sung communication should be social rather than individual, normative rather than particular”. The vocal music relies much on ‘speech’ and it is intertwined with various social practices. Levi-Strauss puts ‘music’ as a part of culture, which is different from nature. To him, ‘nature produces noises not musical sound’, the latter is solely a consequence of culture, which has ‘created musical instruments and singing’ (Levi-Strauss, 1983: 22). Levi-Strauss claims that there is a ‘close affinity’ between ‘music’ and ‘myths’. Both ‘music’ and ‘myths’ have sequence, and the whole have to be taken into considerations to derive the meaning. While myth communicates message, music is a language with some ‘meaning’ (ibid: 18). It is very common among the society ‘without writing’ to find myths being presented and narrated through/in music. There are cases where poetry and music conflate. Roland Barthes has also analyzed the relationship between music and language; specially taking the case of ‘vocal music’. Barthes describes ‘vocal music’ as ‘art song, lived, or melodie, a very specific space (genre) in which language encounters a voice’ (Barthes, 1985: 269). In semiological analysis of music is considered as equivalent to signifiance or signifying (ibid: 270). Signifiance provide the render or music performer with a signifier, rather than a clear signified; it demands a bodily active response rather than a passive receptor of an already packaged meaning. Further, music is divided into ‘pheno-song’ and ‘geno-song’. According to Barthes, pheno-song covers ‘all the phenomena, all the structure of the sung language’; while the geno-song is the ‘volumes of the speaking and singing voices, the space in which the signification germinate’ (ibid: 270). Here, Barthes gave more emphasis on ‘geno-song’, which he describes as the ‘grain of voice’, the depth of production where melody actually works on language (ibid: 271). The basic difference between music and

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12 Levi-Strauss used this term as a substitute for the general usage of the concept ‘primitive’.

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language is that, in music code and message are constituted into one. Further, Roland Barthes distinguishes two kinds of music: ‘one you listen to, one you play’ (ibid: 261). Listening to music and playing constitutes two different arts. By playing music, Barthes is not referring to performance before the audience, but playing music for the sheer pleasure of it, with friends or in groups.

Unlike the Western music, Indian music, according to D P Mukherjee, does not differentiate between ‘composition’ and ‘execution’ (Mukherjee, 1948: 154). Further, in India, in historical past, ‘classical music’ has always served two-masters: religion and the court [ibid: 154]. However, with the advent of new technologies, music has moved away from that exclusive concentration to popular culture. According to Mukherjee, three important social agencies have lately been working upon in Indian music, these are: gramophone, films, and radio (ibid: 175).

Classical music is characterized by abstraction, while folk music is presented in simple ‘narratives’. Classical or abstract music needs certain knowledge and specialization, whereas folk music is simple and can be easily followed. Willard Rhodes argued that ‘Abstract instrumental music is incapable of communicating ideologies and ideas... it has to rely upon texts and cantatas to carry the message’ (Willard, 1962: 14). Vocal music that has words and language has the advantage of making the communication more explicit. In the history of music, folk music and folksongs have been considered as the early stage in the development of music. In this context, musical art consisted chiefly of vocal music and included such as work songs, and songs of everyday life, and historical songs, as well as epos (Belaive, 1965). In such societies, the musical art and social life are closely interwoven. The musical folklore is a type of music that is closely interwoven with the text, ‘they reflect every aspect of life, social relations, and ideas of clan, tribal and ethnic groups all over the globe’ (Belaiev, 1965). Therefore, musical representations are basically ‘narratives’ about the events and situations that occur in a particular social environ. Although, music employ different mediums, it is also akin to literary representations of the social world.
Literature in most societies develop through various modes of writing. Literature has been basically defined as a form of ‘intellectual expression’, ‘contemplating the world with detachment and composition’ (Finnegan, 1988). Sociological approach to literature has been shaped by the assumption that ‘literature’ is ‘conditioned deeply by the social context’ (Eagleton, 1988). There have been wide theoretical deliberations over the differences between ‘oral’ and ‘scribal’ (written) literature. Writing has been considered as a ‘cultural technique’ that is wholly dependent on forms of ‘specialized training’, not only for the producers but also for the receivers (Williams 1981: 94). Whereas, anthropologists like Franz Boas (1940) are of the view that songs and tales of the past were a form of literary activity, and precursor to the emergence of literacy. Although, there are distinct variations between the two forms of literature, in terms of nature of the text and forms of writing, the emphasis has been that ‘oral literature’ is not lacking in various aspects as a form of literature (Finnegan 1988; Dundes 1968). And, the functions of oral and written literature in society have been construed as similar. Therefore, to have comprehensive understanding of the different forms of literature that are in practice, in the tribal societies, the two forms of literature will be analyzed in this study. Instead of considering literature just as a text, ‘written culture’ would be analyzed as intrinsic to the cultural practice of a community.

Like all forms of art, the relationships between literature and society are intertwined in various aspects. Milton Albrecht has shown three sorts of connection between literature and society (Albrecht, 1984). One view is that literature “reflects” society, it analyzes literature as it exists, representations found in text were construed as social reality; secondly, it is held that literature influences or ‘shapes’ societies; thirdly, literature functions socially to maintain social order (Albrecht, 1984). However, the influences of literature in society are realms of fact extraneous to literature itself. Literature, however, has its own ‘structures’, and generates meaning in a different way. While analyzing the complexities involved in the relationship between literature and society, Lucien Goldman remarked: “The essential relationship between the life of a society and literary creation is not concern with the content of the two sectors of human reality, but only the mental structures with what might be called the categories which shaped both the empirical consciousness of a certain social group and the imaginary universe created by the writer’ (Goldman, 1970: 584).
Literary and musical presentations are basically based on ‘narratives’. Although, music and literature employ varied mediums in its artistic works, the modes of representations in these two forms of art depends heavily on ‘narratives’. Basically, narratives is defined as the actual written or spoken statements that tell us of an event, or series of events. Whereas, the first sense of a narrative refers to the signifier that constructs the story, narrative can also be the story itself; that is, the events that make up the discourses real or fictional raw material – narrative signified (Gennette, 1988: 13). The third connotation of narrative refers to the act of narrating itself – the moment, this action is itself fictional, and is distinguished from the actual production of the text (ibid:13). Narratives are, however, much larger than the sentences, they contain many sentences. In short, narratives are a kind of discourses.

The basic level of narratives, according to Roland Barthes, is ‘Functions’. Functions are considered as containing all elements of narratives. As Barthes argued, in a narrative text there is nothing that does not have meaning. Even the most trivial function in a narrative, such as telephone ringing, or lighting a cigarette has meaning (Barthes, 1982: 104). Barthes divides functions into two sorts: Distributive functions and Indices. Distributive function involves a kind of cause and effect logic; if the telephone rings, it will be either answered or not. We find the meaning of such functions in what comes immediately after them. Indices are details that can be collected together to produce a kind of meaning that is not chronological; however, they contribute to the formation of ‘character’. Narrative, therefore, does not directly represent reality. The modern novel uses function and indices of character and atmosphere to generate reality (Allen, 2003: 49). Narratives do not reach us directly and do not represent the world directly; the meaning is always bound up with the system that forms the basis of narratives. The ‘meaning’ of narratives stem from the system out of which it was produced, and not from the reality. In narratives, the relationship between ‘reality’ and what is represented shares an indirect and mediated relation.
People and Locale: Tangkhul Nagas in Ukhrul district

The tribe that has been chosen for the study is Tangkhul Nagas in Manipur, with the population of 1,407,78 (2001 Census), the literacy rate is 68.9 %, and 198 villages. The Tangkhul Nagas are one of the major Naga tribes inhabiting mainly Ukhrul district in Manipur. However, Tanghuls are also spread over other districts of Manipur, like Senapati and Chandel, also sizable numbers of Tanghuls are living across the border in Myanmar. The infrastructure of Ukhrul is still poor. And, the development of infrastructure is taking place in snail pace manner. The main road that connects Ukhrul is through the National highway that comes from Imphal and Kohima in Nagaland. The main town of Ukhrul district is Ukhrul town, from which the name of the district is derived. The naming of district by the name of Headquarter of the district, and not by the name of the community, has been the common convention in Manipur, and elsewhere in other states of Northeast region. Perhaps, the reason could be that the compositions of communities in most of the district have been varied and heterogeneous. Such practices also indicates that the creation of district has more to do with the functioning of administration, rather than defining the geographical domain that a community occupies. In Ukhrul district, the Tangkhuls are the majority community, with some Kuki villages in certain parts of the district. The actual geographical inhabitation of Tangkhuls overlaps the official boundary demarcations of Ukhrul District. There are substantial numbers of Tangkhul villages in Senapati district, in the West, and Chandel District which is in Southern side of Ukhrul District. Although, Ukhrul District is supposed to be the administrative demarcations for the Tangkhuls, it has not served that purpose. In terms of administration, those Tangkhuls villages locating outside the boundary district and other country, is outside the purview of District Administrations. However, the authority of Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL), apex body of all the Tangkhuls, is honored by the Tangkhuls in other district and elsewhere else. For legal disputes and other purposes, the Tangkhuls in other district also come to Tangkhul Naga Long for its legal services.

There are various legends about the origin and arrival of Tangkhuls to their present geographical location. One of the Tangkhul legends says they came out from a cave at a place called Muirungphy, by killing a tiger which was blocking the way (Brown 1873). The
cave-origin legend appears to be a ‘myth’ as it refers to primordial times and places, and deviates from the accounts in oral history of the Tangkhuls. Julian Jacobs states that “Naga origin stories have two aspects. One aspect is essentially mythological and describes the supernatural origin of mankind...the other aspects describes in detail the actual movements of people in the Naga Hills” (Jacobs et al, 1998: 12). The Nagas’ accounts of their past were based on the oral narratives. Therefore, myths and history gets completely intertwined. In most of the oral culture, there is a thin line that differentiates myths from history. Mircea Eliade considers myths as more than ‘sacred history’, and rather as ‘coherent history’, as it facilitates in tracing the ‘primordial history’ of mankind (Eliade, 1969: 75-76). Levi-Strauss holds that even if a myth ‘always refers to have taken place long ago’, the ‘specific patterns’ described in myths is ‘timeless’ as ‘it explains the present, the past, as well as the future’ (Levi-Strauss 1963: 210). The mythical explanation of the Nagas past should also be considered in terms of ‘primordial history’ which is not a contrast, but complimentary to the actual historical events of the past.

T. C. Hodson, one of the earliest Westerners to study the Tangkhuls, wrote that there are three traditions of the Tangkhuls which explains their origin. The first tradition connects them with the valley, which holds that they migrated from the valley to the hill areas because of heat and mosquitoes. According to the second tradition, after migrating from Maikel (a village in Mao areas) they disperse from Hundung and went in different directions. The third tradition deals with later period and narrates the process of big villages dividing up, and establishment of new villages (Hodson, 1911: 8 – 9). Basing on the oral histories and written recorded that are available, the Tangkhuls appears to have arrived to their present location by waves of migration from different directions (Shimray 2000: 4-11). Within the Nagas, the Tangkhul are considered as closest to the Aos and Angamis (ibid). However, they have also been considered as having close affinities with the Meteis, their closest neighbor in Manipur. In the present situation, the pan-Naga identity movement, which has emerged after India’s independence, has brought the Tangkhul’s closer to other Naga tribes in Manipur and those living in the states of Nagaland, Assam and Arunachal. While legend has it that Tangkhul’s and Meiteis were brothers in ancient past, the social distance between the two communities have widened in the recent period. These indicate the phenomena where community identities are established and at the same time boundaries are further strengthened.
Robert Brown, a colonial officer who was Manipur in 1873, described that the Tangkhuls were also known as 'Luhupas', a Manipuri term which mean a 'hat or covering head', referring to the typical headgear worn by the Tangkhul Nagas in their traditional times (Brown, Robert 1874: 37). Pertaining to the physical features of Tagkhuls in the past, Brown’s description indicates that the Tangkhuls were a “tall race of men, with large heads and heavy solid features, as a rule; their general facial characteristic resemble those of the Angamis, and some of them are remarkably muscular” (Brown, 1874:38). Further, Brown described the dressing patterns of Tangkhuls as ‘scanty’, ‘consisting of a piece of cloth folded around the waist, a portion of which hangs down in the front’ (ibid). A custom which have been described as ‘unique and peculiar’ to the Tangkhuls was the ‘wearing of a ring from an eight to a fourth of an inch wide, made of deer’s horn or ivory, which is passed on to the foreskin, fitting tightly’ (ibid). Now, this ‘ring’ was worn when the young male attain puberty and continued throughout the life until death. Presumably, Brown described that this ring was worn to ‘prevent erectico penis’; but, more significantly perhaps it had to do with the modesty and chastity of the male-folk. These practices and features of Tangkhuls which have been described by Robert Brown highlight the conditions of the Tangkhul. Recently, the Tangkhul have begun to call themselves as 'Wung Tangkhul', which is a re-interpretation of the past traditions and indirectly referring to the present status of the Tangkhuls among various Naga tribes. This usage is mostly employed by the Naga revolutionary organizations in their formal usages, but yet to find common acceptance among the people and at the official usages. With the advent of colonialism and Christianity, those traditional customs and practices have lapsed into antiquity.

The Christian Tangkhuls began to adopt new way of life which deviated much from past traditions and cultural practices. Taking note of the shift that has taken place with the lifestyle of a new generation of Nagas, Horam describes that “the Naga youth today are as conscious of their appearance as the youth are everywhere in the world. They are spending more money on clothes, popular gramophone records (those of Lata Mageshgar, Kishore Kumar, and Jim Reeves, Elvis, the Beatles and so on), jewellery, and cosmetics than their parents had spent. There is a definite swing towards non-conformity especially among the younger generation who seem to be far removed from their parents most of whom still
cling to their old-world” (Horam, 1977:99). The changes that Horam described had begun with the second generations of Tangkhul Christians. Today, the third generations of Tangkhul Christians are already entering into the threshold of ‘global culture’, connecting themselves with the rest of the world in every possible way.

**Ukhrul District: Administration and Communication Systems**

Ukhrul district is located in the eastern part of Manipur, sharing a porous boundary with Myanmar in the east. In the official gazetteer, the area of Ukhrul district is subdivided into five divisions: (1) Ukhrul, (2) Phungyar, (3) Chingai, (4) Kasom Khullen, (5) Kamjong. The official demarcation of Ukhrul district in terms of sub-divisions is for administrative purposes of governance and bureaucratic functions, which on the other hand does have not much social and cultural significance. The Tangkhuls, in this present age, have divided their geographical regions into four sections: East (Zingsho), West (Zingtun), North (Ato), and South (Aze). However, in their traditional system, contiguous villages which have intimate cultural practices, shared historical past, and distinctive occupational specialization largely determine their geographical demarcations. These contiguous villages have similar dialects; otherwise among the Tangkhuls, each village has a dialect that is not easily comprehensible to other villages. They also have shared cultural practices, such as style of singing folksong and folkdance. The nomenclature that is given to each contiguous village, such as Kharao, Raphei, Kamo, Rem Kongyang and Kadhour, are significantly attached to historical past and contain deep social meanings (Shimray, 2000:11). Occupational specialization and expertise of certain crafts constitutes one of the distinctive feature in which these contiguous villages are geographically divided. According to Maya Gachui, each region of Tangkhul nagas had their own occupational specialization and arts. Rem Kongyang region specialized in ironsmiths, as the people were expert in making kazei (spear), ngaha (axe), khai (dao) etc. The Reiphei region, which is located in the Northern side of Ukhrul, was well known for hampai (earthen pots). The people of Kadhour region were good in making chum (granaries) and salt-making. The Tangkhuls of Kharao region, which lies in the west of Ukhrul, were considered as expert in weaving, as they make all kinds of shawls and sarongs; and those in Kamo region, which lies in the east of Ukhrul, were considered as specialists in handicrafts for they make all kinds of shopkai (bamboo
education systems and a common language of the Tangkhuls, not only the inter-village interaction, but also the significance of learning the common language of the tribe has became essential.

Map of Ukhrul District

(Source: Administrative Atlas, Ukhrul District, Manipur State, Census of India, 2001.)
The communication systems in Ukhrul district has improved a lot in the last one
decade. Radio broadcasting, All India Radio (AIR) located in Imphal\textsuperscript{13}, can be considered
as one of the earliest communication system for the Tangkhuls; which connected the
Tangkhuls within themselves as well as with the outside world. In villages and towns in
Ukhrul district, radio continues to be the main source of information. However, recently
Cable Televisions networks in towns as well as in villages have opened up their world.
With the arrival of Cable TV, the people in the villages were able to get connected with the
cultural practice in other parts of the world. Tele-services such as telephones and mobile
phones, and internet have made interaction and communication much more rapid and easier
for the people to communicate and stay connected. The new and modern technology of
communications, like Internet, are only available in towns and the sub-divisions of Ukhrul
district. Some of the villages in the border areas are still lacking in transport and
communications, even now they are yet to get electricity and get connected with motorable
roads. Therefore, villagers in remote areas walk miles and the whole day whenever they
have go to towns and cities. The difficulties in transport appear to have less impact on
influence of towns and cities and their cultural life on the villages, as most of the
youngsters from the villages grew up in towns and cities in pursuance of quality
educations.

The emphasis of present research enquiry is to understand the transitions that have
taken place in the cultural practices of the Tangkhul Nagas, living in Ukhrul district. For
this purpose, music and literature of the Tangkhuls has been selected for analysis. As
mentioned before, the major intention of this research is to map the trajectories that
represent the cultural practices of the Tangkhuls, with the historical encounters of
colonialism and conversion to Christianity. The category of ‘folk’\textsuperscript{14} and ‘modern’ has been
employed here in the form of ‘past’ and the ‘present’ to mark the periodical distance that
the tribe has traversed, and also as a tool for the identification for social and cultural
changes. However, these terms have not been used to imply that the past traditions are

\textsuperscript{13}Initially, AIR radio programs for communities in Manipur were broadcast from Guwahati. However, with
the establishment of AIR station in Imphal the radio programs in Tangkhul language has been broadcasted
from this station.

\textsuperscript{14}Roma Chatterji has remarked that “The term ‘folk’ ... comes to signify an archaism, suggesting that perhaps
the traces within modern civilization are not contemporaneous with it” (Chatterji, 2003).
incongruent with the present, for in practice there is amalgamation of two in various aspects.

**Methods and Fieldwork**

The fieldwork of this research has been carried out in the tradition of ethnographic inquiry, where the fieldworker interacts and lives ‘intimately’ with the people being studied (Madan, 1975). In the case of fieldworker being an ‘insider’ to the locality and people being studied, ‘intimacy’ has been described as a process of ‘rediscovering’ of one’s own society, rather than a new discovery in ‘distant societies’ (Narayan, 1998). After staying away from the place where one was born and bred, and enjoying the life of metro cities in Delhi for almost a decade, one does find distances and gaps that have emerged through the years of staying away from home, and by the traits and knowledge that have been acquired in Universities and city life. With a renewed enthusiasm to learn more about the society that one has been primordially attached, the fieldworker has proceeded to the field in Ukhrul district with voice recorders, diaries and past memories as tools to acquire the empirical realities.

Researchersing an area where one has no formal knowledge or expertise has been a difficult task. But, these problems have been routinely faced by most of the sociologists who have worked on an area like ‘music’, where knowledge and craft of the art is acquired by long years of practice and learning, and confined to certain individuals. However, contacting and interacting with people in this field is easier than it is imagined as they are well known and well-regarded within the community. Attending and participating with community activities one does become part of the society and in the dynamics of the events; as for instance enjoying the music just like teenagers in the concerts. The ‘detachment’ comes when one starts raising questions about the events being enacted and dynamics of the social situations.
The fieldwork has been carried out in Ukhrul town, which is officially considered as headquarter of Ukhrul district and un-officially as the headquarter of all the Tangkhuls living in the country and abroad; and in one sub-division, Kamjong, the easternmost official post, where one could meet Myanmarese almost everyday. And also in four Tangkhul villages: Ramva and Ringui village in Kadhour region; Lunghar and Longpi in Raphei region. Whereas, Ukhrul has most of the modern facilities, the villages were not-so-modern in terms of infrastructure and mode of living conditions. But, culturally one finds seamless relations between towns and villages, in terms of usage of modern electronics and dresses. Even though village dialects vary from one village to another, language has never been a barrier as most villagers speak the ‘common’ Tangkhul language.

The fieldwork has been carried out during two phases, first during the autumn season in 2006 (August to December), and second in the summer of 2007 (May-July). Ukhrul town have been the place where most of the study is conducted, the four villages and the subdivision were visited separately during the course of fieldwork. As Ramva and Ringui are adjacent, these two villages have been studied at the same time. The fieldwork in these two villages was conducted during the autumn season of 2006 (Aug-Dec). Ramva is well connected by road and have a leisurely lifestyle typical of the suburbs. Ringui does not have proper connection with motorable road and the people were absent during the harvest seasons, as they spend most of their time in the field, spending even the nights in the forest. Longpi and Lunghar were studied during the second fieldtrip, in the summer of 2006 (May-

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**Name of the places studied along with list of population.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Place</th>
<th>Classification of Place</th>
<th>Total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ukhrul</td>
<td>District Headquarter</td>
<td>20156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamjong</td>
<td>Sub-Division</td>
<td>12937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramva (Lambui)</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>1488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ringui (Toungou)</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>1707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longpi (Nungbi)</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>1382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunghar</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>1596</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: Census of India, 2001).
June). People in these villages are busy throughout the year in cultivation, so the most opportune time to interact and meet them is during the festivals. And the people appear to have stronger attachment with traditions and customs than villagers from other regions and residents of town areas.

Kamjong, the sub division in the east, has been easier to travel and work as there is a regular bus service. While in Kamjong, people were surprised that a person is visiting the place without much ‘business’ to do. Thus, it was suggested that I take up the post of a teacher in the local school. Of course, such professions have been commonly taken-up by young graduates who have not able to get government jobs or go for higher studies. Often, the researcher was placed within the social dynamics of the locality. In Ramva and Ringui, the people treated me like a member of the family, whereas certain distance emerged in Longpi and Lunghar when I revealed my village identity. In Ukhrul, I could merge with the crowd and be a research student, who have come back from Delhi. Every interaction and interview ended with words of encouragement to go ahead in life and make contributions to the welfare of the community.

Structure of the Work

The second chapter begins with the comprehensive analysis of the past—historical encounters and cultural changes—and the chronology that connects the past with the present and vice versa. This chapter is an analysis of past ‘cultural practices’ of the Tangkhuls, where encounters between the ‘folk traditions’ and colonialism coupled with Christianity took place. The approach of the Colonial ruler and its impact on the Tangkhuls and consequences of Missionary work among the Tangkhuls is interrogated. The line that connects the ‘folk traditions’ with the ‘present’ is drawn.

The third chapter focuses on the practices of ‘written culture’ in Tangkhul society, where oral and written literature has been contrasted and analyzed in its own right. The term ‘written culture’ has been employed in the sense that it is ‘opposed to’ and ‘different
from performing culture. The various modes of 'writing' are deliberated, in the light of difference between 'oral' and 'written' literature. The main feature of oral literature of the Tangkhuls is interrogated, and the emergent traits of new forms of literature are analyzed.

The practice of performing culture is taken up in the fourth chapter, which traces the performing traditions of the Tangkhuls. The various forms of performance in the past traditions and its relations with the cultural practices in the contemporary times are interrogated. In the past, the performance was closely knitted with the customs and rituals of the society. The musical performance of present time is the focal point of this chapter, where performance in every form is interrogated. The orientation of performance moves towards leisure time and entertainment, along with the influences from mainstream popular culture and Western cultural practices.

From 'action', the focus shifts to analysis of the 'text' in the fifth chapter, where the works of music and literature are analyzed 'textually'. Various genres in music and literature and the context in which these genres emerged are studied. Influences from various other cultures are taken into account. The text in music and literature of the Tangkhuls has emerged as the reflection of the changing times. It has emerged as a realm where voices of the people can be expressed and identity of the community is constructed.

The sixth chapter stretches the focus of the work into wider aspects of cultural practices of the Tangkhul, by taking the case of 'contestations' between 'global' and 'local' culture in Ukhrul district. The focus in this chapter is not confined to music and literature, but more on the consumption patterns, forms of entertainment, and the impact of new technology. It also looks into how the changing societies are opening up the barriers and adopting global practices. Consumptions and usages of new technology have established the connection between local and global in various aspects. On the other hand, the local communities are re-invigorating past traditions as the last refuge to assert their cultural identity to face the onslaught of globalization.
Chapter Two

Cultural Practices of the Tangkhul Nagas:
Historical Encounters and Cultural Changes

One significant way of understanding the cultural practices of a community is to analyze the historical backgrounds and transitions that have taken place through the ages. Cultural practices are not isolated monoliths that remain unchanged when other areas of society have moved ahead. Those who have studied culture from various established disciplines have given differential importance to the myriad aspects of culture. According to Raymond Williams, in archeology and cultural anthropology the reference to culture is primarily 'material production', whereas in history and cultural studies the reference is primarily to 'signifying or symbolic systems' (Williams, 1976: 91). This differential focus has often led to confusion and added to the complexities in the concept of 'culture'. However, as Raymond Williams affirms, the relations between 'material' and 'symbolic' productions have come to be seen in recent arguments as 'related rather than contrasted' (ibid). The usages of the concept of culture appear to be inclusive, rather than exclusive and restricted, and there is wide gamut of practices that came under the rubric of 'cultural practices'. Those who have given importance to the symbolic significance of culture have taken 'shared meanings, values attitudes and symbolic forms' as distinctive features of cultural practices (Burke, 1978a). Whether it is material productions in the form of artifacts or signifying practices like dance performance, the 'meaning' that is derived from such 'objects' and 'practices' can be considered as a distinctive feature which could be employed as a yardstick to differentiate culture from other aspects of society. What makes culture significant for analysis is that it is pervasive in everyday life and practiced by all members

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1. Culture in its early usage, according to Raymond Williams, was a 'noun process'; the tending of something, basically crops and animals. According to him, there are three broad active category of usages of the term 'culture' since its adoption: (i) 'the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, from 18th century, (ii) independent noun which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people or group; (iii) the independent and abstract noun, which describe the works and practices of intellectual, especially artistic activity (Williams, 1976: 90–91).